



# Joanot Martorell

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by Pau Sanchis

*Tirant lo Blanc*, the 15th century Catalan fictional epic, the work which was, and remains, the most successful — both within and outside of the Catalan linguistic domain — having been translated into Spanish and Italian in the 18th century, was written by — according to the historian Jaume Chiner — a knight born in Valencia between 1405 and 1410 and who died in 1465.

For many years Martorell had to share the credit for *Tirant lo Blanc* with Martí Joan de Galba, long considered co-author of the book. Recently, however, specialists, of which Martí de Riquer or Albert Hauf were amongst the first, have argued that the work is solely Martorell's, albeit Hauf — author of the most recent, excellent philological edition — not as resoundingly as others.

As Llàlucia Martín Pascual has explained, Joanot Martorell's family came from the middle nobility of the kingdom of Valencia in the courts of the Duke of Gandia and Martí I l'Humà. His life was that of a chivalrous knight who, for various reasons, clashed with other knights. In many cases these conflicts did not result in duels but in the exchange of money or property. Such was the case with Ausiàs March, who married Isabel Martorell and with whom Joanot and his brother Galceran maintained a conflict over his sister's dowry, resolved by Martorell conceding part of his land. The correspondence of many of these disputes has been conserved, for example with Perot Mercader, Jaume Ripoll o Gonçal d'Íxer or Martorell's cousin Joan de Mompalau to defend the honour of his sister Damiata: a conflict in which Queen Maria, wife of Alfons el Magnànim, had to intervene. This correspondence — the famous letters from battle — are a fascinating testimony to the type of knight that Martorell was.

Martorell also travelled to England and through Portugal. The literary outcome of these voyages was the short novel *Guillem de Varoïc*, a translation of the Anglo-Norman poem Guy of Warwick, which tells a similar story to the Latin text *Guinus de Baruic* from Lisbon. Martorell also wrote a text entitled *Flor de cavalleria* (Anthology of What is Best in Chivalry) of which only the beginning remains.

In later years Martorell's life was filled with incidents and periods of imprisonment as a result of duels or legal disputes, such as his time in Barcelona and Naples. Martorell ended his days bankrupt after having sold his titles and came to depend on the money lender Martí Joan de Galba. In fact, Martí Joan de Galba came into possession of the manuscript of *Tirant lo Blanc* in 1464 as a pawn for a loan. It seems Martorell began writing it in Barcelona four years previously at the court of the Prince of Viana.

Translated by Katherine Reynolds