



## James I and his Era. Brief Analysis of a Major Political and Cultural Inheritance\*

Antoni Riera\*\*

Institut d'Estudis Catalans  
 Universitat de Barcelona

### INTRODUCTION

We have gathered here at Poblet, the solemn burial place of the royal houses of Aragon and Catalonia, to remember a birth, not a death, and to celebrate the first of several institutional events to commemorate the eight-hundredth anniversary of the birth of James I, one of the sovereigns who are interred here.

James I, like his contemporaries Emperor Frederick II and Fernando III of Castile, was a major figure of the Mediterranean and Iberian Middle Ages. The scope of his achievements fully justifies the scientifically rigorous and forward-looking analysis of his work and inheritance being undertaken in 2008 by the peoples who were once part of the Catalan-Aragonese crown. For indeed, though some of his enterprises reveal insufficient foresight, a lack of vision of the future, much of what we are today in the demographic, economic, social, political and cultural spheres — and much of what we are not — was initially forged during his reign.

Great personages, however, do not arise from nowhere or operate in a void: they are always the fruit of earlier ages and act within a particular context. Their powerful actions, moreover, produce an impact on their own era, causing it to evolve in accordance with their projects and building up a legacy. So what were the essential traits of the historical context of James I? When he occupied the throne, the final phase in the long period of demographic and economic growth fuelled by the feudal system all over the Western World was drawing to a close; a strong upsurge in trade was getting underway, closely associated with structural surpluses of farm produce caused by the reclaiming of barren land for two hundred years, increases in the amount of money in circulation and the availability of credit, and advances in technology and thought.

During the first two-thirds of the 13th century, the development of long-distance trading gave shape to western Europe along the Mediterranean and Atlantic seaboard and boosted the role of the bourgeoisie in economic, political and cultural life. It was a period of transition, during which the new Roman law vied with ancient feudal norms and the concentration of power in the hands of monarchs who no longer considered themselves merely the leading members of the nobility laid the foundations of the new territorial states. It was an age when sovereigns strove to make inroads into seigneuries that enjoyed immunity so as to recover jurisdictional and fiscal control over all the lands in their respective kingdoms; an age of rebellious nobles and administrative and tax reform, of the advance of *ius commune* over consuetudinary law. And it was then that curricula were renewed in the nascent universities, starting with law and medicine. While all these changes were taking place, the crusaders' last enclaves in Holy Land were slowly waning under pressure from the Mamluks, the Mongols were advancing on eastern Europe, and Christianity was fast gaining ground at the expense of Islam in the western Mediterranean.

### THE DIFFICULT TIMES OF THE KING'S MINORITY AND THE FIRST PHASE OF HIS REIGN

James I was born in Montpellier during the night of 1-2 February 1208, as the feast of Candlemas was dawning. He was the son of Peter 'the Catholic' and Mary of Montpellier, an ill-assorted couple who in effect had parted before he was conceived. The chronicles, notably the one written by the monarch himself, make no attempt to conceal these circumstances but they do surround his conception and birth with marvels and good omens that I refrain from mentioning here because they are already well known. He spent the first three years of his life, from 1208 to 1211, with his mother in the city of his birth.

Thus the future king's mother tongue was Occitanian. Languedoc in those days was a cultural giant and a political dwarf: the poetry of the troubadours and courtly love were cultivated there, but it lacked the coherent political

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\*\* E-mail: [ariera@iec.cat](mailto:ariera@iec.cat)

structures and the native dynasty that could have formed the backbone of a strong state. This power vacuum made it easier for the two powerful neighbouring states, the Catalan-Aragonese crown and France, to encroach upon it by means of feudal ties. At the time of James I's birth, the crusade launched a few weeks earlier by Innocent III to eradicate the Cathar heresy, with military support from the French monarchy and ideological support from the Dominican and Cistercian orders, had unleashed considerable tension. Simon de Montfort, a leading member of the nobility of northern France, soon distinguished himself among those who fought to defend religious orthodoxy.

Unable to withstand the crusaders' onslaught, the local nobility, headed by Raymond VI of Toulouse, asked Peter 'the Catholic', who was their superior lord, to intervene. The sovereign used delaying tactics to gain time: he negotiated an agreement with Simon de Montfort which included the marriage of the latter's daughter Amicia to his own heir, and Prince James was handed over as a hostage to his future father-in-law to be brought up in Carcassonne. South of the Pyrenees the situation was also changing fast: the decline of the Almohad caliphate had reduced the Muslims' defensive capacity in the Iberian Peninsula. Two great battles waged against this complex backcloth changed the course of history on both sides of the mountains and were to affect the future orientation of the reign of James I. On 16 July 1212 a coalition of Christian Iberian forces with Gallic reinforcements defeated the Almohads at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, in which the count-king played an important role. Then one year later, on 12 September 1213, a Catalan, Aragonese and Occitanian force was defeated by Simon de Montfort's army of crusaders at Muret, near Toulouse. Peter 'the Catholic' was killed in that battle.

Battles alone do not determine the history of peoples but —as Antoni Furió has recently pointed out — they pace it and speed it up. The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa facilitated the southward and eastward thrust of the Catalan-Aragonese crown into the lands beyond the Ebro and the islands of the western Mediterranean. Muret, on the other hand, closed the door to another possibility: that of a great state straddling the Pyrenees and based almost exclusively on pacts of feudal allegiance.

Shortly after Muret, Mary of Montpellier died in Rome. James I had now lost both his parents and was confined to Carcassonne, where he had begun to receive the knightly, ultra-orthodox education of a crusader, in Occitanian and French.

In January 1214 Innocent III, the superior lord of the Catalan-Aragonese crown, ordered Simon de Montfort to present the six-year-old James I to his Catalan and Aragonese subjects. The new sovereign was placed in the charge of Guillem de Mont-rodró, a master of the Order of the Temple, and taken to the securely defended castle of Monzón, right on the border between Catalonia and Aragon, where he was to complete his education in the company of his cousin Ramon Berenguer V of Provence, who was also an orphan.

The programme of training to which James I was subjected by the Knights Templar is one of the darkest features of his life. In those days princes were educated by training them in the use of arms and techniques of combat rather than in the liberal arts. The child was brought up to be a warrior king. Though certain 20th century historians have questioned his ability to write, a careful reading of the *Llibre dels feits* — the chronicle of his reign dictated by the king himself — reveals that at Monzón he learnt both Catalan and Aragonese, the languages in which he was to address his future subjects. His education also included Latin — though he never acquired a mastery of it —, ancient history, from the Bible to the Roman classics, and medieval history, or at any rate the chronicles and annals of Catalonia, Aragon, France and The Holy Land, the last two being territories frequented by the Knights Templar. Literary historians have identified numerous references in the *Llibre dels feits* to Greek and Latin history, classical mythology, the Arthurian tradition and the Bible.

While the sovereign was growing up in Monzón, his kingdoms were administered by a regency council headed by his uncle Sanç of Rosselló, who took advantage of his favourable position to provide discreet support to the count of Toulouse and the rest of the Occitanian nobility to help them withstand the pressure of the French crusaders and the papal legates. Along the southern frontiers, towards al-Andalus, on the other hand, the situation remained stable. The attitude of the king's uncle led Honorius III to advance the monarch's coming of age. In 1218 he set up a royal council comprising Archbishop Aspàreg of Tarragona and two members each of the high Catalan and the high Aragonese nobility.

Thus James I began to reign at the age of ten. As long as he was a minor the Catalan and Aragonese nobles tried to make up for the dearth of plunder due to the immobile southern frontier and the disintegration of feudal ties with Occitania by stepping up the pillaging of the royal patrimony, much of which had already been pledged under the careless administration of the young king's father. As the sovereign recalled some decades later in his chronicle, "The land was destroyed and pledged to such an extent that we had nothing to eat!" ("No teníem de què menjar, tan destruïda i empenyorada estava la terra!"). The first eight years of his reign were difficult. The sovereign's finances were at an extremely low ebb and he was obliged to make daring coinage mutations. He also found himself caught up in the struggles between the leading noble dynasties, which caused unrest in Catalonia and Aragon. The nobles, who demanded land, money and compensation for the losses they had suffered, kept the king prisoner till he gave in to their claims. However, with assistance from some of the Knights Templar and lawyers specialized in the new *ius commune*, he gradually managed to halt the flow of funds from the treasury, stabilize the coinage, forge closer relations with the bourgeoisie, and impose his authority on the aristocracy. Once he had succeeded in recovering the initiative from the nobility, his period of training was an end.

## THE AGE OF THE GREAT CONQUESTS

The second phase of the reign of James I began in 1227 and was to be marked by expansion and rapidly advancing frontiers. During this time he strove to channel the nobility's belligerence and demands for new revenues, and the bourgeoisie's thirst for new markets, in an outward direction.

The recent dismantling of the web of bonds of allegiance which Alfons 'the Troubadour' and Peter 'the Catholic' had woven to the north of the Corberes, and the agreement between the Holy See and the French monarch made it inadvisable to orientate military energies towards the north. The slow collapse of the Almohad caliphate, on the other hand, opened up much more favourable prospects to the south and east of the Catalan-Aragonese kingdom.

So territorial expansion could be directed towards two fronts: the kingdom of Valencia and the Balearic Islands. Whereas for the Aragonese aristocracy the southward advance took precedence, the Catalan nobility and bourgeoisie considered it more profitable to expand to the east.

Both the sovereign and his advisers were aware that conquering territory from the inhabitants of Al-Andalus was the great undertaking of his reign. James I's entire chronicle, his entire life, one might say, demonstrates this. The *Llibre dels feits* is devoted primarily to military exploits. War, in 13th century feudal societies, dominated all else; it was a way of life, a veritable profession, not only for monarchs and the high nobility, but for knights and foot-soldiers, frontiersmen and adventurers of all types, who executed quick, devastating raids into enemy territory in search of booty and especially captives. They then demanded large ransoms for the latter, or sold them as slaves.

The conquest of Majorca was a difficult enterprise calling for a fleet that was sufficiently well organized to be able to transport a powerful feudal army, complete with its horses and war machines, and to guarantee supplies during the campaign. Until the reign of James I, large naval contingents from the Italian cities of Genoa and Pisa had always taken part in the Catalans' overseas conquests. However, in the last quarter of the 12th century and the first quarter of the 13th, the growth of Catalan trade had given shipbuilding in Barcelona, Cotlliure and Tortosa a boost. By 1227 the Catalan-Aragonese crown already had sufficient naval potential and experience to invade the Balearics with its own fleet. A few clashes between Catalan and Balearic ships in 1226 furnished the excuse for setting the project in motion. The objective, however, was no longer to destroy the pirate fleets' bases but to vanquish and colonize a maritime enclave of great economic and strategic value.

According to the chronicle, preparations for the venture commenced at a banquet in Tarragona towards the end of 1228. The host, Pere Martell, was a galley captain from Barcelona who had been to the Balearics several times and gave an enthusiastic report of the riches to be found there. However, contemporary documents show

that the decision to launch the attack had been taken earlier on and the preparations, by this time, were already underway. Proof of this is the fact that the terms of the conquest were defined at a meeting of the Catalan parliament held in Barcelona around Christmas. The king undertook in writing to share out the lands, castles, towns, houses and moveable goods obtained in proportion to the military or monetary contribution of each participant. To pay for fitting out the fleet, the procurators of the three estates granted the sovereign a special subsidy that was raised by means of a new tax charged on each pair of oxen and known as *bovatge*.

The fleet set sail on 5 September 1229 from Salou, Cambrils and Tarragona. The conquest, which proved considerably more complicated than expected, was carried out in three stages. During the first stage, from September 1229 to October 1230, the capital of the island and the region of El Pla were conquered. Ciutat de Mallorca<sup>1</sup> was taken by storm on 31 December and the pillaging lasted a week.

Only a few of the inhabitants managed to flee the city and take refuge in the mountainous zones of the island. The majority, basically unarmed civilians, were mercilessly massacred by the feudal Christian army. The royal chronicle describes the wave of violence in considerable detail:

"They saw so many Moors dead in the houses, streets, gardens and farmyards that it was horrifying to see." ("Van veure tants sarraïns morts per cases, per carrers, per horts i per corrals, que feia gran feredat de veure.")

The death toll was so high that systematic destruction of the corpses was organized to avoid an epidemic, as the chronicle also relates: "The archbishop and bishops granted a thousand days' indulgence to anyone who removed a dead Moor from the city. And so the people willingly removed all the bodies from the city in order to earn the indulgence, dragging them away with horses, mules and nags. And then they collected large amounts of firewood and burnt them. And the Moors who died numbered fifty thousands, and thirty thousand were captured alive and taken prisoner." ("L'arquebisbe i els bisbes donaren mil dies de perdó a tothom que traguera un sarraí mort fora de la ciutat. I així, la gent, de bon grat i per guanyar el perdó, amb cavalls, amb muls i amb rossins, arrossegant-los, tragueren tots els morts fora la ciutat. I després reuniren molta llenya i els cremaren. I foren cinquanta mil els sarraïns que hi moriren, i trenta mil els qui foren presos vius i foren captius.")

The value of the testimony contained in this passage from the *Llibre dels feits* is qualitative rather than quantitative: it demonstrates the scale of the slaughter, the matter-of-fact view taken of it, and the desire to exterminate which underlay the actions of feudal armies at the period and applied, not only to those who offered resistance, but to those who surrendered or fled as well.

The second stage of the conquest, which took place in May and June 1231, aimed to flush the Muslims out of the

island's mountainous enclaves. The last pockets of resistance, located in a very poor area in the heart of the Serra de Tramuntana, were overcome between May and June 1232 during the sovereign's third stay in Majorca.

The conquest of Majorca yielded an enormous amount of plunder in the form of human beings, lands and other immovables. The Moors who that survived the fighting and the massacres were reduced to captivity: those who could pay a ransom were released and allowed to live on the island as free men, though nearly all preferred to emigrate to Minorca, Valencia, Granada or Barbary. Those unable to pay were shared out between the sovereign and the other participants in the campaign, who used them as labourers on farms and in craftsmen's workshops, or sold them as slaves on international markets. Thus the defeated were not confined to areas of low strategic value and organized into segregated ethnic communities, such as those that already existed in lower Aragon and were soon to be created in Valencia. As Antoni Mas has recently remarked, "if there is one thing that characterizes the conquest of Majorca with respect to other earlier or contemporary Catalan-Aragonese conquests, it is its destructive nature". What could have led the victors to treat the Muslim population of Majorca in this way? The wish to avert the danger of a 'fifth column' in an island enclave of great strategic value that was particularly hard to defend? The belief that the island, owing to its small size, could be colonized by Christian settlers in a few years? As time went by the captives, under pressure from the church hierarchy and attracted by the possibility of redemption, gradually converted to Christianity, adopted Catalan family names, and ultimately dissolved into Balearic feudal society.

The commissaries in charge of dividing up the real estate carefully assessed the participants' contributions to the campaign and assigned them to one of five groups headed respectively by James I, Nunyo Sanç (count of Rosselló), Berenguer de Palou (bishop of Barcelona), Gastó de Montcada (viscount of Bearn) and Hug IV (count of Empúries). The last four were members of the privileged Catalan estates. Each of these in turn was to share the property he had received with the other members of his group and his own vassals. The sovereign received half the buildings in the city and half the farms on the island; the four representatives of the feudal nobility received the other half of the capital city and the remainder of the island.

To assure the defence of the island the grantee in charge of each group agreed to set up a permanent host and bear the cost of maintaining it. Each of the five portions arising out of the shareout was assessed in terms of *cavalleries*. These units, contrary to what has been believed until recently, were not compact fiefs but batches of real assets that were likely to generate a particular amount of revenue. An area of approximately 227 hectares on the average, spread over several rural districts, amounted to one *cavalleria*. For every 130 *cavalleries* the holder was under the permanent obligation to maintain one armed horse.

As a result of these calculations, the sovereign had to contribute 43.6 horses while the other secular and ecclesiastical lords together had to contribute 59.7.

The chief beneficiaries of the shareout did not settle in Majorca: instead — as is shown in the *Llibres del repartiment* (Books of distribution) — they chose to colonize their respective lots by letting them on emphyteutic leases or selling them. These settlers were also entitled to set up other farming families on the lands they had received. Each time the property was transferred, the assignee had to pay the assignor a down payment and an annual rent.

Thus whereas cases of peasants being tied to the land or subjected to abusive practices were already documented by this time in Old Catalonia,<sup>2</sup> the same did not occur in Majorca. This has led some Balearic historians to maintain that the resulting rural society was not feudal, but a new, more evolved frontier society, made up of free individuals. I do not share this view, though for lack of time I refrain from setting out my reasons here. In the second third of the 13th century, the light seigniorial dues attracted a gradual flow of rural manpower to Majorca. Applicants for land came mostly from Old Catalonia, Languedoc, Liguria and Provence, though a few Aragonese, Navarrese and even Portuguese are also recorded.

Let us turn now to the other islands. Minorca submitted without resistance to Catalan-Aragonese sovereignty during James I's second stay in Majorca. Under the terms of the Treaty of Capdepera, signed on 17 June 1232, the inhabitants of the 'minor Balearic island' declared themselves the subjects of the count-king and undertook to pay a specific tax in the form of cattle and grain. In exchange the sovereign agreed to respect their religion and political structures. He granted the fief of Eivissa and Formentera to Guillem de Montgrí, the archbishop-elect of Tarragona, Nunyo Sanç of Rosselló, and Prince Peter of Portugal, who conquered the islands entirely at their own expense in the summer of 1235.

The archipelago became just another kingdom in the Catalan-Aragonese crown. Its legal regime was established in a Charter of Liberties inspired by those granted to Tortosa and Lleida. Under it the Usages of Barcelona were relegated to the status of supplementary law, to resolve cases not covered by the Charter. When analysed in detail, this first great legislative text of the age of James I can be seen to constitute a variant of a charter of settlement, designed to set a large city into motion again after a period of intense upheaval. A deliberate ambiguity underlies it, since in many of the articles the drafters failed to define the territory of application and the reader is left wondering if they refer exclusively to the city and its borough or to the whole of the island. This lack of precision, as Vicent Garcia Edo has recently pointed out, was to become one of the defining traits of the subsequent Majorcan legal system.

While James I, with support from the Catalan nobility, clergy and bourgeoisie, was carrying out the conquest of Majorca, the Aragonese nobles — who were not very in-

terested as yet in overseas undertakings — were launching local attacks against the northern districts of the emirate of Valencia from an area that stretched from the lower Ebro to the ranges of Teruel. In view of the success achieved by Blasco de Alagón in Ares and Morella in 1232, once James I had expelled the Moors from Majorca he felt he should assume the leading role that pertained to him in the conquest and colonization of the eastern Iberian peninsula.

The operation was planned at a meeting held in Alcañiz at the beginning of 1233 between the sovereign, Blasco de Alagón and Hug de Forcalquer, a master of the Order of Hospitallers. Because of the size of the Valencian emirate and its population density, the conquest had to be carried out in stages. During the first stage, from 1233 to 1235, Borriana, Peníscola, Castelló and Borriol, the main localities in the emirate's northern regions, were taken. The mountainous area of the Eslida range was left till later. The military and economic costs of this first phase were borne by the sovereign, the Order of Hospitallers, and a few members of the Aragonese nobility, such as Blasco de Alagón and Eximén de Urrea. Before tackling the second phase, the sovereign convened a joint meeting of the parliaments of Aragon and Catalonia at Monzón in 1236. The clergy, the nobles and the cities on either side of the River Cinca were well represented at the assembly, and agreement was reached about military and economic support for the campaign and the future distribution of land and booty. The active participation of all three estates from Catalonia shows that the sovereign felt the conquest and colonization of Valencia should no longer be an exclusively Aragonese enterprise. Outside support, meanwhile, was to be the Pope's responsibility. In February 1237 Gregory IX granted the expedition crusade status. The Holy See had entrusted the French monarchy with the task of eradicating heresy in Languedoc, and the Catalan-Aragonese monarchy was given the mission of spreading Christianity along the Mediterranean coast of the Iberian Peninsula.

The army assembled in the spring of 1237 in Teruel. The objectives of this second phase were the capital and the lands between valleys of the Palància and the Xúquer. The city of Valencia surrendered on 28 December 1238 and the emir, after being granted a seven-year truce by James I, abandoned the city and settled in Xàtiva. Finally, between 1241 and 1245, the lands between the Xúquer and Verd rivers were taken. The southern frontier of the kingdom of Valencia, which was renegotiated with Castile in the Treaty of Almirra in 1244, stretched from Biar, in the Iberic System, to Bosot, on the shores of the Mediterranean.

During the early phases of the conquest, the sovereign made personal donations of land by granting charters. From 1239, following the fall of the capital, James I sought to attract settlers by increasing the number of donations, which were registered in the *Llibre del repartiment*. As in Majorca, many of the original grantees sold the land or

buildings they had received and returned to their places of origin. At the same time the Moors who had surrendered to the conquerors and signed agreements with them won the right to remain in the new kingdom of Valencia. Thus many of the native inhabitants stayed on under the terms of the surrender negotiated with James I and were concentrated in Moorish quarters all over the Valencian Country. Contrary to what had occurred in Majorca, these Moorish inhabitants (Mudejars) obtained administrative, judicial, religious and linguistic autonomy in exchange for paying high taxes. Hence the imbalance between the extension of the lands conquered and the demographic potential of the conquerors led to the development of a twofold society in the country regions of Valencia: on the one hand families of Christian emphyteuticaries and holders of allodial land, who guaranteed the irreversibility of the conquest, and on the other, segregated communities of Muslims, who produced a substantial portion of the fiscal and seigniorial revenues. The only reliable data available on the origins of the settlers concern the city of Valencia, where 48.5% were Catalans, 44.5% Aragonese, and the remaining 7%, foreigners. These proportions varied, however, in each area of the countryside.

James I decided not to attach the newly conquered lands to Aragon and Catalonia, as the nobles in both countries had expected. Instead he created a new kingdom, which would give the monarchy greater scope for action and be less subject to the ambitions of the great feudal nobility. Consequently he severely limited the size of the territorial concessions to nobles and knights, making them much smaller than in Majorca; he promulgated a Roman-type legal code known as the *Furs*, first for the city of Valencia and then for the entire kingdom; he created a new currency, the Valencian *reial*, distinct from the deniers of Barcelona and Jaca, which were in circulation in the Principality of Catalonia and the Ebro valley respectively; and he founded a representative and specifically Valencian parliament. These distinctive features would gradually endow Valencia with the singularity it acquired within the Catalan-Aragonese crown.

In the twenty-six years between 1229 and 1245, James I added to the realm he had inherited from his father — the 84,324 km<sup>2</sup> of Aragon and Catalonia — the Balearic Islands and the kingdom of Valencia, another 24,791 km<sup>2</sup>. The conquered lands amounted to an increase of approximately 30%, something never previously achieved in a single reign.

#### THE OCCITANIAN DREAM IS DEFINITELY RELINQUISHED: THE TREATY OF CORBEIL

The completion of the conquest of Valencia and the death of his cousin Ramon Berenguer V of Provence without male issue prompted James I and his advisers, in 1245, to renew his old political ties with Occitania, where the

French had steadily been building up their power with firm support from the Holy See. In 1229, as the conquest of Majorca was getting underway, Raymond VII of Toulouse had been obliged to give the hand of his heir Joan, and the seneschalships of Beaucaire and Carcassone, to Alphonse of Poitiers, the brother of Louis IX. James I was aware that his hold over his newly-won territory in the Iberian Peninsula was too precarious for him to maintain an open war to the north of the Corberes range or break with the Holy See. He decided to maintain a low profile and attempted an unusual diplomatic operation: that of joining the lineages of Toulouse and Provence through a marriage between Raymond VII and Beatrice, the heir to the Count of Provence. The French monarchy and the Holy See, however, foiled the operation in 1246 by forcing the countess's marriage to Charles of Anjou, another brother of Louis IX. This strengthened the French presence in the Midi and was highly detrimental to Catalan commercial and political interests in the western Mediterranean. Moreover, the first Mudéjar rising, led by Al-Azraq, compelled James I to concentrate on the kingdom of Valencia.

Not until 1258, after the revolt of the Valencian Mudéjars had been crushed, were James I and his counsellors in a position to resume the defence of Catalan-Aragonese interests in Occitania. But by now the situation had worsened. The French, with enduring support from the papacy, had acquired a firmer hold over Languedoc, where their intelligent marriage policy now enabled them to dominate the two main lineages: the counts of Toulouse and the counts of Provence. They had also wiped out the Cathar heresy.

Thus the Catalan-Aragonese crown was obliged to acknowledge that the changes that had taken place in Occitania during the second quarter of the 13th century were irrevocable. After instructing his legal advisers to make a careful analysis of the situation, in 1258 James I accepted the new state of affairs. Under the Treaty of Corbeil, Louis IX of France severed the ancient ties of allegiance that had linked the counts of Barcelona to the kings of France since the days of Charlemagne; James I, in exchange, gave up all his remaining jurisdictional and feudal rights in Occitanian lands, except the seignury of Montpellier, the enclaves of Carladès and Omeladès, and the Val d'Aran. Though this agreement has aroused much criticism among certain sectors of Catalan, Valencian and Aragonese historiography, in fact it attests to the prudent and realistic policy pursued by James I — now an old man — towards Occitania. He knew full well that if he were to resume a leading role in Languedoc, the result would be an open clash with France, the foremost military power and best administered State in the West, and with the Holy See, which punished any outside attempt to support the Occitanian nobility with excommunication. Thus the Treaty of Corbeil put an end to expansion beyond the Pyrenees and implied a conscious and resolute decision in favour of the moves already underway to increase Cat-

alan-Aragonese influence across the Mediterranean and in Iberian Peninsula.

## TOWARDS A NEW FOREIGN POLICY

When one door shuts, another usually opens and James I put the fall-off in tension that followed the Treaty of Corbeil to good use by opening up new political scenarios and giving a fresh impetus to the Catalan-Aragonese crown's mercantile and military influence in the Mediterranean. The area he chose was Sicily, an island in the midst of the ancient *mare nostrum* with a large grain surplus. The Sicilian market was of strategic importance to all merchants in the western Mediterranean and the island had been ruled since the death of Emperor Conrad IV in 1254 by the bastard Manfred, a member of the Hohenstaufen family who was acting as regent for the infant heir Conradin. Manfred had become the leader of the Italian Ghibelline party (which supported the German emperor against the pro-papal faction) and had consequently been excommunicated by the Holy See. James I, acting on the advice of Catalan businessmen, decided to take advantage of the weakness of the Sicilian court. The contacts initiated in Barcelona in 1260 culminated in Montpellier on 13 June 1262 in the marriage of Prince Peter to Constance of Sicily. Unsurprisingly, the alliance was viewed with alarm by France, Provence and above all the Pope, who was to enfeoff the kingdom of Sicily to Charles of Anjou a few years later.

A new revolt of the Valencian and Murcian Mudéjars and the disadvantages of a possible excommunication prevented the Catalans and Aragonese from helping Manfred to ward off an attack from the Count of Provence. Charles of Anjou, with the support of France, defeated Manfred at Benevento in 1266 and Conradin at Tagliacozzo two years later. There was every sign that the Catalan-Aragonese crown, after relinquishing its ties with Occitania, was about to lose its opportunities in Sicily as well. But the count-king still had one card up his sleeve: on Conradin's death, his inheritance and the leadership of the Ghibellines passed to Princess Constance, the wife of the Aragonese heir. However, family quarrels, Mudéjar rebellions and old age prevented James I from glimpsing the fruits of his last international undertaking.

## THE KINGDOM OF MURCIA IS OCCUPIED AND RETURNED TO CASTILE

Under the Alcaraz agreement of 1243, the emir of Murcia, Muhammad Ibn Hud, had become the vassal of Ferdinand III of Castile and promised to hand over to him half the taxes he raised. Thus Murcia had not been conquered or even occupied by the force of arms. The king of Castile's prime objective was the effective incorporation of the Guadalquivir valley and he exercised only a type of

protectorate over Murcia: he controlled the main fortresses, which he manned with Christian garrisons, but he was experiencing great difficulties in sending large contingents of peasants from the Duero, Tajo and Guadiana valleys to Murcia because they found the prospects offered by the distribution of land in Jaen, Cordova and Seville more attractive.

In 1264 a major revolt of Mudejars was sparked off simultaneously in Castile and Valencia by discontent over the arbitrary way the new local authorities were enforcing the conditions of the surrender. The rising was on an unprecedented scale and had the resolute backing of the sultanate of Granada. Owing to the weakness of the Castilian occupation, the rebels in the Vinalopó and Segura valleys initially met with success. Alfonso X was unable to contain the revolt along all the fronts, so he concentrated his forces in Betic Andalusia and asked the Catalan-Aragonese crown to intervene in Murcia. James I, realizing what was at stake, called on his subjects to make him an extraordinary grant to finance a campaign to the south of the River Verd. The Catalans had misgivings over the undertaking but they agreed to apply the *bovatge* tax once more; the Aragonese on the other hand not only refused point blank to provide economic or military resources but seized the opportunity to demand satisfaction from the king over certain unresolved grievances and violations of their *Fueros*. While the army was being prepared, Prince Peter carried out two raids against the Murcian Mudejars. The royal campaign got underway at the end of November 1265 and culminated in the surrender of the Murcian capital at the beginning of February 1266. James I, considering that agreements were made to be respected and his kingdoms did not have sufficient surplus population to permit systematic colonization of any new territories, handed the kingdom of Murcia over to his son-in-law, Alfonso X of Castile, after partially settling it with Catalans. This show of political realism caused discontent among those who had taken part in the conquest. The population that settled in the Segura valley, however, was to facilitate the conquest carried out by James II forty years later.

### ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RULER

James I was not only a warrior but a ruler, who endowed the Catalan-Aragonese crown with new administrative, fiscal, judicial and political structures. During his reign the municipal regime of the main cities was consolidated; the former *assemblies de pau i treva* (assemblies of peace and truce) evolved into the parliament, or Corts, following the incorporation of representatives of the cities and an increase in its attributions; and the old Curia Regis became the Royal Council. In Aragon the *Fueros* (regional laws and privileges) were compiled and the Justicia (royal magistracy) was established. In order to boost trade, overseas consulates were set up and the *universitat de prohoms de Ribera* — a council of distinguished citizens — in Bar-

celona. This council, and the rules it drew up to regulate trade and maritime transport, were the immediate forerunners of the Consolat de Mar and the *Llibre del Consolat de Mar*, respectively.

### SHARING OUT THE KINGDOMS

No one, however, is without contradictions and errors, and James I was no exception. Though he had surrounded himself with forward-looking legal experts and had allowed Roman Law to influence some of his legal initiatives, such as the Valencian *Furs* (code of law) and the Majorcan Charter of Liberties, James I had a patrimonial conception of his domains: he did not consider himself a mere administrator of territories which could not be split up, but a lord with the right to dispose freely of his realms.

This contradiction explains why, as his children were born, he began to plan how the Catalan-Aragonese crown was to be shared out. This anachronistic policy of successions gave rise to forty years of tension between James I, his immediate descendants, and the representative forces in each territory. Two of his sons died and another entered the church. That left him with two heirs: Princes Peter and James. Aware of the opposition the division of the kingdoms aroused in the entourage of his first-born son and certain social groups, first and foremost the experts in *ius commune*, he decided in 1262 to settle the matter once and for all by imposing an agreement between the two princes: Peter was to inherit Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia, while James received the Balearic Islands, the Pyrenean counties of Rosselló and Cerdanya and the seignury of Montpellier. The distribution was rather uneven: nearly 90% of the territory, in a single compact block, was to go to the first-born, while the second son had to be content with the remaining 10%, made up of several scattered units which were, however, of great strategic value.

Besides sowing the seeds of future disputes — for neither heir was satisfied with his portion of the inheritance —, the shareout reduced the military and political capabilities of the resulting two kingdoms at an especially inauspicious time, when all the adjoining states were acquiring new territories and increasing their coercive potential. France was rounding off the incorporation of Languedoc, Castile was absorbing Betic Andalusia and the kingdom of Murcia, and Provence was being attached to the kingdom of Sicily. History was soon to confirm that the solution adopted by James I with regard to his succession was his greatest mistake.

### ASSESSMENT OF A REIGN

The overall results of James I's sixty-six year reign were positive. To the 84,324 km<sup>2</sup> in Aragon, Catalonia and the seignury of Montpellier which he inherited from his fa-

ther, he added 24,791 km<sup>2</sup> in the Balearic Islands and the kingdom of Valencia, thereby increasing his realms by 30 %, an unprecedented figure for a single reign. This growth was not achieved without cost, however: it caused much bloodshed, primarily among the vanquished, many of whom, especially in Majorca, lost not only their property but their lives. But many of the victors also died in battle or while stifling the intermittent revolts of the Valencian Mudejars, who were exasperated by the arbitrary action of the new local authorities and the pressure of rising taxes.

James I displayed great political realism in deciding to give up the unstable feudal ties on which the expansion into Occitania had been based, along with the mirage of a multinational state extending from Nice to Oloron, and from Orhac to Teruel, with its hub in the Pyrenees and its seat of government in Barcelona. He deliberately set his sights on the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean, two areas where the Catalan-Aragonese crown, and especially its merchants, could expand at lower military, economic and ideological expense. Thus the outward thrust of his reign arose from of a careful analysis of profitability and not unsuccessful diplomacy. The decision to respect the frontier agreed upon with Castile in Almirra and not to annex the kingdom of Murcia are further evidence of the realism shown by an old king who had discovered that military conquest is worth little if the territory cannot be colonized. The inadequate flow of settlers from north of the Ebro made it necessary to permit large groups of Islamic inhabitants to subsist all over the kingdom of Valencia. This gave rise to a dual society made up of the families of Christian emphyteuticaries and freeholders on the one hand, who ensured that the conquest would be a lasting one, and separate Muslim communities on the other, who yielded much of the revenue in the form of taxes and seigneurial dues. As long as this situation continued, any new territorial advance by a powerful neighbouring Christian kingdom into an area densely populated by Muslims had but slender chances of success.

James I created a composite state stretching from Montpellier to Ariza and from Salses to La Vila Joiosa and endowed it with a highly decentralized political organization by setting up autonomous units, each with its own jurisdiction, administrative and representative institutions, currency and measurements. It was complicated to manage, but highly efficient, since it did not interfere with the economic, human and cultural ties between the different territories. It also had drawbacks however: it delayed the concentration of power in the hands of the sovereign in an age when the monarchies in the states bordering on the Catalan-Aragonese crown were increasing their ascendancy, with the support of Roman law, at the expense of the feudal nobility.

James I reorganized the Chancellery and encouraged the use of registers, in which copies of all the documents emanating from the court were kept. With the help of a few Knights Templar, churchmen, laymen and burghers, he put the management of the royal patrimony in order.

At public events he addressed his subjects in the language of each territory: Catalan, Aragonese or Occitan. When it came to writing his chronicle, however, he chose Catalan, producing an unusual text with considerable ideological contents. In it he voiced a high degree of self-satisfaction, surrounded his persona with mythical elements borrowed from the classics, justified his achievements and silenced his mistakes, and presented himself as a maker of peoples and a creator of dynasties.

Many Valencians and Majorcans still regard James I 'the Conqueror' as the founder of their people, the creator of their collective identity and their national feeling. His legend had fed the collective imagination of successive generations and materialized into numerous popular constructions such as traditional tales, songs, the Festes de l'Estandard and 'giants'.<sup>3</sup>

For all these reasons, and many others which I have not time to set out here, it is especially opportune, as I said at the beginning, that academic and political institutions throughout the lands that made up the former Catalan-Aragonese crown should be undertaking new research into James I and his era. This will enable us, not merely to achieve a more thorough understanding of our common past, but to position ourselves better with regard to the present and the immediate future. These endeavours will yield ideas of benefit to us all. The legacy of James I undoubtedly has a future, providing that, together, we are able to manage it properly.

## NOTES

- [1] Ciutat de Mallorca is the traditional name of the city now known officially as Palma de Mallorca. It is still in widespread use today.
- [2] The term Old Catalonia refers to the territories originally reconquered and settled by the Carolingian dynasty, which lie north and east of a line extending approximately from the Llobregat and Cardener rivers to the Montsec massif, north of Lleida.
- [3] The Festes de l'Estandard (Festivals of the standard) are held each year in Palma de Mallorca to commemorate the entry of the troops of James I into the city. 'Giants' are bigger-than-lifesize human figures made of wood and papier mâché which are a feature of popular parades in many localities. Some of them represent King James I.