

JAMES I AND GOD: LEGITIMACY, PROTECTION AND CONSOLATION IN THE *LLIBRE DELS FETS*

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ABSTRACT

This article is an examination of the nature of the relationship between James I, king of Aragon (1213-76) and God. The source is the king's autobiography, called the *Llibre dels Fets* or Book of Deeds, where he relates the partnership between himself and the deity in the conquests of Majorca and Valencia and the reconquest of Murcia. An in-depth analysis of the *Llibre* reveals how the circumstances of James's life pushed him beyond the norm in his reliance on God's protection and how he manipulates what he considers God's will to fulfill his own designs.

KEY WORDS

Power, Monarchy, Language, Literature, Crown of Aragon

CAPITALIA VERBA

Potentia, Regia potestas, Lingua, Litterae, Corona Aragoniae

When future historians look back upon our times, not least among the resources available to them for its study will be the personal accounts of political affairs written by those who were at the very centre of events. They will be able to consult Mahatma Gandhi's *Experiments with Truth*, Mandela's *Long Road to Freedom*, Gorbachev's *Memoirs* and so forth, and while being properly cautious of their source, they will no doubt appreciate that, as with all sources, however problematic they may be, it is always a boon to have them there.¹ What the medievalist might give for *Living History* by Eleanor Aquitaine or perhaps Arnau Amalric's provocative *Hereticcatcher!* The Christian world of the Middle Ages lacked such gems but, it should be remembered, we do possess a remarkable Catalan text, usually now called the *Llibre dels Fets* or *Book of Deeds*, the author of which, beyond a reasonable doubt, was a Christian king, James I of Aragon, the "Conqueror".²

In his *Llibre*, an essentially militaristic work, James described in great detail many of the major events in which he was involved during his sixty-three year reign; most notably, the conquests of the kingdoms of Majorca and Valencia and the reconquest of the kingdom of Murcia. But, at the same time, he left us a picture of his times and, albeit often unwittingly, an intimate self-portrait, an image of himself, reflected through his work. As Bisson has remarked, "No king in history ever revealed himself better to posterity".³ And in revealing himself, James, at the same time, revealed his relationship with God. For it can also certainly be said that no king ever revealed his god better to posterity and it is that relationship we examine in this article.

It is important to emphasize, before advancing, that there is little doubt among the scholarly community today that the authorship of the *Llibre dels Fets* pertains to the king. Nobody but James himself could be the author of this work. The arguments against another possible author, arguments so well elaborated by Ferran Soldevila,⁴ are very strong indeed. Who else could the author be? Why would they have written the work? Why would they have written as if they were the king himself? Who would have had sufficient knowledge of the details of James's life? Who would have had the imagination? But the arguments in favour of James are equally strong. The *Llibre dels Fets* demonstrates a very detailed knowledge of all of the king's military campaigns and the political events of the king's adult life "dovetailing exactly with the mentality in much of the king's independent documentation".⁵ Events are seen almost entirely from what would have been James's own perspective. For one

1. Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. London: Beacon Press, 1993; Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom*. London: Abacus, 1995; Gorbachev, Mikhail. *Memoirs*. London: Bantón Books, 1997.

2. The best edition is *Llibre dels Fets del rei En Jaume*, 2 volumes, ed. Jordi Bruguera. Barcelona: Barcino, 1991. Modern translations into Catalan and English are: *Llibre dels Fets de Jaume I*, trans. Antoni Ferrando, Vicent Josep Escartí. Barcelona: Afers, 1995; *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon*, trans. Damian Smith, Helena Buffery. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003 (hereafter BDJJA).

3. Bisson, Thomas. *The Medieval Crown of Aragon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986: 84.

4. Soldevila, Ferran. *Les quatre grans croniques*. Barcelona: Editorial Selecta, 1971: 36-37.

5. Burns, Robert Ignatius. "The Spiritual Life of James I the Conqueror, king of Aragon-Catalonia, 1208-1276: portrait and self-portrait", *Jaime I y su época (ponencias)*, X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón (Zaragoza, 1978). Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1979: 1, 328.



telling example among many, in the Majorca campaign we read of the death of the Montcadas at the battle of Porto Pí only after the battle is over, when James receives news of their deaths, and there is no account of their heroic performance in the battle, since James did not see it.⁶ There is a justification of the actions of the king, which nobody but the king need justify. Thus, most revealingly, James's labours much on the embarrassing failure of his expedition to the Holy Land in 1269-70, which another author would have passed over quickly as uneventful and irrelevant.⁷ The *Llibre dels Fets* reveals feelings that only the king could have felt. There is an adoration of James's mother, Marie of Montpellier and an ambivalent attitude to his father, Peter II (hero of Las Navas, villain at Muret, and bad husband to Marie) which another author even one trained in psychology, would not capture.⁸ There are many intimate memories of events (for instance, the indignation of his first wife at James's adopted plan for her escape from the Aragonese nobles; a mother swallow who had nested on James's tent; a night spent sweating at Puig when his knights were ready to abandon him and the Valencia campaign).⁹ Throughout the text there is an easy familiarity with the rulers and major figures of James's reign.

It is perhaps also necessary to say a few words about the construction of James's work and its purpose. When the *Llibre* was written remains a subject of great debate and a great amount of further study is still needed to resolve this matter. The work may have been undertaken at various times of the king's reign. It has been suggested that the initial impetus was perhaps provided in the 1230s by demands for the king's personal account of the conquest of Majorca,¹⁰ of which the troubadours sang, no doubt stories already being told, with additions, by those who had participated. It has been argued that the stories of the Valencian campaign were probably told in the 1240s and early 1250s and then, after a long gap, James returned to his stories towards the very end of life (in the last years probably being aided in the writing of the text by Bishop Jaime Sarroca of Huesca, either his son or more probably son of the king's half-brother, Pere del Rei).¹¹ There was a long gap between 1245 and 1264 when James related nothing except, briefly, the campaigns against al-Azraq. But it may well be more reasonable to argue, as Cingolani has done recently, that

6. *Llibre*, chs. 63-5; Asperti, Stefano. "Il re e la storia: proposte per una nuova lettura del 'Llibre dels feyts' di Jaume I". *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, 3 (1984): 276.

7. *Llibre*, chs. 63-5; Smith, Damian. "Guerra Santa y Tierra Santa en el pensamiento y la acción de Jaime I de Aragón", *Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin du XI^e au XIII^e siècle*, Daniel Baloup, Philippe Jossierand, eds. Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2006: 305-321.

8. Contrast the very brief chapter 6 of the *Llibre* on Peter II and the extensive praise of the saintly Marie in chapter 7.

9. *Llibre*, chs. 23 (wife), 215 (swallow), 237 (Puig).

10. Coll i Allentorn, Miquel. "Llibre dels Feits". *Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana*. Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 1987: 14, 71.

11. *BDJA*: 7, 15; Asperti, Stefano. "Indagini sull' 'Llibre dels Feys' di Jaume I: dall'originale all'archetipo". *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 33 (1982): 269-85; Pujol, Josep. "Cultura eclesiàstica o competència retòrica? El Llatí, la Bíblia i El Rei En Jaume". *Estudis Romànics*, 23 (2001): 147-172, successfully refutes the idea of an ecclesiastical author for the whole of the text put forward in Riera, Jaume. "La personalitat eclesiàstica del redactor del 'Llibre dels Fets'", *Jaime I y su época. X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón. Comunicaciones*, 3, 4 y 5. Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1982: 575-589.



the whole work is constructed at the end of James's reign since there is no evidence it was written before and some early events mentioned, which do not appear to have an immediately logical place in the work, such as the Aragonese revolt of 1227, the war in Urgell in 1228, and the negotiations with Sancho VII of Navarre relate to political problems which again pressed in the final years of his reign and which he must have suspected his successors would have to deal with.¹² The *Llibre* is then not a response in origin to the Majorca campaign but rather to the king's failed expedition to the Holy Land, and to the histories that were beginning to press upon the lands of the crown from outside, particularly the *De rebus Hispanie* of Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, and the *Crònica de Espanya*, first translated into Catalan sometime between 1269 and 1277.¹³

The format the king chose owed something to the troubadours, something to Christian *Gestes* and perhaps a little to consciousness of the Arab world where rulers customarily set down what they had been able to achieve thanks to divine assistance. The majority of the participants in the Majorca campaign were Catalans and James chose Catalan as the language for his work.¹⁴ It is important for the present topic that it is remembered that James narrated his stories (his work is a succession of stories about his reign rather than in the traditional style of a chronicle) in diverse sessions to knights of his household, while a scribe wrote everything down in shorthand.¹⁵ As James's court was itinerant, it is quite possible that sometimes he had many documents to hand which could aid his memory and at other times very few. Where James was and to whom he was speaking will have had an affect on the nature of how he told his stories. That is, not only is it probable that which tales he told and how he told them depended on which members of particular noble families were present when he was telling them, but the religious flavour of the text would depend on where he was telling the tale and whether there were important clerics present or not. For instance, when a Saracen significantly helped James in the early stages of the Majorca campaign, James related, "So acted that angel that God had sent us... and when I say angel I mean the Saracen, who was so good to us that we took him for an angel, and for that reason we say he was *like* an angel". It is not difficult to imagine that after the initial words James looked up to see a bishop or an abbot frowning at him and thus checked his remarks and proceeded more cautiously.¹⁶ This is speculation, of course, but it is hopefully a reminder of how

12. Cingolani, Stefano. *La Memòria dels Reis: Les quatre grans Cròniques*. Barcelona: Base, 2007: 31-74; Cingolani, Stefano. *Jaume I: Història i mite d'un rei*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2007.

13. Cingolani, Stefano. *La Memòria dels Reis...*: 77-78; on the later part of James's reign and relations in Urgell, Navarre and with the Aragonese nobles, the best work remains Soldevila, Ferran. *Pere el Gran*, 2 volumes. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1995.

14. On some occasions James inserts words from languages other than Catalan to indicate that the speaker is talking a language other than Catalan. See Badia, Antoni M. *Cohèrència i arbitrarietat de la substitució lingüística dins la "Crònica" de Jaume I*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1987.

15. *Llibre*, ch. 69; Asperti, Stefano. "Indagini"...: 271.

16. *Llibre*, ch. 71. The timing of the construction of James's work should certainly be a focus of attention when the celebrations for the 800th anniversary of his birth arrive in 2008.



important it is for us to examine further in the years to come the historical contexts of the construction of James's stories.

The purpose of the king in composing the *Llibre dels Fets* was, as is said in the preface of the work (which, even if it may possibly be influenced by Bishop Jaume Sarroca in style, reflects the general spirit of James's work)¹⁷ so that other kings would see what James had been able to achieve with God's help.¹⁸ The kings in question were most likely to be James's successors (and were —the book had no wide distribution outside the family circle) and James expected the book to be read out loud to them.¹⁹ The work is then something of a guidebook for how to rule and no doubt inserts some political events because they were problems James expected his successors would have to deal with and where the crown had claims to defend. The work, as has been said, functions as propaganda, education and legitimization.²⁰

Were it not that James had placed the whole objective of his work as glorifying God we might see the relationship between James and God as an inappropriate subject. Though he was quite surrounded by saints, both in his family and in his entourage, James stood defiantly untainted by virtue.²¹ A serial adulterer, he tried to have his common law wife, Teresa, put away, claiming she was a leper, so that he could marry his beautiful mistress, Berenguera, an incestuous union which Clement IV declared "antagonistic to God, abominable to the angels, and monstrous to men".²² Vindictive to his children, when his heir Prince Peter had his rebellious illegitimate half-brother, Fernando Sánchez de Castro, drowned in the Cinca, James commented, "This greatly pleased us when we heard it".²³ Merciless to those whom he felt had betrayed him, he chopped out Bishop Berenguer of Girona's

17. *BDJA*: 15, note 1.

18. *Llibre*, ch. 1

19. *Llibre*, ch. 69; Pujol, Josep. "The Llibre del Rei En Jaume: A matter of style", *Historical Literature in Medieval Iberia*, Alan Deyermond, ed. London: Queen Mary and Westfield College: 1996: 35-37.

20. Badia, Lola. "Llegir el Libre del Rei Jaume". *Serra d'Or*, 385 (1992): 55; *Llibre dels fets de Jaume I*, trans. Antoni Ferrando, Vicent Josep Escartí...: 9-10; Rubiés, Joan Pau; Salrach, Josep. "Entorn de la mentalitat i la ideologia del bloc del poder feudal a través de la historiografia medieval fins a les quatre grans cròniques", *La formació i expansió del feudalisme Català: Actes del col·loqui organitzat pel col·legi universitari de Girona (8-11 de gener de 1985)*, Jaume Portella i Comas, ed. Girona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Col·legi Universitari de Girona, 1986: 506

21. By far the best analysis of the king's character is Burns, Robert Ignatius. "The Spiritual Life of James the Conqueror, King of Arago-Catalonia, 1208-1276". *Catholic Historical Review* 62 (1976): 1-35. James's relations included Ferdinand III, Louis IX and Elizabeth of Hungary and his associates Ramon de Penafort, Bernat Calvó, and Pere Nolasc.

22. Chamberlin, Cynthia. "The 'Sainted Queen' and the 'sin of Berenguela': Teresa Gil de Vidaure and Berenguela Alfonso in documents of the Crown of Aragon, 1255-1272", *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages*, Paul Chevedden, Donald Kagay, Paul Padilla, eds. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995: 1, 303-321; *Documentos de Clemente IV (1265-1268) referentes a España*, ed. Santiago Domínguez Sánchez. León: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1996: 163 (nº 56).

23. *Llibre*, ch. 550; Soldevila, Ferran. *Pere el Gran*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1995: I, 376-7.



tongue, because he had reproached him.²⁴ Vicious to his enemies, he planned siege-operations so that missiles missing a castle would hit where the Muslim women and children were standing and his best-loved tactic in war was to ravage crops in order to produce famine.²⁵

Nevertheless, James was neither the first nor the last to believe that, given the wider scheme of things, such foibles mattered little. Examples, ancient and modern, leave us in no doubt that political leaders can well reconcile terrible acts of carnage with a profound love of their deity. And James became profoundly convinced (a conviction no doubt early nursed into him by the protecting Templars and the ecclesiastics of his Minority council) that from before birth, through travails, until death, his life was conceived as part of the divine plan, guided and protected by God, Who, at vital moments, intervened in support of him. James, seeing these clear signs of God's love, submitted his will to that of God, to Whom he dedicated all his military service against the Moors, and composed his *Llibre* "so that all men may recognize and know, when we have passed from this mortal life, the deeds that we have done with the help of the powerful Lord, in Whom is true Trinity".²⁶

To begin, the story of James's conception is one of the most popular in all Catalan literature and, lovingly embellished by the chroniclers Desclot and then more so Muntaner has James's father, Peter II, very much in the dark, tricked into sleeping with his estranged wife, Marie of Montpellier, furtively substituted into his bed in place of his mistress by the wiles of the good men of Montpellier.²⁷ But this is some distance from James's own less earthy account of his own beginnings. For James, after his grandfather, Alfonso II, had reneged on a promise to marry Eudoxia, daughter of the Emperor Manuel, in what "would seem to be the work of God", his father, Peter, had then married the daughter of Eudoxia, Marie, because "Our Lord wished that the original promise...should be fulfilled". This was, for those who read James's text, to be wondered at — "a miraculous thing".²⁸ Since Peter and Marie "did not greatly care for each other", James's birth "came about through God's grace" and it was "the will of God we were born into this world". Peter II was persuaded by one of his nobles to go to Mireval where Marie was staying. "That night when they were both at Mireval, Our Lord willed that we should be conceived". Our Lord then willed that James would be born at Montpellier, on Candlemas' eve (1208). His birth was accompanied by "good signs and happenings", too numerous for all to be

24. *La documentación pontificia de Inocencio IV (1243-1254)*, ed. Augusto Quintana Prieto. Rome: Instituto Español de Estudios Eclesiásticos, 1987: I, 319-320 (n° 304); *Documentos de Jaime I de Aragón*, ed. Ambrosio Huici, María Cabanes. Valencia: Anúbar, 1976-82: II, 228-230 (n° 432-433), 240-241 (n° 443-444); Paris, Matthew. *English History*, John Allen Giles, trans. London: H. G. Bohn, 1853: II, 189.

25. *Llibre*, ch. 194; Kagay, Donald. "Army Mobilization, Royal Administration, and the Realm in the Thirteenth Century Crown of Aragon", *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the middle ages*, Paul Chevedden, Donald Kagay, Paul Padilla, eds. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995: II, 95-115.

26. *Llibre*, ch. 1.

27. *Crònica de Ramon Muntaner*, ed. Vicent Josep Escartí. Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1999: chs. 3-5; *Crònica de Bernat Desclot*, ed. Miquel Coll. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1990: ch. 4; Riquer, Martí de. *Llegendes històriques catalanes*. Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 2000: 49-103.

28. *Llibre*, chs. 2, 5, 7.



mentioned. Immediately carried to Notre-Dame-des-Tables, the clergy by chance sang the *Te Deum* as he arrived at the porch. When he arrived at Saint-Firmin, they were singing *Benedictus Dominus*. His mother "rejoiced at all the good signs", ordered twelve candles made of equal measure, each bearing the name of an apostle, and had all lit at the same time. The candle of St James "lasted a full three fingers breadth longer than the others" and, by God's grace, he had the name James.²⁹

Besides the evident Marian devotion (both to his mother and to the mother of Christ), these initial passages of the king, looking back upon his earliest years are concentrated on how God's special design and protection were concentrated on creating in him a man superior to other men. Whether or not James knew the actual history of the marital alliances of his grandfather Alfonso II is unclear. In reality Alfonso II married Sancha of Castile, daughter of Alfonso VII of Castile-León in 1174.³⁰ It appears that subsequently, perhaps to cement an alliance with Frederick Barbarossa, a marriage was arranged between Alfonso's brother Ramon Berenguer, count of Provence and Eudoxia, daughter of a nephew of the Emperor Manuel Comnenus. But when she arrived, Raymond refused her, possibly due to an alteration in the crown's relationship with Barbarossa, though she was nevertheless married to William VIII of Montpellier, an ally of Alfonso II.³¹ But what mattered to James was that his own birth had been part of God's grand design, that God's guiding hand righted a wrong and legitimated his role above all other men, through the superior quality of his birth. When James is born the clerics of Montpellier, the elite of the church, bear witness to the greatness of the occasion by singing the *Te Deum*—the hymn of thanksgiving in which not only the clergy but the apostles, prophets and martyrs give thanks to the Lord for what he has done—give thanks to the Lord for the birth of James. Other clergy then sing the *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*. It is worth remembering how it continues:

*Quia visitavit et fecit redemptionem plebi suae/ et erexit cornu salutis nobis in domo David pueri sui/ Sicut locutus est per os sanctorum, qui a saeculo sunt, Prophetarum ejus/ Salutem ex inimicis et de manu omnium qui aderunt nos.*³²

The clergy announce what James in his autobiography will adamantly maintain—that he is a chief part of God's plan for the redemption of the Christian people and will deliver them safely from the hands of their enemies in the form of the Muslims of the Balearics and southern Spain. And if God at the outset legitimizes

29. *Llibre*, chs. 5, 48. See Soldevila, Ferran. *Els primers temps de Jaume I*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1968, ch. 1.

30. *Alfonso II, rey de Aragón, conde de Barcelona y marqués de Provenza. Documentos (1162-1196)*, ed. Ana Sanchez Casabón. Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1996: 161.

31. Vajay, Szabolcs de. "Eudoxia Comnena, abuela bizantina de Jaime el conquistador", *Jaime I y su época (ponencias)*. X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón (Zaragoza, 1978). Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1979: I, 147-165; Aurell, Martí. *Les Noces del Comte: Matrimoni i poder a Catalunya (785-1213)*. Barcelona: Omega, 1998: 405.

32. *The Daily Missal and Liturgical Manual*, ed. J. Dukes. Leeds: Lavery & Sons, 1955: 96 (*Te Deum*), 1700 (*Benedictus Dominus Deus*).



this special role, then God also legitimizes James's rights as king of Aragon, which had probably at some points, particularly in his early years, been placed in question due to the rumour of the improbability of Peter II being James's father given Peter's well-known antipathy towards James's mother Marie.³³ But this union too was part of God's plan. As the conception of Christ had been part of the divine plan, now also, in a lesser manner, the conception of James is part of that design. And not only does God legitimize James as his special leader of the Christians and as king of Aragon, but God also legitimizes James's claims to Montpellier, claims which had been hotly disputed since his youth, with the viscounts of Montpellier, the consuls of the city, and at times, the kings of France, seeking to undermine his position.³⁴ But God wills that James is born in Montpellier, of Marie of Montpellier, and, as he also takes care to remind us, the pope (Innocent III) had confirmed that this was so and that her rivals in Montpellier were not children of a legal marriage.³⁵ God and his apostle, Innocent III, for James the best pope of his era, legitimize all aspects of James's rule.³⁶

If initially God's chief role was to legitimate, then in the next stage of life he serves as protector of the young child and the youth beset by evil forces. When James was in the cradle, someone threw a rock down at James through a trapdoor, but God wished to protect him so he did not die. James never tells us who it was. Possibly we are supposed to suspect supporters of William IX of Montpellier or even members of James's own family but the very vagueness of the threat reminds the audience that everybody but God was against the boy king.³⁷ After the death of his father at Muret,³⁸ (and neither there nor anywhere in his work does James mention the subject of heresy or heretics),³⁹ during his long and troubled minority,⁴⁰ it was the Lord who made him prevail against "the bad men" who came against him and by the age of twenty, fighting in the county of Urgell, James was already deeply conscious of being God's lieutenant.⁴¹ As James grows up, his relation with God

33. The suggestion comes from Riquer, *Llegendes històriques*, page 51 since In June 1209, Peter II had concluded an alliance with Sancho VII of Navarre naming his brother Alfonso as his heir without any mention of James at all. Conversely Marie of Montpellier named James as her heir in July 1229. Lacarra, José María; González Anton, Luis. "Los testamentos de la reina María de Montpellier". *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 177 (1980): 678-83.

34. Baumel, Jean. *Histoire d'une seigneurie du Midi de La France, II: Montpellier sous la seigneurie de Jacques le Conquérant et des rois de Majorque*. Montpellier: Causse, 1971.

35. *Llibre*, ch. 4.

36. *Llibre*, ch. 10.

37. *Llibre*, ch. 5; Bernat Desclot (ch. 4) also reports this and says the force of the blow was such as to break the cradle. Desclot comments that the identity of the perpetrators of the crime was uncertain but he believed it to be the work of James's relatives, who hoped to have his lands for themselves.

38. Alvira Cabrer, Martín. *El Jueves de Muret: 12 de septiembre de 1213*. Barcelona: Vicerectorat de Cultura de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2002: 330-52.

39. A point well made by Homet, Raquel. "Caracteres de lo político en el *Llibre dels Fets* de Jaime el Conquistador". *Res Gesta*, 32 (1993): 175.

40. Soldevila, Ferran. *Primers Temps...*; Smith, Damian. "Pope Innocent III and the Minority of James I". *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 30/1 (2000): 19-50.

41. *Llibre*, chs. 35 (lieutenant), 57 (bad men).

changes. He is no longer a boy. He has both rights from God and responsibilities to God. And equally his people have responsibilities to him as their God-given king. When Aragonese forces move against him during the revolt of 1227, Pedro Pomar advises James to flee. The king responds:

Don Pedro Pomar, we are the king of Aragon and the kingdom is ours by right, and those who come against us are our subjects and in coming to fight us they do what they ought not to do, since we defend what is right and they do wrong; and so God must help us. And while we live, we shall not abandon this town and shall defeat them. Thus, on this occasion we will not follow your advice.⁴²

God must defend the king not only because he is king and he is attacked by people who are his subjects (so much so that “we dare not enter the cities that God has given us”) but because he is right and defends right.⁴³ This is even clearer in the king’s defence of Aurembiaix in the dispute for Urgell. “God has set you in His place to maintain just law”, Guillem de Cervera reminds the king on Aurembiaix’s behalf and James, more legally-minded than is often noted (and, of course, long associated with Ramon de Penyafort) also puts into the mouth of the Bolognese trained expert in Roman law Guillem Sasala his own sentiments:

God, my lord, has put you in His place, so that you may give justice and reason to those who cannot find either; and the countess requests that you defend her rights’.⁴⁴

The defence of right, particularly the right of a widow such as Aurembiaix, was a God-given duty of the king but he had another major role and this would now come to the fore and remain for the rest of the reign. He must not only defend but also attack the enemies of the faith and expanded the boundaries of Christendom. Looking back, probably from the vantage point of old age, it seemed evident now to James that all until now had been a preparation for James’s part as the instrument of the Lord in war. So it pleased the Lord to assemble the Barcelonan *Cort* of 1228, which decided on the conquest of Majorca.⁴⁵ In the crossing to Majorca, when storm clouds gathered, it was through the virtue of God, and the intercession of the Virgin Mary, that the Provençal wind forced the fleet to land at Palomera rather than Pollença.⁴⁶ At the siege of Palma, divine guidance stopped the initial Muslim surrender terms from being accepted, and God willed that the Christians would be strengthened and the Muslims weakened. When the city was captured, “Our Lord

42. *Llibre*, ch. 29.

43. *Llibre*, ch. 31.

44. *Llibre*, chs. 34 (Guillem de Cervera), 35 (Guillem Sasala).

45. *Llibre*, ch. 52. The king puts the thought into the mouth of Archbishop Aspàreg of Tarragona.

46. *Llibre*, chs. 57-8. On the campaign, see Santamaria, Álvaro. “La expansión político-militar de la Corona de Aragón bajo la dirección de Jaime I”, *Jaime I y su época (ponencias)*. X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón (Zaragoza, 1978). Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1982: III, 91-146.



had arranged it that all the men of the army found so much to take that it was unnecessary to fight among themselves". God had done James such grace that he had given him a kingdom inside the sea, "a thing that no king had ever achieved before". When James returned to protect Majorca in 1231 and there was a good sea, he has Berenguer Sesposes say to him, "that God loved us so much that we could cross the sea in wooden clogs". God made Majorca prosper and by His grace Saracen galleys that attacked Majorca received more harm than they could do.⁴⁷

We must reemphasize that this all seemed very clear to the king as he looked back. Given his tremendous success it had become increasingly obvious that all *was* done through God's will. But there are reasons to think that James was not quite as concentrated on Divine Providence in 1228/9 as he thought he had been (or liked to think he had been) when he reflected on the matter later on. In the lawsuits (1255-71) involving the question of the bigamous Count Àlvar of Urgell and his wives, where claims to land given at the conquest of Majorca were being disputed, six witnesses were called to give evidence concerning the Barcelonan *Cort* of 1228 where the land divisions had been arranged. One witness remembered that James had delivered a speech saying that the king of Majorca had captured a ship belonging to his men and that James had sent his scribe "Jasquius" to the king to demand its restitution. The king of Majorca refused and James said he had called the *Cort* together to decide upon the manner in which he should respond and ultimately it was decided that James should go with his army to capture the city and land of Majorca. The recollections of this witness (P. de Castronolo, a citizen of Barcelona) contrast sharply with the king's account of his own speech though it finds echoes in the account of Desclot.⁴⁸ James mentions the incident of his stolen boat later on his story but not in relation to the *Cort*.⁴⁹ In the construction of his history, for James the *Cort* was a divinely arranged moment for uniting all his people under him. It is again a reminder that in James's reconstruction of his life his relationship with God is perhaps a little more to the fore than it was at the time of the events he describes.

This may also be the case with James's contention that God directed him away from contesting the succession in the kingdom of León, when in reality on the death of Alfonso IX, the temptation of a marriage with Alfonso's daughter and a faraway kingdom was easily outweighed by prospects to the immediate south.⁵⁰ To what extent James felt at the time that he was being divinely guided we cannot really know but when looking back it was certain to him that God willed that he

47. *Llibre*, chs. 80 (surrender terms), 88 (unnecessary to fight), 105 (kingdom in the sea), 116 (wooden clogs), 125 (Saracen galleys). On the military tactics adopted by James in the campaign, see Ribas de Pina, Miquel. *La Conquesta de Mallorca pel Rei en Jaume I: Estudi Tècnic Militar*. Mallorca: Imprenta Mossèn Alcover, 1934.

48. See Kagay, Donald. "The emergence of 'Parliament' in the Thirteenth-Century Crown of Aragon: A View from the Gallery", *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions: Essays in Honor of Joseph F. O'Callaghan*, Donald Kagay, Theresa Vann, eds. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999: 226, 235.

49. *Llibre*, ch. 77; BDJA: 100, note 110.

50. *Llibre*, ch. 106. See Engels, Odilo. "El rey Jaime I y la política internacional del siglo XIII", *Jaime I y su época (ponencias)*. X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón (Zaragoza, 1978). Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1979: I, 213-240.



would undertake the conquest of the kingdom of Valencia. Looking back, throughout that long and difficult task James had been able to move patiently, convinced that God would eventually give him every major Muslim stronghold. At the outset of that conquest (1231-2), God gave Blasco de Alagón the vital fortress of Morella in order that he could deliver it to James (This was perhaps not quite Blasco's view of events).⁵¹ At the siege of Borriana, Jesus Christ allowed James to take the town without receiving harm or a wound. At the siege of Valencia itself, a crossbowman fired at James and an arrow, running through the brim of the helmet and the hood of mail, hit him on the forehead (leaving him, in fact, with a serious wound) but, by God's will, the arrow did not go through his head.⁵² In James's account, even Zayyān, the governor of Valencia, accepted he must surrender the city because God had willed that James would have it. At Xàtiva, James left his knights imprisoned there so he had an excuse to attack and obtain the castle, "since God had arranged it so for us". When the great rebel Muslim leader al-Azraq attempted to ambush James near Rugat in 1258, "if Our Lord had not helped us against him, he would have killed or confounded us".⁵³

There is a remarkable coherence and consistency of thought concerning the part played by divine providence and the protection given to the king in his conquests of Majorca, Valencia and Murcia. This consistency is surely a further reason to suspect that the *Llibre* was constructed at one time rather than at many times. Before the reconquest of Murcia, at the *Cortes* of Zaragoza, in December 1264, it was reported to James that it had been revealed by an angel of the Lord to a Navarrese friar that James would save Spain. When entering reconquered Murcia the king was seized with devotion because of the grace and mercy that God had given him through the prayers of the Virgin Mary. All the good that God had done James came through her prayers.⁵⁴ God's work then took a new direction as He commended to James an alliance with the Ilkhān, Abaqa, so that the Holy Land could be recovered. But, in 1269, with James setting off for Outremer, God's plan changed, no longer did the voyage please Him, He did not wish to improve the weather for the journey, and the king abandoned the enterprise since "We could not force the will of God".⁵⁵ In

51. *Llibre*, ch. 129 (God wills conquest), ch. 136 (Blasco). Arroyo, Fernando. "Blasco de Alagón y el comienzo de la reconquista valenciana". *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón*, IX (1973): 71-99.

52. *Llibre*, chs. 174 (Borriana), 266 (arrow).

53. *Llibre*, chs. 278 (Zayyān), 321 (Xàtiva), 375 (al-Azraq). On negotiations for Xàtiva, see Burns, Robert; Chevedden, Paul. *Negotiating Cultures: Bilingual Surrender Treaties in Muslim-Crusader Spain under James the Conqueror*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999. On al-Azraq, see Burns, Robert Ignatius. "The Crusade against al-Azraq: A Thirteenth-Century Mudejar revolt in international perspective". *American Historical Review*, 93/1 (1988): 80-106.

54. *Llibre*, chs. 389 (angel), 451 (Murcia), 453 (Our Lady's prayers). Generally, on the Murcian reconquest, see Torres Fontes, Juan. *La Reconquista de Murcia en 1266 por Jaime I de Aragón*. Murcia: Patronato de Cultura de la Excm. Diputación de Murcia, 1967; Garrido, Josep David. *Jaume I i el regne de Múrcia*. Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 1997.

55. *Llibre*, chs. 477 (Ilkhān), 487, 492 (Outremer). Carreras, Francesch. "La Creuada a Terra Santa", *Congrés d'Història de la Corona d'Aragó dedicat al rey en Jaume I y a la seua época*. Barcelona: Stampa d'en Francisco Altés, 1909: I, 106-138.



June 1276, with Valencia in revolt, a sickness befell James "because it was pleasing to God" and abdicating in favour of Prince Peter, he vested in the Cistercian habit, intending to end his days at Poblet. But it pleased the Lord that he would not complete the journey there. He died at Valencia on 27 July.⁵⁶ From beginning to end the Lord had planned it all.

This is to labour the point on celestial involvement almost as much as James did himself and, it could be pointed out, not without reason, that if a medieval Spanish king or, indeed, any crusader, had not believed in divine providence that would be something more to write home about. Yet there is something very noticeable about James. The fact is that in a work of approximately 160,000 words covering a period of over sixty years really the *only* characters of major influence other than the king himself are God and His mother. That requires us to look beyond the social acquisition of religious belief to the personality and personal circumstances of the individual.

James's father, Peter II, died at the battle of Muret on 12 September 1213. James was five years and seven months old and in the hands of Simon de Montfort, who had been given him to raise as part of what turned out to be a failed alliance between Aragon and the Albigensian crusaders. Peter II cared little or nothing at all for his heir. James's attitude to him was ambivalent: Peter was a great warrior but definitely not a good family man.⁵⁷ James's mother, Marie, had died at Rome five months previously, protecting the rights of her son before Innocent III. James, though he could have little remembered her, adored her and doted on her memory.⁵⁸ God, Who is almost always a paternal figure, acts as James's idealized father, strong and protective, from a particularly early age. This image is pronounced in the *Llibre*. When Our Lord gives James illnesses, He does so by way of warning, "like a father who corrects his son". God and his earthly father are often combined in James's thoughts. Facing revolt in Aragon in 1227, James wonders that he dare not enter the cities "that God has given us, which our father has left to us". Before the Majorca conquest, he has the bishop of Barcelona say of him what God said of Jesus "*Ecce Filius Meus dilectus, qui in corde Meo placuit...you are a son of Our Lord*".⁵⁹ Likewise the representation of the Virgin Mary as the caring intercessor (who, of course, customarily acts as a maternal figure to Catholic males, particularly in moments of high stress and generally provides a field day for psychologists) is especially pronounced in the *Llibre*. Entering her church in Murcia, after the conquest, the king wept long and

56. *Llibre*, chs. 560-6.

57. *Llibre*, chs. 6, 77 (warrior), 5, 9 (bad husband). See Soldevila, Ferran. *Els primers temps de Jaume I...*: ch. 1; Alvira Cabrer, Martín. *El Jueves de Muret...*; Smith, Damian. *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon: The Limits of Papal Authority*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004: ch. 4.

58. *Llibre*, ch. 7. Aurell, Martí. *Les Noces del Comte: Matrimoni i poder a Catalunya (785-1213)*. Barcelona: Omega, 1999: 405-42.

59. *Llibre*, ch. 1 (illnesses), ch. 31 (cities), ch. 53 (bishop). On the Aragonese revolt, see González, Luis Anton. "La revuelta de la nobleza aragonesa contra Jaime I en 1224-1227", *Homenaje a Don José María Lacarra de Miguel en su jubilación de profesorado: Estudios Medievales*. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1977: II, 143-163. On the speech of Bishop Berenguer de Palou II, see Pujol, Josep. "Cultura eclesiàstica o competència retòrica? El Llatí, La Bíblia i El Rei en Jaume". *Estudis Romànics*, XXIII (2001): 156-157.



heartfeltly, unable to leave her altar, knowing that it was through her prayers that he had done what he had done.⁶⁰

We should also note that James suffered from what we would no doubt now term paranoia. Most of his family dead, rescued from the hands of Montfort by Cardinal Peter of Benevento, he was then brought up at the awesomely grim Templar fortress at Monzón, in virtual isolation (except for the presence during a time of his cousin Raymond Berenguer V of Provence), and with his lands riven by factions. Though the threat to him was exaggerated in his own mind, part of the reason for his fear was that, in his youth, people *were* out to get him or, at least, to control him.⁶¹ Childhood trauma and solitariness are classic backgrounds for those who, feeling different from others, convince themselves they are empowered with some special mission. Indeed, when subject to fear of conspiracies, James no longer felt only God's lieutenant but something closer to Christ Himself. When the Aragonese nobles refused to support the taxes for the king's Murcian campaign in 1265, he responded to them, "it seems that you wish to act as the Jews acted towards Our Lord, when on the night of Thursday, at the Supper, they seized Him and brought Him before Pilate to judge Him, and they cried out 'Crucify, crucify'".⁶² Seeking to deceive others and self-deluding, James uses the excuse of the divine plan to protect him from responsibility for his own faults and inadequacies. Having sent his uncle Bernat Guillem to probable death at Puig de Santa Maria in 1237 during the Valencia campaign, he could console himself that "he has died serving God and us".⁶³ In September 1229, determined on the unifying campaign to Majorca, when his fleet had been hit by a storm James insisted that they continue since "as we go in the name of God, we are confident that He will guide us".⁶⁴ In 1269, no longer with the stomach for the Holy Land, and it was rumoured by some, missing his beloved Berengueta, he spent an interminable time in his work insisting God was against the crusade and that the adverse weather conditions his fleet encountered were sure indication of this.⁶⁵ Evermore egoistical with age, James becomes the official spokes-

60. *Llibre*, ch. 451 (Murcia); Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin; Argyle, Michael. *The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience*. London: Routledge, 1997: 108, 146, 244; Deconchy, Jean Pierre. *Structure genetique de l'idée de Dieu*. Brussels: Editions Lumen Vitae, 1967.

61. Soldevila, Ferran. *Els primers temps...*; A defence of James's great uncle Sancho's procuratorship is provided by Sanpere, Salvador. "Minoría de Jaime I: vindicació del procurador Conde Sancho: Años 1214-1219", *Congrés d'Història de la Corona d'Aragó dedicat al rey en Jaume I y a la seua època*. Barcelona: Stampa d'en Francisco Altés, 1909: II, 580-694.

62. *Llibre*, ch. 397; Argyle, Michael. *The Psychology of Intepersonal Behaviour*. London: Penguin Books, 1994: 234-235.

63. *Llibre*, ch. 232.

64. *Llibre*, ch. 56.

65. *Llibre*, ch. 232 (Bernat); chs. 484-493 (Holy Land). The number of concessions of castles, towns and goods made to Berenguera around this time suggest she was much in James's thoughts (*Alicante y su territorio en la época de Jaime I de Aragón*, José Martínez Ortiz, ed. Alicante: Instituto de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, Diputación Provincial de Alicante, 1993: nos. 455, 465-6, 471, 482, 488, 503, 506-507. On the 1269 campaign, see Smith, Damian. "Guerra Santa y Tierra Santa en el pensamiento y la acción de Jaime I de Aragón", *Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin du XIè au XIIIè siècle*, Daniel Baloup, Phillippe Josserand, eds. Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail (Méridiennes), 2006:



man for the Almighty. When his confessor Arnau de Segarra refused him absolution because of the relationship with Berenguera, he replied that God would forgive him if he conquered Murcia since he had no ill-will towards anybody and that was sufficient for God. When, during the Aragonese revolt of 1267, men of the opposing army entered Lizana saying all would be as God willed, James snapped back at them "God wills what we tell you".⁶⁶

So self-absorbed, it is little wonder that when miracles occur they relate to the king. The matrimonial machinations of his ancestors were "a miraculous thing". Miraculous cures were worked at the tomb of his mother in Saint Peter's, when sick people drank with wine or water the stone scraped from her tomb. But miracles were few. Only on one other occasion does James talk of a miracle and it is not much of a miracle at that: "Our Lord showed us a great miracle" at Tarragona when four sailors were drowned and two saved when the moored galleys were hit by a storm.⁶⁷ Indeed such is the shortage of miracles in the *Llibre*, that an eighteenth-century Spanish noble, José Villarroya, cast doubts on the king's authorship of the text.⁶⁸ Surely, if James had written it, it would be awash with miracles? Even though his thesis was flawed, he had a point. After all, how could one write of the conquest of Valencia and not mention a single miraculous event? Part of this is that James, for all his soldiers' talk, was an educated man, surrounded for much of his time by highly-educated men and, like very many, he did not look for miraculous explanations when natural ones were at hand.⁶⁹ That does not mean James was particularly skeptical but, for him, miracles did not happen very often. Saints could appear, and James surmised from Muslim accounts that Saint George appeared during the storming of Majorca city. Visions no doubt occurred, but concerning the Navarrese friar's vision of an angel, even though the angel said good things about James, the king has Don Jimeno de Urrea reply dryly that visions are all very well.

284-302, 305-321. But see Cingolani, Stefano. *Jaume I...*: forthcoming, where it is argued on the basis of Desclot that Berenguera was with the king on th campaign and therefore accusations of weakness against James were more unjustified still.

66. *Llibre*, ch. 426 (Berenguera); ch. 460 (Lizana).

67. *Llibre*, ch. 7 (Marriages), ch. 7 (Marie), ch. 107 (Tarragona). The cult of Marie of Montpellier was also nurtured by the monks of Ripoll who wrote that miracles were worked at her tomb (*Gesta Comitum Barcinonensium*, eds. Lucien Barrau, Jaume Massó. Barcelona: Fundació Concepció Rabell i Cibis. Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1925: ch. 35).

68. Villarroya, José. *Colección de cartas historico-criticas en que se convence que el rey D. Jayme I de Aragon no fue el verdadero autor de la Cronica o Comentarios que corren en su nombre*. Valencia: Oficina de Benito Monfort, 1800. But see comments of Soldevila in "Prefaci al 'Llibre dels Feits del rei En Jaume' o 'Crònica de Jaume I'", *Les quatre grans cròniques*, ed. Ferran Soldevila. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1971: 7-64, as well as Pujol, Josep. "The *Llibre del Rei En Jaume*: A matter of style", *Historical Literature in Medieval Iberia*, Alan Deyermond ed. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996: 35-65.

69. On James's education, Cawsey, Suzanne. *Kingship and Propaganda in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002: ch. 3. On changing attitudes to miracles, see Chenu, Marie Dominique. *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968: 1-48.

The only angel who God sent James was really a Saracen who seemed like an angel, so helpful was he to the Christian cause.⁷⁰

Likewise, the king saw little of God in Nature. He knew that God was his creator, that God had wished to fashion Majorca in the sea, and that God directed the winds for or against him, as He saw fit.⁷¹ But that was all. James saw the beautiful moon, gazed at the stars in the sky, after a storm watched appear the blue and red arc “that they call of Saint Martin”, and wondered at a solar eclipse. He observed the labours of the spider that could weave away and lose all in an instant, and would not raise camp at Borriana until a swallow and her little ones had departed from the nest made on the pole of his tent. He was in awe before the beauty of Majorca, Valencia and Xàtiva, and at the conquests of Valencia and Murcia he wept and kissed the ground.⁷² But the omnipotence of God was not revealed in any of this. Undoubtedly that reflected changing attitudes and the march forward of Greek and Arabic physics, of a Nature guided by laws which God did not tamper with.⁷³ But the personality of the king is also in play. The king did not really need manifestations of God in Nature and God, therefore, did not tend to waste His time on Nature when His attentions were fully occupied with the king. As James existed for God, so God existed for James. As James moved remorselessly forward against his worldly foes, God protected him, but most of all protected him from the anxieties inside of him. For it was never the physical world that “the conqueror” had most need to conquer. Rather the enemies had been on the inside, enemies against whom James needed God’s legitimation; on the outside —enemies against whom the king needed God’s protection; and within the king’s own head —enemies against whom the king needed God’s consolation.

70. *Llibre*, chs. 84 (George), 390 (Jimeno), 71 (Saracen angel). On James’s reticence concerning miracles, see Burns, Robert Ignatius. “The Spiritual Life of James the Conqueror, King of Arago-Catalonia, 1208-1276”. *Catholic Historical Review* 62 (1976): 336.

71. *Llibre*, chs. 63 (creator), 47 (Majorca), 58, 486-7 (winds).

72. *Llibre*, chs. 57 (moon), 67 (stars), 485 (rainbow), 305 (eclipse), 236 (spider), 215 (swallow), 67 (Majorca), 318 (Xàtiva), 128 (Valencia), 282, 443 (kissing the ground).

73. On Nature, miracles and reason, see Murray, Alexander. *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990: 9-17.

