

## The four great Catalan chronicles, one of the best historiographic series in mediaeval Europe\*

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### ABSTRACT

The chronicles of James I (c. 1270-1276), Bernat Desclot (c. 1280-1288), Ramon Muntaner (1325-1328) and Peter the Ceremonious (c. 1345-1385), known as the four great Catalan chronicles, are one of the best sets of historiographic works from mediaeval Europe. Eminent scholars, historians and philologists have studied and published them, and translations in numerous languages have also been issued. Nonetheless, they are still undeservedly unknown outside the circle of experts in Catalan history and literature. In 1971, Ferran Soldevila published a joint edition of all four chronicles with profuse historical annotations, which was recently revised and expanded by the historian Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol and the linguist Jordi Bruguera in an edition which currently provides the best access to these works. This article provides a summary of current knowledge of these works from an interdisciplinary perspective, along with a few new insights.

**KEYWORDS:** historiography, chronicles, James I the Conqueror, Bernat Desclot, Ramon Muntaner, Peter III the Ceremonious

The chronicles of James I (c. 1270-1276), Bernat Desclot (c. 1280-1288), Ramon Muntaner (1325-1328) and Peter the Ceremonious (c. 1345-1385), known as the four great Catalan chronicles, are one of the best sets of historiographic works from mediaeval Europe.<sup>1</sup> They are part of a European context in which historiography had already made the shift from chronological lists of events to the narration of deeds, and in the majority of cases from narration in Latin to the vernacular. After all, narrative and the vernacular language were the elements needed to connect with the audience for which they were meant – urban, courtly, secular, outside the university – and therefore the best guarantee of achieving the purpose they sought: to disseminate a certain interpretation of the present and its historical antecedents. In all four cases, the choice of the Catalan language can be explained by the fact that it was the language of the most dynamic and influential regions in the composite Catalan-Aragonese state, which is currently known by the conventional name

of the Crown of Aragon, and in consequence the dominant vernacular at the court and in the administration. For this same reason, these chronicles are also predominantly Catalan-centric.

Despite this, they were not the first Catalan chronicles and the first ones that used Catalan in which the narrative form was adopted. Previously, the House of Barcelona, the dynasty which had governed the Catalan countships since the 9th century and acquired the kingdom of Aragon in 1137 – thereafter known as the “House of Aragon” – sponsored the writing of an official chronicle by anonymous monks in the monastery of Ripoll in successive periods from the reign of Raymond Berengar IV (1131-1162) until the reign of James II (1291-1327). This chronicle, known as the *Gesta comitum Barchinonensium et regum Aragonum* (“Deeds of the Counts of Barcelona and Kings of Aragon”), was written in Latin, but in the second half of the 13th century, the need was felt for a version in Catalan (Fig. 1). Yet despite adopting the narrative form, the *Gesta comitum* was a history of the lineage of the count-kings and the transmission of power along this lineage, and even if it was translated into Catalan, it was not suitable for the new propagandistic purposes which are attributed to the historiography after the second half of the 13th century within a more complex society.<sup>2</sup>

In the Crown of Aragon, the responses to these new needs, with their more collective dimension, were the four great chronicles. These Catalan chronicles differ

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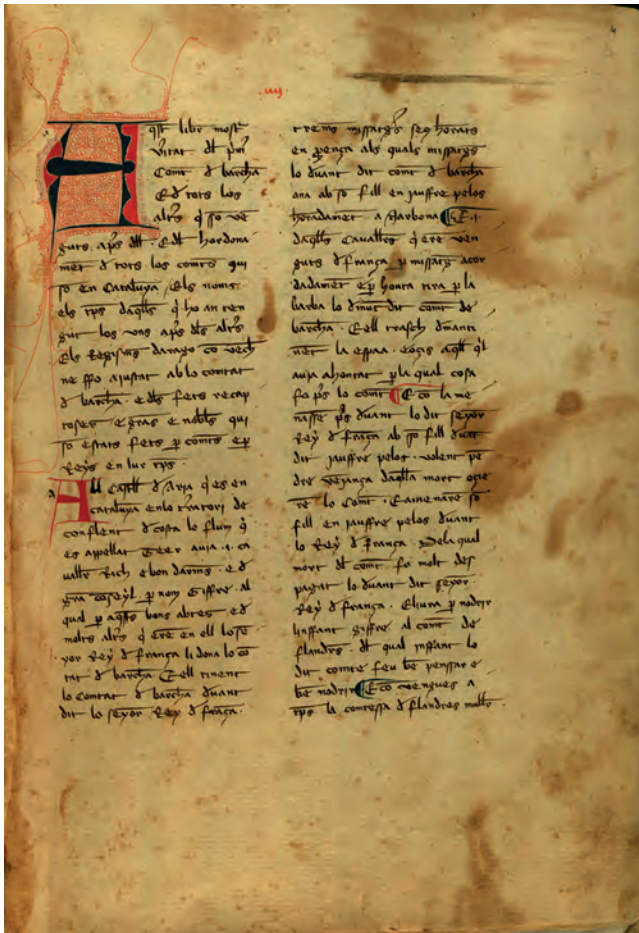


FIG. 1: Catalan translation of the *Gesta comitum Barchinonesium et regum Aragonum*. Biblioteca de Catalunya, ms. 943, f. 4r (copy from the mid-14th century).

from the other major historiographic projects in Europe from the same period – such as those by Alphonse X of Castile and Louis IX of France – because they are not universal chronicles, meaning that they do not begin with the creation of the world following the biblical story, nor do they date further back than their authors’ lifetime. They recount deeds which are contemporary with or very close to their authors, and in some cases the authors actually participated in them, so they have access to living testimonials and even to official documents. The chronicles of James I and Peter the Ceremonious are the only “autobiographies” of mediaeval monarchs, although this term should not be understood in the current sense, given that they did not personally write the texts of the chronicles but instead recounted them orally or inspired them, and at least the latter oversaw and revised the wording.

In the 19th century, at a time when the historical and literary underpinnings of European national identities were being sought, the intellectuals of the Catalan Renaissance rediscovered the great chronicles and viewed them as the foundational texts of their own national identity. This romantic view of the chronicles, which drew from their collective and Catalan-centric dimension and was fostered by the political situation in Catalonia, has im-

bued many historical and philological studies until today, although in recent generations a more objective analysis of these works can be seen. During the first half of the 20th century, swept by the assumption that there must be an epic national poetry in Catalan literature like the kind published – and held up for display – in the neighbouring nations, eminent historians and philologists developed the hypothesis that within the texts of the chronicles were actually prose versions of *chansons de geste* in Catalan, and this would be the only place where any trace might remain. Currently, however, this hypothesis has been rejected.<sup>3</sup>

In the new urban society of the 13th century, with more and more powerful cities dominated by a new social group, the bourgeoisie, which demanded access to political and cultural leadership, and with new monarchies which obtained the support of this group to impose themselves on the nobility, the need to disseminate and impose an expedient version of the deeds became increasingly important. Previously, propaganda had served other initiatives. Troubadour poems, especially the *serventes* genre, had efficiently met this need in a society where oral communication predominated over writing, which was the purview of the few who exclusively wrote in Latin. After the 13th century, the societal dissemination of writing and books, coupled with the yearning to apply them to everyday life, to the trades and entertainment, led to the advent of new sensibilities and new means of transmitting knowledge, culture and information.

In this context, a new kind of historiographical work emerged – which we should call “history” more than “chronicle” – that showcased the narration, the story, which turned out to be a much more useful way to reach key social sectors, namely the bourgeoisie and the nobility, especially in the vernacular. In these sectors, the consumption of fictional works was on the rise, although, as they were in the midst of the transition from orality to writing, these works were envisioned to be recited and listened to. For this reason, it should come as no surprise that when choosing to make a new product of this kind, methods and resources from fictional works were unconsciously incorporated with the intention of making the story appealing, or that – setting aside their subsequent transmission – the first “histories” were designed to be read collectively and listened to. This is the backdrop of the mixture of real events and legends, the narrative resources and the literary references and the heroic or chivalric tone which can be detected in the vernacular “histories” from the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century.

Just as these chronicles drew from literature – the novelisation of history – to make the story appealing, they also tend to fall short on truthfulness to meet the propagandistic objectives. This is a common feature of all the chronicles from the period. However, the novelisation, manipulations, lies, inventions and silences do not invalidate these works but are instead extraordinarily interest-

ing features in order to make a correct historical and literary criticism of them.

Just as in other cases from around the same time, the four great Catalan chronicles clearly intended to serve as the “mirrors of princes”, as exemplary guides to political behaviour. This didactic and moral value connects with a conception of history viewed as a litany of deeds or lives of exemplary persons who should be imitated in order to improve the present. This is expressed in the prologue to the *Historia troiana* by Guido delle Colonne (13th century), a novelised version of the conquest of Troy “in mediæval chain mail” (Gabriel Llompart) which delighted both urban and courtly audiences. It is also expressed in the prologue to the *Llibre dels fets* by James I, which claims to have been written to “give an example to all men of the world who do what we have done”. The chronicles’ presence in the documented private libraries from the 14th and 15th centuries seems to prove that they were indeed perceived in this way.

Yet paradoxically, no lavish manuscripts of these chronicles comparable to the French chronicles’ manuscripts, for example, are conserved. The closest one is the famous manuscript of the *Llibre dels fets* from Poblet, an initiative dating from 1343 at this important monastery which enjoyed royal patronage, to which Peter the Ceremonious donated many books; however, this copy only contains two miniatures and eleven elaborate initial letters (Fig. 2). The Biblioteca de Catalunya’s manuscript of Desclot’s chronicle has to be the most illustrated one, but for reasons unknown the decoration was left undone and only two of the countless miniatures initially planned were actually drawn (Fig. 3). The El Escorial manuscript of Muntaner’s chronicle also has extremely limited illustrations (Fig. 4). The others go no further than the proper application of colour to the hierarchisation of the content (initial letters, headings, paraps) in the best of cases (Fig. 4). We still lack an explanation of why these chronicles did not attract an audience that valued ostentation, while works like the *Grandes chroniques de France* and the chronicles of Villani and Froissart did. Despite this, the number of manuscripts conserved and the printed editions from the early modern period reveal widespread dissemination which was not limited to the Catalan-speaking regions, because there are also old translations into other languages of these works.

From the 19th century until today, this extraordinary set of historiographic works has been studied and published by countless historians and philologists. Most noteworthy are the contributions by Jaume Massó i Torrents, Lluís Nicolau d’Olwer, Jordi Rubió i Balaguer, Miquel Coll i Alentorn, Ferran Soldevila, Martí de Riquer, Stefano Asperti, Albert G. Hauf, Josep M. Pujol, Stefano M. Cingolani, Josep Antoni Aguilar, Xavier Renedo and Jaume Aurell. Nonetheless, the fact that they are written in Catalan, coupled with the political history of Catalonia, has undeservedly limited their dissemination, despite their recent translations.

Below is a presentation of the state of the art on each of the four great chronicles. The article will conclude with general overview of the study and publication of these chronicles.

### THE *LLIBRE DELS FETS DEL REI EN JAUME*

The first of the great Catalan chronicles is the *Llibre dels fets del rei En Jaume* (“King James’ Book of Deeds”) (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> James I the Conqueror (Montpellier 1208-Alzira 1276) had a long, seminal reign (1213-1276). He ascended to the throne as a young boy after the death of his father in the battle of Muret as he defended his Occitan vassals from the crusade against the Albigensian heresy. Meantime, the Catalan-Aragonese domination and influence over much of the southern part of the kingdom of France waned – along with the English ones over the western part of the kingdom – as a result of the French monarchy’s impetus from that new social group which would definitively shift the socioeconomic and political relations and the physiognomy of Western Europe after the 13th century:



FIG. 2: James I at a dinner in Tarragona in 1228 where the conquest of Mallorca was planned, in a miniature from the *Llibre dels fets del rei En Jaume*. Biblioteca de Reserva de la Universitat de Barcelona, ms. 1, f. 27r (copy made in Poblet in 1343).

the bourgeoisie. In the history of the Catalan-speaking lands and Aragon, James I presided in the 13th century, which has been called the “peak” of the Middle Ages, although it is the century that opens a new era. This is the century which witnessed the ascent of the bourgeoisie, which forced a redesign of feudal society; the rebirth of urban society, with new concerns and new urban, artistic and literary tastes and a new lifestyle; the bourgeoisie’s access to political control over cities and participation in the monarchy’s governance via the courts and parliaments; the creation of a new educational system, universities, befitting the new urban demand; the emergence of a new religiosity and new religious orders which connected with – and controlled – this new public; the valuation and dissemination of books and writing, and of paper, which made them more affordable than ever and led to a veritable cultural revolution; the emergence of the vernacular languages as tools to transmit and provide access to knowledge and dealings in everyday life; the retreat of the old clerical cultural and political elites and the rise of “secular” elites, that is non-clerical and not acculturated in Latin; written pacts and the establishment of a new figure who guaranteed them, the notary; the quest for a new model of physician and medicine which could guarantee a long, healthy life; and the revival of Roman law, which fostered a solid monarchy capable of imposing itself on the nobility and providing stability, when well-oiled with money. All of these extraordinarily important new developments were taking shape also in the kingdoms of James I.

The catastrophe in Muret left the young James in the hands of the French enemy, according to the pacts which his father had reached following an old chivalric mindset, which would gradually vanish in the 13th century. Once released, for years he was subjected to regencies and noble circles which vied for control over the kingdom; indeed, this nobility decided to educate him among their own, with the Templars. James reached adulthood imbued with the old mindset, in stark contrast to the new developments of the era that were becoming increasingly evident. He was always an old-style king in a new world, but he was canny enough to see how these new ways could be his best ally in imposing himself in his kingdoms, and he even contributed to promoting them.

His personal contradictions, in addition to his steadfast support of the bourgeoisie, became clear in his decisions. While his father had died defeated and defending heretics, he became a champion of Christianity and expanded it by depriving Islam of its domination over the Balearic Islands (1229) and the lands of Valencia (1229-1245) and Murcia (1265-1266). On the other hand, despite condemning his father’s womanising, not only did he inherit this inclination but he also far outstripped his father. The patrimonial conception of the state, a feature of his old mindset, explains the different wills which divided the kingdoms among his legitimate sons, sparking family upheaval and noble factions, to the despair of those who yearned for stability and a strong monarchy as well as

Prince Peter, the son who ended up inheriting most of the kingdoms.

Despite its incipient expansion, the Crown of Aragon remained limited to the Iberian Peninsula, especially after the retreat after the expulsion from Occitania. Nonetheless, James managed to weave international alliances which bore fruit in subsequent reigns. The struggle to retain influence over Provence, which ended in failure when it fell to the Anjous, and the rivalry with France fostered the continuation and even deepening of the alliance with the Holy Roman Empire. Examples of this include his marriage to Violant of Hungary, who came from a satellite kingdom of the Empire, and the marriage of their heir, Peter, to Constance of Sicily, who came from an independent kingdom of the imperial dynasty of the Hohenstauffens. Indeed, despite the opposition of France and the papacy, this latter marriage took place with extraordinary ostentation at the most internationally visible place in their kingdoms, Montpellier. James I laid down the guidelines of a Ghibelline orientation that Peter the Great took to its utmost, which encompassed not only international politics but also new forms of culture and governance.

All of these contexts, naturally the most complex ones that we can possibly cover here, explain why he had the notion to write a chronicle, along with its form, language used, content and intentionality. The *Llibre dels fets*, which was written during the last years of the reign of James I, after around 1270, is autobiographical in form. In the voice of the king himself, it recounts the deeds which the monarch experienced, and only those. Despite all the possible nuanced definitions of the genre of autobiography, which was incipient at the time, it is the oldest royal autobiography in the West, and if for that reason alone it vividly contrasts with other historiographic products from the period.

The king is the author, but he is clearly a special author, not the same kind that later Peter the Ceremonious or his son-in-law Alphonse X of Castile would be. Like them, James did not personally write the chronicle, but unlike them, he did orally set forth his memories to a group of collaborators, some of whom were familiar with the work of writing and making books, so they must have been clerks in the Chancellery, and less likely clergymen, as previously assumed. James spoke as his collaborators copied what he said and later gave it its definitive form by introducing the royal “we”. The signs of orality in the language reveal this method, with its gruff style and poorly-constructed and somewhat disorganised sentences; however, these are the characteristics which also make the chronicle such a vivid, spontaneous text.

The evidence of this method and the scant information on the king’s education and readings – which have led some to attribute to him the *Llibre de doctrina del rei En Jaume*, a compilation of excerpts from moral, political and encyclopaedic readings by his grandson James II – have fostered the idea of a monarch who was not familiar with writing, and perhaps even illiterate, which matches

his old-school education. At the same time, the use of the Scriptures in the prologue of the chronicle – whose authenticity has thus been debated – have led some to posit exclusively ecclesiastic collaborators and to view the chronicle itself as the product of an ecclesiastic milieu, which also matches the transition from clerical to secular cultural elites at the time. Currently, these ideas have been discarded or heavily shaded, given that there is no proof of the king's illiteracy, and the biblical references contain errors which would have been incomprehensible had they been written by clergymen.

James I and his milieu were driven to write a chronicle like the *Llibre dels fets* to fulfil political and personal needs. On the one hand, they had to counter the Kingdom of Castile's marginal, subsidiary view of the Crown of Aragon which was found in the flourishing Castilian historiography, in particular the *Historia de rebus Hispanie*, a history of the Iberian Peninsula which insisted on presenting the Castilian kingdom as the sole heir of the Visigoths and therefore as the one that was predestined to dominate – “reconquer” – the entire peninsula. Because of its modernity and breadth, this work by Archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, also known as “the Toledan”, could not be countered by the *Gesta comitum*, the old chronicle of the lineage of the Catalan counts, even if it were updated and translated to the vernacular. Nor could this effect be achieved by translating Jiménez de Rada's work into Catalan, even if the part corresponding to the Crown of Aragon was expanded and fleshed out. On the other hand, James and his milieu felt the need to alter the memory of the deeds in the Crown of Aragon after the disaster of Muret and a father and predecessor who was defeated and morally reprehensible.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that James I wanted to present himself as a providential monarch sent by God to reconduct and refound the state and the dynasty and preserve its independence. He was the chosen one to spearhead and guide its rebirth. He believed that the expansive era in which he lived, full of new developments, seemed to justify this perspective. What is more, he saw his personal life as one long example worth imitating, like the exemplary stories in didactic works. This is the deeper meaning of the *Llibre dels fets*, and it is visible from the very beginning, in the prologue. After that, the story of the king being sired and born, which stresses the portends immediately thereafter, seeks to show how they heralded an exceptional king predestined to do God's work, like a new Arthur. This comparison with the Arthurian legend becomes evident in the celebrated legend sparked by James' story, which is also found in the later chronicles of Desclot and Muntaner. The literary referent – heroic, chivalrous, recognisable – worked perfectly to disseminate the message, and not even an author as reluctant to use these referents as Desclot could resist it. The great length of the story of the conquests of Mallorca and Valencia in the book seeks to present the image of a crusader king devoted to expanding the faith, a chosen king whom God therefore protected from injury from the

terrifying crossbows – a passage which, in form, once again shows a recognisable literary reference to the *Chanson de Guillaume*, a 12th-century French *chanson de geste*.

Generally speaking, James I chose to recount the deeds that show that he is a good king in God's eyes, yet without neglecting intimate, everyday details which also present him as an accessible, human hero. In short, in his book, the king creates his own literary character, a character with the ideal profile for an exceptional time and circumstances. He created his own myth with resounding success that lasts even until today. Indeed, the mythicised image of James I which intentionally emanates from the *Llibre dels fets* has become ingrained in popular memory, in the arts, in literature and even in research.<sup>5</sup>

These objectives required the memory of the deeds to be manipulated, as was common in the historiography of the era. Apart from the fact that in the latter years of his life, when the chronicle was written, his recollection of deeds that occurred long ago might have been somewhat murky, the desire to create his own character led to clear manipulations. Failures are silenced in the chronicle, such as the first attack in Peníscola, as are morally reprehensible deeds, such as his thriving extramarital amorous pursuits. Likewise, the way certain deeds are presented contrasts with other stories, when they exist, such as the account of the conquest of Mallorca.<sup>6</sup>

The *Llibre dels fets del rei En Jaume* remained valid for many years, both at home and abroad, and the myth spread, as mentioned above. It is preserved in a dozen manuscripts copied between the 14th and 18th centuries. In the Catalan court, it served an educational purpose during the 14th and 15th centuries. It was printed in Valencia during the 16th century to defend other political interests. James II (1291-1327) also used it for political purposes and promoted its translation into Latin by the Dominican and ambassador of the king, Pere Marsili, which had to contribute to attracting Church resources for the crusade against the kingdom of Granada.<sup>7</sup> This Latin translation contains additions and deletions, as well as details which may have been in the original but do not appear in the Catalan manuscripts preserved today. The fact that this Latin translation dates from 1314, long before the oldest manuscript of the Catalan text, which dates from 1343, fuelled doubts about the dating of the Catalan text and speculations that the Latin text might predate it, as the research by Stefano Asperti has debunked.<sup>8</sup> More recently, it has been translated into modern Catalan, and the complete version has been translated into Spanish, English, French, Portuguese and Japanese.

#### **THE *LLIBRE DEL REI EN PERE* BY BERNAT DESCLOT**

The *Llibre del rei En Pere d'Aragó i dels seus antecessors passats* by Bernat Desclot is the second of the great Catalan chronicles (Fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> The subject of this chronicle is the

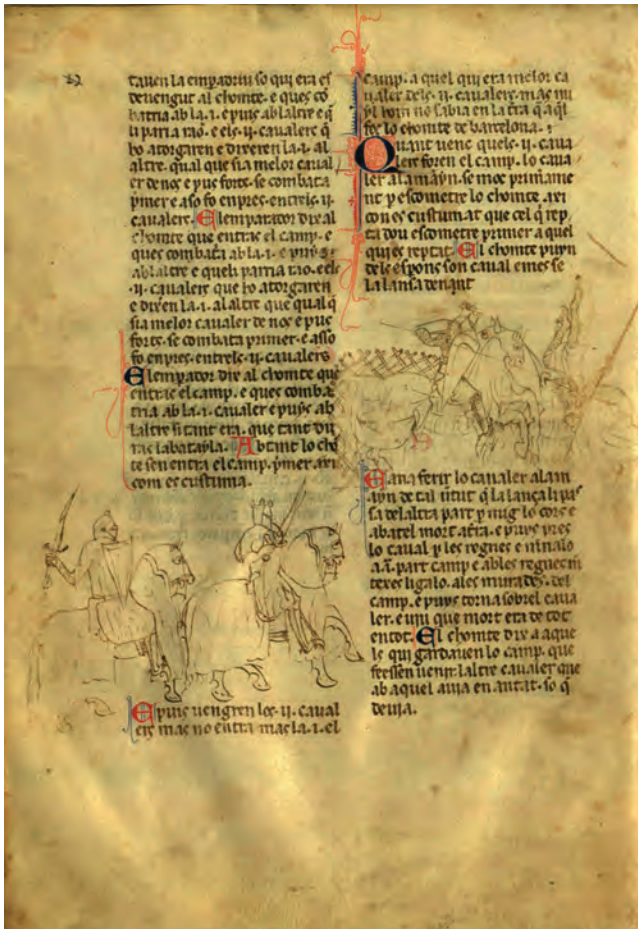


FIG. 3: Legend of the good count of Barcelona and the empress of Germany in the *Llibre del rei En Pere d'Aragó* by Bernat Desclot. Biblioteca de Catalunya, ms. 486, f. 15v (copy from the first half of the 14th century).

life of Peter II the Great (Valencia 1240 – Vilafranca del Penedès 1285), who had a short yet decisive reign in the history of the Crown of Aragon (1276-1285). Peter ascended to the throne after a long period of clashes with his father, James I, because of the latter's plans to divide his inheritance. Believing Peter to be feeble, a large faction of the nobility tried to take advantage of the transfer of power to impose themselves; however, the new king boldly seized control of the situation. The reign soon focused on the Sicilian question because of both the king's personal interest and the interests of the mercantile elite in his kingdoms, who were quite concerned about the expansionism of Charles of Anjou, who was cutting off trade routes and markets. The rivalry between Peter and Charles was longstanding. With the powerful assistance of France and the papacy, Charles had managed to wrest the inheritance of the Catalan countships of Provence (1246) and the kingdom of Sicily, in doing so exterminating part of the family of Constance, Peter's wife (1266-1268).

With the steadfast support of the Catalan mercantile oligarchy, the Sicilian exiles, the people of Sicily, and those who in Italy and in Bizantium feared Charles' designs, Pe-

ter led a military expedition that took control of the island (1282) assisted by the popular uprising in the Sicilian Vespers. This opened the Sicilian ports to Catalan merchants, kept the French away from the enticing Maghreb and provided new feudal domains to the Catalan-Aragonese nobility; in short, it started the Mediterranean expansion of the Crown of Aragon. However, in parallel, it placed Peter the Great and his states at the heart of the vast European battle between the pro-Pope Guelphs and the pro-imperial Ghibellines, and after the extermination of the Hohenstauffens, turned him into nothing less than the international leader of the Ghibelline faction.

The pope excommunicated him, divested him of his kingdoms and, with the assistance of his French allies, summoned a Crusade against the Crown of Aragon to eliminate him. Thanks to the support of the oligarchy, which took advantage of the occasion to secure provisions from the king, the origin of Catalan parliamentarism, coupled with the resistance of Girona, the disease in the French army and the bloody maritime war led by admiral Roger of Lauria, the French-papal Crusade was a glaring failure. Peter died shortly thereafter, not without the pleasure of witnessing Charles of Anjou, the pope and the king of France precede him, but he bequeathed to his successors an open international conflict, the War of the Sicilian Vespers, which did not conclude until 1302.

The Crown of Aragon that Peter the Great inherited, which had been consolidated and expanded by James I, was experiencing the expansive juncture common to Western Europe at the time, but it was not strong enough to deal with a conflict of this size solely with weapons. Peter was even more aware than his ancestors of the need for a cultural policy which would bolster his position, both at home and in the international arena. His troubadours played a very prominent role in this cultural policy, as they had in previous reigns. However, now this role was combined with other initiatives like historiography, and it would become even stronger because it was contextualised by the secularisation of government stemming from the process of replacing the old cultural clerical elites with new secular elites. The Ghibellinism which the monarchy embraced connected with this transformation precisely because it sought to govern with this new approach.

Bernat Desclot's chronicle originated in the needs that arose from this context. It was envisioned as the best tool to ideologically deal with the Crown of Aragon's expansion beyond the strict boundaries of the Iberian Peninsula and its entry into the greater international arena, and to control a changing society. It was meant to disseminate the story that Peter the Great wanted in prose, just as the troubadours spread it in verse. Like Charles of Anjou, there was a newfound awareness of the value of propaganda in that struggle.

It is a work of historiography unlike previous ones, a more efficient one, as befit the new times. The author was an individual within the king's immediate circle who was profoundly familiar with the administration, the use of

writing and courtly literature. Identifying him is tricky because no Bernat Desclot appears in the copious royal documentation conserved. Based on indications from the text, Coll i Alentorn proposed identifying him as Bernat Escrivà, a civil servant from Roussillon who may have had an Occitanian family background and occupied different managerial posts in the royal administration (Escrivà means clerk). The double name can be explained by the custom of the era within the context of the birth of modern surnames.

The author obviously had access to all the royal documentation, even the monarch's most personal documents, and he constantly demonstrated this with the intention of conveying objectivity. He often transcribed or summarised the documents conserved. This was Desclot's main kind of source, although he also used eyewitnesses, other chronicles and legends. Drawing from his professional experience, he managed to put a distance between himself and the deeds recounted in order to ensure the maximum efficiency of the story, and this is why he refrained from providing his own testimony except in the episodes that are the most intertwined with Peter's interests, such as the battle of the feast day of the Assumption of Mary in August 1285. For that same reason, he radically limited the use of providentialism, except for when needed, such as in the celebrated episode of the plague of flies that attacked the French army in the siege of Girona and saved a monarch in a very difficult situation.

In order to give the story meaning and power, and to ensure that it was properly disseminated, he used narrative mechanisms from courtly literature, since it was quite popular among urban milieus. He drew from the forms and characters of chivalrous literature, in particular *chansons de geste* and the Arthurian novels, along with troubadour poetry. Desclot created a main character who was always youthful, capable of epic deeds, comparable to Roland – the prototype of epic heroes – and Alexander – the prototype of the good king, conqueror, chivalrous, bold and curious. There is no dearth of devices like dialogues and examples. Furthermore, the ideological framework of courtliness, which identified the best part of the upper social echelon – who lived at court and accepted its set of values – and is found in all the literature created and disseminated from those circles, also appears in this chronicle. Peter and the Catalans, whose courtliness the enemy disputed, following this logic, are presented as the true standard-bearers of those values. The chronicle closes with the typical final formula of *planhs*, the genre of funeral eulogies of troubadoursque poetry used after the death of illustrious figures.

Desclot constructed a painstakingly crafted text whose first draft, written after around 1280, he partly revised after the king's death in 1285, until he himself passed away in 1288.<sup>10</sup> The entire chronicle was designed according to the political interests of Peter the Great and the Catalan oligarchy, the engine driving the Crown of Aragon. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the work is

radically Catalan-centric and that Peter, similar to other propagandistic literature of the era, is the representative of the "fine lineage of the count of Barcelona", nicknamed "the Barcelonian".<sup>11</sup> The chronicle contains a prologue and two parts. In the prologue, Desclot reveals his awareness as an author and makes a lengthy exposition of his objectives. The first part starts with the founding of the Crown of Aragon and recounts a selection of deeds prior to the life of Peter the Great, even drawing from legends (Fig. 3), with the twofold intention of presenting his family, political and ideological background – a chivalrous, courtly lineage, Ghibelline in leanings, the legitimate lords of Provence, allies of the Empire – and to counter the image that James I had wanted to give of himself in the *Llibre dels fets* – Desclot's James I is deliberately debatable and imperfect; he is chivalrous and courtly, but not the founder of the Crown of Aragon or the one chosen by Providence. Critics have often misunderstood this first part because of the sources from which Desclot drew. The second part outlines the biography of Peter the Great, who is always presented as a knight king, the best and most courtly knight in the world, and a great conqueror – "he was the second Alexander because of his chivalrousness and conquests", as the prologue claims.

The portrait that Desclot sketches of Peter the Great is precisely the most remarkable content and the one that has had the most impact of this chronicle. He constructs his main character with the profile of a literary hero from chivalrous literature, whose devices he used to ensure that it was warmly received. The figure of Peter constructed thus, as a prototype of all the virtues, acts as a narrative and propagandistic tool. This tool is reinforced by presenting counter figures as lacking chivalrous or courtly values, as bad kings, traitors, proud and arrogant: James of Mallorca, Charles of Anjou, Philip III of France and the French in general.

The myth of Peter *the Great* had been created by his main troubadour, Cerverí de Girona,<sup>12</sup> but Desclot pushed it even further thanks to the possibilities of prose. The chronicle by the Guelph Salimbene di Adam attests to the popularity of the myth and the efficiency of the method; it contains a portrait of the king as a "second Alexander" after a symbolic ascent to the mountain of the Canigó, nothing less than propaganda coming from Peter's court. This is joined by great praise from another Guelph author, Dante ("d'ogni valor portò cinta la corda", "he possessed all the virtues"); his courtly facet was reported by Boccaccio, another Guelph; it would later appear in Shakespeare; and the chivalrous and courtly facet also reached the *Curial*. It is a myth that is still alive today in both research and popular literature.

Obviously, it is a portrait of the king which has little to do with the real Peter. The negative traits of his character – impulsive, proud, vengeful, authoritarian – are silenced or masterfully turned into positive virtues, such as in the story of the challenge of Bordeaux and the repression of the revolution in Barcelona waged by Berenguer Oller.

The same method was used for the secondary characters, such as Roger of Lauria and his cruelty in war. And it was further used to reframe warriors who displayed no chivalrous virtues whatsoever – the Almogavars and crossbowmen – but were extremely useful and the sign of a new time in which such virtues would soon cease to function even as an ideological and narrative resource.

The chronicle by Bernat Desclot is conserved today in around twenty manuscripts copied between the 14th and 18th centuries. It was translated into Aragonese and Spanish in the 15th century, and more recently it has been the subject of complete translations into Spanish, Italian and English, and extensive parts of it into French.

### THE CHRONICLE BY RAMON MUNTANER

The *Chronicle* by Ramon Muntaner is the third and most extensive of the great Catalan chronicles (Fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> Unlike Desclot, Ramon Muntaner (Peralada 1265-Ibiza 1336) is a well-documented figure. Muntaner was born in the small yet active town of Peralada, in NE Catalonia, at that



FIG. 4: The author writing his work, in a manuscript of the *Chronicle* by Ramon Muntaner. Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, ms. K.I.6, f. 1r (copy from the second quarter of the 14th century).

time a feudal domain of the Rocabertí family. Recent documentary data have forced us to correct our previous notions of this chronicler and his family, affecting our understanding of the author and his work.<sup>14</sup> According to the preconceived romantic image of him, a chronicler like he must have been a nobleman and an active warrior, and he must have been a member of the royal court from a young age. However, it has been confirmed that he was born into a family of merchants who were thoroughly integrated into the local bourgeoisie and town leadership (consuls, bailiffs, jurists). For this reason, his father could afford a home in the main square and, as Muntaner recounts with emotion and intention, host James I and Alphonse X of Castile there when they visited the town (1274-1275). There are still debates as to whether Muntaner's youthful sojourns in Paris (1276), Montpellier (1281) and perhaps Zaragoza and Bordeaux (1286-1287) were related to his inclusion in court retinues, or more likely whether they were family commercial journeys.

Muntaner belonged to a new world in which the cities had become preminent and powerful poles of attraction, and the bourgeoisie driving them were the most dynamic, expanding social group. All over the land, in larger and smaller cities, trade and the advent of a new economic and cultural elite were becoming clear. However, his family was far from the royal court, which the chronicler, when he was young, seemed to observe as a spectator, and remote from the large cities and their possibilities. Muntaner's life would have unfolded in this family milieu were it not from the impact of the War of the Sicilian Vespers and the opportunities provided him by Catalan expansion around the Mediterranean which the conflict had ushered in.

The destruction of Peralada during the French Crusade of 1285 must have led to the family's ruin, and perhaps as well to the death of his father and elder brother – Muntaner was a younger son – pushing the future chronicler into exile southward, in Valencia. An erroneous interpretation of the chronicle, which perfectly matched that romantic image, posited that during those years he had participated in the maritime war led by Roger of Lauria, but there is no evidence of this.

With the seizure of the Balearic Islands to James II of Mallorca (1286), Muntaner took advantage by the fact that he had wealthy relatives there to move to Mallorca and make the most of the economic opportunities offered by the conquest of Menorca (1287). Despite the fact that he secured the status of citizen of Mallorca and earned generous compensation for his loans to the Crown, at the end of the seizure (1298) he went to Sicily to participate in the final phase of the war. His participation in this and other wars, which the romantic view had interpreted as direct involvement in combat, should be understood instead in the sphere of organisation, logistics and at most the oversight of operations. As was common, this kind of involvement allowed him to participate in the lucrative business of war and served as his economic and social lever.



On Sicily, he made an important contact: the German-born mercenary Roger de Flor, whose administrator he became, and with whom he went to Byzantium in 1303 with the Great Catalan Company which Roger organised – comprised primarily of Almogavars – which had been hired by the Greek emperor to fight against the Turks.<sup>15</sup> Muntaner served as the administrator (“mestre racional”) of the Company, and only occasionally did he oversee war operations – like the defence of Gallipoli, led by the women who accompanied the Almogavars under his orders.

After the murder of Roger de Flor, in the maelstrom of the dispute among the Byzantine factions, the antagonism of the Genovese, the ambitions of the Catalan kings and the dire internal dissent which ensued, Muntaner left the Company (1307) and went into the service of Prince Ferdinand of Mallorca, a younger son of the Mallorcan royal house who was in Greece seeking his fortune. After that, he suffered hardships as a captive of the Venetians and Angevins, who subjected him to torture because he was an envoy of the King of Sicily. Once released, the latter entrusted him (1309) to assure Sicilian dominance over Djerba, a strategic position in the Maghreb, and he was finally assigned to govern it (1311-1315). Because of his closeness with Ferdinand of Mallorca, he was assigned to take the prince’s son from Sicily to Perpignan (1315), as he would inherit the Mallorcan crown after his father’s death.

He then went to Valencia, where he had both assets and family, and where he had married a woman from the local bourgeois elite. There he became the administrator of an admiral of James II of Aragon and participated in and earned profit from the organization of the conquest of Sardinia (1324-1325). He traded in luxury fabrics, purchased properties and rents, and joined the city’s urban patriciate. Within this framework, he became one of the leaders of the municipality, which he officially represented at the coronation of Alphonse III the Benign (1328) and in the Courts of the kingdom (1329). After participating in the organization of a crusade against Granada, which was never performed, he left for Mallorca (1332), where a son was modestly placed in the court of James III of Mallorca, the prince he had brought over from Sicily as a child. James entrusted him with numerous managerial posts and ultimately with the governance of Ibiza, where Muntaner died. There is no evidence that he was ennobled, as has been assumed, although his descendants were.

What stands out in Muntaner’s biography is first that he was an individual who came from the non-privileged estate, from a family of merchants in a small, secluded town, who rose to the bourgeois elite of a large city, driven by his status as a younger son and his family’s financial ruin in the war. Secondly, he made an enormous personal profit from the Catalan political, military and economic expansion around the Mediterranean, which individuals like him needed and spurred; in this sense, he is a “man of empire”, in the celebrated expression coined by Carles Riba. Third, because of all this he managed to engage in contact with all three branches of the Royal House – Cat-

alonia-Aragon, Mallorca and Sicily – and earn profits in the guise of businesses, posts and favours, although the divisions and clashes among them caused him a great deal of anguish. Fourth, he belonged to a social milieu which took writing and books for granted as the tools for dealing with everyday life and social promotion, and he himself was part of the new “secular” cultural elites that were promoting the written use of the vernacular.

Muntaner’s profile as a chronicler is quite different to the authors of the other great chronicles, and much more modern. He is not a king who wrote or organised the writing of a chronicle, nor a royal functionary with an education that he put on display, nor a man of the Church writing a chronicle, all clear exponents of the old cultural elites. He is a “secular” man without any further training than the merchant’s training he got from his family, yet he was imbued with the courtly culture and literature which these sectors were adopting. He wrote on his own initiative, not for any king or municipal power, and he did so because he knew that written works – even if, like his, they were meant to be heard – had an impact. He wrote in the vernacular, as befitting the sociocultural milieu in which he operated: Latin would not have fulfilled his objective, and he most likely did not know it. Within Europe, he was not the first “secular” chronicler, but he was one of the first and most interesting and capable.

Ramon Muntaner reports precisely on the time and place when he began to write his “book”, as well as on his age when he undertook this project: 15 May 1325, in the farmstead which he owned through his wife in Xirivella, in the hinterland of the city of Valencia, when he was 60 years old. This extraordinarily precise information intends to underscore the importance that the author attached to his personal decision to write the chronicle, as contained in an elaborate prologue that the author wrote to make the work stand out. In it, he justified his decision to write, set forth his objectives and the method he would use and outlined the content. It contains the famous cliché of a supernatural and supposedly holy vision which woke him as he was sleeping and ordered him to start writing. Through this mechanism, Muntaner acknowledged being the eyewitness of deeds during his lifetime which he considered extraordinary – those related to the Mediterranean expansion – which he attributes to God’s will at all times. He attributes his personal success to rectitude in his dispatch of assignments and his treatment of the vanquished; he defended the need to provide a personal account of the deeds that he had experienced; and he expressed the need for the kings of Aragon to take him as an example in order to ensure their success, with the desire for them to reward him and his loved ones.

Indeed, the work is constantly presented as a practical “prince’s mirror”, a compilation of advice on how to navigate the right course when taking decisions and governing, meant for the monarchs of the Crown of Aragon. Muntaner had already taken on the role of royal counselor before writing his *Chronicle*, in a poem addressed to

James II in 1322 – tellingly entitled *Sermó* (Sermon) – in which he advises on the logistics to be applied in the conquest of Sardinia, which had just been announced. The poem combines two traditions which the author believed were effective in that case: the *serventes* – it had to be chanted with the tone of the French *chanson de geste* *Gui de Nanteuil* – and narrative poetry. Because of the confluence of objectives, Muntaner decided to include it in the *Chronicle*.

In the *Chronicle*, Muntaner recounts the deeds which he witnessed, and others as well, from the siring of James I (1207) to the coronation of Alphonse III the Benign (1328). Yet despite appearances, it is not an autobiography. In fact, there are few details from his personal life. When methodologically justifying his choice of deeds to recount, he excluded personal ones if they were not related to the “deeds of the lords”, which were the ones chosen. Among these deeds, the ones with the most profound impact on him were related to his journey to the Byzantine Empire with the Almogavars, and the story of it he recounts is extraordinarily important in learning about that historical episode and the way a company of mercenaries worked. He took advantage of this choice and the narration of the deeds to reveal himself to be a capable commander (the defence of Gallipoli), a sound administrator (Catalan Company, governance of Djerba) and a faithful, efficient servant (moving Prince James) at the most delicate junctures, and to show how the qualities of a good manager coupled with the fact of being on the right side who owns the truth are guarantee of success.

The chronicler stated which side owned the truth in the prologue: the kings of the Crown of Aragon. And by extension the other branches of the House of Barcelona: the kings of Mallorca and Sicily. He had met them all, had served them and had been rewarded. The exaltation of these kings and the Mediterranean interests they represented, as well as of the Catalans and of the Catalan language – this is once again a radically Catalan-centric chronicle – combine with an extreme providentialism – these kings and their subjects are the chosen ones – with the goal of justifying and promoting the Mediterranean expansion. In his eyes, the “extraordinary deeds”, the first major steps in this expansion which he experienced, confirmed the profits of the latter.

However, these profits and their continuation were in danger because there were dissensions and clashes among the three branches of the dynasty, which started to pursue different local interests. Muntaner defends the unity of action in many passages, the most famous of which is the example of the reed shrub, which is so strong that it cannot be uprooted whole, yet a child can destroy it if he pulls out the reeds one by one. The preciousness of the narration of the coronation of the last king he knew, Alphonse the Benign, in 1328, which closes the chronicle, also has this goal in mind: to showcase the brilliance of a powerful, fertile monarchy which inspires its subjects’ fealty, and to caution the new king, who, in Muntaner’s eyes, reached

the throne with the hopes of remedying that situation. He must have finished the *Chronicle* that year or shortly thereafter.

In his book, he uses manipulations, inventions and silences when they served his purposes, as was common in European historiographic works from the period. The distance between his story of the presence of the Catalans in Greece and the reports in the Greek sources is well known: his is full of praise, theirs paints it as infernal. Yet both were manipulated to defend opposing positions.

Muntaner also drew from his incredible skill as a storyteller. He has a colloquial, vivid, spontaneous style filled with signs of orality and popular sayings, which combines with his literary culture (the celebrated expression “*Què us diré?*”, “What shall I tell you?”, used to make the discourse more cohesive, also has this twofold origin, as do his exaggerations). He demonstrates familiarity with other chronicles – he may have attended readings of the chronicles of James I and Desclot – *chansons de geste* and other chivalrous literature, which would particularly match a plot full of battles and deeds by “lords”. The recourse to novelisation, based on these sources, is still frequent in the chronicles from his era as a way to connect with their audience, particularly in authors like Muntaner who have no access to official documents or lack the authority of a king. His source of authority is his own eyewitness accounts – which, when needed, he emphasises are the “true truth” – and divine providence.

Muntaner’s *Chronicle* was broadly disseminated and extremely influential. It is conserved in eight manuscripts copied in the 14th and 15th centuries; sequels were written; it was partly included in more sweeping chronicles; it was printed twice in the 16th century, in Valencia and Barcelona; it was the subject of partial paraphrasing in Spanish in the 17th century and old translations into Sicilian and Spanish; it inspired the 15th-century novel *Tirant lo Blanc* as well as recent historical novels; and more recently it has been translated into modern Catalan, and the complete version into Spanish, Italian, French, English and German.

The content and characteristics of Muntaner’s work have sparked skewed views which cloud our understanding and assessment of it, from an overly acritical glorification in romantic history, which draws from the Catalan national mythology, to an exaggerated belittlement in some recent works, inspired by a zeal to demythify it.

### THE CHRONICLE OF PETER III THE CEREMONIOUS

The fourth and last, and briefest, of the great chronicles is the *Chronicle* by Peter the Ceremonious (Fig 5).<sup>16</sup> Peter III the Ceremonious (Balaguer 1319-Barcelona 1387) had a long reign (1336-1387) that was as fertile as it was tumultuous. Peter ascended to the throne at a young age, with a notion of predestination comparable to what his



FIG. 5: Start of the *Chronicle of Peter III the Ceremonious*. Biblioteca de Catalunya, ms. 976, f. 1r (copy from the 16th century).

great-great-grandfather, James I, had felt; his father only became king because his uncle gave up the throne, and despite his feeble constitution, he survived an elder brother who would have reigned, along with the intrigues of his stepmother and other relatives. He was convinced that his duty was to conserve and strengthen the inheritance he had received and the memory of the family lineage, that is, to guarantee the continuity of their domain. Despite his authoritarian leanings – which were visible in the coronation, when he threatened the archbishop of Zaragoza if he dared to touch the crown that only he wanted to put on his own head, and in the reforms he planned – the country's sociopolitical structure and the scarcity of the royal domain prevented him from laying the groundwork of a modern authoritarian monarchy. Paradoxically, this failure, coupled with his meticulous and orderly nature, led him to promote estate-based parliamentarism and the inherited monarchy model, which essentially remained in place following his redesign until the conquest and annexation of the Crown of Aragon to Castile in the early 18th century.

As a consequence of this idea of conserving and strengthening his domains, his policy of reintegrating the kingdoms inherited by the dynasty, which in some cases

had been associated with other branches of the House of Barcelona, led him to his first major clash. The target was King James III of Mallorca, whose kingdom he conquered and annexed to his Crown (1343-1349). His authoritarian policy in the first few years of his reign led to a great deal of civil conflict, namely the uprising of the Unions in the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia (1347-1348), led by his brothers. While the uprising in Aragon was essentially among the nobility, in Valencia the urban echelons staunchly joined in, and therefore it was much more dangerous to the king. He managed to beat them after dire difficulties, and the repression was particularly harsh and bloody in Valencia.

These events overlapped with the effects of the major crisis of feudalism in the late Middle Ages, which had exhausted its expansive potential, with constant poor harvests since 1333, along with famines and the scourge of the plague, which acted on weakened bodies to decimate the population of both the country and the entire continent starting in 1348 and in subsequent cyclical, interminable episodes, with the consequent depletion of the coffers. This mediaeval “great depression” visibly affected Catalonia, the engine of the Crown of Aragon. Control over the trade routes in the western Mediterranean, in harsh competition with the Genoese, and especially efforts to keep possession of Sardinia, the centre of the Mediterranean political, military and commercial dominance of the House of Barcelona, consumed enormous amounts of economic and human resources. The wars with Genoa and the judge of Arborea, the leading lord on Sardinia, associated with that strategic objective lasted even beyond the central years of the 14th century.

On the other hand, the struggle to maintain a balance on the Iberian Peninsula that was favourable to the Crown of Aragon, continuing the policy of the previous count-kings, led to the war of Castile, known as the War of the Two Peters (1356-1375). This war was the most devastating of the conflicts in which the king and his kingdoms became enmeshed because of the combination of the Catalan crisis, the rise of Castile and the fact that it was complicated by Europe's Hundred Years' War. Peter favored the enthronement of the Trastámaras in Castile in the futile pursuit of that Iberian balance. He was able to start integrating Sicily into the main branch of the dynasty, which would be completed later, and he wrested control of the Greek lordships which had been occupied by the Almogavars, the duchies of Athens and Neopatria, all aimed at maintaining a strong presence in Mediterranean trade routes. Nonetheless, they were much more competitive and uncertain than in the previous reigns.

The family's internecine dissent, often stemming from the monarch's decisions or political orientations, were often dangerously mixed with opposition movements, such as during the clashes with the Unions or after his marriage with Sibila of Fortià and the new royal policy in favour of the petty nobility and artisan bourgeoisie. His relations with his brothers, James of Urgell and Ferdinand

of Tortosa were not at all easy, nor was his relationship with his firstborn son, John, which was personally more painful.

Peter III was one of the members of his dynasty with a more intense relationship with culture and writing. He was keenly aware of the role that they could play in attaining his objectives of conserving and strengthening his kingdoms, as well as persuading and dominating his subjects. Evidence of this include his promotion of works and translations, copies of books and personal writing; the forceful use of his brilliant oratory skills; his predilection for history as the ideal tool to conserve and disseminate a given memory of events, his lineage and his own deeds; the powerful organisation of the Royal Archive; the structure of his administration, court and protocol; and especially an impressive bureaucracy associated with a new model of written language which coupled with his meticulous, insistent and tireless character, despite his resignation to authoritarianism, it allowed him to control a none-too-easy composite state, whose survival he assured.<sup>17</sup>

We have to situate the so-called personal chronicle by Peter the Ceremonious – in order to distinguish it from the general chronicle, known as the chronicle of San Juan de la Peña, which he also had written – within the context of this exceptional monarch's personality, the duties he imposed upon himself as political objectives and the extraordinarily difficult times in which he was fated to live in, The general chronicle recounts the history of the Iberian Peninsula from the Catalan-Aragonese political stances and is therefore a continuation and update of the *Gesta comitum*, the official chronicle of the dynasty. Once again, his personal chronicle is an autobiographical chronicle which only discusses the events in which the king directly participated, just like the *Llibre dels fets* by James I. Peter III admired James I more than any other of his predecessors in the lineage, and he accepted the image of himself and his reign that the Conqueror sought to paint in the *Llibre dels fets*. This is why Peter decided not only to be buried by his side and found the royal pantheon in Poblet as a symbolic referent of the dynasty, intentionally complemented by a library of history books that would illustrate it, but he also set out to make his own *llibre dels fets* or "book of deeds". He took the autobiographical form, and the structure and very conception, from James I's book.

However, not only were the times different, but so were the means available to Peter the Ceremonious. The Royal Chancellery, the core organisation in the administration, had developed enormously, especially under James II (1291-1327) and in particular under Peter himself. This organisation, which was skilled at using the king for its objectives, was charged with writing the chronicle and offered much greater possibilities than what had been available to James I and Bernat Desclot; not only did the Chancellery have many outstanding experts in writing and script, it also had an advanced archive structure and the staff trained to locate information and document sources. Peter literally mobilised the Chancellery to write a chronicle.

Extraordinarily important document proof remains with precise instructions from the king to Bernat Descoll and other functionaries, which also vouch for the monarch's personal involvement. The king's intervention was intense: he was in charge of the overall design, of revising the material written and most likely of writing the prologue himself, although he also provided memories – even related to the location of the document sources – and added his personal aspirations, feelings and reflections to the work. It was written after 1345 and throughout his entire reign, albeit with several hiatuses due to political and military problems which consumed the king's time. Two versions remain, one of which, the definitive one, was revised by the monarch in around 1385.

The main sources of the work are the official documents from that formidable Chancellery and the royal archives, lawsuits, the king's personal mementos and those of his allies, and perhaps some previous historiographic texts. In some parts, especially those on James of Mallorca and the uprisings of the Unions, it almost seems like a diary because of the systematic use of documents, especially accounting records. The royal chronicle deliberately imitates the incredible detail of James I's *Llibre dels fets* with the new potential afforded by an organised Chancellery and royal archive. On the other hand, it is written according to the forms of its time, using aesthetic, linguistic and literary models which are generally more verbose, and historiographic models which no longer draw from literary fiction. The conception and form of the text make it a much more useful testimony for scholars of the past than the previous chronicles.

Peter the Ceremonious was keenly aware of the value of the historiographic genre as a tool for managing his own political memory. Behind the decision to write a chronicle of his reign, and also behind his decision to imitate James I, was the conviction that it was a useful political and ideological instrument for reinforcing and guaranteeing the continuity of the Catalan-Aragonese monarchy at a time of dire crisis, just like other initiatives associated with monarchic ritualism which were not the reflection of a banal obsession with protocol and ceremony, as has often been believed.

The royal chronicle consists in a prologue, five long chapters or parts and an appendix. It is highly likely that the king personally wrote the prologue. It imitates the kind of speech he was accustomed to delivering before the Courts and on other occasions, in which he excelled.<sup>18</sup> This prologue is full of biblical and classical references, and it is important because in it he sketches his conception of history. The first chapter (Ch. I, 1319-1336) is introductory in nature and was probably also written by the king. Just like in the *Llibre dels fets*, this initial chapter explains the monarch's personal background: how he became king because his uncle stepped aside, which paved the way for his father, Alphonse III the Benign, to reign; a description of his father's reign; and the origin of dynastic rights over Sardinia, the centre of his monarchy's Medi-

terranean domains. The next chapters deal with the family and internal policy and the failure of authoritarianism: the coronation of the king, the dispossession of James III of Mallorca and the conquest of his kingdom (Ch. II-III, 1336-1345), the uprising of the Unions and the Black Death (Ch. IV, 1345-1352). Then he examines Mediterranean policy, primarily the struggle against the Genoese for Sardinia, the judge of Arborea and the Sardinians (Ch. V, 1351-1355), and Iberian policy, with the War of the Two Peters with Castile (Ch. VI, 1356-1369). The king planned another chapter on the definitive triumph over the Sardinians and the Genoese, but it was never written. Instead, a diverse set of materials was assembled referring particularly to his policy over Sicily from 1370-1385, which managed to bring it back into the dynastic branch of the kings of Aragon. The materials are not elaborated upon and were probably completed after the king's death, and they make up the chronicle's Appendix.

The chronicle of Peter the Ceremonious has been treated like the Cinderella of the four great chronicles. It has suffered from decades of prejudices that historians and philologists have accumulated against Peter III and what he meant. Without bearing in mind the political, socio-economic, cultural and ideological context of his time whatsoever, or sometimes even bearing it in mind, he has been blamed for the start of the decline of Catalonia. Likewise, according to the tendentious psychological portraits in vogue, such a flawed king naturally had a morally lacking personality: tortuous, conspiratorial, Machiavellian. And it was therefore logical that he would produce a chronicle with a "lower" literary value. In reality, the atmosphere of deceit and conspiracies which is so clearly reflected in the chronicle is a sign of new times and a new mindset in Europe in that period: it was a time of endless misery, famine, wars and plagues; of profound crisis in the economy, society and values; of relativism and the lack of scruples; and of the definitive end of the ideals of chivalry (now a mere rhetorical claim). In short, it was the society of the "autumn of the Middle Ages", in the celebrated historiographic label coined by Johan Huizinga.

Until recently, those prejudices, often unconsciously conveyed by some recent criticism, have hindered us from seeing that the style of the chronicle of Peter the Ceremonious, which is so different from the epic, chivalrous and fictionalised style of its three predecessors, reflects the profound changes that Catalan culture and prose had undergone during the 14th century, of which it is fascinating testimony. In the new context, the resources provided by literature had ceased to be useful, valuable tools to construct an efficient story. Instead, precision and details were needed, and therefore in the chronicle these qualities do not solely reflect the king's personality, which in turn can be explained by the character of the era. For this reason, the style is chancery-esque and avoids novelisation. Counter to what has often been claimed, the language is rich, clear and understandable, and the work is not bereft of episodes of considerable literary value.

Among the most literarily valuable episodes are the ones that cover the most difficult events in his reign. They are also the most famous ones, boasting extraordinary cruelty which the king did not conceal, and this has caused misunderstanding and astonishment: the horrifying story of the repression against the Unions in Valencia; in particular the murder of Prince Ferdinand on the king's orders; and the fall into disgrace, the trial and beheading of Bernat de Cabrera. With just a few exceptions – such as in the catastrophic War of the Two Peters with Castile – the king did not hide his cruelties, failures or dubious successes. And he did so because he wanted an accurate memory of himself as a diligent king when dealing with the affairs of governance and treason, and a righteous one in the administration of justice.

For all of these reasons, the chronicle of Peter the Ceremonious is a chronicle of a new time which would provide yet other examples in Catalan historiography, although they would be much less successful.

The work is conserved in six manuscripts copied in the 15th and 16th centuries. It was included whole in the *Cròniques de Catalunya* by Pere Miquel Carbonell printed in Barcelona in 1546-1547, and more recently it was translated in its entirety into Spanish and English.

#### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CHRONICLE'S EDITIONS

In recent times, the centuries-long breach that has separated historians' and philologists' study and understanding of the four great chronicles has begun to close, albeit still not enough. It could be claimed that there have been the historians' great chronicles and the philologists' great chronicles, and that the analyses performed by both, full of undeniable contributions, have lacked interconnection. To be fair, perhaps logically it should be noted that this lack of communication has been greater from the sphere of the historians towards the philologists than in the other direction. The former have viewed the chronicles as the origin of their profession and especially as yet another historical source, and they have limited their interest to finding documentary evidence of the stories of the chronicles, while ignoring the contributions from philology because they viewed them as secondary and, indeed, did not understand them. Philologists, in turn, have analysed them solely as literary works, enshrining them as the origin of Catalan narrative and identifying them as the embryo of the chivalrous novel, but they have often downplayed the historical dimension and contextualisation. This unfortunate situation, which is now only tentatively working towards more interdisciplinary approaches, was nothing other than a reflection of the fragmentation and consequent lack of communication among the humanistic disciplines.

The editions that have been published (critical, semi-critical, standardised, modernised) have inevitably repro-

duced this lack of communication. Obviously, this does not mean that there have been no essential contributions from the two disciplinary fields despite this breach. The one that has had the most impact is unquestionably the joint edition of all four chronicles issued by Ferran Soldevila on India paper published posthumously in 1971, but exhausted years ago. Soldevila's edition reflected the need to make works attributed foundational national importance available to historians and philologists, as well as to a broader educated audience, and to do so in a rigorous way. This is how the decision was made to offer the texts in standardised writing, yet with profuse annotations – exclusively historical notes – which were the outcome of the eminent historian's lifelong research.

This joint edition of the four great chronicles, now once again available with a comprehensive and updated revision, continues to be the benchmark edition of the four texts, given that until now the efforts to produce critical editions have yielded uneven, uncomplete results. The new edition of Soldevila's work, published in five volumes by the History-Archaeology Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (2007-2016), was overseen by Josep Massot i Muntaner and enriched with a philological revision by the linguist Jordi Bruguera, previously the author of a critical edition of the *Llibre dels fets*, and an update and expansion of the historical annotations by the historian Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallo, the author of numerous historical studies on the entire period encompassed by the chronicles and the possessor of profound knowledge of the documentation conserved. Even though the philological contributions to this monumental edition were limited to linguistic commentary, rendering it still necessary to refer to other publications in order to ascertain the use of literary resources and sources in the construction of the chronicles, it is nonetheless an extremely important step forward in the knowledge and dissemination of these unique works.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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