

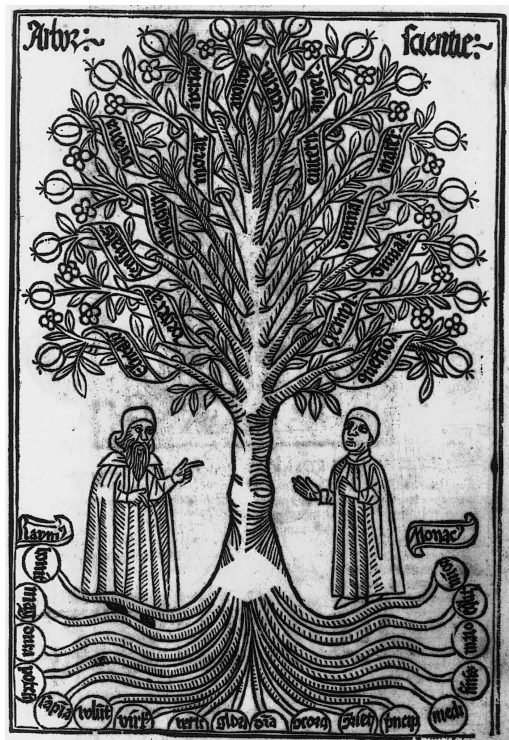
LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

During the Middle Ages, Catalan witnessed a considerable written output, both literary and merely utilitarian. In this latter category, we can find all types of documents from as early as the 12th century, just as in other European languages at the time. These include:

- *Private*: Agreements, donations, wills, complaints, personal letters, letters of challenge, diaries;
- *Public*: Royal documents, books containing divisions of estates at the expense of the autochthonous Muslims, speeches from the Courts, or parliaments (general ones from the Crown or particular ones from Catalonia, Valencia and Sardinia);
- *Commercial*: Inventories, contracts, tariffs, loan and maritime insurance policies, bills of exchange;
- *Legal*: *Usatges de Barcelona* (c. 1300; *The Usatges of Barcelona: The Fundamental Law of Catalonia, 1994*), *Costums de Tortosa* (1272; another collection of legal regulations), *Furs de València* (laws and privileges of the kingdom; 13th century), *Llibre del Consolat de Mar* (1385; *Consulate of the Sea, 1975*), a variety of ordinances;
- *Judicial*: Accusations, interrogations, summaries and rulings from the courts;
- *Diplomatic*: International treaties, capitulations;
- *Linguistic*: Glossaries and vocabularies, treatises on correct language use;
- *Scientific*: Medical books, veterinary books, books on the Natural Sciences, etc.;
- *Translations*: Literary, religious, philosophical, scientific, humanistic, etc.

However, apart from the religious oratory of the *Homilies d'Organyà* (*Homilies of Organyà*, from around 1200), which is the first text in Catalan of a certain length after

the two brief excerpts conserved from the *Liber iudiciorum* (c. 1150, c. 1140/80), during the 13th and 14th centuries some of the greatest works of history were written in Catalan (the “Four Great Chronicles”, namely: *Llibre dels feits* [*The Chronicle of James I*, 1883; *Book of the Deeds of James I of Aragon*, 2003], the *Crònica de Bernat Desclot* [*Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 1928], the *Crònica de Ramon Muntaner* [*Muntaner’s Chronicle*, 1980], and the *Crònica de Pere el Cerimoniós* [*Chronicle of Peter IV of Aragon*, 1980]). However, it is primarily with Ramon Llull (1232-1316; traditionally known in English as Raymond Lully or Lull) when the first great landmarks in Catalan literature appear. A first-generation Majorcan (the son of colonists hailing from Barcelona), this great yet controversial scholar, bold missionary and indefatigable traveller wrote a monumental number of works (approximately 300) in Catalan, Latin and Arabic which encompass a wide range of subjects in an array of literary genres. In Catalan, his most noteworthy writings include his novels *Llibre*



Ramon Llull, left, also known in English as Raymond Lully or Lull (1232-1316), according to an illustration from the 1505 Barcelona edition of his *Arbor Scientiae*. This restless and indefatigable Majorcan monk was author of a huge oeuvre in Catalan, Latin and Arabic and is regarded as the father of literary prose in Catalan.

d'Evast e Blaquerna (Blanquerna, 1925, *passim*), and *Fèlix o Llibre de meravelles* (*Felix or Book of Wonders*). These two works also include, respectively, the celebrated *Llibre d'amic e amat* (*The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, 1923, c. 1995), a treatise in a mystical tone divided into as many versicles as there are days in the year and bearing influences from many sources, including the Bible's *Song of Songs*; and the political-social fable *Llibre de les bèsties* (*The Book of the Beasts*, 1927, 1978). Also noteworthy is his *Arbre de ciència* (*Arbor Scientiae*), a type of encyclopaedia of the contemporary knowledge from his vantage point. The *Doctor Illuminatus*, as Lull was also known, introduced into Catalan not only a noteworthy corpus of educated terms with Latin roots, but also, starting from him, the language and those who cultivated it as a literary language had a flexible, rich model of prose appropriate for narrative, science and philosophy. Lull, in short, along with a few other authors from his day, such as Dante and Eckhart, was one of the first writers in Europe that as early as the 13th century spoke about these realms of knowledge, which until then had been the preserve of Latin, in a common language.

Also around that time, the language of the government swiftly crystallised into a homogeneous and common model of Catalan for the entire linguistic domain. Those who wielded the pen in Barcelona, Valencia or Majorca, for either practical or literary purposes, spoke and wrote in the language of their region, yet they made an effort to avoid excessively prominent local expressions that could make it difficult for their texts to be understood in other Catalan-speaking regions. To accomplish this, they imitated – while at the same time they helped to create – the language of prestigious institutions and personalities, first of all that of the King's Court, that is, the language of the Crown, its entourage and its governing bodies.

Among the latter two, the Royal Chancellery, the body charged with drafting and issuing royal decisions in written form, was of key importance. Its documents presented a Catalan without dialect fissures, elegant and especially prestigious as they had the King as their signatory. This model of language, which has been called the *King's Catalan*, inspired by the name of the traditional English linguistic model, reached the most far-flung corners of the Crown where Catalan was spoken. What is more, a multiplying effect developed, which in turn served as a reputable model for other minor civil servants and scribes scattered throughout the entire Catalan-speaking area, including courts of justice, local institutions and notaries. Precisely one of the causes that contributed to the disappearance of this prestigious, vital model of unified or “standard” language came from the gradual absorption of the Chancellery into other bodies situated in Castile starting at the end of the 15th century.

In the midst of the growing splendour of the Catalan language and prose literature, only the language of poetry rose as an exception: during the Middle Ages the Catalan, Valencian and Majorcan poets who composed did so in Provençal, or later in a conventional language that was a hybrid of Provençal and Catalan, in propor-

tions that varied according to each author and even according to different manuscripts that have reached us from the same author. Prominent among these authors are the brothers Pere (1336/37-1413) and Jaume (1334/35-1410) March, and Jordi de Sant Jordi (c. 1395-1424). The massive use of Provençal, or Old Occitan, in poetry was mainly due to the enormous literary prestige that the troubadours from southern France (but also those from Northern Catalonia and Italy who wrote in Occitan) had conferred on this language, and it was further fostered by its clear similarity with Catalan as well as by the close ties and feudal alliances between the County of Barcelona, starting in the 11th century, and later the Crown of Aragon, and Languedoc and Provence until the battle of Muret (1213). (The convention of composing in Old Occitan could be compared today to the numerous pop music bands from all over the world that, though English may not be their native language, nonetheless use it in their songs.) This state of affairs was maintained until the first third of the 15th century, when the first body of poetry entirely in Catalan appeared, thanks to the formidable literary figure of the Valencian Ausias March, son and nephew, respectively, of the aforementioned Pere and Jaume March – both of them, as the vast majority of Neo-Valencians, the sons of migrated Catalan colonists.

With the 14th century works by Francesc Eiximenis, a Franciscan from Gerona who lived in Valencia; by Saint Vincent Ferrer, a Valencian Dominican; and by the royal civil servant from Barcelona, Bernat Metge, we enter into the golden age of Catalan literature, which would last until the end of the 15th century. The works by Eiximenis (1327/32-1409), who studied in Oxford and Toulouse, were widely disseminated during his time and were translated not only to Latin but also to Spanish, French and Dutch. His memory and works are claimed both by Catalans and Valencians. Apart from the literary value of his works, his oeuvre is enormously important for learning about and documenting mediaeval daily life. With *Lo crestià* (*The Christian*), an unfinished work, he planned an enormous encyclopaedic compendium of all the knowledge of his time. He also wrote didactic and religious works, including the *Llibre dels àngels* (*Book of Angels*), an amusing *Llibre de les dones* (*Book of Women*) and a *Vita Christi* (*Life of Christ*). For his part, Vicent Ferrer (1350-1419), canonised by the Roman Catholic Church in 1458, was a highly educated religious preacher who employed an apocalyptic tone, in addition to being a key figure in both ending the Great Western Schism (1378-1417) and resolving the crisis of succession in the Crown of Aragon that arose as a result of the 1410 death of Martin I the Human of Aragon, the last king from the dynasty of the Counts of Barcelona (Compromise of Caspe, Aragon, 1412). His almost three hundred sermons in Catalan (although he also preached in Latin and is widely remembered even today for his talent with languages) were compiled *in situ* by stenographers from his own retinue and reflect, albeit palely, the spectacle his sermons must have been, which spread throughout the Crown of Aragon, the rest of the Iberian peninsula, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and France, where he died and is buried (in Vannes, Bretagne).

Bernat Metge (1340/46-1413), raised in the educated milieu of the Royal Chancellery, is best known as the author of *Lo somni* (*The Dream*, 2002). This dialogue in apologia mode, in a tone somewhere between irony and sarcasm in the classical style of Cicero, which features the author himself as the main character, grapples with a variety of issues ranging from personal to political and theological. His prose, undoubtedly some of the most elegant in Catalan literature from any age, also shows solid knowledge of authors such as Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Also from this period are the Majorcan author Anselm Turmeda and Arnau de Vilanova, the latter most likely from Valencia. Turmeda (c. 1350-c. 1430) was also a moralistic writer. Originally a Franciscan, he abjured his faith and converted to Islam – to this day his tomb is still venerated in the city of Tunis. A satirical author of both verse and prose, his most important work in the latter genre is the *Disputa de l'ase* (*The Ass's Dispute*), which has come down to us only in its French translation (Paris, 1544). Arnau de Vilanova (1230/40-1331), a physician to popes and kings, wrote almost seventy books in Catalan and Latin, and is known not only for his works of medicine and alchemy but also, as a religious reformer, for his apocalyptic prophecies, which were not always entirely orthodox. His most important work of this in Catalan is the *Raonament d'Avinyó* (*Reasoning of Avignon*).

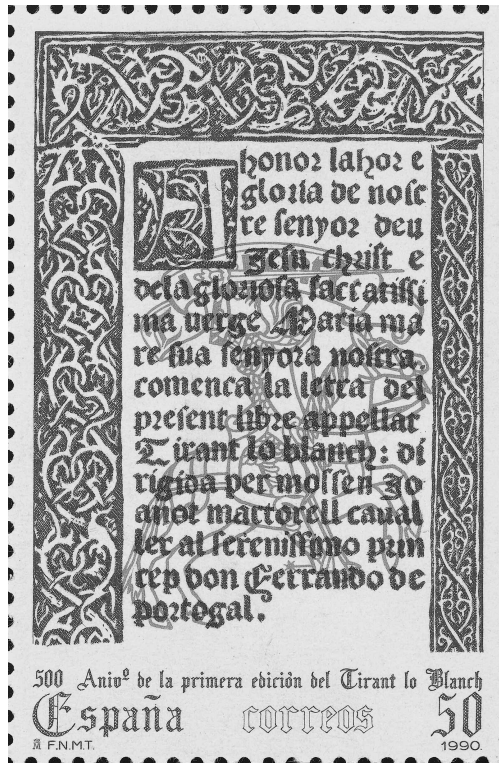
Given the sizeable number of Valencian authors writing in Catalan which emerged in the 15th century, it should be said that there have been not unjustified proposals to label this the “Valencian century” of Catalan literature. Also during the middle of this century was when the chivalric novel *Curial e Güelfa* (*Curial and Guelfa*, 1982) was written by an anonymous author. Nevertheless, it is mainly known for being the century which ushered in the poetic works of Ausias March and the novel *Tirant lo Blanc* by his brother-in-law, Joanot Martorell, both members of the small Valencian nobility.

Ausias March (1400-1459), son and nephew of two renowned Valencian poets who wrote in Provençal, as mentioned above, is perhaps the finest poet in Europe from the time of Geoffrey Chaucer to François Villon. Just as Llull can be regarded as the father of Catalan literary prose, March was the first writer to choose to use Catalan for poetry. As a classical author of Catalan literature, his almost 10,000 verses, which are introspective, not always easy and full of striking images, have never ceased to be read and to influence Catalan poets from all subsequent ages. An educated layman, not only was he familiar with the literary tradition of the Provençal troubadours, one can also discern in his works echoes of Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Dante and Petrarch. His 127 poems, probably composed as of 1427, have traditionally been grouped into four subject-based divisions, currently under revision: the *Cants d'amor* (*Songs of Love*), the *Cants de mort* (*Death Songs*), the *Cants morals* (*Moral Songs*) and, finally, his great *Cant espiritual* (*Spiritual Song*). [*Selected Poems*, 1986; *A Key Anthology*, 1992; *Ausiàs March: Verse Translations of Thirty Poems*, 2006.]



Spanish translation (1560) of a selection of poems by Ausias March (1400-1459), “a Valencian knight from the Catalan nation”, as declared on this cover page, a work by the Portuguese writer Jorge de Montemayor (or Montemor). March is the greatest poet of classical Catalan literature. Within European mediaeval literature, his oeuvre is regarded as the greatest from the time of Chaucer and Villon.

Joanot Martorell (1410/11-1465) is the author of *Tirant lo Blanc*. Originally published in 1490; it was published in English as *Tirant lo Blanc* in 1984, and *Tirant lo Blanc Complete* in 1993 [1974]. This work has been regarded by some critics as the first great modern novel in European literature. It is an extraordinary narration that resolves around the trials and tribulations of its main character, the errant knight Tirant lo Blanc, through England, Sicily, Rhodes, North Africa and primarily the Byzantine Empire, where he will meet and fall in love with Carmesina, the very young daughter of the emperor. *Tirant lo Blanc* has been described by the Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa as a “total” novel, which he views as a novel that is at once chivalrous, realistic, fantastical, humorous, historical, military, social, erotic and psychological – yet none of these things exclusively. The merits of the novel were acknowledged and extolled by Cervantes, who in *Don Quixote* (chapter 6 of part I), held



A stamp issued by the Spanish Post Office commemorating the fifth centenary of the publication of *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490). This novel by the Valencian nobleman Joanot Martorell (1410/11-1465), brother-in-law of the poet Ausias March, was warmly praised by Cervantes as the “best book in the world” (*Don Quixote*, part I, chapter 6). Widely regarded as one of the first novels in modern western literature, it has been translated into more than a dozen languages.

nothing back when he described it as “the best book in the world”. Evidence of its success and literary qualities can be found in the early translations into and printing runs in Spanish (1511), Italian (1513) and French (1737?), which thus introduced the book, as well as Cervantes, to eminences as wide-ranging as Ariosto, Rousseau and Catherine the Great of Russia. Also, one episode of the novel inspired, indirectly via Ariosto, the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* (c. 1598) by Shakespeare. Likewise, chapters 85-97 of *Tirant* are the oldest testimony to the legendary creation of the Order of the Garter, the most distinguished of the knights’ orders in England, as well as of the oldest version of its famous motto: *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (‘Shame to him who thinks ill of it’). Currently, *Tirant* has been translated into more than a dozen languages, including the most widely-spoken western languages as well as others such as Chinese, Finnish, Swedish, Dutch and Romanian.

Other natives of Valencia include the physician Jaume Roig (1434-1478), author of *L'Espill o Llibre de les dones* (*The Mirror or the Book of Women*), a jocose and anti-female autobiography of an old man, made up of 16,000 very brief four-syllable lines in a colloquial tone; the abbess Isabel de Villena (1430-1490), author of a popular and emotional *Vita Christi* (*Life of Christ*); and the nobleman Joan Roís de Corella (1435-1497), who wrote on religious and profane topics and bears the reputation as the best poet in Catalan from the second half of the 15th century, as well as also being a prolific prose writer in an early baroque style. The works of this latter author are regarded by many scholars as the swan's song of *classical* Catalan literature. Likewise, in 1474 the first known book in Catalan was printed in the city of Valencia: *Les trobes en llaors de la Verge Maria* (*Songs in Praise of the Virgin Mary*). However, this book, which compiles compositions by some forty authors who had submitted their works to a poetry contest, is more esteemed for its historical and cultural interest (it is probably the first printed book in the Iberian peninsula) than for its literary value. Finally, the Valencians were also responsible for the now-lost translation and printing of the entire Bible (in 1478) into Catalan by Bonifaci Ferrer (brother of Saint Vincent), but most copies of which were burnt by order of the Inquisition (we recall that biblical translation into "vulgar" languages was forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church).