



Translating religious enemy's animus: Problems translating *Tirant lo Blanc* into Arabic

Traduciendo la animadversión religiosa del enemigo: Problemas para la traducción al árabe del *Tirant lo Blanc*

Traduzindo a animosidade religiosa do inimigo; problemas para a tradução ao árabe do *Tirant lo Blanc*

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Resumen: En este artículo hablamos en primer lugar de la novela- *Tirant lo Blanc*- y su autoría. Abordamos las dificultades de la traducción entre dos ámbitos culturales muy heterogéneos. Exponemos la dificultad de la traducción literaria de la lucha del Tirant frente al Islam, así como la dificultad traductológica en la traducción del término moro, moros al árabe tomando como referencia las traducciones al árabe de Don Quijote de la Mancha.

Abstract: First of all, this article is about the novel and its authorship. We are dealing with the translating difficulties with regard to these two heterogeneous cultures. We are presenting how difficult *Tirant's* translation is referred to Islam, as well as the words 'Moor' when having to translate them into Arabic, taking as a reference *Don Quixote of La Mancha* translations into Arabic.

Keywords: *Tirant lo Blanc* – Joan Martorell – Islam – Moors – Translation into Arabic.

Palabras clave: *Tirant lo Blanc* – Joan Martorell – Islam – Moros – Traducción al árabe.

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Introduction

Mr. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra wrote in his masterful *Don Quixote of La Mancha* that *Tirant lo Blanc* is “the best book in the world”:

I’m telling you the truth, Mr. Buddy. This book is the best one in the world because of its written style. It is here where knights eat and sleep and die on their beds. It is here where they do their testaments before they die. The remaining books this gender lack of all this information. (Cervantes 2003: 411).

We cherished great respect and fear facing such a complicated task as translating “the best book in the world” into Arabic is. The reason is because of the linguistic variety and conceptual depth, as well.

But in the end, this is a matter of work, so that we set on it. Then, we had been carrying this superb work’s translation out since long ago. The more we relish it the more we highly think of it. We have just finished translating four hundred and eighty-seven chapters into Arabic, which are the ones *Tirant lo Blanc* is composed of. At present, it is about to be published by Islamic Studies Egyptian Institute in Madrid and also by IVITRA which is the Translating International Virtual Institute.

I. *Tirant lo Blanc’s* authorship

Joanot Martorell (Joanot is just a diminutive used in the family setting and a term of endearment, as well). He was a native to Gandía (Valencia) knight. With regard to the last research, he was probably born in Valencia City about 1410. The author’s grandfather was Knight Guillem Martorell, who was the royal adviser and in charge of Treasury. His father was Francesc Martorell, who was married to Damiata Abelló. He was King Martin I of Aragon’s butler, who was known as Martín the Human. One of Joanot Martorell’s sisters was married to the Valencian famous poet Ausías March².

With regard to his biography, it should be noted that several parts of it show him as an aggressive and fighter person with a hectic life and chivalrous events and love affairs, as well. He had many rows and challenges to death

² Ausías March was a Valencian medieval knight. He was one of the most important poets in the Golden Age and in Catalan literature.



even though most of these duels were just verbal ones (Ivars, 54-62). We have some information with regard to some of the chivalresque fightings he was so fond of because of the fourteen letters due to the fourteen (battle letters or exchanged letters) Joanot Martorell kept on writing for his whole life. These letters have been published by *Tirant lo Blanc*'s publishers in the care of Martí de Riquer (1947; 1979).

Martorell took the position of Denia's attorney. He was a tireless traveller. He spent many years travelling around Europe. It is believed that he visited the Eastern countries. According to some historical documents, the Valencian writer travelled to England in 1438 and spent long periods of time in that country. He travelled to Portugal in 1443 and to Nápoles in 1442 and 1454.

Joanot wrote many letters and we have come to know many things about his life because of that. As an author, he wrote a chivalry theoretical play under the title of "Guillem de Varoic" and a short story about chivalric novel called "Flor de cavallería" ("Chivalresque Flower"), but *Tirant lo Blanc* was the work which immortalized the author. Furthermore, it was defined as the first great modern novel because of its realism and its wealth procedures. This is a surprising, original and overflowed imagination. Moreover, it is provided with an excellent narrative which is typical of a great writer who has travelled and read a lot.

The novel is supported on a heroes and legend's story. Its main character is Tirant lo Blanc. He is a novelistic character. He is Blanca's son, Great Britain's Duke descendent. The story takes place in England, North Africa, the Mediterranean Islands –Rodas and Sicily– and Constantinople.

Martorell and his *Tirant lo Blanc* inscribe in 15th's century historical frame, where Aragon's Crown shines with brightness. In that time, Valencia's Kingdom lives the literary Golden Age.

Martorell stands out in the novel's introduction that his work had been written in a "vulgar"³ language, like many other writers their age did. It was the Valencian language, spoken all over Valencian lands. Martorell tells earthly and naval battles with preciseness, hunt, banquets, political ploys and romantic conquests. The critic Martí de Riquer is of the opinion that: When

³ Vulgar means Latin or culture language opposite to "romance", in the vernacular or "vulgar" spoken by people, Valencian language.



Joanot Martorell makes its characters speak and moves its rethorical away Tirant lo Blanc remains unforgettable and keeps the principles which the modern reader nicely gets, in a short dialogue, unequivocal and familiar.” (RIQUER 1965: 632-671).

Martorell starts relating his novel in January the 2nd in 1460 (as recorded in his dedication). He dies without issue and according to some people leaving his work unfinished in 1465. His manuscript lies at Martí Joan de Galba’s hands. This manuscript was a loan guarantee to him (RIQUER 1992, 267).

Not before 1489 does Galba take his first steps so as to publish the manuscript – the printing house did not come into Valencia till 1474, that is nine years after Martorell’s death—. That issue comes to an end, but Martí Joan de Galba dies during the first months in 1490. He was not able to see the printed book (Martorell, 52). Having obtained all these circumstances out of the documents, a debate has started with regard to Galba’s modifying of the manuscript, or to the printers one, or whether it was never modified, referring to Joan Martorell’s single authorship or Martorell and Galba’s double authorship.

The incunabulum comes out in November the 20th in 1490, published by Nicolau Spindeler German printer who was living in Valencia. A second publishing takes place seven years later in Barcelona by Diego de Gumiel’s printing. The very same himself will publish his first Castilian (Spanish) translation in Valladolid in 1511, supported by the one in 1497.

Despite the first Castilian version (Valladolid, 1511) was printed with no indication with regard to his author or author’s names it was believed among many Castilian speakers in 16th century, and specially by Miguel de Cervantes, that this work was an anonymous one. The first Valencian or Catalan edition was published in November the 20th, 1490. Valencian readers knew because of its introduction that it was a supposed original English novel’s translation into Valencian by Joanot Martorell. According to some researchers, he died before finishing his translating tasks. He had translated just three out of the four parts which defined the supposed original English text into his mother tongue.

Marti Joan de Galba was in charge of translating into Valencian the fourth remaining part of the book at Lady Isabel de Llorís’ request.



Nevertheless, neither in 1490's Valencian edition nor in 1511's Castilian version is perceived any evidence regarding Martorell's three parts division and Galba's one. We must take into account that the work in both Valencian and Castilian versions appears arranged into four hundred and eighty seven chapters.

Nowadays, some of this work's researchers consider that Galba's intervention did not limit just to a number of final chapters, but it was progressive all through the text. On the other hand, some other researchers confirm that Galba's intercession has been a symbolic one or maybe that he did not even exist.

Anyhow, the fact is that Martí Joan de Galba's leading figure is certified in Valencian files: his engagement in 1457, his wife's death in 1482 and his own death in 1490 (RIQUER 1974, 24).

II. Translating difficulties between two very heterogeneous cultural fields

In order to translate such a literary work like the one we are working on has to meet text beauty, style and marks, as well. That is grammar, lexical and phonology. We must take into account that style marks in literary works written in such languages as Valencian, Castilian or English might stop being that kind when being translated into Arabic, because of its great stylistic difference to European languages. We will remember that the term "to translate" comes from Latin term *traducere*, which means 'the result of one thing being moved from one place to another' consists of the fact of expressing one language previously written into a different language or being capable to have it expressed.

One of the problems we face when translating a literary work such as *Tirant lo Blanc* consists of looking for equivalents, which can cause the same effect on this translation's reader, that is, the same effect that Joanot Martorell expected when reading the original text. This fact makes us to always deal with the text from de literary work point of view, so that the language we use is as familiar or similar as possible to the original by Joanot Martorell. Let us not forget either its power or its beauty and also its dynamic components.



Therefore, we have always tried the translation quality to be as similar as the one in the original text. We have also been very careful so that the work's contents remain the same. With regard to the above mentioned, we must take into account what experts of great stature such as V. García Yebra said: "Translation consists of reproducing the language's message from the original source or language into the receiving language or final language, throughout the nearest and more natural equivalent. Firstly, with regard to the sense it is provided with and secondly, referring to style". (GARCÍA, 31-32)

One of the first obstacles we might find in literary translation from Valencian into Arabic –in fact, we have encountered some of them during *Tirant lo Blanc's* translation– comes from the fact that both languages are vehicles for expressing two very different cultures. That is the reason why it has been quite difficult to find equivalents, and many times it has turned out to be a bit disappointing.

Taking into account that the original language in *Tirant lo Blanc* is the spoken Valencian in Joanot Martorell's times and that the receiving language is Arabic obviously, both languages belong to quite different cultural, religious and even identity references between both of them. That is the reason why one of the problems we have had to face is the one of trying to find Arabic terms which show some terms' most accurate meaning. For example, terms related to the armament in battles which very often appears in the work, but it does not exist in Arabic language. Just as likely, it is very difficult to find related terms so as to translate suits and dresses, typical fabrics, or dresses' colors and description names commonly used by Joanot Martorell in his work.

Hardly have we translated into Arabic all of the titles the author uses in his work (such as Duke, Count, Marquise and so on), because they lack of an Arabic equivalent term with regard to the receiving language. The same happens to some jobs which appear in his work which are only suitable for Christian society from peninsular Levante in 15th Century. They did not exist in any Moslim society in the Mediterranean Southern shore.

Aspects of daily life such as gastronomy and food are particular issues for the author and the readers the original text is addressed to. Some of its food is odd and unknown to the Arab reader (not only the pork associated ones). We have made an effort to try to match an equivalent term to them.



III. Literary work's difficulties with regard to *Tirant's* battle facing Islam

It is quite difficult and sometimes even impossible searching lexical equivalents in Arabic to some particular terms that we find in *Tirant*, such as the ones related to social, legal or religious matters. Arabic language is Islam's religious and official language and also the cultural and sociopolitical one. We must take into account that this Arabic translation is addressed to a learned Arab reader who will be more than likely a Muslim. It is quite complicated to make a Muslim to understand Christian's religious expressions which are very commonly used in this work.

That is why it turns out to be necessary for some terms to go with the required explanations about its meaning and importance, specified in an explanatory footnote.

We have also taken the challenge on double-meaning words translation. Any translator fears them because of their difficult translation. Sometimes, double-meaning words which are written on purpose are very difficult or even impossible to translate. Because of that, we have had to take part to use examples very close to Arabic language, so as the reader does not become confused.

We have always made sure a literary work, but as usual we might realize about literary or almost literary translation being much more effective than looking for an equivalent term. That is the reason why we have very seldom used this method.

It is very common that conversations among people are reflected in literary works. The proverbs and sayings which Joanot Martorell frequently used went with an elaborated sound very difficult to translate. Not only did we try to find an equivalent to its meaning, but to its sound as well.

It seems to be very complicated to let the reader get certain elements which on the other hand are very easily assimilated by the original work's addressee, such as customs, popular writings, as it happens in chapters 88-92 (Martorell, 196-198) when he speaks about knights' duties and virtues and so on. These elements might even change the author's message.



Not to say that we have had to face a number of limits so as to translate *Tirant lo Blanc*. These linguistic, textual and hearsay limits have forced us to take part in a better way or maybe not that much, so as to achieve the same effect or a similar one on our readers than the original work causes on Joan Martorell's readers. In many occasions, we have been able to achieve this aim throughout a good lexical assortment. In many other occasions, it has been necessary to reflect the meaning, name and shown ideas explanations at footnotes and so on.

Translation field has started a debate about the footnotes use in literary works translations. In the translators field, there are some translators who think that using footnotes means failure and shame to the translator. Sometimes it is true, because a bad translator goes to footnotes so as to pretend his "failure", because of not having been able to find an equivalent to the terms, sentences, ideas, concept and so on. Nevertheless, it is unfair to generalize, because every work shows different peculiarities.

So, one translator might need the use of footnotes or avoid them, according to any work in particular difficulties. Being the case such a novel as *Tirant* which was written in the spoken language in Valencia in 15th century, is plenty of terms, sentences and great importance are given to the meaning and the culture, which is even unknown to Valencian and Catalan contemporary people (HAUF, 1658).⁴

Owing to this circumstance, not only does the use of footnotes clarify some aspects, but beautify the work itself. I. e., some footnotes function is to clarify a place's right where the reader gets used to. Places such as Navarra, Aragón and so on are quoted. These places are very familiar to the original text's reader. In exchange, these places are quite unknown to the Arab reader even though if he is a learned one. That is the reason why it is required to explain the translation's reader where all these places are located.

Regarding place names, actually, it is impossible to find equalizations in Arabic to certain terms related to described or announced regions by Martorell. Additionally, it is necessary to place the Arabic translation reader in the

⁴ This way, even the newest and strictest original language work edition, the Albert Hauf himself needed to add more than one thousand footnotes at the end of any chapters, having as purpose helping on behalf of the contemporary reader's understanding (HAUF, 2004).



religious, cultural and social field whom the readers the original work was addressed to during the 15th century.

Tirant lo Blanc is a very well known work in Spain and in some other countries. But it is completely unknown in the Arab countries. When they gave us translating *Tirant* into Arabic job, we started looking for some references as much in libraries and book-shops as on the Internet in Arabic language, regarding its authorship, possible relations with the Arab culture and so on. But we found just nothing at all. We took it for granted that this universal literature milestone has remained hidden to the Arabic speaker. We found ourselves obligated to write up a detailed introduction so as to alleviate these lacks, with regard to both Joanot Martorell's biography and the circumstances and shadows with regard to his authorship.

IV. 'Moor', translating difficulties

We have met some difficulties when translating terms such as 'Moor' into Arabic. Which one is the best possible option? We must take into account that this term has not any accurate equivalent in Arabic. Having looked for former of parallel ones we have found that translators used several semantic models at *Don Quixote of La Mancha* translation into Arabic. So, for example, 'Abd el-'Aziz Al Ahwānī A's (1957) first translation the term *magrebí* was used to refer to *Moor*. 'Abd al-Raḥman Badawī's second translation (1965) used the same term *Magrebí*. On the other hand, Sulayman al-'Aṭṭār used the term *Arabic* to refer to *moro* (2002). Actually, the fact of using *Magrebí* or *Arabic* terms is half a solution.

In our opinion, the most accurate translation to the word *Moor* is *Moslem* or *Muslim* in Arabic, because it is the one which most common elements has got in the semantic field. As a subsequence, it is closer in meaning. We must take into account that Joanot Martorell used the term *moro* to refer to Turkish, Egyptian, North-African or Persian inhabitants, as well. He also uses this term so as to refer to people who practice Islamic religion or regarding a cultural field or Islamic territory from a general point of view and no country or region in particular.

We can see an example in the battles and wars which deal with the King of England versus King of Gran Canarias. The author refers to the first one as the *Christian king* whereas refers to the second one as the *Moor king*.



When speaking about armies, the *Moor* always fight against the *Christian*. It does not matter if these *Moor* come from Egypt, Turkey, North Africa and so on.

To conclude, we refer to the word *moro* that F. Corriente includes in his Spanish-Arabic dictionary as “Muslim, who lives in North Africa and Al-Ándalus” (CORRIENTE, 811).

When it was time to translate the work we were quite worried about the way the author speaks about Muslim, Islam and Islam’s Prophet taking into account the problems entitled to the authors who make negative references to Islam or to its Prophet⁵. Taking into account that this work is in Arabic and it is addressed to an Arab reader, likely a Moslem one, we found ourselves compulsory to include footnotes with our explanation, as well as our disagreement with the author in several occasions when makes some derogatory allusions or offences to Islam, to Moslems or to Islam’s Prophet. We have added to the footnotes “Negative Reference” mark, so as to dissociate from any insult to Islam.

Some will wonder, why do we have to dissociate ourselves from *Tirant lo Blanc* when he made negative references to Islam? This is a learned way of showing respect to the original work, and also to the readers. This is a diplomatic way to avoid any kind of confrontation against any Arabic and Islamic world’s sector.

In order to explain this point we must come back to *Don Quixote of La Mancha* first translation into Arabic by ‘Abd al-Aziz al-Ahwani, who just published the first part of the work. This first translation into Arabic was very successful in the beginning. Nevertheless, its fame was decreasing step by step because of several demands with regard to some passages in the work. These passages contained negative references to the Muslim and to Prophet Muhammad⁶.

⁵ A lot has been written regarding this matter by María Jesús Rubiera. Recently, it has been included in his biography, as well. A new point of view has been given according to Francisco Franco Sánchez’s research: “Tirant i l’Islam. L’Islam com a variable d’anàlisi de l’obra”.

⁶ With regard to this work’s translations into Arabic and the Moslim learned reader’s receipt. See de Hany El Erian research: “Cervantes y Egipto” (Cervantes and Egypt).



According to these *Don Quixote* early Arabic friends, Cervantes used to express in a very offensive way his own feelings regarding Islam. As a result, it was never accepted by a Muslim.

Naturally, it was not taken into account that the work was written in 17th century. There was enmity and confrontation between the Half Moon and the Cross. It was hardly expected for any Christian writer at that time, neither for Martorell nor for Cervantes positive or neutral opinions to Islam to be written. The reason was that Spanish identity, regarding ideology and religion, was traditionally fighting against Islam which brought Al-Andalus under control in the Middle Ages.

It is necessary for the Arabic and Muslim reader to understand that negative passages or fighting against the Muslim contained in Joan Martorell and Miguel de Cervantes novel's are facets which cannot be concealed. They just belong to the time they were written and to the public it was addressed to.

But these understandable attacks according to that time, cannot stop being odd incidents in any of the quoted works. We have to make the Muslim reader to understand that all these references do not diminish any literary nor cultural value to all these literary monuments which belong as a whole to humankind.

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