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The Conception of James I of Aragon and its Literary Consequences

La concepción de Jaime I de Aragón y sus consecuencias literarias

Resumen

En la primera parte de este estudio, quiero describir el desarrollo de la historia popular de la concepción de Jaime I de Aragón (1213-1276) desde la época de la propia crónica del rey hasta el siglo XVII. En la segunda parte, me ocupo del contexto histórico de la concepción del rey, que, dada la conocida antipatía entre su padre, Pedro II (1196-1213) y su madre, María de Montpellier, está en su propia manera no menos notable que las historias contadas por cronistas posteriores y en el teatro. En la tercera parte del estudio, propongo tentativamente las razones - políticas, religiosas, sociales, culturales y artísticas, de por qué la historia se desarrolló de la manera en que lo hizo.

Palabras clave

Jaime I, Aragón, Montpellier, crónicas catalanas, folklore

Abstract

In the first part of this study I aim to describe the development of the popular story of the conception of James I of Aragon (1213-1276) from the time of the king's own chronicle until the seventeenth century. In the second part, I deal with the actual historical context of the king's conception, which, given the well-known antipathy between his father, Peter II (1196-1213) and his mother, Marie of Montpellier, is in its way no less remarkable than the stories told by later chroniclers and in the theatre. In the third part of the study, I tentatively suggest the reasons - political, religious, social, cultural and artistic - why the story developed in the way that it did.

Keywords

James I, Aragon, Montpellier, Catalan chronicles, folklor

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James I of Aragon's own account of his conception was rather mundane. His father (King Peter II) did not wish to see his mother (Marie of Montpellier). One time, King Peter happened to be at Lattes, while the queen was at Mireval. A nobleman by the name of Guillermo de Alcalá, insistently persuaded the king to go to Mireval. Peter went to Mireval and that night 'Our Lord willed that we should be conceived'. When the queen realised she was pregnant, she went to Montpellier and the Lord willed that James would be born at the house of the Tornemira family, on the eve of Candlemas Day (so 1 February). Marie had the baby carried to Notre Dame-des-Tables, where as they entered through the porch the clergy inside began to sing *Te Deum laudamus*; they then took James to the church of Saint Firmin where the clergy began singing *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* as the infant entered the church. The queen ordered 12 candles to be lit, of equal size and weight, and each bearing the name of an apostle, and that of Saint James lasted three times longer than the others and therefore he had the name James. Later, James reported, while he was in the cradle, someone threw a rock down at him through a trapdoor, but it missed the cradle since 'God wished to protect us so that we should not die'¹.

James may well be relating these events at the end of his reign, in the 1270s, not long therefore before the first Catalan chronicles which treat the same theme. One of these was by Bernat Desclot, a shadowy figure, probably working in the Aragonese royal chancery, who had a hero in James's son, Peter III, and composed his detailed chronicle in stages during the 1280s. Desclot tells us a little more than James did. Peter II had not seen the queen for a long time. He was by chance at a castle near Montpellier but intending to see a mistress, a noblewoman, whom he wished his steward to bring to him. Marie of Montpellier found out about this and summoned the steward, who was her vassal. The queen explained to the steward that she was grieved since she had no son who would be her heir in Montpellier and asked him that when he was required to take the king's mistress to his bedchamber, that he would take her instead, telling the king that the lady who was his mistress had asked for there to be no light in the room. The steward agreed with the queen's plan, explained to the king that the lady his mistress had demanded that nobody whatsoever should know of her arrival; the king agreed; the steward brought the queen rather than the mistress to the bedchamber; the king after supper came to the room in the dark, the king lay with his wife, believing her to be his mistress; the queen, being wise and prudent, knew that she had conceived, and therefore then spoke to the king, asking that he not be angered at the deception but that she had wished for a child who would be heir 'to our land and our realm'. She asked that the night and the hour be set down in writing. The king hid his amazement, spoke fair words to her, and in the morning returned to Catalonia, while she remained at the castle and gave birth to a son, James. Desclot also tells us about the assassination attempt on the cradle².

Francois Delpech, in his excellent study of this matter, contemplated the possibility that Desclot may have invented this story³. But we now know from a source which was not available to *Delpech, the Libre dels Reis*, an anonymous universal Catalan chronicle composed

1277-80, that a similar but distinct version of the story already existed before Desclot and this version would be elaborated upon by Ramon Muntaner, a low-ranking knight, who had met James I and Alfonso the Wise of Castile when a boy, and was an active participant in much of the Catalan Mediterranean expansion, including the expeditions to the East, which had caused him to write his chronicle in the mid-to late 1320s⁴. In the interests of space, the more influential and fuller version from Muntaner follows: Peter II often did not visit Marie when he went to Montpellier and openly held tournaments in honour of a gentlewoman of Montpellier whom he loved. Everybody in the town was unhappy about this but especially the consuls and notables of Montpellier, who sent for a knight, who was close to the king, and promised to make him rich if he would fall in with a plan, which they had devised, because of the injury done to the queen; the lack of an heir; and because 'we, on no account, would ever wish that Montpellier should ever be separated from the kingdom of Aragon'. And the plan was that the knight should tell the king that his gentlewoman would come to him secretly in his chamber under cover of darkness, but, when the king had gone to bed the knight would go to the twelve consuls, who would, alongside Marie, come to the chamber, with 12 notables of the city, 12 honourable ladies, 12 damsels, two notaries, a clerk of the bishop, two canons, and four worthy religious, all carrying lighted candles, and those would all wait outside, while Marie entered the chamber. The knight agreed but asked that for seven days leading up to the plan being carried out masses to the Virgin Mary be said throughout the city. The consuls concurred, ordering that all the inhabitants of Montpellier should go to the churches, watch, pray and fast on the eve of the event. The consuls then went to the queen, who fell in with their plan, declaring that the council of Montpellier was surely the wisest in the world⁵.

So, on the planned night the king went to his chamber, the people of Montpellier went to the churches to pray, and the consuls, the notables, the ladies, the damsels, the representative of the bishop, the religious, the notaries brought Marie to Peter's bedchamber, and waited outside, all kneeling in prayer, while the king lay with his wife believing her to be the gentlewoman whom he loved. At dawn, all those who were outside the king's bed chamber entered into the chamber with their lighted candles and the king, startled (as one might expect—there were 57 people in front of him in his bedroom, whom he had not been expecting), sprang up on the bed and drew his sword. They all knelt down and weeping said, 'Lord, deign to look and see who it is lies by your side'. The queen sat up, the king recognized her and, when what had been done was explained, the king expressed the wish that what had been intended would come to pass. The king then left Montpellier, while the notables agreed that they, their wives, six knights left by the king, the knight who had helped hatch the plot and the two notaries, who had already drawn up public documents about the event in the king's presence, would all remain continuously with the queen during the next nine months, after which Marie gave birth to a beautiful and fine son, 'born for the good of Christians and most particularly for his people'⁶.

1. *Libre dels Fets*, ch. 5.

2. Desclot 2010, ch. 4, pp. 64-68.

3. Delpech 1993, p. 127.

4. *Libre dels Reis*, pp. 203-5; Muntaner, chs. 3-6, pp. 37-43; Cingolani 2007, pp. 159-93.

5. Muntaner 1999, chs. 3-5, pp. 39-42.

6. Muntaner 1999, ch. 5, p. 42.

These stories may in part seem fairly familiar. It is probably worth pointing out here that in *Boccaccio's Decameron*—a quarter of a century after Muntaner—the ninth story of the third day tells a similar tale and what is more it is set in the same region. Gillette cures the king of France, who offers her the husband she wants, Bertrand, count of Roussillon, who however does not consider her lineage equal to his and says, somewhat unsportingly, that he will live with her only when she wears a ring in his possession on her finger and carries his child in her arms. Bertrand goes off to Florence, falls in love with a young noblewoman, Gillette follows him, has the mother of the noblewoman persuade Count Bertrand that he has to send his ring to her, to show his good intentions towards her daughter, while Gillette secretly substitutes the count's lover in his bed on various occasions. Count Bertrand returns home. Gillette returns to land at Montpellier and then goes to present Bertrand with his ring and children. And they all live happily ever after⁷. So as Delpech has suggested, it is reasonable to think that either this tale derives from the other tale or that there was a pre-existing tradition in southern France from which these various stories develop⁸. This tale from Boccaccio, of course, served as the basic plot for Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends wells*, with the Roussillon setting maintained⁹.

Some of the relevant chronicles make no mention of the story of the substitution at all. The various versions of the thirteenth century *Gesta Comitum Barchinonensium*, produced at Ripoll, mention James's birth without suggesting anything odd about it¹⁰. The Dominican Pere Marsili, in his 1313 Latin translation of James's *Libre dels Fets*, appears to mention the story obliquely when at the courts of Barcelona in 1228 he has the king say that his coming into this world was generated through a divinely inspired trick ('astutia')¹¹. But most vernacular chronicles knew the story and used it. The popular Pere Tomic in 1438 broadly followed Desclot, as did Pere Carbonell at the end of the fifteenth century, who added that Marie had been advanced in years and had little hope of children except through a miracle¹². Pere Antoni Beuter, a distinguished historian of Valencia, in 1551, mixed the various versions, adding in that the queen was both old and ugly, gave a name (Pedro de Fluvián) to the king's steward, made the woman of whom Peter was enamoured the daughter of the principal knight of the city of Montpellier, allowed for a second encounter between Peter and Marie at Mireval, where James would actually be conceived, and added that he had all this from the king's chronicle where the king had said that his mother, Marie, had told him what had happened¹³. Jeronimo Zurita, appointed by Philip II at the request of the cortes of Aragon, where it was felt some of the existing chronicles of Aragon were not entirely reliable, in his 1563 *Anales* reconciled the story told by the king with those of the substitution by having the nobleman Guillén de Alcalá, 'according to what is written', arrange the substitution¹⁴.

It was probably mainly through Beuter and Zurita that the story worked its way to the theatre, notably in a complicated play, *La Reina Doña Maria*, attributed to the great playwright, Lope de Vega, and written after 1618. In this play, difficult to explain briefly and impossible at length, Peter married Marie to end a fifteen-year war with her brother King William of Montpellier but, while going to the pope to be crowned, asked for a divorce because his wife was ugly. While the pope discourages Peter, an ambassador from Jerusalem arrives in Aragon to negotiate Peter's marriage to the daughter of King Conrad. The ambassador falls in love with a Doña Juana, who is also loved by the king. There is a plot to kill Juana by supporters of Marie against which Marie intervenes. In turn, Juana, who does not love the king, proposes to have Marie substitute her in the king's bed in the darkness, a scene Lope passes over discreetly. The king, when he realises what has happened, is absolutely furious, especially when he discovers that the queen is pregnant; and it is implied he is behind a plot to assassinate the infant James in his cradle. Aiming to declare the queen an adulteress and James illegitimate, Peter sets out to kill all those who knew about the substitution, although not Juana whose love he is still hoping to win. Learning however that Juana has fled overseas with the ambassador, the king pardons all offenses and reconciles with his wife¹⁵.

Finally, Calderón de la Barca, like Lope, Jesuit-educated, another prolific dramatist, in 1638 he wrote *Gustos y disgustos no son mas que imaginación*. The action has moved to Zaragoza. Lattes is the name of a wood where the king hunts; Mireval, a residence on the banks of the Ebro where the queen is kept away from the court because her cruel husband does not love her. James (alas!) has gone from the story altogether except that Marie has a dream that one day she will have a son whom God will give such virtue that he will conquer Valencia. King Peter is in love with the daughter of the count of Montfort, Violente, secretly married to one Don Vicente. In a comedy of errors, Vicente believes Violente unfaithful to him with the king, while the king by night, believing he is wooing Violente, woos the queen, who disguises her voice and encourages the king. Marie then tricks Peter into going to see Violente in the garden at Mireval, where the jealous Vicente also goes, aiming to kill his wife. Both men advance in darkness towards Violente, and in doing so confront each other. The king impedes Vicente from attacking his wife, whom a great crowd with torches at a signal now reveal to be none other than Queen Marie. The abashed Peter, caught in the intention of adultery with his own wife, recognizes the foolishness of all his desires, reconciles with Marie and concludes that the likes and dislikes of this world are imaginary¹⁶.

7. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, I, pp. 249-57.

8. Delpech 1991, p. 135.

9. Cole 1981.

10. Gestes del Comtes 2012, p. 132; Gestes del Comtes 2008, p. 127; Gesta Comitum Barchinonensium 2012, p. 152.

11. Marsili 2015, p. 72: '*Certum est quod adventus noster in hunc mundum et corporalis natiuitatis a Dei dono specialissimo fuisse concessus dignoscitur, quia, rege, patre nostro, suam consortem, reginam, habente odio, per magnam humanam, sed a Deo inspiratam, astutiam fuissemus generatus*'.

12. Tomic 1886, p. 152; Carbonell 1997, pp. 42-3; Riquer 2000, pp. 81-2.

13. Beuter 1604, pp. 2-3.

14. Zurita 1967-72, Bk. II, ch. 59; Kagan 2009, p. 105.

15. Lope de Vega 1898, pp. 603-38; Wolf 1855, 241-79. My thanks to Dr. Alejandro Reidy for this reference and for confirmation that doubts remain concerning the attribution.

16. Calderón de la Barca 1956.

Let me go back now to the twelfth century where this story begins and hopefully, within the limits of the possible, to what actually happened. In 1179, a Byzantine princess, Eudoxia Comnena, had been sent with envoys from the Emperor Manuel so that she might marry Ramon Berenguer IV of Provence, the brother of the king of Aragon, Alfonso II, as part of a grand alliance against the German Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa¹⁷. But, as the *Annals of Pisa* relate, by the time Eudoxia arrived the Aragonese had thought better of upsetting Barbarossa and her envoys were left to arrange a hasty marriage with a lesser figure, William VIII, lord of Montpellier¹⁸. The marriage between William and Eudoxia produced a daughter, Marie, probably born in 1181, but Eudoxia failed in her primary task of producing a male heir. After 1180 and the fall of her house, Eudoxia was politically useless and she was put away at the monastery at Aniane, where William's uncle was the abbot¹⁹. William VIII married again, to Agnes, a Castilian noblewoman, who produced certainly eight children including six sons. Marie still had some political use for her father and was married to the soon-to-be-deceased Barral, viscount of Marseilles in 1191, and then, in 1197, to Bernard IV, count of Comminges, by whom she had two daughters, Mathilde and Petronille²⁰. In 1201, Bernard, who already had three wives before Marie, two of whom were still living, sent Marie back to her father²¹.

William VIII certainly did not want his daughter back. When she had married Bernard, William had Marie recognize that it was the age-old custom of Montpellier that dominion and jurisdiction could never be transmitted to females of the line when there were surviving males and had her relinquish all rights on Montpellier in perpetuity²². He did this because, although William and Agnes had been married in church, William's marriage to Eudoxia had never been formally dissolved by the Church. Therefore, a question mark hung over the legitimacy of William's almost innumerable children by Agnes. Aware that Philip Augustus of France had recently had his children by Agnes of Meran recognized as legitimate by the pope (even though the Church considered Philip still married to Ingeborg of Denmark), William VIII looked for a similar response from the pope in favour of his own children by his own Agnes. But William VIII very seriously miscalculated. Pope Innocent III responded with the decretal *Per Venerabilem*, famous among historians for the exquisite sophistication of its treatment of the nature and extent of papal power. Among much else, explaining that the two cases of Philip Augustus and William were dissimilar, Innocent pointed out that Philip had no superior in temporal affairs to judge the case of the legitimacy of his children to inherit (and therefore he could send the matter to the pope or, in the opinion of some, judge it himself), whereas William most certainly did have superiors in temporal affairs who could judge the matter (most obviously, from the pope's viewpoint, King Philip)²³.

William VIII died in November 1202, probably never having read Innocent's letter. In his will he left Montpellier to his eldest son, William IX, and stipulated that only if all of his sons died without legitimate heirs would his eldest daughter, Marie, inherit²⁴. On 1 August 1203, William IX took the oath of fidelity to the local bishop of Maguelonne

by which his ancestors had always recognized themselves men of the bishop for Montpellier²⁵. But led by the provost of Maguelonne, Guy de Ventadour, there was a sizable group in the town, including in the consulate, who felt that Marie was the legitimate heir and, or perhaps more so, that the town would be better served by marrying Marie to the king of Aragon, Peter II²⁶. For Peter II the lure of Montpellier lay in the consolidation of his power in a region where the crown had built up its influence over a long period, and strategically and financially Montpellier seemed a prize worth a marriage, even though Peter's father and grandfather had both married members of a royal house. There was a bit of a coup and on 15th June 1204 Peter married Marie in the house of the Templars at Montpellier, Marie bringing in dowry the seigneurie of Montpellier, which would go to their first-born son, and Peter bringing the county of Roussillon. The king promised on the Gospels that he would never alienate the dowry he received with Marie²⁷.

There do not appear to have been problems with the marriage initially (at least, it survived the wedding night, unlike that of Philip and Ingeborg). It may be significant that when Peter II went to Rome to be crowned by the pope in November 1204, he did not take Marie with him²⁸. But Marie soon became pregnant with a girl, Sancha, who would be born in October 1205. By then things definitely had gone wrong. In September 1205, Peter forced Marie into an agreement which made him exclusive lord of Montpellier and, when Sancha was born, he immediately, without asking Marie, married Sancha to Raymond the son of Raymond VI count of Toulouse, to whom Peter owed a large sum of money. Moreover, the dowry he offered with the girl was Montpellier, which Raymond VII would receive on the death of the king²⁹. The queen was not amused and had a letter written to all the people of Montpellier telling them in great detail what had happened, the argument which she had had with the king, how the king had threatened her, the intimidation she had suffered, and how she had been 'crucified'. The king had retorted that he did not want a land, an honor, a wife or anything else with which he was not able to do just as he wished³⁰.

To make matters worse, Sancha died soon afterwards and Peter in summer 1206 sought an annulment of the marriage sending envoys to Rome arguing that there were two impediments when he had entered into his de facto marriage to Marie: firstly, he had had carnal relations with a relative of Marie before contracting the marriage (an argument unlikely to succeed); secondly, and more importantly, a marriage existed between Marie and Bernard IV of Comminges which had never been dissolved. Since, the envoys argued, Peter was a Catholic and God-fearing man, the matter was branded upon his conscience and he feared the damage to his soul³¹. At the same moment, Peter sent envoys to Jerusalem to arrange his marriage to the heiress of Jerusalem, Marie de Montferrat, the daughter of Conrad. The marriage was agreed provided Peter bring military aid to the Holy Land by All Saint's Day, 1207 and providing the pope approved³². In autumn 1206, at Montpellier, there was a dramatic revolt against Peter II's rule. The castle at Montpellier

17. Marcos Hierro 2013; Aurell 1998, pp. 405-6.

18. Maragone 1936, p. 69.

19. Aurell 1998, p. 406.

20. Germain-Martel 1884-86, nos. 29, 204-6.

21. Germain-Martel 1884-86, nos. 37-9, 207-9.

22. Germain-Martel 1884-86, nos. 204-6.

23. Rouquette 1914, nos. 167-8; Rousseau 2014; Tierney 1962.

24. Germain-Martel 1884-86, no. 99.

25. Rouquette 1912-14, V, no. 273.

26. Vidal 1987.

27. Teulet 1863-1909, no. 707.

28. Mansilla 1955, no. 337.

29. Alvira 2009, nos. 569, 576.

30. Alvira 2009, no. 575.

31. Mansilla 1955, no. 347.

32. Vincke 1935, no. 1.

where Peter was staying was attacked by the townspeople and when the king fled to the neighbouring castle at Lattes, he received the same treatment and had to flee again. Although a peace was negotiated in October, the king was humiliated and pressed the pope for the annulment case to proceed³³.

The immediate backdrop to James's conception appears to be that of his humiliated father determined to annul the marriage to his mother and seeking a much better marriage elsewhere. This has been perplexing for historians. Could there have been a substitution of the woman in Peter's bedchamber? This must be very unlikely. The sources which mention this are all late. Peter and Marie's marriage case is simply the best documented of this entire period, which is why one can write about it in excruciating detail, and at no point does any party make any mention of this at all³⁴. Moreover, Peter II was soon to be one of the major players in the Albigensian Crusade, for which there are a tremendous number of sources, and no foe ever mentioned a tale which was so perfect for mocking the king. There is another unlikely possibility, which was suggested by Martí Aurell, and therefore should be taken seriously, and that is that Peter may have been determined to press on with the annulment case and considered that the best way to speed it up was to demonstrate he was co-habiting with the queen³⁵. It had indeed been the case with William VIII and Eudoxia that the process for the annulment of their marriage had stalled because they were expected to be co-habiting when the process began³⁶. But Peter's case was not the same and his argument, however insincere, was that his soul was in danger if he remained with Marie. So that he wished a pregnancy to demonstrate co-habitation is implausible, as Professor Aurell graciously accepts³⁷. The most probable explanation is that Peter had realized that he did not have the financial means to fulfil the terms of the Jerusalem marriage and still, at the age of thirty, without a legitimate son, he was persuaded to reconcile with the queen, quite possibly by the knight Guillermo de Alcalá mentioned by James, who certainly witnessed a number of the king's charters around this time³⁸. Emotions may have outweighed reasons, of course. We do usually try to give people cool calculating reasons for their actions in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

The reconciliation was very brief. By August 1207, Peter's hostilities with Montpellier had resumed and when he sought to recover his castles, the queen ordered the consuls to hold them against the king³⁹. At the treaty of Mallén with Sancho VII of Navarre in May 1209, Peter named his brother Alfonso as his heir and did not mention his son⁴⁰. But it is highly unlikely that he would have been behind any assassination attempt if one occurred. He at least knew James was a useful bargaining counter and in February 1210 arranged his marriage to Aurembiaix of

Urgell to strengthen his hold on that important county; and in January 1211, he arranged James's marriage to Amicie, daughter of Simon de Montfort who was to become the boy's guardian and responsible for his upbringing⁴¹.

Robert Ignatius Burns commented that only an artist such as James could have conceived his disordered life as a single-minded service to Almighty God⁴². But that is what James did in his autobiography and he did so sure in the belief that from well before his birth, God was already planning his coming into the world. Indeed, James starts his own life story with the story of his Byzantine grandmother, daughter, as he has it, of the Emperor Manuel. She came to marry (he thought) Alfonso II, his grandfather, only to be turned away and then married to the lord of Montpellier, and produced an heir, Marie, who would marry James's father⁴³. This was all the workings of God, just as it was the will of the Lord that James be conceived even though his father did not like his mother. James's own account of his presentation at the major churches of Montpellier on Candlemas Eve, mirroring the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, suggests his belief in an almost messianic calling, confirmed when the early plots upon his life were thwarted by God's protection. Customary practices and rituals - the mother choosing a child's name through lighting candles; the clergy singing the office- were for James signs and wonders for his special role in God's design⁴⁴.

The early Catalan chronicles had every reason to concur with the king's view of his place in the Divine plan, even though the probable troubadour origins of their story added an irreverent vaudevillian touch. The extent to which the Catalan chronicles and others sought to legitimize dynasties is, one suspects, slightly exaggerated by historians. The word 'legitimize' is perhaps sometimes overused or used in too vague a way to describe usefully what they are doing. But they were written, at least in part, to exalt the dynasty and add to its prestige. And from the *Libre dels Reis* right through to Beuter and Zurita, they were very conscious that James, although not the founder of the dynasty, was, as the conqueror of Majorca and Valencia, of prime importance in the monarchy's success. Only Muntaner, who gives us the longest version of the story of James's conception, gave him little space generally and this was only because he considered there were just too many books written about James already (and that was in 1325)⁴⁵. It was a normal and very long-established practice to surround the birth and first years of the heroic figure, real or imagined, with stories which demonstrated their special status and a part of the classical and medieval tradition, as well as others, to have children conceived when one of the parties involved came in disguise. Here in the Stith-Thompson Motif-Index of Folk Literature our story falls most closely under K (Deception) 1843.

33. Vaissète 1872-93, VI, pp. 246-7; Rouquette 1912-14, VI, no. 292; Mansilla 1955, no. 360.

34. Vincke 1935, pp. 108-89.

35. Aurell 1998, p. 414.

36. Rouquette 1914, nos. 167-8.

37. Mansilla 1935, no. 347. My thanks to Professor Aurell for correspondence on this matter.

38. *Libre dels Fets*, ch. 5; Alvira 2009, nos. 706-9.

39. Rouquette 1914b, p. 55, no. 1; Smith 2004, p. 74.

40. Alvira 2009, no. 899.

41. Alvira 2009, nos. 1016, 1113.

42. Burns 1976, p. 35.

43. *Libre dels Fets*, ch. 1.

44. Smith 2007.

45. Muntaner 1999, ch. 7.

2 Wife takes place of mistress in husband's bed bringing about a reconciliation⁴⁶; while the story which appears most relevant here is the prose Lancelot, where Elaine the daughter of King Pelles, the guardian of the grail, substitutes for Guinevere, with Lancelot unaware of the deception, and she conceives Galahad. This early thirteenth-century work was popular and there was certainly a Catalan translation by the early fourteenth century⁴⁷.

There is also a political explanation for the stories. The government of Montpellier rested with the king, the consulate and the bishop of Maguelonne, but, in reality, the consuls administered the town⁴⁸. They felt an alliance with the king of Aragon was to the town's advantage as Aragonese conquests opened up trading options throughout the Western Mediterranean. The consulate was sometimes at odds with the bishop over jurisdictional limits and the bishop looked to the king of France for support, in 1255 acknowledging Saint Louis as overlord and declaring that Montpellier was since time immemorial part of the kingdom of France⁴⁹. James was willing to do homage to the bishop for Montpellier but did not acknowledge that he held Montpellier as a subfeud from the king of France since he did not acknowledge that Montpellier was situated in the kingdom of France⁵⁰. The whole matter of Montpellier was passed over in discreet silence at the treaty of Corbeil between the two kings in 1258 but tensions flared if somebody appealed from the jurisdiction of Aragon to that of the French king, as happened in the Gaudin affair of 1264, when an imprisoned French trader did just that⁵¹. On that occasion, Saint Louis, with typical magnanimity, declared that he preferred the king of Aragon possess something which belonged to the king of France rather than the other way around (a response which suited James down to the ground) but trouble was brewing.

As Marti de Riquer suggested, it is not unlikely that, given the well-known marital discord between James's mother and father, those with French sympathies may now have gossiped about the legitimacy of their son and, furthermore, the legitimacy of his rule in Montpellier.⁵² And if they did, it is not unlikely that those sympathetic to Aragon would have developed stories which celebrated James's unlikely conception. And it is not unreasonable to think that as Aragon's hold on Montpellier loosened after James's death, with James II of Majorca's acknowledgement of French overlordship while in conflict with his brother Peter III; the bishop of Maguelonne's sale of his rights to Philip IV; and with the strangulation of Montpellierian trade through the development of the French port of Aiguesmortes; that the chronicler Ramon Muntaner, determined that every one of the lands of the house of Aragon should be kept in the family, would have felt it necessary to pile more and more of the great and the good of Montpellier into Peter II's bedroom to confirm that

'we, on no account, would ever wish that Montpellier should ever be separated from the kingdom of Aragon'⁵³.

While in the story of James's conception as told by Desclot it is the queen who controls the action, in the *Libre dels Reis* and Muntaner, it is the consuls and notables of Montpellier who take the lead in devising the plot and in confirming its success⁵⁴. So it is also not unreasonable to think that this version of the story was first developed at Montpellier and in league with the consuls, for whom James's rule was something of a golden age, especially since he was rarely there and they had a large measure of control over the city. But there is certainly another possibility here too, which is that, however it was later dealt with by the Catalan chronicles, this story originated in part as something of a joke upon the consuls. The conception of James would have taken place around the beginning of May and it appears that the merrier month of May, so beloved of the troubadours, and all the festivals surrounding it, are being evoked by the torch procession into the king's bedchamber. In their conflicts with the local bishop, consuls had fallen suspect of heresy, and in the late 1240s, inquisitions were hovering around the area.⁵⁵ May Day processions, which elsewhere were the subject of ecclesiastical concern because of their non-Christian elements, were banned by the consuls in 1253: 'men and women were not to make the May in Montpellier or its district' and particularly they were not to process with candles or torches⁵⁶. It is feasible at least that a troubadour, reacting to this killjoy legislation, decided playfully to place the well-to-do of Montpellier as the central actors in his *sirventés*, processing with candles to the king's bedroom, indulging in the very fertility rite which they had determined to ban.

Such speculation the study of medieval history very often generously allows us. But medieval chroniclers were certainly not inclined to speculate. Some, particularly monastic chronicles, chose not to include the story possibly because they considered its content inappropriate. But, as Spiegel has pointed out, 'once fictional elements became part of the received stock of stories, there was practically no sound theoretical ground for banishing them from the narrative'⁵⁷. Medieval chroniclers and even some early modern ones are, of course, well-known for mixing the historical and the legendary with little qualm, and that was the case from the *Libre dels Reis*, through Tomic, through Beuter; and those who wished to provide some explanation and exculpation of the king's behaviour could throw in some additional 'facts' such as the twenty-six year old queen's advanced age. Even by far the best of them, Zurita, whose work is still rightly used and often cited, could only caution his readers about the tale of the substitution with an 'according to what is written' and then hope to make sense of it by combining it with the king's own story⁵⁸.

46. Rank 2008; Thompson 1955-8, IV, p. 443.

47. Riquer 2000, pp. 75-8; Bohigas 1962, pp. 179-87.

48. Lewis 1947, pp. 51-67, 562-77.

49. Baumel 1971, pp. 103-5; Abulafia 1992, p. 46.

50. Lecoy 1892, I, pp. 139-41.

51. Baumel 1971, pp. 122-5; Lecoy 1891, I, pp. 142-3.

52. Riquer 2000, pp. 65-6.

53. Muntaner 1999, ch. 3; Lecoy de la Marche 1892, I, p. 179; II, no. 27; Abulafia 1992, p. 47.

54. *Libre dels Reis*, p. 204; Muntaner, ch. 3.

55. Baumel 1971, pp. 84-5; Smith 2010, p. 116.

56. *Thalamus Parvus*, p. 147; Delpech 1988, pp. 93-4.

57. Spiegel 1997, p. 102. Also Urbanski 2013.

58. Zurita 1967-72, Bk. II, ch. 59.

Of course, this did not matter in the theatre. Lope, if Lope it be, prided himself on historic detail, and indeed long hankered after the post of royal chronicler, but that detail was secondary to the attraction of the story, the requirements of the plot, and that he should provide a happy and a moral ending, in which the virtues of the queen and the king's mistress (who with Lope acquires a name for the very first time) are exalted⁵⁹. And for Calderón, for whom God, the monarchy and honour were as central as they had been for his forebears, what matters is the distrust of a reality interpreted through one's weaknesses; the importance of forgiveness; and fidelity within marriage⁶⁰.

History (alas!) was not a play written by Calderón and all did not end well. King Peter pursued the annulment until, Marie, almost destitute, travelled to Rome in 1213 to defend herself and her son before the Pope. Innocent III decided that the marriage between Marie and Bernard of Comminges had indeed never been annulled, but then neither had a marriage between Bernard and one of his previous wives and therefore Marie's marriage to Bernard was never legitimate and therefore her marriage to Peter was⁶¹. In April 1213, the exhausted queen, after naming James as her heir in Montpellier, died, and was buried in Saint Peter's⁶². Hence she never had the opportunity to tell her son her story. Five months later, Peter II, likewise exhausted, according to his son, after having spent a night of passion with a young woman of the area, was defeated and killed by Simon, count of Montfort at the battle of Muret, leaving him, no doubt legitimately, prey to the burlesques of troubadours, chroniclers and playwrights for some centuries to come⁶³.

59. Dixon 2009, pp. 251-64; Delpech 1993, pp. 67-72.

60. Rodríguez Cuadros 2009; Delpech 1993, pp. 73-77.

61. Mansilla 1935, nos. 497-8.

62. Lacarra, González Anton 1978, pp. 117-20; *Llibre dels Fets*, ch. 7; Gestes dels Comtes 2012, p.134.

63. *Llibre dels Fets*, ch. 9; Alvira 2008.

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