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Friend or Foe? The Catalan Company as Proxy Actors in the Aegean and Asia Minor Vacuum

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The term "vacuum" could apply to the Aegean and Asia Minor region at almost any point between the shattering of the Byzantine empire by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453. During these years the area was divided amongst a number of competing factions, few of whom – with the exception of the Ottomans in the fifteenth century – dominated for any significant length of time. Despite this instability, the region remained hugely important, especially within the context of trade between Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia. As a consequence it was hotly contested by internal and external powers from a variety of ethnic, religious and political backgrounds.[1] In particular, the region witnessed the growing use of "proxy actors" by external forces, who aligned themselves with local factions in order to gain influence and further their interests in the area. The study of proxy warfare in the Aegean and Asia Minor takes on added significance, given the prevalence of discussions amongst military historians and policy makers around "epochal change theory" and the emergence of a "new Middle Ages" or "neo-Medievalism" in modern military encounters, which it is claimed has led to a rise in irregular warfare against violent non-state actors, for which proxies of various types are regularly employed (e.g. warlords, militias and mercenaries).[2] Thus, when compared to present-day military encounters – not least in regions of the Middle East where a power vacuum has also developed into a crucible of different competing factions and intervening (but indecisive) outside powers – certain parallels can be drawn with the use of proxies in the fourteenth-century Aegean and Asia Minor.

Of particular importance for the discussion of medieval proxy actors in this region are the mercenary band known as the Catalan Grand Company, who campaigned in

1 For an overview of the region at this time, see Mike Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean, 1291–1352* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 17–31; *Contact and Conflict in Frankish Greece and the Aegean*, ed. Mike Carr and Nikolaos G. Chrissis (Farnham, 2014), pp. 4–12; Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade: Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin: 1300–1415* (Venice, 1983), pp. 3–20.

2 See, for example, Phil Williams, *From the New Middle Ages to a New Dark Age: The Decline of the State and U.S. Strategy* (Carlisle, PA, 2008); Robert J. Bunker (ed.), *Non-State Threats and Future Wars* (London, 2003); Jorg Friedrichs, "The Meaning of New Medievalism," *European Journal of International Relations* 7 (2001), 475–502.

Asia Minor, the Aegean and Greece from 1303 to 1311, before conquering the duchy of Athens and ruling it until 1388. The exploits of the Catalan Company are well known and have been the focus of many detailed studies, pioneered by Antonio Rubió y Lluch in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] Kenneth M. Setton made the Catalans accessible to an English readership in the mid-twentieth century through his studies into their rulership of Athens,[4] many aspects of which have since been expanded and improved by other eastern-Mediterranean specialists.[5] Since then, much research has been undertaken into the Catalan campaign in the East and their establishment in Greece. Of particular relevance to this article are R. I. Burns's study into the Catalan relations with the Angevins and Aragonese from 1305 to 1311 and Angeliki Laiou's detailed analysis of their service with the Byzantines and campaigns in Thrace and Macedonia, which remains the best narrative of events.[6] Likewise three recent studies, two published in this journal, have shed much light on the military history of the Catalan campaign and the use of mercenaries in Byzantium.[7]

Considering the wealth of research into the Catalan Company, it is not the purpose of this article to uncover hitherto unknown facets of their campaign in the East, but rather to draw on existing research in order to frame the actions of the Company within the context of medieval proxy actors, the focus of the

3 Rubió y Lluch published many works on the Catalans, notably *La Espedición y Dominación de los Catalans en Oriente juzgadas por los Griegos*, Memórias de la Real Acadamia de Buenos Letras de Barcelona, vol. IV (Barcelona, 1893); *La companyía Catalana sota el Comandament de Teobald de Çepoy, 1307–1310* (Barcelona, 1923).

4 Kenneth M. Setton, "The Avignonese Papacy and the Catalan Duchy of Athens," *Byzantion* 17 (1944–45), 281–303; idem, *Catalan Domination of Athens: 1311–1388* (Cambridge, MA, 1948); idem, "The Catalans in Greece, 1311–1380," in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton, 6 vols. (Madison, WI, 1969–89), 3:167–224.

5 For example, David Jacoby, "Catalans, Turcs et Vénitiens en Romanie (1305–1332): Un nouveau témoignage de Marino Sanudo Torsello," *Studi Medievali* 15.1 (1974), 217–61; "L'état catalan en Grèce: société et institutions politiques," in *Els Catalans a la Mediterrània oriental a l'edat mitjana*, ed. Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol (Barcelona, 2003), pp. 79–101; "La 'Compagnie catalane' et l'état catalan de Grèce – Quelques aspects de leur histoire," in idem, *Société et démographie à Byzance et en Romanie latine* (London, 1975), item. V; Jep Pascot, *Les almugavares: mercenaires Catalans du Moyen Age (1302–1388)* (Brussels, 1971); Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, "The Catalans of Athens and the beginning of Turkish Expansion in the Aegean Area," *Studi Medievali* 21.2 (1980), 821–38.

6 Robert Ignatius Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers, 1305–1311," *Speculum* 29 (1954), 751–71; Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282–1328* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), pp. 134–243. Also of use is the popular history by Alfonso Lowe, *The Catalan Vengeance* (London, 1972).

7 Savvas Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries in Byzantium in the Period ca. 1290–1305 as Viewed by the Sources," *Byzantion* 79 (2009), 208–30; Scott Jessee and Anatoly Isaenko, "The Military Effectiveness of Alan Mercenaries in Byzantium, 1301–1306," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 11 (2013), 107–32; Nikolaos S. Kanellopoulos and Ioanna K. Lekea, "Prelude to Kephissos (1311): An Analysis of the Battle of Apros (1305)," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 12 (2014), 119–38. See also Mark C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204–1453* (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 78–82 and *passim*.

special issue of this journal. The Catalans came into contact with many of the main players in the late-medieval Mediterranean at some point, and by focussing on them this article aims to provide a case study into the means by which local and outside powers in the later Middle Ages attempted to use irregular proxy actors to achieve their goals in contested regions. It will focus on how these powers aimed to utilize the Catalans as a proxy group by attempting to exert authority and control over them, such as through payment and the bestowal of titles. It will also explore the reaction of the Catalans to these overtures. As we shall see, they had a habit of antagonizing almost everyone they dealt with, especially their employers (hence the title "friend or foe?"), so the article will also posit some observations as to why no state was able to successfully control the Catalans, and other proxy actors, in this area.

The Geo-political Context

To emphasize the complexity of the region under discussion – and also to demonstrate the limitations of simplistic descriptors such as "Latins," "Greeks" and "Turks" – this article will begin with a very brief overview of the various factions with whom the Catalans came into contact, divided into the three main contested areas through which they travelled: Asia Minor, the Aegean and Greece. The first of these, Asia Minor, was a land that had been split between Byzantine and Seljuk rule since the eleventh century. By the end of the thirteenth century the situation was somewhat different. The empire of the Seljuk Turks had collapsed after their defeat at the hands of the Mongols at Köse Dag in 1243 and in the second half of the century the authority of the Mongols began to rapidly decline, allowing a number of Turkish tribal principalities, known today as the beyliks or emirates, to establish themselves in place of the Mongols. These Turks quickly advanced through Byzantine lands in western Anatolia and by the early years of the fourteenth century they controlled the majority of the Anatolian–Aegean coast, leaving the Byzantines only the coastal lands hugging the southern shore of the Sea of Marmora and opposite the hinterland Constantinople. The Turkish beyliks were not, however, united and they regularly fought against one another and sometimes aligned themselves with non-Turks in order to further their own objectives. The Aydin Turks and the Ottomans, for example, famously allied with the Byzantine emperor John Kantakouzenos during the Byzantine civil wars in the mid-fourteenth century. Asia Minor was thus a region contested not only by the Byzantines and Turks (and on occasion Latins), but also between the different Turkish beyliks, who did not form one homogeneous entity.[8]

8 For more on the Turkish beyliks, see Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean*, pp. 32–37; Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade*, pp. 4–12, 105–21; Rudi Paul Lindner, *Explorations in Ottoman Prehistory* (Ann Arbor, 2007), pp. 1–12; Cemal Kafadar, *Between the Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 1–9; Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey: A General Survey of the Material and Spiritual Culture and History c.1071–1330*, trans. J. Jones-Williams (London, 1968), pp. 1–32, 64–72.

The second contested area was the Aegean. Here the islands were divided among those held by the Venetians since the Fourth Crusade, notably Crete and Naxos; those which (for the early fourteenth century anyway) remained in Greek hands, such as Lesbos and Leros; and those which were seized within the first decade of the fourteenth century by other Latins, namely Rhodes (by the Hospitallers) and Chios (by the Genoese). To speak of these islands as being split between two united "Greek" or "Latin" spheres is, however, an oversimplification. The Hospitallers, Genoese and Venetians, although all "Latins," were often in direct competition and conflict with one another, and many of the islands governed by Greeks were ruled without much direct intervention from the emperor and government at Constantinople, despite being nominally "Byzantine." To add to this were the aforementioned Turks who began to raid the islands once they had reached the Aegean coast at the beginning of the century.[9] The result was a situation every bit as complex as that found in Asia Minor: the Aegean zone was, on the face of it, contested between Latins and Greeks, Latins and Turks, and Greeks and Turks, but also between the different Latin and Greek factions themselves, and – on a few occasions – between coalitions of Byzantine and Latin, or Byzantine and Turkish powers.[10]

The third contested area was Greece. Like the Aegean, the Venetians controlled territories in Greece (such as Modon and Coron), as did the Greeks themselves, although in Epiros, Thessaly and Mistras they were sometimes rivals and not allies of the emperor and government in Constantinople. To add to this were the lands ruled by the Franks since the Fourth Crusade, such as the principality of Achaia and its vassal state, the duchy of Athens, whose suzerain lords were the Angevin kings of Naples. In 1311 the Catalans seized Athens and added further to this complicated mix: they were traditionally aligned with the Aragonese and thus natural enemies of the Angevins, as we shall see. On the northern borders were also the long-time rivals of the Byzantines, such as the Albanians, Serbs, and Bulgarians.[11] The existence of such a complex patchwork of states meant that Greece was contested at sometime or another between almost all of the aforementioned regional powers, few of whom were ever aligned into cohesive national or ethnic groups.

9 For the various Aegean islands, see the references provided by Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean*, pp. 21–25; Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade*, pp. 3–20; Peter Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean, 1204–1500* (London, 1995), pp. 135–60.

10 The most well known of these were the "anti-Turkish leagues" of the 1330s and 1340s, for which see Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean*, pp. 63–78; Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade*, pp. 21–62.

11 For more on Greece, see Lock, *Franks in the Aegean*, pp. 68–108; Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 114–56.

The Composition of the Catalan Company and its Campaign in the East

The Catalan Company was formed after the end of the war of the Sicilian Vespers in 1302 by Roger of Flor, an ex-Templar and commander of Aragonese forces under Frederick III of Sicily, the younger brother of James II of Aragon.[12] Roger realized that he and his troops would be surplus to requirements in Sicily, so he sought service with the Byzantine emperor, Andronikos II Palaiologos. The Company, which reached Constantinople in September 1303, was initially made up of a mixture of troops who had fought in the Sicilian war, mostly Aragonese and Catalan cavalry and almogavar infantry, but later it also included contingents of local Turkish and Greek fighters from Asia Minor. The exact size of the army varies in the sources, but the most probable figure is that given by Ramon Muntaner, a leading member of the Company and key source for events, who stated that the force recruited in 1302–3 consisted of 1,500 cavalry, 4,000 almogavar infantry and 1,000 seamen, not counting galley slaves and sailors.[13] Given that their numbers probably increased by a few thousand in the years between their arrival at Constantinople and the battle of Halmyros in 1311, the Catalans were quite sizeable for a mercenary band, especially in the context of the region at this time.[14]

The almogavars, in particular, were the crack troops of the Catalans: a highly specialized group of frontier infantry, lightly armed and famed for their agility, hardiness and bravery in battle. The name "almogavar" comes from the Arabic for "devastator," an apt descriptor of their traits, as is confirmed by the account of the Catalan chronicler Bernard Desclot:

> These soldiers that are called almogavars are men who live for naught save warfare, and they dwell not in towns nor in cities but in mountains and forests. And they fight continually with the Saracens and make forays within their lands for a day or two, pillaging and taking many Saracens captive, and likewise their goods, whereby they live. And they suffer many hardships such as other men could scarce endure. And at times they pass two full

12 According to Ramon Muntaner, Roger of Flor conceived the idea of founding the Catalan Company during the celebrations of the Peace of Caltabellotta, which ended the Sicilian Vespers on 31 August 1302: Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 9 vols. (Barcelona, 1927–52), 6:17–18; *The Catalan Expedition to the East: from the Chronicle of Ramon Muntaner*, trans. Robert D. Hughes (Barcelona, 2006), pp. 36–37.

13 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:22; Hughes trans., p. 42. Pachymeres gives the slightly larger size of 8,000 "Catalans and almogavars" (Κατελάνων καὶ 'Αμογαβάρων), whereas Gregoras reduces the number to 1,000 Catalans and 1,000 almogavars: George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, ed. A. Failler, trans. V. Laurent, 5 vols. (Paris, 1984–99), 4:430–31; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte: Historia Rhomaïke*, trans. J. L. Van Dieten, 6 vols. (Stuttgart, 1973–2007), 1:177; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, p. 134; Jessee and Isaenko, "The Military Effectiveness of Alan Mercenaries in Byzantium," p. 120; Kanellopoulos and Lekea, "Prelude to Kephissos," p. 122.

14 Kelly DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century: Discipline, Tactics and Technology* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 60–61. Gregoras claims that on the eve of the battle of Halmyros, the Catalan army numbered 3,500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry: Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, p. 194.

> days, if need be, without food and live off the herbs of the fields, and this they do without harm to themselves. And the adalids who are their chiefs guide them about, for these know the regions of land and the roads therein. And the almogavars wear no other raiment than a tunic or shift, whether it be summer or winter, and about their limbs breeches of leather, and on their feet leather sandals. And they bear at their side a good dagger with a thick strap and a scabbard which hangs from the girdle. And each man has a lance and two darts and a leather shoulder bag to carry his food. And these men are exceedingly strong and are swift to flee or to pursue, and they are Catalans and Aragonese and Saracens.[15]

In particular, the almogavars were very effective against heavily armoured knights, primarily because of the agility afforded them by their light armour, and their ability to use a range of weapons including spears, which they sometimes broke in half in order to disembowel horses at close quarters, as well as crossbows, javelins and other projectiles for unhorsing riders at a distance. They even excelled in maritime combat, where their nimbleness and willingness to fight barefoot on slippery decks proved an asset against more heavily armoured opponents. To add to this, the almogavars were highly disciplined and regularly paired with the cavalry units to great effect.[16]

The Catalans were recruited by the Byzantine emperor in order to re-conquer territories lost to the Turks in Asia Minor. Initially at least, relations between the Catalans and their Byzantine employers were good and after arriving in Constantinople in September 1303 the Company was received well and the soldiers' wages were paid.[17] The peace was temporarily shattered when a skirmish broke out between the Catalans and the Genoese of Pera, but this did not adversely affect relations with the emperor.[18] In the autumn of 1303 the Company set out to confront the Turks, defeating one group at the Artaki peninsula on the Asian side of the Sea of Marmara.[19] Here the Catalans were joined by an army of Alan mercenaries. The Catalans and Alans frequently clashed as they wintered at Artaki before resuming the campaign against the Turks in April 1304, this time further

15 Bernard Desclot, *Crónica*, ed. M. Coll i Alentorn, 4 vols. (Barcelona, 1949–50), 3:63; *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon: A.D. 1276–1285*, trans. F. L. Critchlow (Princeton, NJ, 1928), pp. 28–29; J. N. Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229–1327," *English Historical Review* Supplement 8 (1975), 1–54, at pp. 10–11.

16 See Kanellopoulos and Lekea, "Prelude to Kephissos," pp. 122–23; Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan- Mediterranean Empire," pp. 10–11; Paul Douglas Humphries, "Of Arms and Men: Siege and Battle Tactics in the Catalan Grand Chronicles (1208–1387)," *Military Affairs* 49 (1985), pp. 174–75; DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, pp. 58–65; John Pryor, "The Naval Battles of Roger of Lauria," in idem, *Commerce, Shipping and Naval Warfare in the Medieval Mediterranean*, Variorum Reprints (London, 1987), item VI, 179–216, esp. pp. 188, 199–200.

17 The arrival of the Catalans at Constantinople is recorded by the three main sources for events: Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:21–23; Hughes trans., pp. 41–3; George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:430–37; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:176.

18 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:23–25; Hughes trans., pp. 44–46.

19 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:25–26; Hughes trans., pp. 47–48. According to Pachymeres the Catalans "performed many evils" at Artaki, including looting and pillaging the native Greeks and harassing the local women: George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:436–37, 56–59.

south where they defeated a force from Sarukhan and Aydin near Philadelphia, and another force of the same Turks, as well as those from Menteshe, outside the city of Tire.[20] In the summer the Catalans defeated the Aydin Turks again in the coastal region of Anaea, opposite Samos, and then another force from Aydin "and all the other Turks who had been sent from the other tribes" further inland in August.[21] In this time Roger of Flor returned to Constantinople (in March 1304), where he collected money for wages from the emperor, which was distributed amongst the Company upon his arrival at Anaea, probably in the early summer.[22]

Relations between the Catalans and their Byzantine paymasters began, however, to deteriorate after Andronikos recalled Roger of Flor and his army from Asia Minor to Constantinople in late summer or early autumn 1304, ostensibly to help his son Michael IX, who was campaigning against the Bulgarians in Thrace. Roger returned to Constantinople as requested by the emperor while the bulk of the Catalan army wintered in the Gallipoli region. The first indication of trouble is given by Muntaner, who reports that Andronikos "out of malice" attempted to pay the Company with debased coinage.[23] According to Muntaner, this transgression marked the point at which the Byzantines put in motion a plot to have Roger of Flor assassinated. First Andronikos placated the Catalans over the debased coinage by granting Roger the office of "Caesar of the Empire,"[24] along with authority to govern any territories he conquered from the Turks in Asia Minor. The title of Grand Duke passed in turn to Berengar of Entença, a Catalan lord who had joined the Company some months earlier with a force of 300 horsemen and 1,000 foot-soldiers.[25] After this Andronikos dispatched Roger to his son Michael IX in Adrianople, for reasons which remain unknown.[26] Here Roger and his retinue were "cut into pieces" on the orders of Michael IX by Alan mercenaries in the Byzantine army (4 April 1305), before an attack was launched at the main Catalan force at Gallipoli.[27]

The Company repelled the Byzantine assault and afterwards embarked on what has become known as the Catalan Vengeance, a five-year rampage where they occupied the fortress of Gallipoli and devastated the areas of Constantinople, Thrace and Macedonia, before marching into Thessaly and finally

20 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:32–35; trans. Hughes, pp. 55–58; George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:462–71; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:177–78.

21 Muntaner writes that the second battle took place on the Feast of the Assumption, so around 15 August 1304: Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:37–38; Hughes trans., pp. 62–23.

22 He paid the Company's wages before the defeat of the Turks at Anaea, which was probably in June or July 1304: Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:30, 37; Hughes trans., pp. 52, 62.

23 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:40–41; Hughes trans., p. 66. Cf. George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:526–30.

24 This was a purely honorific title, but still one of the highest titles, being third in the hierarchy: Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 143–4.

25 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:41; Hughes trans., p. 67.

26 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:41–44; Hughes trans., pp. 67–70.

27 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:46–48; Hughes trans., pp. 73–75. Cf. George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:474–77; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:179.

to Athens.[28] Initially they were under the command of Berengar of Entença, who led armies to sack the regions of Heraclea, Rodosto and Panion on the northern coast of the Sea of Marmara, before he was captured by the Genoese in May 1305.[29] But this proved to only be a minor setback and the Catalans won a major victory over a Byzantine army, including a large contingent of Alan mercenaries, at Apros in southern Thrace on 20 June.[30] The defeat dealt the Byzantine military a severe blow and thereafter the Company, now under the command of the marshal Bernard of Rocafort, overran Thrace with little opposition.[31] In the following years, the main hindrance to the Catalans was their lack of unity. Rocafort was a divisive character and a clear split in the Company emerged when Entença was released from prison and returned to Gallipoli in late summer 1306. Although Entença was killed a few months later, the Company was not united behind Rocafort.[32] It is against this backdrop of infighting and factional strife that attempts by the Aragonese and Franco-Angevins to bring the Catalans into their Aegean schemes were stepped up.

Eventually the dearth of food in Thrace forced the Catalans to leave Gallipoli for Macedonia in the summer of 1307. They made their base at Kassandra on the Chalkidike Peninsula and raided the monasteries on Mount Athos before laying siege to Thessalonica in 1308. However, a lack of provisions and spirited defence held up the conquest of the city and further exacerbated the factional infighting within the Company. Things came to a head towards the end of 1308 when a number of dissatisfied members seized Rocafort and handed him to the Angevins. In the following year he was taken to Naples and imprisoned by King Robert where he later died.[33] With Rocafort removed, the Catalans left Macedonia for Thessaly. After sacking this land for a year they marched further south and entered the service of Walter of Brienne, the duke of Athens, in the spring of 1310. Unsurprisingly, relations quickly soured and on 15 March 1311 the Catalans defeated Walter at Halmyros and conquered the duchy of Athens for themselves.[34]

The Catalan–Byzantine Agreement

The agreement made between the Byzantines and the Catalans was a result of the dilemma Andronikos II faced in regard to his eastern frontier: he needed to reverse the advances of the Turks, but required mercenaries to carry this out, as

28 Lowe, *The Catalan Vengeance*, pp. 58–122.
29 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:48–52; Hughes trans., pp. 76–80.
30 Jessee and Isaenko, "The Military Effectiveness of Alan Mercenaries in Byzantium," 125–31; Kanellopoulos and Lekea, "Prelude to Kephissos," 125–37; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 162–64.
31 Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 166–71.
32 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:78–79, 84–88; Hughes trans, pp. 113–14, 119–22.
33 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:104–06; Hughes trans, pp. 142–44; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 220–26.
34 Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 226–29.

the native soldiery had proved to be insufficient in numbers, training and loyalty.[35] Ramon Muntaner makes it clear that Roger of Flor was aware of this, writing that Andronikos "was in dire need of [Roger's] assistance, for the Turks [had] taken from him more land than can be covered in a thirty-day journey."[36] Roger was therefore in a position of strength when it came to negotiating the terms of the Catalans' service with the empire, which were extraordinarily generous. According to Muntaner, who helped draw up the contract, these stipulated that the Catalans would be paid four months' wages in advance upon their arrival at Constantinople, at a rate of four ounces per month for armed horsemen and one per month for footsoldiers, and that the emperor would agree to marry his niece, Maria, to Roger, as well as make him Grand Duke of the empire.[37] This policy was, however, fatally flawed from the outset. The imperial treasury was almost empty and the loss of territories in Asia Minor further decreased the tax revenue, meaning that the empire could not afford to pay these mercenaries sufficient funds in order to maintain their loyalty.

Evidence of this problem can be seen in Andronikos' dealings with Roger and his army. Upon their arrival at Constantinople, the emperor managed to pay the Company the four months' wages promised to them. This amounted to the substantial sum of 40,000 ounces, if Muntaner's numbers are to be trusted, which has been calculated by Bartusis as equating to 34 hyperpyron per month for a horse soldier and 8.5 for a foot soldier. This was a considerable sum when compared to the much lower wages of 3 hyperpyron per month that were paid to the Alan mercenaries who served the Byzantines at the same time, and also more than the standard rate paid to mercenaries in Italy during the period.[38] Unsurprisingly, the emperor had considerable difficulty raising these funds and, according to the Greek writers George Pachymeres and Nikephoros Gregoras, he had to take drastic measures, which included imposing a special levy on grain, confiscating one third of the *pronoiai* located in the western territories, withholding the salaries of palace employees and devaluing the currency.[39] In fact, as Kyriakidis has pointed out, the agreement made between Roger and the emperor seems to have been exceedingly generous on the part of the Byzantines. The bestowal of the title of Grand Duke, for example, was not a privilege often awarded to the commander of a mercenary company. The office could be both an honorary title and an effective command, equivalent to a grand admiral or supreme commander of naval forces. Even though Andronikos may have only

35 Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries in Byzantium," 208–30.

36 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:18; Hughes trans., p. 37.

37 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:18–23; Hughes trans., pp. 38–43. See also the corresponding accounts of George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:432–33 and Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:176–77.

38 Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, p. 153.

39 George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:434–37; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:177. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 133, 141; Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries in Byzantium," 217, 225–26.

intended to bestow the honorary title on Roger, in reality Roger was given full autonomy over how to conduct his campaigns in Asia Minor and also over the distribution of the Company's wages. In addition, it seems that the agreement included no stipulations over the size of the Catalan army or the duration of service, which was an unusual omission for a contract with mercenaries.[40] The desperate state of the empire in 1302 seems therefore to have led Andronikos to make a deal with the Catalans which he was simply unable to meet. A further sign of the emperor's desperation can be found after the Catalans objected to the debased coinage with which he attempted to pay them in autumn 1304. At this point Andronikos promoted Roger de Flor to the position of "Caesar of the Empire" and granted him command of territories in Asia Minor, with virtual independence from the government in Constantinople.[41] According to Pachymeres, he also promised the Company that he would pay them 20,000 gold coins and 300,000 *modii* of grain as soon as they crossed to Asia Minor.[42] But these measures were insufficient to inspire loyalty in the face of failed payments, and ultimately the assassination of Roger of Flor backfired – a reflection of the weakness of Byzantium at this time and the risks of employing a proxy group that one could not control by conventional means.

The Catalan–Turkish Agreement

It is worth noting that after the assassination of Roger of Flor, the Catalans allied themselves with some of the Turkish groups whom they had been previously fighting against. Gregoras claims that when the Catalans were at Gallipoli (from 1305) they asked 500 Turks to join with them from Asia Minor.[43] These Turks were not paid by the Company, but were instead allowed to keep four-fifths of the booty they captured for themselves, with the other fifth going to the Catalans. According to Muntaner, under these terms 800 horsemen led by a warlord named Xemelic joined the Company, followed by a further 400 horsemen and 200 footsoldiers led by Xemelic's brother.[44] Pachymeres states that these Turks came from the Aydin beylik and that they were also joined by many

40 Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries in Byzantium," 217–19; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, p. 132. Pachymeres writes that Andronikos later complained that he had only asked Roger of Flor for 500 knights and 1,000 infantry to fight the Turks, but by this stage he was unable to argue otherwise: George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:532–33.

41 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:41–44; Hughes trans., pp. 68–70; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, p. 143.

42 George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:552–55.

43 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:181–82; Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Turks in Europe (1305–13) and the Serbs in Asia Minor (1313)," in *The Ottoman Emirate (1300–1389): Halcyon Days in Crete I: A Symposium Held in Rethymnon, 11–13 January 1991*, ed. Elizabeth A. Zachariadou (Rethymnon, 1993), pp. 159–68, at p. 160.

44 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:75–77; Hughes trans., pp. 109–10.

Greeks from Asia Minor.[45] A few years later another 1,000 Turcopole horsemen (Christianised Turks), who had previously served the emperor as mercenaries, also joined the Company.[46] The additions of these Turks helped the Catalans to defeat the Byzantines at Apros in June 1305 and easily wreak havoc in Thrace and Macedonia over the following years.[47] The appearance and apparent prominence of three irregular war bands at this time – the Catalans and Turks fighting together and the Alans under the employ of the Byzantines – is evidence of the lack of a centralized power and the prominence of irregular proxies in the region.

The Catalans and the Aragonese

In the second stage of the Catalan campaign and the next contested region, that of Thrace and Macedonia, the Catalans were courted by the great western Mediterranean factions who were keen to utilize their military potential to gain a foothold in the region. The first of these were the Aragonese and the second were their rivals, the Franco-Angevins, both of whom had fought for control over Sicily for twenty years before the Catalans began their campaign.

The fact that the Aragonese approached the Company is hardly surprising. They were kinsmen and the Catalans were a key component of the Aragonese armies during the Sicilian war. Moreover, after the end of the war western attention was once again focussed on leading a crusade to recover Constantinople. The Catalans were perfectly placed to carry out western plans in the Aegean, and for the Aragonese they presented the opportunity to create a vassal state in former Byzantine territories that could rival those of the Angevins in Greece. Both James II of Aragon and his younger brother Fredrick III of Sicily were aware of events in Byzantium and once they heard of the conflict with the emperor, they took the opportunity to bring the Catalans back into the fold. Already in 1304 Frederick had intimated to Pope Benedict XI that he was willing to assist in a crusade to recover Constantinople, after which he received papal permission to send ten galleys under the command of his half-brother Sancho of Aragon to capture Byzantine islands in the Aegean. One of Sancho's objectives was to seek out the Catalans in order to see whether they would be willing to assist in this mission.[48] The Company certainly seem to have been open to these overtures, as Muntaner reports that after the assassination of Roger of Flor they raised the banners of St Peter and those of the kings of Aragon and Sicily at their fortress in Gallipoli and

45 George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 4:642–43.

46 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:76–77; Hughes trans., p. 110.

47 Jessee and Isaenko, "The Military Effectiveness of Alan Mercenaries in Byzantium," 125–31; Kanellopoulos and Lekea, "Prelude to Kephissos," 125–37.

48 Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 138–47. Laiou writes that James of Aragon, had separate plans to bring the Catalans under his control, although their exact nature remains obscure: ibid., pp. 138–39, 176–78. Burns also writes of James' connection to the Catalans, but insists that the king never sought to control them in the same degree as Frederick did: Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers," 767–68.

ran into battle with the cry of "Aragon! Aragon! Saint George! Saint George!"[49] Sancho's fleet arrived in the Aegean in spring 1305 and although Pachymeres says that Berengar of Entença left temporarily to join with Sancho and raid some islands, it seems that the Catalans did not make any concrete agreement with Sancho. Muntaner, who was one of the Company's hierarchy and in a position to know, does not mention Sancho's fleet or any agreement with Frederick, beyond a general sense of loyalty to Aragon. With the exception of Pachymeres, the other sources are also silent about any concerted action between the Catalans and Sancho against the Byzantines.[50]

The failure of Sancho's mission did not, however, put an end to Frederick's desire to bring the Catalan Company under his control. In 1306–7 he discussed the possibility of sending his cousin, the Infant Ferdinand of Majorca, the third son of King James of Majorca, to the Aegean to lead the Company in his (Frederick's) name.[51] This is the first time that Frederick formally treated the Catalans as his vassals and in theory, once their allegiance was gained by the Infant, they would carry out Frederick's orders in the region and seek his permission before making any important decisions.[52] The reality was, however, somewhat different. By the time Ferdinand reached Gallipoli in May 1307 the Catalan leadership was split between the party of Berengar of Entença, who was supported by Muntaner and Ferdinand Eiximenis of Arenós, and that of Bernard of Rocafort. Entença's party agreed that the Infant Ferdinand should lead the Company in the name of Frederick III, but Rocafort opposed this. Muntaner, who clearly disliked Rocafort, claims that this was because Rocafort felt that his position in the Company would be threatened by the arrival of the Infant, who would support Entença's party. Furthermore, Rocafort bore a grudge against Frederick III and he managed to convince the greater part of the Catalan army that Frederick had abandoned them after the Sicilian war and that his leadership would be detrimental to the interests of the Company. In the end, the Catalans, after being coerced by Rocafort, proposed that the Infant should lead them in his own right and without overlordship from Frederick III. Although this offer flattered the Infant, he ultimately declined it as he did not wish to go against Frederick's orders.[53] Therefore, although the Catalans flew the banners of the kings of Aragon and Sicily, in reality they remained independent actors in the

49 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:53, 55, 69–70; Hughes trans., pp. 82, 85, 103. It should be noted that the edition of Muntaner that I have consulted (op. cit., p. 55), along with the Hughes translation (p. 85) does not include the words "Aragon! Aragon!" in the Catalan battle cry, but the translation by Lady Goodenough, which has been followed by Burns and others, does: *The Chronicle of Muntaner*, trans. Lady Goodenough (London, 1920–21; repr. Cambridge, Ontario, 2000), p. 435; Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers," p. 768.

50 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:38–52; Hughes trans., pp. 65–80; Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 1:575–76; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, p. 145.

51 For more on the Infant Ferdinand, see Beverly Berg, "The Moreote Expedition of Ferrando of Majorca in the Aragonese Chronicle of Morea," *Byzantion* 55 (1985), 69–90.

52 Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 180–83.

53 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:78–84; Hughes trans., pp. 113–18.

Aegean theatre. Even though there is little doubt that Muntaner and most of the Company felt a strong degree of loyalty to the Aragonese royal house, the leadership was divided over the extent to which control of the Company should be surrendered to a ruler distanced from the complexities of the region which they were in the midst of overrunning.

The Catalans and the Franco-Angevins

After this point, the other main western player in the Mediterranean – the Franco-Angevin faction (which was supported by the papacy) – also tried to secure the services of the Catalans. This was instigated by Charles of Valois, the titular Latin emperor of Constantinople and the younger brother of Philip IV of France. At the time of the Catalan campaign, Charles, along with Philip IV, Pope Clement V, and the Angevins of Naples, who were overlords of most of the Frankish lands in Greece, had focussed their efforts on a crusade to re-conquer Constantinople which would also shore up Latin Greece and pave the way for the recovery of the Holy Land.[54]

By 1307 the crusade preparations were advanced and Charles dispatched his envoy Thibault of Cepoy to the Aegean to negotiate with the Company and bring them into the forthcoming campaign, much as Frederick III had attempted to do with Sancho of Aragon and the Infant Ferdinand.[55] Thibault reached the Catalans in the summer of 1307, who by this time were under the command of Bernard of Rocafort. According to Muntaner, who was no doubt influenced by his dislike of Rocafort, the majority of the Company were unwilling to swear their allegiance to Charles of Valois, but Rocafort "realising that he had been scorned by the Houses of Sicily, Aragon and Majorca, decided to seek friendship with Sir Charles, [...] thus he swore allegiance [...] and made the entire Company do the same."[56] Interestingly, although the Catalans were not natural allies of the Franco-Angevins, they did outwardly display some loyalty to the pope, as is shown by Muntaner's report that they flew the banner of St Peter. On one occasion, Muntaner even writes that the Catalans flew the papal banner "against the emperor and his soldiers, who were schismatics," which is a clear reflection of the anti-Byzantine papal crusade rhetoric of the time.[57] In any event, despite Muntaner's words and the willingness of the Catalans to play the crusader card, there is

54 Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean*, pp. 28–29.

55 For more on Thibaut of Cepoy, see Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers," pp. 762–64.

56 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:95–98; Hughes trans., pp. 130–34; Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers," 755–58, 763–64; Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, pp. 208–09.

57 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:53, 69–70; Hughes trans., pp. 82, 103. It should also be noted that the Company sent legates to the pope and the French, possibly to seek support against the Greeks, but these were unsuccessful: ibid., p. 111; Burns, "The Catalan Company and the European Powers," pp. 755–56.

nothing to suggest that they were interested in furthering papal objectives or seriously allying themselves to Charles of Valois. It is clear that Thibault of Cepoy's authority over the Company was only theoretical, as is suggested by Muntaner, who writes that Rocafort "took less account of him that he would a dog."[58] By 1308 the crusade plans of Charles of Valois crumbled and the Catalans went about their business as an autonomous group once again.

The Catalans and the Duchy of Athens

The final stage of the Catalan campaign was the Company's conquest of the duchy of Athens. Here some comparisons can be drawn with events in Constantinople seven years earlier. The duke of Athens at the time was Walter of Brienne, an Angevin vassal, who invited the Catalans into his territories to fight against various Greek factions who were threatening his borders, namely those of the emperor, as well as Thomas Komnenos of Epiros and John II Angelos of Thessaly. Walter agreed to pay the Catalans for six months' service upfront at the same rate that the Byzantine emperor had agreed to pay them.[59] However, once the Catalans had successfully beaten back the Greeks, Walter was unable to meet his side of the bargain and pay the Company. He attempted to avert disaster by splitting the Company in two and settling 500 men in his lands, but this tactic backfired as the Catalans refused to leave.[60]

What followed was one of the most remarkable pitched battles of the era. The Catalans, still with some of their Turkish allies, met the chivalry of Frankish Greece, commanded by Walter of Brienne, in the marshy plains near Halmyros in Thessaly. The accounts of the battle suggest that the Catalans were outnumbered, but that they were able to position themselves behind marshland which the Frankish heavy cavalry rashly charged into. This allowed the lightly armed almogavars to pick them off and win a resounding victory, not dissimilar to those at Courtrai and Bannockburn (the accounts of which may well have influenced those of Halmyros).[61] During the battle Walter of Brienne was killed and the Catalans seized the duchy of Athens, becoming a "resident" Greek power themselves. Over

58 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:98; Hughes trans., p. 134.

59 The only difference was that this time a rate was stipulated for light horsemen. The wages were four ounces per month for heavily armoured horsemen, two ounces for light horsemen and one ounce for footsoldiers: Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:106–07; Hughes trans., pp. 145–46.

60 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:107–08; Hughes trans., pp. 147–48.

61 For a detailed reconstruction of the battle, see DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, pp. 58–65. The sources give various numbers for the Athenian forces. The Aragonese Chronicle says more than 2,000 cavalry and 4,000 infantry, Gregoras gives the higher figure of 6,400 cavalry and more than 8,000 infantry, and Muntaner the inflated number of 700 French knights and 30,000 Greek footsoldiers. Gregoras states that the Catalan army had increased to 3,500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry: *Libro de los fechos et conquistas del principado de la Morea* (Osnabrück, 1885, repr. 1968), p. 120; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte*, 1:194 ; Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, 6:107; Hughes trans., p. 147.

the following decades, they cemented their alliances with the Turks, expanded their territories further into Greece and into Negroponte to the north, and embarked upon raids of the Aegean islands with the Turks. They also formed stronger ties with the Aragonese and accepted a number of Aragonese vassals as their commander, such as Alfonso Fadrique, the illegitimate son of Frederick III.[62]

Conclusions

The Catalans provide an interesting case study into the use and activities of an irregular proxy force in the Aegean and Asia Minor vacuum – a region of extreme fragmentation and instability. Over a period of less than ten years they came into contact with and served under (either nominally or in reality) some the main powers in the Mediterranean: that is, the Byzantines, Aragonese and the Franco-Angevins. They also fought (undefeated) against two of their supposed overlords (the Angevins and Byzantines), as well as Alan mercenaries and the Turks, with whom they also allied.

Ultimately no power was able to fully control the Catalan Company. Although their numbers were not insurmountable, they were a highly effective military unit who proved themselves in Anatolia against Turkish warrior-nomads, in Thrace and Macedonia against Byzantine and Alan armies and in Greece against heavily armoured Frankish cavalry. The western powers rightly considered the Catalans as a potentially valuable proxy force who could be used to further their own objectives in the region, but unfortunately for them, the Catalans were not interested in playing this role unless it came with significant financial reward. The Catalans, for their part, soon realized that they could achieve much more without outside intervention and used their military prowess to carve out a domain for themselves. Ironically, the only people the Catalans had any form of lasting agreement or peace with (with the exception of their Aragonese overlords) were the Anatolian Turkish beyliks, whose establishment in the region and rise to power was very similar. In fact the Ottomans famously gained their foothold in Europe only after they were shipped there by the Byzantines, who had employed them to fight in Thrace during the 1350s – a move which the Catalans had already shown could be disastrous. This is testament to the prominence of irregular proxy groups in any complex and highly fragmented region.

62 For more on this, see Setton, *The Catalan Domination of Athens*, pp. 14–51; Zachariadou, "The Catalans of Athens and the Beginning of Turkish Expansion in the Aegean Area," pp. 821–38.