

Patronage and Piety

Montserrat and the Royal House of Medieval Catalonia-Aragon

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On August 14, 1285, Peter III the Great, king of Aragon and Sicily, count of Barcelona, arrived at the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat. Peter's heart was troubled. Papal pressure upon France had persuaded its king, Philip III the Bold (r. 1270—1285), to annex the realm of Aragon for Philip's second son Charles. In late spring of that year, eight thousand French troops crossed the eastern Pyrenees, immediately forcing Peter and his mostly Catalan troops onto the defensive. Peter was in a particularly difficult position. He was unable to persuade the recalcitrant Aragonese to mobilize against the French; and his brother, James II, king of Majorca (r. 1276—1311), opted to support the French-papal invasion. Obviously, help had to be sought from a higher power. Peter kept vigil all night before the famous Romanesque image of the Virgin Mary, by this time already blackened by years of smoke conveyed by the thousands of candles lit by her many devotees.¹ With "fervent heart and holy zeal," Peter prayed for aid and renewed courage, so that his enemies "...would be forced to repent of their arrogance in that they had entered wrongfully into his land."² At dawn, after hearing mass and making votive offerings to the Virgin, he and his entourage departed, to eventual victory over the French. Since the days of Peter's ancestors, the earliest Frankish counts of Barcelona, Catalonia-Aragon's rulers had singled out Montserrat for special devotion. Despite its remote location upon the looming "serrated" mountain that gave it its name, Montserrat, under the favorable gaze of its royal overlords, never failed to expand and prosper.

The gigantic, grotesquely shaped monoliths of Montserrat loom over the surrounding Catalan countryside. Its primeval rocks, honeycombed with countless caves and grottoes, instill reverence and inspire legends. Thought to have been both the resting-place of the Holy Grail and the image of the Virgin Mary painted by Saint Luke, the mountain has represented for countless generations the indescribable power of nature and faith. "Montserrat is an arrogant mountain," writes José Pla, "...it is a great mountain which, if viewed from every direction, produces a sensational effect...It is something which does not look like anything."³ That is how this towering outcrop must have appeared to the soldiers of

Wilfred the Hairy (r. 870—897), the local count of Barcelona who reconquered the area from the powerful Moors around 888. Wilfred took an active interest in Montserrat, already the site of several small *ecclesiae*, dating perhaps from Visigothic times. In 888, he promptly donated to his recently established monastery of Ripoll *locum quem nominant Monte Serrado, ecclesias que sunt in cacumine ipsius Montis...* (“the place which they call Montserrat, [and] the churches which are on the peak of the mountain itself...”).⁴

The situation in Wilfred’s realms remained precarious. The districts clustered around Barcelona remained exposed to the hammer-blows of the Moors; Wilfred himself was killed resisting a Moorish incursion that reached Barcelona in 897. Equally tenuous was the position of the several minor churches clinging to the slopes of Montserrat, dedicated to Saint Mary, Saint Acisclus, Saint Peter and Saint Martin. As solemnly confirmed in a petition dating from 982, they remained a possession of Ripoll. Around 945, brief independence was gained with the establishment of the modest hermitage of Saint Cecilia of Montserrat by Caesareus and four monks: Gratosus, Wilfred, Nampon, and Zamenon. This freedom would be short-lived, as Berenguer Raymond I the Crooked (r. 1017—1035) would subsequently rule in favor of Ripoll, placing the modest site under Rivupollian control.⁵ It was not until 1027, with Abbot Oliba’s foundation of a new Benedictine monastery upon the site of the church of Saint Mary, that of Santa María de Montserrat, that Montserrat was truly favored by the counts of Barcelona and their successors. Coinciding with a new age of political cohesion and formation of a nascent Catalan state, comital and royal patronage of the new monastery enabled it to supersede the prior foundation of Saint Cecilia and even that of Ripoll.

Montserrat’s physical and spiritual expansion was due as much to a succession of capable abbots as to its growing fame as a place of contemplation and miraculous cures. From the twelfth century onwards, stories of the benevolent intercession of *La Moreneta* abound. As word spread of its efficacy along the busy pilgrim routes to Rome, Jerusalem and Compostela, pilgrims, both native and foreign, flocked to the site. It was not long before the counts of Barcelona began to esteem Montserrat as well. Raymond Berenguer IV the Saintly (1137—1162), whose marriage to Petronilla in 1150 united the county of Barcelona (Catalonia) to the kingdom of Aragon, would bequeath one of his best possessions to Montserrat.⁶ From Manresa in March 1176, his son Alfonso II the Chaste (r. 1162—1196) would confirm magnificent possessions ceded to the monastery by the nobleman Ramón de Copons.⁷ More modest donations can be located in the records of the small Montserratine hermitage of Sant Salvador, which reveal that its one hermit received seventy *sous* annually from Alfonso for his vestments.⁸

It is Alfonso's last will and testament, however, drawn up at Perpignan in December 1194, that best indicates the growing importance of the monastery of Montserrat in the twelfth century. "The testament of the king [Alfonso]," observes Antoni Aulestía y Pijoan, "portrays in a tangible manner the immense preponderance that the religious spirit had reached in that age."⁹ Indeed, Alfonso bequeathed immense quantities of money and objects to the most important Christian shrines of that age: a chalice and censer for Saint Thomas of Canterbury (*Sancto Thome de Cantuaria unum calicem et turibulum*), a lamp for Saint Angelus of Montegargano (*Dimitto ecclesie Sancti Angeli de Monte Gargano unam lampadem*), a cup well-wrought with gold (*calix bene de auratus*) for Saints Peter and Paul in Rome. Significantly enough, Alfonso let it be known that 300 maravedis were also to be donated to the priory of Montserrat (*CCC. morabetinos priori Montserrat*) and that 150 maravedis be distributed for the purpose of maintaining a priest there "in perpetuity."¹⁰ Clearly, conferring gifts upon Montserrat was considered to be a worthwhile investment. Alfonso's son and successor, Peter II the Catholic (r. 1196—1213), would affirm in 1208 that his cession of the village of Malcavaller to Montserrat was for the purpose of saving his soul and those of his parents. Six years earlier, Peter had already decreed that the monastery's vassals would not have to pay taxes.¹¹

Under Peter's heir, James I the Conqueror (r. 1213—1276), the favor shown to Montserrat continues, and even increases. Montserrat not only became a depository for generous donations and privileges, but also an intimate place of solace, health, and aid. This fact is not surprising considering James' particular devotion to the Virgin Mary. "It is nothing new in the psychology of lechers that the Blessed Virgin should exercise so immediate an attraction," notes Robert I. Burns, "...[s]he is at the forefront of [James'] mind..."¹² James' Marian devotion, if not of the purest sort, nevertheless manifested itself consistently in relation to his actions. During triumphal entries, he had her picture (*imatge*) borne through the streets, in cities whose main churches he invariably dedicated to her.¹³ On landing at Majorca in 1229, he reports that "[he] went to the church of Holy Mary of Vallvert to thank her for the favor and the good."¹⁴ James could thus not forget to thank the Virgin Mary at Montserrat, "...already *one of the most notable things* of Catalonia,"¹⁵ and consequently one of the main centers of Marian devotion in Christendom. Later that year, flushed with victory over his conquest of Moorish Majorca, we find him praying in thanksgiving before the Montserrat's coal black image of the Virgin.¹⁶

This would not be the first or the last time that James would favor the monastery with his attention. At Barcelona, on July 20, 1218, he had publicly affirmed his special protection of "...the venerable monastery and monks of the glorious Mother of God, Santa María de Montserrat,

which God adorns and illumines with continuous miracles, and of all of its villages, vassals, honors, possessions, ancient privileges, allodia and lands..."¹⁷ James' "special protection" entailed benefits ranging from the mundane to the magnificent. On January 8, 1258, we find him prohibiting the inhabitants of Cervera from cutting firewood in the forests and pastures belonging to the monastery (*...dicimus et mandamus vobis firmiter et districte, quatenus non scindatis nec faciatis scindi ligna vel arbores in nemoribus vel devesis*).¹⁸ From 1271 and onwards, his protection and custody of all pilgrims journeying to and from Montserrat, both men and women, meant that anyone harassing them or their goods would receive a stiff fine and incur the royal wrath.¹⁹ It was not an idle threat. The chivalric code to which James subscribed demanded immediate and retributive defense of those who came under his protection.²⁰

James was not alone among his fellow monarchs in his devotion to the Virgin and her monastery at Montserrat. The *Cantigas* of his contemporary, Alfonso X the Learned (r. 1252—1284), king of Castile and León, who called himself the "troubadour of the Virgin Mary," are, in effect, a celebration of her cult. Recounting the miracles attributed to the Virgin over the centuries, and ranging from the ribald to the sublime, the *Cantigas* would also include six poems dedicated to the Virgin of Montserrat, an inclusion undoubtedly inspired by his wife, Yolande (Violant) of Aragon, who was James' daughter. The tone and theme of these six lyrical poems are light-hearted and sympathetic, and suggest familiarity with the legendary history of Montserrat.²¹ Cantiga 311 recounts, for example, the Virgin's resuscitation of a pilgrim who had fallen dead on his way to the monastery. Cantiga 52 tells of how the Virgin made goats come every day to the monastery to let themselves be milked by the monks:

***Mui gran dereit' e das bestias obedecer
a Santa Maria de que Deus quis nacer.***²²

The potency of the Virgin of Montserrat and the majestic locale of the monastery earned them both wide renown. The chronicler Bernat Desclot (d. 1390) would describe Montserrat in these terms: "...this is a place of holy devotion wherein God hath wrought in behalf of mankind great numbers of miracles and wondrous works...And this sanctuary is girded about by lofty and desert mountains in a barren and waste land."²³ The holiness and mystery of the place demanded special respect. Both Peter III, whom we have already seen humbly praying at the Virgin's altar for heavenly aid against the French, and his son, Alfonso III the Liberal (r. 1285—1291), would spare Montserrat's vassals from having to fight their wars.²⁴

For the successor of Alfonso III, his brother James II the Just (r. 1291—1327), devotion to the Virgin of Montserrat was of an extremely personal nature. Succumbing to a serious illness in Naples in 1299, James, in anguish, would promise several wax-candles to the monastery, as confirmed in a document dated June 22, 1302: *Beate Marie de Monteserrato...Nos, Jacobus, Dei gracia rex Aragonum, etc...damus et concedimus imperpetuum...quatuor cereos ponderis centum librarum cere...*²⁵ These candles would be taken every year to the monastery's sacristy on the eve of the Assumption of Our Lady (August 15).²⁶ James' affliction, by all accounts brief but intense, would subside, but his devotion to the Virgin of Montserrat would not. For a man whose "family life was correct and intense,"²⁷ devotion to this sanctuary of the Mother of Christ was logical and natural. Several years after the death of his beloved first wife, Blanche of Naples (d. 1310), James and his two sons, James and Alfonso, would visit Montserrat in honor of her memory. A gift of a magnificent silver icon to the monastery marked his marriage to his third wife, Marie de Lusignan, in 1315.²⁸

By the reign of James II, the count-kings of Catalonia-Aragon began to identify themselves as culturally and dynastically Catalan. Catalonia became the final resting-place for James I, his son, and grandsons, and James II would take special care in building his father's tomb at the abbey of Santes Creus, near Tarragona.²⁹ The monastery of Montserrat too began to be perceived as something purely Catalan, a powerful nationalistic symbol of the divine favor shown to Catalonia. "Montserrat is the miracle of Catalonia," remarks Joan Maragall, "...it is something that is ours that does not look like anything else...Montserrat, above all, is an altar, a temple."³⁰ Anselm M. Albareda is more explicit: "Montserrat and Catalonia are inseparable."³¹ Such feelings surfaced among the Catalans by the fourteenth century. Montserrat had become the emotional center for the Arago-Catalonian realm, both for the common people, whose houses are still adorned by prints of *La Moreneta*, and the realm's monarchs, who were no less reverent towards her. To quote the lyrical poem by Joan Puntí i Collell: "land of love of the best quality/ the heart of Catalonia is Montserrat."³²

As the most powerful religious focal point of medieval Catalonia, Montserrat held enormous sway over the minds of its rulers. At no time was this more apparent than during the reign of the grandson of James II, Peter IV the Ceremonious (r. 1336—1387). Peter assiduously sought the approval of the Virgin of Montserrat for the various Mediterranean ventures that mark his long reign, which is considered the height of the federation of Catalonia-Aragon. In 1343, before departing to subdue the prosperous kingdom of Majorca, ruled by his brother-in-law, James III (r. 1324—1343), Peter made the climb up the famous mountain. Kissing the Virgin's hand, he placed on his finger one of the rings he was to offer to

the image, a gesture meant to ensure protection and success.³³ Success indeed came easily. James' heavy taxes had made it so; Peter could say he came as a liberator righting the Majorcan king's wrongs.

Taxes aside, Peter would attribute his victory over the wayward island kingdom to the Black Virgin. On April 29, 1344, we find him at the foot of the serrated mountain with his entourage. Peter himself relates the visit in his *Crònica*: "In sight of the monastery of Montserrat, the prior of the monastery came forth and received us reverently, offering us his hospitality that very day. At the suitable time, we went to venerate Our Lady Saint Mary; that done, we entered to eat. After eating in company of the prior, we presented to the Virgin a galley whose tackle and rigging were of silver (*una galea ab totes ses eixàrcies d'argent*) in honor of the victory that was extended to us..."³⁴

Having presented his gift, Peter descended from the mountain, but not before praising the hermits on the mountainside, who had prayed for the success of Peter's enterprise at certain hours of the day and night (*en certes hores de dia e de nit*). The subsequent mopping up of James' supporters in Roussillon and Cerdanya proved successful. The unlucky Majorcan king, once vanquished, would himself come to seek consolation in Montserrat in 1344; that same year, records attest to his participation in the solemn celebration of the feast day of the Virgin Mary (September 8).³⁵

As his sobriquet suggests, Peter had a talent for display and ceremony, a capacity one historian has called a "passion for self-celebration."³⁶ The admixture of the public and the private that so often typify public ceremonies of the Middle Ages characterizes Peter's rituals as well. On July 5, 1353, Peter had the members of his expedition to Sardinia, which was led by the tough commander Bernat de Cabrera and composed of barons, knights, and townsmen, convoked in the *cambre blanca* of his royal palace at Valencia. Standing before his audience, Peter began to give one of his famous discourses, which not only inspired its hearers but revealed his own personal sentiments as well.³⁷ We do not have to wonder what these were. After exhorting his men to be obedient to Cabrera, and to serve bravely and faithfully, Peter invoked the name of the Virgin Mary and of Saint George, "...who from time immemorial has been the supporter of the battles of our House of Aragon."³⁸

Both the Virgin Mary and her monastery at Montserrat never seem to have been far from Peter's mind. Throughout his life, Peter would maintain continuous interest in the monastery, which he eulogized as "one of the most solemn and devotional of the world."³⁹ His letters are filled with matters concerning questions of protection over the monastery's pilgrims, appointments, jurisdiction, and decoration.⁴⁰ Peter's queen, Eleanor of Sicily, was even more devoted to the monastery than

her husband. She is known to have made three separate visits to the monastery, one of which seems to have been the longest stay of any member of the royal house, each time dutifully performing the rites of piety and charity. Although gravely ill, Eleanor struggled to the monastery from Barcelona in March 1375, a journey lasting five days, to make her last visit, before dying on April 20, 1375.⁴¹

Peter's sons, who were to succeed him as John I the Hunter (r. 1387—1396) and Martin I the Humanist (r. 1396—1410), inherited his keen interest in Montserrat. John's reign was not a happy one, already "half over when it began."⁴² John suffered from what was probably epilepsy, an affliction that was scantily understood in the fourteenth century. To Barcelona he summoned doctors, including Moorish and Jewish ones, as well as scholars from Paris and Avignon. His spoiled and spirited young wife, Yolande of Bar, gave up feasts, balls, and jewelry.⁴³ Some of John's attendants even promised to make the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.⁴⁴ None of these devices seems to have been of much avail. But John and Yolande did not lose hope. As adherents of the Virgin of Montserrat, they had no doubts concerning her celebrated efficacy or her compassion. In 1380, as duke and duchess of Girona, they had already made a visit to the monastery during a previous bout of John's epilepsy. While John at that time seems to have been preoccupied with what class of wine would be served by the prior, his French wife was deeply impressed, taking the Virgin as her special protectress.⁴⁵

Now, as king and queen, the couple's devotion seemed to be rewarded. John's malady receded only after each had made a vow to make the trip up the mountain barefoot, a promise both kept. While her husband convalesced in Barcelona, Yolande would make the climb first in late October 1387, sending her husband greetings from atop the mountain in an affectionate letter: "Highest and most excellent and most powerful prince and husband...I have arrived at...Montserrat, where, my lord, I find myself well... thanks to Our Lord; and to whom I am devoted [i.e. the Virgin], I have presented with humble reverence, my lord, the jewels of which your lordship is familiar..."⁴⁶

One has to admire John's fortitude. Although still weak, he insisted on making the difficult and uncomfortable trip to Montserrat barefoot and join his wife. Not wanting to wait for warmer months to make the journey, John ordered the monastery to construct two chimneys, a large one for his chambers and a smaller one for the dining hall, despite humble protestations from the prior. Called "the most Montserratine of the Catalan kings," John would make the trip again with his wife (along with a visit to the shrine of the patron saint of Barcelona, Saint Eulalia) in 1393, "according to how it has been accustomed to be done ...by our great predecessors, of good memory."⁴⁷ But despite these pious gestures,

John never completely rid himself of his epilepsy, there being no cure, a fact as true today as it was then. In May 1396, while hunting near Girona, John was knocked off his horse by an epileptic seizure, never to resuscitate.⁴⁸

During one particularly serious epileptic fit, John had expressed a desire to be buried at Montserrat. However, Martin, his brother and successor, would bury him at Poblet, the dynastic mausoleum first conceived as such by their father, after obtaining papal dispensation of John's request.⁴⁹ Martin was made of a different stamp from his brother. While John enjoyed hunting and kept well-stocked menageries filled with lions, stags, and "unicorns" (rhinoceroses), Martin kept a library well-stocked with contemplative tracts and served as patron to men such as the stern Saint Vincent Ferrer (1356—1419). Martin envisioned himself as the defender and nurturer of the churches in his domains.⁵⁰ It is no surprise that it was he who would secure for Montserrat the privileged status of independent abbey from Benedict XIII (antipope, r. 1394—1423), an Aragonese himself, in 1409. Montserrat's abbot from this point on would wear the insignia of his office — the ring, cross, miter, and staff — that would signify the magnified power of his monastery. It was also Martin, as duke of Montblanc, who would donate the impressive portraits of himself, his son Martin, and the principal men of his realm, following his important expeditions to Sicily (1378—1384).⁵¹

No detail escaped Martin's attention. In a letter dated January 12, 1404, we find him asking the abbot of Poblet to lend Montserrat the diacatholicon, that is, a purgative medicine mixed with honey, that had belonged to his father: "Venerable abbot: we very well believe that you know that since in the monastery of the Virgin Mary of Montserrat, in which we place singular devotion, there is no diacatholicon [*catholicon*], which is very necessary there...we ask of you very affectionately that you lend us the diacatholicon that had belonged to the Lord King Peter..."⁵²

In 1410, when Martin died, apparently of a lethal combination of serious indigestion and uncontrollable laughter, no successor had been properly designated, initiating a crisis of succession. The Compromise of Caspe (1412) ushered in the establishment of a new royal house, the Trastámaras. Although this new family was of Castilian provenance, the tradition established by the first counts of Barcelona remained intact. Montserrat would continue to serve its multifarious functions under this new line of kings. The visit made by Ferdinand I of Antequera (r. 1412—1416), the first of his line, to Montserrat in September 1413 before his successful siege of Balaguer, refuge of Jaume of Urgell, his rival for the throne, is indeed reminiscent of that made by Peter IV seventy years earlier. And, like Peter's queen, Eleanor of Sicily, Ferdinand seems to have had a premonition about his approaching demise when he visited

the monastery in 1416. There, Ferdinand confessed his sins and received the sacrament before dying a few days later in the town of Igualada.⁵³

Ferdinand's son and successor, Alfonso V the Magnanimous (r. 1416—1458), would deem the monastery as important as his predecessors did. Alfonso in fact would command the abbot of Montserrat to personally attend to the funerary rites of his father at Igualada, and for the monastery's available monks to perform the necessary masses "night and day, continually."⁵⁴ In 1420, prior to leaving for Sardinia and Sicily, Alfonso would profess "great and singular devotion" (*ingentem et singularem devotionem*) for the Virgin of Montserrat, and considered her his patroness and advocate.⁵⁵ This restless king, "who did not live a single year in the same place," nevertheless found the time on November 20, 1419 to make the climb up the mountain (*muntar a nostra dona de Montserrat*), and again on November 12, 1424.⁵⁶

Alfonso's "great and singular devotion" manifested itself in various ways. As depicted in a miniature from the *Llibre Vermell*, Alfonso V petitioned Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447—1455) in 1453 to confirm the establishment of the Brotherhood of Montserrat, a religious confraternity that had existed as early as the eleventh century.⁵⁷ Brittle and inconspicuous records reveal humbler transactions. A letter dated January 15, 1420 reads: "The monarch [Alfonso V] commands that Brother Arnau Carboner, hermit, who is at Montserrat, at the hermitage called Sant Joan Baptista [*Sant Johan*], be paid a hundred Aragonese florins."⁵⁸ The zealotry with which Queens Eleanor of Sicily and Yolande of Bar displayed their fidelity to the Black Virgin has already been noted. Alfonso's queen, María of Castile, can also be considered to be part of this pious group. María once stayed at Montserrat for three days, and another visit lasted the entire week following the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady (September 8).⁵⁹ The monastery's archives reveal that she also distributed alms at Montserrat with apparent relish. As her husband's lieutenant-general, an office she held capably during his long absences, she also ordered that all those who could take up arms should do so if the property and inhabitants of the monastery were ever threatened.⁶⁰

The relationship between Montserrat and Alfonso's brother, the sour and Machiavellian John II (r. 1458—1479), presents an interesting case. Here we have a monarch whose sympathies and ambitions were clearly Castilian, and whose arbitrary and callous imprisonment of his son, Carlos of Viana, instantaneously lit the fuse of rebellion among Catalans of all classes. On the morning of February 8, 1461, revolution broke out in the streets of Barcelona, with manifestos going up on the walls that read "To arms!" and "Death for the oppressor!"⁶¹ Every revolution needs its symbols and heroes. In Carlos, who would die a prisoner of his father, Catalans from Perpignan to Tortosa found a martyr. His right hand would be put on a silver pedestal for public veneration.⁶²

In the Virgin of Montserrat, already a long established and powerful religious symbol, Catalans found another figure to rally around. Indeed, prior to his imprisonment, Carlos of Viana himself, accompanied by Juana Enríquez, Prince Ferdinand (the future Ferdinand V the Catholic), and Jean of Lorraine, visited the monastery to implore the Virgin's protection against the machinations of his father.⁶³ Following Carlos' death in 1461, the rebels had offered the quasi-republican crown of Catalonia to the ineffective Henry IV of Castile (r. 1454—1474). When this scheme did not materialize, the crown was offered to Pedro, Infante and Constable of Portugal (1429—1466), “[the] latest cat’s paw of their republican frenzy,”⁶⁴ and a fervent devotee of the Montserratine Virgin. On January 11, 1465, at the castle of Gelida, Pedro would order that an oil lamp stay lit day and night before the image of the Black Virgin in order to ensure his safety in his campaigns against John II.⁶⁵ Pedro would indeed emerge unscathed from the subsequent battle of Calaf (February 28, 1465), a particularly bloody engagement (“almost everybody died fighting” remarks one historian)⁶⁶ that resulted in a victory for John. Pedro, however, seems to have been more concerned with his own safety than with defeat. Attributing his deliverance to the intercession of the Virgin of Montserrat, in keeping with the “religio-superstitious ambiguity”⁶⁷ of his faith, Pedro would offer her a magnificent gift, the famed gold and silver cross of Gaston IV de Foix (1436—1472). Set with 764 precious stones of all types, the cross was engraved by Pedro’s chancellor (whose name, significantly enough, was Cosme de Montserrat) with the arms of Aragon and Sicily as well as with Pedro’s personal motto: *Paine pour joie*.⁶⁸

Pedro survived Calaf, but he would only live another year, dying on June 29, 1466, his name-day, in the palace of Juan de Montbuy at Granollers. A month later, the desperate Catalans offered the crown to the senile duke of Provence, René of Anjou, who sent his young son Jean of Lorraine in his stead. Jean, whom we have already seen visiting Montserrat with Carlos of Viana several years previously, confirmed Pedro’s gift in May 1468: *...videlicet auree crucis domini et salvatoris nostri Hiesu Christi, dicte vulgariter la Creu del comte de Foix dono perpetuo adornare et insignire*.⁶⁹ But the tide had already turned against the Catalan cause. Although Jean was a capable and energetic military leader, John soon crushed all resistance by 1472.

John II, however, would always remain a villain in the traditions of Montserrat. A legend published in 1898 by Francesc Carreres i Candi tells the story of the soldiers of the “evil king, called John II” (*mal rei, qui li deien Joan II*)⁷⁰ who found it impossible to storm the well-situated monastery: “The brothers of Montserrat were protecting the Catalan cause against the perjurious king. So that the Holy Image would not fall in the hands of his troops, the monastery was fortified, which was not very

difficult, since it had walls, and could defend itself easily.”⁷¹ With the assistance of a traitorous hermit, the soldiers almost succeed in taking the monastery, but the opportune intercession of the Virgin prevents this from occurring. “Miracle! A miracle of Our Lady of Montserrat!” exclaim the grateful monks, the faithful defenders of the shrine and the true “soldiers of Catalonia.”⁷²

The marriage of John’s son, Ferdinand II the Catholic (r. 1479—1516), to Isabel of Castile (r. 1474—1504) in 1469 ushered in a new age of greatness for a powerful and united Spain. Ferdinand, as “the first modern king of Spain [and] the last medieval king of the Crown of Aragon,”⁷³ would spend considerably less time in Aragon and Catalonia than his predecessors. Fewer than four of Ferdinand’s thirty-seven years were spent in Catalonia.⁷⁴ But union to Castile and entry into the modern age did not mean the medieval concern for the Virgin of Montserrat and her mountainous abode, observed in the long line of Aragonese kings, dwindled. Indeed, as a young prince, Ferdinand had espoused the cause of the monks of Montserrat and supported their professed allegiance to Carlos of Viana.⁷⁵ Following the capture of Granada in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabel visited Montserrat, and initiated reforms intended to strengthen the monastery. However, by installing churchmen there favorable to their interests and drawing it into closer association with monasteries in Castile and Galicia, the Catholic Kings were strengthening royal authority as well.

And yet, self-interest and a desire to increase royal power did not dominate the relationship between Montserrat and Spanish kings of the modern age. Charles V (1500—1558) visited the monastery more than nine times, and always enjoyed conversing and eating with the monks in the refectory. Although constantly hard-pressed for money, Charles always made generous donations to the monastery, and it is said that while at Montserrat both the news of his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor as well as Hernán Cortés’ discovery of Mexico were communicated to him.⁷⁶

The most profound personal devotion held by his son, Philip II (r. 1556—1598), was for the Virgin of Montserrat, an attachment perhaps influenced by his Catalan governess, Estefania de Requesens.⁷⁷ It was a fondness that motivated his affection for Catalonia and resulted in several journeys to the monastery, one of which entailed battling violent rainstorms. It was by his orders that the church of Montserrat was completely rebuilt. And Philip kept with him at all times a candle dedicated to Our Lady of Montserrat, and the arrangements of he made for his death included his holding the candle in one hand. On September 13, 1598, during his last moments, not forgetting these arrangements, he uttered: “Give it to me, it’s time.”⁷⁸ Even after his death, his devotion seems to have remained symbolically steadfast. One

onlooker wrote soon afterwards writes: “At his death, he was clutching in his hand the candle of Our Lady of Montserrat, [which] they could barely pry open [afterwards].”⁷⁹

The War of the Spanish Succession (1701—1714) disrupted the close ties between Montserrat and the monarchy, a temporary situation revived by subsequent visits made by Charles IV (r. 1788—1808), Ferdinand VII (r. 1808, 1814—1833), and Isabel II (r. 1833—1868), and later on, by Alfonso XIII (r. 1886—1931) in 1904. Montserrat, whether favored by the visits of kings or not, remained an important symbol of Catalan aspirations. One of its abbots, Antonio M. Marcet, vigorously promoted the use of the Catalan language in the early twentieth century, establishing a printing press in 1918 that published the celebrated *Biblia de Montserrat* by Buenaventura Ubach and the scholarly series *Analecta Montserratensia*, among other works. During the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Montserrat’s printing press continued to produce books illegally, and was then and afterwards the site of consequential Catalan nationalist demonstrations. Following the introduction of democracy, a new Spanish constitution of 1978 allowed for Catalan autonomy, a move supported by Juan Carlos I (r. 1975—), who has had the occasion to visit the monastery himself. Montserrat has remained at the center of the hopes and faith of all Catalans. An unbroken, thousand-year long tradition of a strong and personal bond with the Aragonese, and subsequently the Spanish, monarchs, although not always amicable, has allowed the monastery to thrive nonetheless through the ages.

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Notes

¹ Hence the name by which she is more popularly known, *La Moreneta*. Anselm M. Albareda has suggested that the chemicals from the varnish put on the image’s hands and face is the cause of her condition, not candles.

² Bernat Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon A.D. 1276—1285*. Translated from the Original Catalan Text by F.L. Critchlow. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928), 320.

³ José Pla, *Cataluña* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1963), 262.

⁴ Quoted from Anselm M. Albareda, *Historia de Montserrat*. Nueva edición, revisada y ampliada por Josep Massot i Muntaner (Barcelona: Publicaciones de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1974), 16.

⁵ Albareda, *Historia*, 16—7.

- ⁶ Albareda, *Historia*, 289.
- ⁷ Albareda, *Historia*, 289.
- ⁸ Amics de Montserrat, *Ermites i Fontes Monserratines* (Granollers: Editorial Montblanc, 1967), 28.
- ⁹ Antoni Aulestía y Pijoan, *Historia de Catalunya*. Anotada y continuada per Ernesto Moliné y Brassé (Barcelona: Centre Editorial Artístich de Miquel Seguí, 1922), 191.
- ¹⁰ Ana Isabel Sánchez Casabón (ed.), *Alfonso II Rey de Aragón, Conde de Barcelona y Marqués de Provenza. Documentos: 1162—1196* (Zaragoza: Institución “Fernando el Católico,” 1995), 810—814 (Document no. 628).
- ¹¹ Albareda, *Historia*, 289.
- ¹² Robert I. Burns, “The Spiritual Life of James the Conqueror, King of Arago-Catalonia, 1208—1276: Portrait and Self-Portrait,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 62 (1), January 1976, 15.
- ¹³ Burns, “Spiritual Life,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 16.
- ¹⁴ Quoted from Burns, “Spiritual Life,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 16.
- ¹⁵ Albareda, *Historia*, 289. The italics are Albareda’s.
- ¹⁶ Albareda, *Historia*, 290.
- ¹⁷ Quoted from Albareda, *Historia*, 289.
- ¹⁸ Ambrosio Huici Miranda and Maria Desamparados Cabanes Pecourt (ed.), *Documentos de Jaime I de Aragon. Volume IV: 1258—1262* (Zaragoza: Textos Medievales, 1982), 18 (Document no. 908).
- ¹⁹ Albareda, *Historia*, 289—90.
- ²⁰ Burns, “Spiritual Life,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 20-21.
- ²¹ Higiní Anglès, “Les Cantigues Montserratines del Rei Alfons el Savi i la Seva Importancia Musical,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 9, 1962, 22.
- ²² Quoted from Anglès, “Les Cantigues Montserratines,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 25.
- ²³ Desclot, *Chronicle*, 320.
- ²⁴ Albareda, *Historia*, 290.
- ²⁵ Antoni M. Aragó i Cabañas, “El Vot de Jaume II a Montserrat,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 9, 1962, 37—8.
- ²⁶ Frederic Udina i Martorell, “Els Privilegis Reials Atorgats al Monestir de Montserrat en una Confirmació de Carles I (1519),” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 9, 1962, 85.
- ²⁷ T.N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 96.
- ²⁸ Aragó i Cabañas, “El Vot de Jaume II,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 35. James’ interest extended into other church matters. From his reign onwards, for example, the lighting of wax-candles at the elevation of the Host would signify the royal presence of Christ, and presumably, that of the monarchs of Catalonia-Aragon as well.
- ²⁹ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 100.
- ³⁰ Quoted from Pla, *Cataluña*, 262.
- ³¹ Albareda, *Historia*, 287.
- ³² Joan Puntí i Collell, “Seny i Amor,” from *Antologia Lírica de Montserrat*. Segona Edició (Barcelona: M. Montserrat Borrat, 1947), 32.
- ³³ Albareda, *Historia*, 290.
- ³⁴ *Pere III el Cerimoniós: Crònica*. A cura d’Anna Cortadellas. Pròleg de J.N. Hillgarth (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1995), 135. My translation
- ³⁵ Albareda, *Historia*, 291.
- ³⁶ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 119.

- ³⁷ Rafael Tasis, *La Vida del Rei En Pere III* (Barcelona: Editorial Aedos, 1954), 157.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Quoted from Albareda, *Historia*, 159.
- ⁴⁰ See “Documents de l’Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó i del Reial Patrimoni,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 4, 1920—21, 319—336.
- ⁴¹ Albareda, *Historia*, 293—4.
- ⁴² Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 121.
- ⁴³ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 122.
- ⁴⁴ “Documents de l’Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó i del Reial Patrimoni,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 4, 1920—21, 325n.
- ⁴⁵ Albareda, *Historia*, 297. In 1380, Yolande also offered to the monastery a wax-candle worth 40 gold Aragonese florins, and her husband would bestow several splendid candlesticks upon the monastery.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted from Albareda, *Historia*, 297—8. My translation.
- ⁴⁷ Albareda, *Historia*, 291, 297—8. Quoted from a letter to Conselleres of Barcelona (August 20, 1393).
- ⁴⁸ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 125.
- ⁴⁹ Albareda, *Historia*, 299.
- ⁵⁰ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 130.
- ⁵¹ Albareda, *Historia*, 291. A great fire unfortunately destroyed this magnificent gift in 1811.
- ⁵² Letter 488 (Valencia, 12 janer 1404). My translation. Antoni Rubió y Lluch, *Documents per l’Historia de la Cultura Catalana Mig-Eval. Volum I* (Barcelona, Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1908), 428.
- ⁵³ Albareda, *Historia*, 299.
- ⁵⁴ Andrés Giménez Soler (compilador), *Itinerario del rey don Alfonso de Aragón y de Nápoles* (Zaragoza: Mariano Escar, 1909), 23.
- ⁵⁵ Albareda, *Historia*, 292.
- ⁵⁶ Soler, *Itinerario del rey don Alfonso*, 5, 24.
- ⁵⁷ See Albareda, *Historia*, 169—175, for a detailed description and history of this organization.
- ⁵⁸ Amics de Montserrat, *Ermites i Fontes Monserratines*, 60.
- ⁵⁹ Albareda, *Historia*, 294.
- ⁶⁰ Udina i Martorell, “Els Privilegis Reials Atorgats al Monestir de Montserrat en una Confirmació de Carles I (1519),” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 9, 1962, 86. The letter is dated August 9, 1446.
- ⁶¹ Townsend Miller, *Henry IV of Castile: 1425—1474* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1972), 129.
- ⁶² Miller, *Henry IV*, 130. The rest of Carlos’ body was enshrined within the cathedral at Barcelona. The Generalitat hired tramps and freed prisoners, faking blindness or lameness, to come and pray before his effigy and leap up cured. Such was the beginning of the cult of *Sant Karles de Cathalunya*.
- ⁶³ Albareda, *Historia*, 292.
- ⁶⁴ Miller, *Henry IV*, 162.
- ⁶⁵ J. Ernesto Martínez Ferrando, *Tragedia del Insigne Condestable Don Pedro de Portugal* (Madrid: Instituto Jeronimo Zurita, 1942), 123.
- ⁶⁶ Quoted from J. Ernest Martínez Ferrando, “Pere de Portugal i la Verge de Montserrat,” *Analecta Montserratensia*, 9, 1962, 60.

⁶⁷ Ferrando, "Pere de Portugal," *Analecta*, 59.

⁶⁸ Ferrando, "Pere de Portugal," *Analecta*, 60—1.

⁶⁹ Quoted from Ferrando, "Pere de Portugal," *Analecta*, 61.

⁷⁰ "El fals ermità de Montserrat," quoted from Amics de Montserrat, *Ermites i Fontes Monserratines*, 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Both quotes from Amics de Montserrat, *Ermites i Fontes Monserratines*, 40.

⁷³ Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 160.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ A. de la Torre, "Algunos datos sobre los comienzos de la reforma de Monserrat en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos," *Boletín de la Academia de la Historia*, 107, 1935, 446.

⁷⁶ Albareda, *Historia*, 268—9.

⁷⁷ Henry Kamen, *Philip of Spain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 234.

⁷⁸ Kamen, *Philip of Spain*, 315.

⁷⁹ Quoted from Albareda, *Historia*, 269.