

Logistics and Food Supply in the *Crònica* of Ramon Muntaner

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Ramon Muntaner and the Expedition to the East

“In the midst of such hearty feasting, while everyone was celebrating, Friar Roger was deep in thought; but even this seemed stubborn of him, nobody in the world had greater foresight than he. And his thoughts were these: ‘You have lost this lord, as have, likewise, those Catalan and Aragonese men who have served him, for he is unable to give them anything, and they will be a great burden upon him. And they are like all men, for they cannot survive without food, and so, since they will receive nothing from the King, they will cause great devastation out of necessity; and, in the end, they will destroy all the land, and all of them will perish one by one. So, since this lord who has bestowed such honours upon you is so well served, it is necessary that you seek to relieve him of these troops, for the sake of his honour and for their own advantage.’”¹

The scene Muntaner reports here took place in August 1302 and the festivities mentioned were the celebrations on the occasion of the Peace of Caltabellotta. The Peace of Caltabellotta was the ending point of the

1 HUGHES, 2006, p. 36.

War of the Sicilian Vespers, which had been fought since 1282.² The man deep in thought, although there was a great party all around him, was Roger de Flor, leader of the Great Catalan Company.³ In this function, the conclusion of a peace agreement could only be bad news for him. The Great Catalan Company was a mercenary company and for mercenaries, peace is synonymous with unemployment and unemployment is, at least in those times, synonymous with starvation. The mercenaries of the Great Catalan Company were, as Muntaner writes, of course “like all men, for they cannot survive without food”.⁴ Without payment or free access to food supply, they would take what they need by force and thereby “cause great devastation without necessity”.⁵

I decided to begin my article with the given scene, because these considerations of Roger de Flor were the starting point for a military operation known today as *The Catalan Expedition to the East*, “perhaps the most fantastic military adventure of the later Middle Ages”.⁶ As we see, the question of feeding troops and food supply is not only strongly interconnected with the military aims of the expedition. According to Muntaner, it was this question, which was in fact the reason for planning such an expedition.⁷ Moreover, this topic will play a major role during the entire expedition. Of course, all military expeditions in the Middle Ages, as well as in other periods of history, were subject to considerations such as: How can we feed our troops? How and which way can we transport the victuals and the equipment? What about fodder for the horses? For how many days should every soldier carry

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- 2 For a short history of events and of the Company see BURNS, 1954, pp. 751f. and SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 11-17. For more historical background about the War of Sicilian Vespers see ABULAFIA, 1997, pp. 57-81, 107-112. About the Catalan Company in Greece see ABULAFIA, 1997, pp. 118-123.
 - 3 VONES, 1999, cols. 550-551.
 - 4 HUGHES, 2006, p. 36.
 - 5 IBID., p. 36.
 - 6 BURNS, 1954, p. 751.
 - 7 The Byzantine author Gregoras also gives a close connection between the Peace of Caltabellotta, the need of the Great Catalan Company for make a living and the Expedition to the East. See KYRIAKIDIS, 2011, pp. 126f.. Abulafia calls the Catalan Company a “by-product of the War of the Vespers”. ABULAFIA, 1997, p. 120.

rations in the case of emergency? However, very often the sources remain silent about the solutions, about the not so glorious day-to-day business of war. Mostly, we only receive information if things went horribly wrong, that is, for example, when a campaign had to be cancelled or that an army was defeated by famine rather than by the enemy.⁸ Yet, we should not be surprised, because the logistics of a campaign usually do not produce exciting stories, at least at first glance. The “knight in the shining armour” is a more useful protagonist than the baker in the flour-powdered coat and battle cries are more easily performed in front of the audience than the maledictions of the muleteers. The chroniclers also knew about the topics, which interested their audience, usually persons of higher rank and that were narrations about other persons in power. Not only are logistics of military expeditions not very glorious, the topic is somewhat rustically and inappropriate for nobles. “While the class that would have been interested to read about logistics was not a reading class at all until the modern era, the class that did the writing thus regarded logistics as undignified, the province of its social inferiors.”⁹, as Edward N. Luttwak has correctly observed. In addition, chroniclers very often had no experience in warfare themselves and one could therefore suggest that some simply did not know about the problems and solutions of logistics. Nevertheless, they were experts in literary and social conventions and, as a result, the material conditions of war were drawn to the background while the literary style and the expectations of the audience came to the fore.¹⁰

The chronicler I would like to introduce here is an exceptional case. Ramon Muntaner was born at Peralada in 1265, where his father owned a lodging. It is very likely that he was as a young man in the service of admiral Roger of Lauria. Around 1300, he met Roger de Flor in Sicily, where Muntaner was constable in the service of Frederick III of Sicily. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Great Catalan Company where he soon took up his office as treasurer and chancellor of the company. Due

8 Not a disaster, but an example for several problems concerning logistics caused by a variety of reasons is the English campaign in Scotland in 1327. See NICHOLSON, 1965, pp. 26-41; HARARI, 2000, p. 319.

9 LUTTWALK, 1993, p. 6.

10 *IBID.*, pp. 4-7. About Muntaner’s literary style see AURELL, 2012, pp. 84-89 and SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 42-48.

to his office, he had significant participation in the organisation of the *Catalan Expedition to the East*. In Greece, he became captain of Gallipoli in addition to his former office.¹¹ Muntaner describes Gallipoli as the base camp of the company; in his own words, it was “the most important of them all, and anyone who had need of any item, whether it be clothing or amour or anything else, went there.”¹² Therefore, Muntaner was, firstly, well experienced in warfare. He was a professional soldier and familiar with fighting at sea as well as on land. Secondly, he was also quite familiar with the problems and solutions of logistics at war, simply because it was his job within the Great Catalan Company. Last but not least, he was not only a professional soldier, he was a chronicler as well. He started to write his *Crònica* in 1325 and finished it in 1328. The official intention of his work is the praising of the crown of Aragon.¹³ However, there is another intention, which is quite pragmatic and private. Because he had lost all of his possessions several times, he hoped that he would secure a well-paid office at court, for example. This is why his *Crònica*, at least in parts, also highlights his own abilities and skills. It is a little similar to an application letter.¹⁴ More often, he wrote about how things were done, because he wanted his reader to recognise how well the things were done by him, Ramon Muntaner. In my opinion, these three points are good arguments for choosing the *Crònica* to obtain an insight into the organisation of food supply and logistics.

11 For further biographical detail on Muntaner see AURELL, 2012, pp. 72-76; SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 18-20.

12 HUGHES, 2006, p. 93.

13 SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 20-22.

14 In 1309 Frederick appointed him as commander of the island Djerba. According to the *Crònica*, Muntaner was chosen because of his unsurpassed experience in war and the management of soldiers. His positive qualities are given in a direct speech and put into the mouth of Frederik. Here the second intention becomes quite clear. After 1328 he moved to Majorca in order to serve King James III and was knighted shortly before his death in 1336. AURELL, 2012, pp. 73-76. See also SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 20-22.

Quantities and the problem of concrete figures

Now we shall go *in medias res* and ask the very basic question: From where did the Great Catalan Company get their victuals?

In very general terms, there were three possibilities for a medieval soldier to get his food.

The first possibility: The army brought along the victuals the soldiers needed during the campaign.

The second possibility: The soldiers bought their food from merchants who accompanied the army.

The third possibility: The soldiers took their food from the area where the campaign took place, that is, the army was *living off the land*.

The kind method employed depended on the number of troops, the duration of the campaign and, of course, the situation. Usually, all three methods were used in combination and the company did so as well. All three methods had advantages and disadvantages and careful considerations were needed to find the combination, which was appropriate in the current situation.

The first possibility has a very clear advantage: The army is entirely independent from merchants as well as the area surrounding it. If the enemy employed the tactic of scorched earth, the baggage train was the life insurance of the army. If travelling by ship, the first possibility is the most ideal. At sea, there are no merchants, at least not until the ship reaches the next harbour, and to live off the land is, without land, obviously not an option.

In the spring of 1303, the Great Catalan Company started their expedition. Roger de Flor had negotiated a contract with the emperor of Constantinople, who wanted the company in his service in order to fight the Turks. The company embarked in Messina with direction to Monemvasia at the very southern tip of Greece. According to the chronicle, “God granted them such fine weather, that, in a few days, they put ashore”.¹⁵ Here, the supply method and, at least approximately, the duration are clear. What about the number of troops? Muntaner provides the following information in his enumeration: 4000 Almo-

15 HUGHES, 2006, p. 43.

gavers (Almogavers are a Catalan type of light infantry.), 1500 knights and horsemen and 1000 seamen. That is a total of 6500 men. In addition to that, many of the men took their wives and children with them.¹⁶ Muntaner mentions this several times without providing a number. He also mentions that there were galley slaves and sailors who belonged to the hired ships, but again without a concrete number. Furthermore, the horsemen and knights had to take their horses, which also required fodder. About the rations the men of the company took with them, Muntaner wrote: "...to every person – man, woman or child – who was leaving with the Grand Duke [Roger de Flor], he gave a quintal of biscuit and ten pieces of cheese, and a bacon of salted pork fat between every four persons, together with garlic and onions."¹⁷ And "knights and horsemen had double rations of everything."¹⁸

Now, at the first glance, it is time to pull out the calculator. However, as you can imagine, it is not as easy as that. There are several issues in the *Crònica* as well as other medieval chronicles, which prevent the historian from seeing medieval logistics as a question of basic arithmetic operations. The first problem is that there are, obviously, numbers missing. Muntaner does not tell us, how many wives, children and slaves were with the company. These persons also needed food. The second problem is that, where we do have absolute numbers, we do not know how reliable they are. It is not unusual for medieval chroniclers to exaggerate numbers, especially the numbers of troops. According to the *Crònica*, we have to calculate with 6500 men. However, we simply do not know if this is, in our sense, correct information and, ultimately, the historian just has to admit his unknowingness. It is almost the same with the statements about food in the *Crònica*. Because the intention of the *Crònica* is the praising of the house of Aragon, it is possible that Frederick of Sicily should be illustrated as particular generous. Therefore, the quantity of food provided by him could be exaggerated as well. The third problem is rather technical: How much is a quintal of biscuit? The medieval units of measurement are not familiar to us. Very often, their naming

16 IBID., p. 42.

17 IBID., p. 41.

18 IBID., p. 42.

remained, but their meaning changed throughout the centuries or depended on the regional traditions.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the mentioned problems, I shall attempt a calculation, using the figures we know or can estimate. The aim of the calculation is to show the dimensions with which the medieval logistic specialist had to cope. I shall try to calculate the amount of biscuit, because biscuit is the only kind of food we get with the *quintal* an indication of the quantity. The *quintal*, originated from the *centenarius*, is a unit of measurement which meant 100 Roman pounds. It passed into the Arabic as *cantar* and returned to Europe through Arab merchants. It is similar to other traditional units of measurement as the German *Zentner* or the English *hundredweight*, the first, depending on the region, is around 50 kilograms, the second around 45 kilograms. The Spanish *quintal*, which is used for the calculation, is around 46 kilograms.¹⁹

According to the *Crònica*, there were 5000 men, the Almogavers and seamen, with single rations and 1500 men, the knights and horsemen, with double rations. We therefore need 5000 quintals for the Almogavers and seamen, being 230 tons, and 3000 quintals for the knights and horsemen, being 138 tons of biscuit. Therefore, based on the figures the chronicle tells us, 368 tons of biscuit were on the ships. And what about the horses? According to the work of Yuval Noah Harari, a horse needs 10 kilograms of dry fodder each day.²⁰ If we assume that every knight and horseman had at least one horse with him, although we know that knights usually had more than one horse when campaigning,²¹ we have to add 15 tons of fodder for each day at sea. According to Muntaner, they were at sea “a few days”. For only three days at sea, 45 tons of fodder are needed. This would be, calculated with the figures of the chronicle, 413 tons. To provide an impression of

19 HUGHES, 2006, p. 41 note 54;
<https://www.unc.edu/~rowlett/units/dictQ.html>, 25.11.2015.

20 HARARI, 2000, p. 305.

21 The shipping of horses creates its own very special challenge. Conscious of the rather small flotilla and the fact that the Almogavers were infantry and that they didn't sail to enemy territory, which meant they were able to buy horses after reaching the destination, I would suggest that the number of shipped horses was rather small compared to other campaigns in the 14th century. See LAMBERT, 2011, pp. 95-100.

the dimension: Today, more than six very large freight wagons would be needed to transport 413 tons of cargo by train.²² I would like to note that these numbers are only for fodder and biscuit. There were, as we have already seen, other kinds of food on the ships, such as cheese and bacon. Naturally, the company had to bring along their armours, weapons, several kinds of tools, cooking utensils and other things.²³ Consequently, I believe it is quite clear now that being a medieval logistic specialist was not an easy job.²⁴ Now, I shall now refrain from further calculations and return to the advantages and disadvantages of the possible methods of food supply.

Methods of Transport

The clear disadvantage of the “bring along your own stuff” method is the laborious transport of the things. Again, the numbers of the following considerations are taken from the work of Harari. According to him, the biggest medieval carts had a maximum load of 4 tons.²⁵ To transport the just calculated amounts of biscuit, 92 carts were required. To supply an army not only for a few days, but for weeks, it would be necessary to employ hundreds of carts. Even if there were hundreds of carts and animals to pull them, more difficulties would occur. The mobility of the carts, and therefore the mobility of the entire army, would depend on the existence of streets and their condition, on the landscape and on the weather. Another possibility, especially in the mountainous areas of Greece and Asia Minor, would be packhorses and mules. A pack animal could carry 150 kilograms on average.²⁶

22 Calculated with the load limit of covered bulk goods wagons used by Deutsche Bahn. http://www.gueterwagenkatalog.rail.dbschenker.de/gwk-de/start/gattung_t_gedeckte_schuettgutwagen/3157124/Talns_969.html?start=0, 25.11.2015.

23 HARARI, 2000, p. 314.

24 Of course one could claim that the expedition of the Catalan Company was a single event and a rather small enterprise. Much more impressive, but not object of this article, are the quantities of victuals shipped to France by the English in the 14th century. See LAMBERT, 2011, p. 90 table 2.9.

25 HARARI, 2000, p. 312.

26 IBID., p. 312. Haldon gives lower loading capacities. Even small differences in the estimated average load could cause completely other

Obviously, without any calculation, one would need legions of them. Another problem of the transport by pack animals was well known by The Great Catalan Company and Muntaner, because they experienced it at the siege of Messina in the Wars of the Sicilian Vespers.

“So the siege lasted so long, that Messina was at risk of being evacuated on account of starvation. Nevertheless, the Lord King entered Messina twice, each time bringing in more than ten thousand mules laden with wheat and with flour and much livestock; but all this was as nothing, for wheat brought by land does not amount so much, since all the horsemen and the accompanying soldiers have already eaten a great amount by the time they leave. So the city was in great distress.”²⁷

From this we can conclude, that food transports by pack animals were useful to provide a marching army for a short time. However, they were not useful to send provisions over long distances, because much of the food was consumed during the transport. Worthless, at least in the long run, was the transport of fodder by pack animals. If we assume the already mentioned 10 kilograms of fodder each day and an average load of 150 kilograms, you will end up with a well-nourished pack animal after 15 days and a hungry accompanying soldier thinking about eating his packhorse.²⁸ Except from the quotation, there is no evidence for the transport of food by pack animals during the Catalan expedition to the east. Maybe, Muntaner and the company had learnt their lesson.

Another option of delivering food and equipment was to transport it by ships. In 1303, the emperor of Byzantium sent the Great Catalan Company to Asia Minor, more precise, to Cape Artaki on the peninsula of Cyzikus. They planned to march further inland in order to fight against the Turks. Muntaner tells us that it was arranged: “...that when he [Roger de Flor] moved inland with his army, his galleys should await him with food and all other provisions in appointed places.”²⁹ The major benefit of this method of transport was the large loading capacity. A seafaring vessel could carry on average 150 tons; some even had a

results to a calculation regarding the numbers of pack-animals. HALDON, 2006, pp. 5-8.

27 HUGHES, 2006, p. 30.

28 HARARI, 2000, p. 320.

29 HUGHES, 2006, p. 47.

maximum load of up to 300 tons.³⁰ Therefore, it was possible to supply an entire army with a small number of ships and, in proportion, the crew of a ship consumed less of the cargo.³¹ The clear disadvantage was that ships were less flexible. The supply by ship could naturally only work in coastal regions or along big rivers. In 1303, the decision was seemingly correct, because we do not hear of any problems with the supply lines concerning that year.

Merchants and food trade

In October 1303, the company decided to spend the winter in Artaki. To ensure constant supply during winter, the company employed a system, which is a mixture of two methods. They lived, in a wider sense, off the land, but paid for the things they consumed. In a first step, a committee of twelve persons was founded. Six persons belonged to the Catalan Company and six were notables of the locality. In a second step, the committee assigned lodgings and thereby distributed the members of the company to several hosts.

“And they made the followings arrangements: namely, that each person’s host was obliged to give him bread, wine, oats, salted pork fat, cheese, vegetables, a bed, and everything that he might need: for, with the exception of fresh meat and seasonings, each host had to provide his guest with everything else. And those twelve men assigned a suitable price to each thing, and they instructed the host to keep a tally of each thing used by the person who was lodging in his house, and to carry this out from the first day of November until the end of March.”³²

The plan was that, in March, the money for the consumed items would be deducted from the pay of the hosted person. It is not difficult to guess that this plan worked only in theory. When, in February 1304, all members of the company were requested to bring their bills to the treasurer, it quickly became clear that “there was no one who had not

30 HARARI, 2000, pp. 312f.

31 IBID., p. 313.

32 HUGHES, 2006, p. 51.

consumed more by far than was warranted by the time they had stayed there.”³³ In the end, de Flor generously decided to pay the bills without deducting any sums from the payments of his soldiers. At least this is the end of the story as Muntaner tells it. It is reasonable to think that not all things were paid and that the inhabitants of Artaki had to shoulder the most of the costs.³⁴ Nevertheless, the described system was, in the Catalan point of view, very useful. It was repeatedly employed during the Catalan expedition to the east.

The company bought their food through this system not only from the peasants, but also from merchants. We do not know from where the merchants obtained their goods nor do we have much information about their numbers, their origins or their trading habits. In his description of Gallipoli, Muntaner informs us that “all merchants, whatever their status, came to visit and to settle there.”³⁵ Thus, there were different types of merchants; some just stopped for a visit, while others settled down. The merchants in Gallipoli are later mentioned in the *Crònica* in a somewhat untypical context: The Great Company had left Gallipoli in order to fight against the Alans, Muntaner stayed behind with only a couple of men. The emperor had learnt about the absence of the soldiers from Gallipoli and, because he and the company had meanwhile become enemies, sent eighteen Genoese galleys against Muntaner and his small force. Muntaner had therefore to organise the defence of Gallipoli with rather uncommon means:

“I ensured that all the women we had were fully armed (since we had a large amount of armour), and I deployed them along the ramparts; and on each section of the ramparts, I placed a merchant, from among the Catalan merchants who were present, to be in command of the womenfolk.”³⁶

According to this, there must have been merchants who either accompanied the company from the outset or followed them on to

³³ IBID., p. 52.

³⁴ The Byzantine author Pachymeres blamed the Catalan Company for impose burdens on the local population as well as for committing crimes against them. See KYRIAKIDIS, 2011, p. 123.

³⁵ HUGHES, 2006, p. 93.

³⁶ HUGHES, 2006, p. 104.

Greece later. Besides this military context, we, as already said, are not informed about the merchants. Muntaner possibly did not mention them, because the presence of merchants at Gallipoli was taken for granted. We learn about a disadvantage of this method of food supply in an indirect way. The problem was that the imbalance of supply and demand in times of war led to exorbitant prices for food. Usually, the payments of the soldiers, at least in part, were destined for the acquisition of food and equipment. Exorbitant prices for basic foodstuff meant that the payments were not sufficient to buy other necessary items. This could result in inadequate equipment or discontent in the army, both with negative impact on the fighting power. Because of this, a wise leader of a mercenary company needed to keep a closer eye on the prices and take countermeasures against usury.³⁷

Roger de Flor was such a foresighted leader. During the War of the Sicilian Vespers, he captured several provision ships of the enemy and sold the food at giveaway prices. Occasionally, he even bought food and resold it with loss. According to Muntaner, he “announced the sale of fine wheat at thirty tarins a salma, which had cost him more than forty tarins, and which he could have sold at ten ounces a salma, if he had wished.”³⁸ A salma was a unit of measurement for grain in Sicily; in modern terms, it was about 263 litres. One ounce valued thirty tarins.³⁹ Thus, Roger de Flor, according to the *Crònica*, sold the wheat with a loss of 25 percent when he could have sold it at ten times the price. Muntaner’s reason for telling this story is, of course, the depiction of Roger de Flor as an able and generous leader, who is interested in the well-being of the people in general and of his men in particular. Therefore, it is possible that the proportions of the given sums are not correct. However, as already outlined, de Flor had very good reasons, besides any philanthropic considerations, to act as described in the *Crònica*.

37 HARARI, 2000, p. 315.

38 HUGHES, 2006, p. 31.

39 IBID., p. 31 note 35.

Living off the land

Let us now have a look at the third possibility to get victuals and other things; that is to live off the land. For the Great Catalan Company, as for the most other armies in the Middle Ages, this method of food supply played a major role. Muntaner presents the peninsula of Gallipoli as a land of milk and honey:

“And everyone was wealthy and well-supplied, so they did not sow nor plough nor dig the vines nor prune them, and yet each year they took in as much wine and as much wheat and oats as they desired. Therefore, for five years, we lived from the crops’ own regrowth. And so our raids became more wondrous than you could ever imagine, so much so that, if someone were to tell you about them all, he could not write a document long enough.”⁴⁰

Later on, the situation changed remarkably:

“Now it is true that we had been on the Gallipoli peninsula and in that region for seven years since the Caesar’s death, and we had lived from the crops’ own regrowth for five years. And, similarly, we had left that entire region uninhabited to a distance of ten days’ march in every direction and so, having driven out all the people, nothing could be harvested; and on account of this, we were forced to leave that country.”⁴¹

First, the duration Muntaner states here is verifiably wrong. The Company did not stay at the peninsula for five years; they stayed for two years, from the summer of 1305 to that of 1307.⁴² Within two years, the company had the dubious honour to achieve the entire depopulation and devastation of the Gallipoli peninsula and the neighbouring areas. Because of that, they “were forced to leave that country.” The leaving of Gallipoli is, after the leaving of Sicily and the following expedition to the east, the second example for moving the

40 IBID., pp. 93f.

41 IBID., p. 119.

42 IBID., p. 93 note 118.

entire Great Catalan Company to another location due to supply conditions. They did not leave Gallipoli for military aims, strategic considerations or changing politics. They left because there was nothing left in Gallipoli.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the methods of food supply, we here see one of the clearest disadvantages of the “living off the land” method: it is strictly limited in time. But what is meant by living off the land? Very generally, there is a direct and a rather indirect way in doing so and it could be employed as an offensive and as a defensive weapon.⁴³ The direct way is, quite simply, to take the food from where the army is campaigning. Smaller groups of soldiers explored the area and raided small villages or farms. They took away the stock of the peasants and drove away the livestock in order to collect food for the army. Because of its simplicity, this seems to be a foolproof method. Yet, as most issues concerning logistics, things became increasingly complicated due to the quantity of food needed and the large numbers of people involved. I would just like to mention some problems, which could occur: firstly, the larger the army, the more raiding groups are needed. Consequently, they were difficult to coordinate. It could well have been that one group went to a village because they had heard of the large amounts of stock and just found smoking ruins, because their comrades had heard the same. Secondly, all problems I have already mentioned concerning transport and consume during the transport of food are of course also true in this occasion. Therefore, the groups could only act in a specific area; otherwise, the way back would have been too long. Thirdly, to raid a region also meant to divide the troops. Sending out groups of soldiers weakened the main force and the small groups had to be careful to circumvent the enemy. This method would only have been without risk without hostile troops around.⁴⁴

Muntaner also had to learn this lesson, as a story about an attack on a timber transport shows.⁴⁵ He tells us in the *Crònica* that he used to send out two carts and two mules for wood every day. At this given day, the carts were accompanied by a mounted crossbowman and four

43 SABLONIER, 1971, p. 75; LYNN, 1993, p. 37.

44 HARARI, 2000, pp. 306-309.

45 HUGHES, 2006, p. 95f.

foot soldiers. This small escort illustrates that nobody expected an attack. Indeed, the main forces of the notorious enemies were far enough away. However, what nobody in the company knew was that a certain Sir Christopher George, a noble from the kingdom of Thessalonica, was in the vicinity with 80 mounted men. According to the description, it seems reasonable to suggest that these men were looking for an adventure as well as spoils. Nothing indicates that their actions signified a greater military offensive against Gallipoli or the Catalans. Therefore, it was quite a negative surprise for the five soldiers. They were attacked, but the mounted crossbowmen managed to escape and rode back to Gallipoli from where Muntaner sent reinforcements. In the meantime, the four foot soldiers had climbed a nearby tower and did their best to defend themselves desperately. The forces from Gallipoli appeared just in time to defeat Sir George and his group and to rescue their comrades. The fact that it was possible for the mounted soldier to ride back, fetch other soldiers, and return in time to rescue the four, illustrates that the distances travelled by the wood transports were usually rather short.

With this example, I would like to conclude my list of possible difficulties in the hope that it left at least a small impression. The indirect way of living off the land is taking everything away besides food. The acquired things could be reused, exchanged for desired goods, or simply turned into cash. In the Eastern Mediterranean, not only things, but also people were abducted and sold. The slave trade was omnipresent in this region and we know from the *Crònica* that the company held auctions at which their captives were sold.⁴⁶ It was not allowed for Christians to sell Christian slaves, but this ban was very often circumvented by arguing that the rule must only be applied for the “right”, roman-catholic Christians. The Greek were orthodox Christians, i.e. heretics, and many of them thus also end up at the slave market. Sometimes, the ban was circumvented without any convincing argument. On the following day after the just outlined attack on the wood transport, such an auction was held “for the horses and the captives and for the spoils that we had acquired.”⁴⁷, as Muntaner writes.

46 Of course, ransoms were demanded for the release of wealthy and noble captives. SABLONIER, 1971, pp. 84-86.

47 HUGHES, 2006, p. 96.

As mentioned above, the captives were men from Thessalonica and therefore most likely Christians. However, this did not seem to provoke any feelings of guilt by the Catalans. Overall, the company raised large sums of money by selling their booty, be it objects, livestock or human beings. This money could be spent on food, which leads us back to possibility number two. Because the selling of booty and the buying of food are intermediate steps, one could call this an indirect way of living off the land.

Both, the direct and the indirect way, were employed by the Great Catalan Company and both had a devastating impact on the areas in question. Not surprisingly, this method was not only used due to the need of food or money, but also as a tactical weapon, it “not only filled the cook pot of the medieval warrior but served as his sword and shield.”⁴⁸ It could be used as an offensive weapon, employed with the aim to cause as much destruction as possible to the territory of the enemy, to spread fear among the population and to destroy the economic and agrarian basis of the country. As we have seen, the Catalan Company succeeded in doing so and called it the *Catalan Vengeance*⁴⁹, but noted too late that, on this occasion, they had destroyed their own basis. Usually, marching and not immobile armies used “living off the land” method as an offensive weapon precisely because of that. As *tactic of scorched earth*, it could also be used as a defence. Thereby, the own territory was devastated in the hope that the enemy would find nothing of use for him and would consequently be compelled to turn around or just perish by starvation. If there were any fortifications in the concerned area then it would be wise to collect everything useful and bring it to safety behind the walls. Thus, the

48 LYNN, 1993, p. 37.

49 KYRIAKIDIS, 2011, p. 124. Up to the 19th century the name Catalan was a term of reproach in some parts of Greece, e.g. in Thrace persisted the oath “May the vengeance of the Catalans overtake you!” whereas in Euboea bad conduct was commented with “Not even the Catalans would do that!”. Besides the Catalan Vengeance other Catalan activities like piracy might have influenced these terms. SETTON, 1975, pp. 247f.. It has also been suggested that the prosperity gap of villages that appears in early 14th century Byzantine tax records might be related to the march of the Catalans. ABULAFIA, 1997, p. 121.

besieged would have better chances of resisting a long time and the besieging party would have the trouble.⁵⁰

There is no explicit mention of this method during the expedition to the east, but the description of the siege of Madytos could be a hint. One of the commanders of the company, Ferdinand Eiximenis, besieged Madytos with a force of 80 horsemen and 200 foot soldiers. According to the *Crònica*, the castle was defended by more than 700 Greeks. Muntaner reports, evidently quite enervated: “In effect, the nobleman [Ferdinand Eiximenis] was besieged in reality more than those within, for it was I who sent all the bread they ate by boat from Gallipoli, and it was twenty four miles from Gallipoli to there. So the task of sending them provisions was mine entirely.”⁵¹ One explanation for the situation could be that Eiximenis was not able to send out some groups to collect food, because of his rather small force. Another explanation could be that the Greeks had employed the described method and therefore the searching for food would be useless anyway. The problems were possibly a result of both. However, in the end, thanks to the provisions sent by Muntaner, Eiximenis was victorious and took Madytos after eight months. One would not need extraordinary interpretive skills to notice that, in Muntaner’s opinion, this victory was at least partly his own.

“...for they could not live in the absence of war.”

But, maybe because he felt that his skills were not really valued any longer in the company, maybe because of the conflicts in the leadership circle or maybe, as he himself wrote, because Ferdinand of Majorca was in need of his service, Muntaner left the company one year after their leaving from Gallipoli and went back to the west. In 1308, he became governor of the islands Djerba and Kerkennah near the Tunisian coast.⁵² The Great Catalan Company continued to make a noise in the world. In 1311, they conquered the duchy of Athens, in

50 LYNN, 1993, pp. 34-37.

51 HUGHES, 2006, p. 92.

52 SABLONIER, 1971, p. 19; see also note 14.

1318 the duchy of Neopatria.⁵³ A short description of the conquest of Athens is the last story in the *Crònica* concerning the company.⁵⁴ The Catalan rule over Athens lasted until 1388, and we know from other sources that the company as well as the inhabitants had quite turbulent times.⁵⁵ However, because none of these events are part of the *Crònica*, they fall outside the scope of this investigation.

The starting point was the Peace of Caltabellotta and the need of the Great Catalan Company to search for new fields of activity. During the Expedition to the East, the leaving of Gallipoli constituted a turning point due to supply conditions. One of the last sentences Muntaner wrote about his company concerning their life style in Athens shows that the problems concerning the relation of war and food supply remained unsolved after the conquest. The new leader of the company, Bernard Estanyol, developed a remarkable strategy to deal with the expected difficulties.

“And Bernard Estanyol’s strategy was this: namely, that they would wage one war at a time and make truces with the other parties, and that then, when they had ravaged the country against which they were fighting, they would forge a truce with that county and begin to wage war against one of the others. And they lead this same life even now, for they could not live in the absence of war.”⁵⁶

Here, Muntaner captured the essence of the problem of the Great Catalan Company as well as other mercenary companies. Their options to acquire food or other kinds of spoils depended on their possibility to wage war. The principle *bellum se ipsum alet* can be traced through the history of the Great Catalan Company as well as, of course, through the history of warfare.

53 SETTON, 1975, pp. 21-36.

54 HUGHES, 2006, pp. 147-149.

55 For the history of the Catalan rule in Greece see SETTON, 1975.

56 HUGHES, 2006, p. 153.

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