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Export Control and the Rise of the Office
of the Admiral in the Crown of Aragon 1245 – 1282

(TESTO PROVVISORIO)

The conquest of Valencia in 1245 confronted James I with several administrative issues for which the governmental apparatus of the Crown of Aragon was not prepared. One of the major issues that has been frequently overlooked in modern historiography is the fact that in one stroke the Crown of Aragon had doubled the length of coastline it now had to control and protect. This became a serious issue during the mudéjar revolt of 1275. This paper will look at the methods the Crown of Aragon initially employed for attacking opponents and for control of the new coastline, and how these evolved into the Office of the Admiral due to political and military pressures, both internal and external.

The problem that confronted James I was a fiscal one. Adequately controlling a long coastline required a number of galleys of various sizes to patrol it. This, however, was an inherently expensive proposition. A typical galley of the period carrying 104 oars cost approximately 60 ounces of gold per month to operate.¹ The *Siete Partidas*, written at approximately the same time, recognized the inherent choice of either arming a large fleet to conduct operations or simply arming a few ‘fast ships’ for pursuit, or in other words privateering. This second choice as laid out in the *Siete Partidas* gave the crown several options.²

- 1) The crown provided ships, equipment, provisions, arms, and paid the crews.
- 2) The crown provided the ships, equipment and arms, but others organized the squadron and provided provisions and pay.
- 3) The crown provided only ships and equipment, and others supplied arms, provisions and pay.

From the crown’s perspective, the last option was the most attractive since it was required to provide only the ship, which was essentially the least costly of aspect of a privateering operation. Provisions and pay constituted the bulk of the costs for arming a galley. More importantly it allowed the crown to keep galleys in service at a minimal cost. It has been generally assumed that these licenses have been for individuals to arm a private vessel, but the evidence suggests that just as frequently the permission was for arming a ship owned by the crown. A good example of this was the permission granted to the Bishop of Barcelona on 4 February 1263 to arm a galley against the ‘Saraceni’ and to operate it independently of the fleet. It is clear that a royal galley is being armed by the bishop.³

A similar document dated 13 July 1264 allowing the Archbishop of Tarragona to arm a galley certainly implies that it a royal galley being outfitted. In both these cases, what is interesting to note is that the bishops are not being required to provide the customary royal fifth of all the loot acquired by the ships. The permission of 1264 is patently clear about this in stating that “We concede to you that all profit that the foresaid galley may make by itself or with others and no part will be demanded by us but that all thus will held as your own.”⁴

However, this was not completely a free license. In an agreement, dated 8 November 1264, between an agent of the Archbishop of Tarragona and James I, the Archbishop agrees to pay James I 9,000 *solidus* for the right to arm a galley. In return James released any rights as to the control of the galley and assured that no officials would interfere with the arming of the vessel. It is not clear if this was the same galley mentioned in the July 13th permission.⁵

The other option, which is not stated in the *Siete Partidas*, was to license a *societas*, or group of investors, to operate a vessel owned and armed by them. An example of this is a license granted to

¹ L.V. MOTT, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Catalan-Aragonese Fleet in the War of the Sicilian Vespers*, Gainesville 2003 (University Press of Florida), p. 226.

² *Las Siete Partidas*, Book II, Title XXVI, Law XXIX.

³ ARCHIVO DE CORONA DE ARAGON (ACA), *Cancillería real*, Registro 10, fol. 141v. Also see Note 20.

⁴ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 11, fol. 196v

⁵ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 13, fol. 236v

a future fleet admiral, Raymond Marquet, and his “partnership and friends” dated 8 March 1265.⁶ It allows them to arm “ships, galleys and any other light ship, and as many as they wish.” This is one of the primary differences between a permission to arm a royal vessel versus a license granted to a group to conduct privateering. The permission to arm a royal vessel was given invariably for a specific number of ships or galleys, usually one or two, whereas the license for privateering allowed a *societas* to arm as many vessels as it wanted or could afford. There were no charges associated with this license as far we know, but license states the *societas* had to give the king one-fifth of all revenues.⁷

However, one of the main issues and problems involved with licensing corsairs was that of control. All of the ‘cursairi’ who armed galleys for raiding did so under license from the king which often entailed strict prohibitions against them attacking friendly shipping, even if it was Muslim. Unrestricted attacks on friendly shipping could quickly entangle the crown in an unwanted and costly confrontation. The standard procedure for controlling the corsairs was to issue specific prohibitions in their license, such as that issued to Pericono of Villafelle on 2 February 1280. In the license it is clearly stated “that he will make no harm to the lands of the King of Tunis or the King of Granada.”⁸

More often the king simply issued a blanket prohibition to all corsairs forbidding them from attacking the lands or ships of a particular party. In one of the earliest examples dated 5 August 1264, James I issued a prohibition against any attack on the people, or animals and goods, on the islands of Ibiza and Formentera.⁹ Often, however, the issue was not so clear, as in the case of Cartagena, which was under the control of the Kingdom of Castile. Castile was at peace with Aragon in 1273, but the port of Cartagena offered a tempting target in that ships from all over the Mediterranean called there, including Muslim shipping. To prevent raids on the port and thus a possible international incident, James issued an order on 5 February 1273 to all corsairs licensed by the crown that they should note that “We have received into our custody and protection every and each ship and other vessel that are or will be in the port of Cartagena for the time they are there and the persons and even goods that are in them and the same land of Cartagena and its Christian and even Jewish and Muslim men and all of their goods.”¹⁰ It goes on to state that any corsair who ignores the restriction will forfeit his ship and all of his goods.

The issue could be even more complicated when dealing with passengers on a targeted vessel. The ship might belong to an enemy, but some of the passengers might belong to a friend state. An example of the conundrum can be seen in a lengthy license issued to Bernardo Cantulli dated 23 July 1264.¹¹ In 1262 James I had obtained permission for the Catalans to establish a *fundaco* at Alexandria and the port soon became one of the most important commercial connections for Barcelona. The king granted Bernardo a license to attack “Saracen on the sea and land” except those of Alexandria. He was strictly forbidden to harm or molest those of Alexandria or harm their goods in any way. Any Muslims and their goods in the vessel that could be positively identified as not being from Alexandria were fair game and could be sold into slavery and their goods auctioned off. However, those who were from the city, or claimed to be, had to be brought with their merchandise unharmed to Barcelona. This license was clearly written with the idea of avoiding offending an important trading partner. How successful this type of restrictive license was in protecting friendly merchants is unknown, but it should be noted that most licenses issued did not make such fine distinctions.

The problem, of course, was how to enforce these restrictions on a group whose primary motivation was greed and who were not too concerned about distinguishing friend from foe. As in the above case, the most common method for controlling the behavior of the corsairs was to have them pledge their house and goods as collateral for their good behavior. In the Kingdom of Sicily

⁶ ACA, *Cancilleria real*, Registro 15, fol. 10v

⁷ The ‘king’s fifth’ was the typical fee for a privateering license in the Crown of Aragon, Castile and in the Kingdom of Sicily.

⁸ ACA, *Cancilleria real*, Registro 49, fol. 24v.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Registro 14, fol. 62v

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Registro 19, fol. 98v

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Registro 13, fol. 207v

if the amount pledged did not equal the amount of damages, the admiral had to pay the difference. This arrangement insured the office of the admiral would demand a sufficient pledge.¹² The pledges of the corsairs in the Crown of Aragon were handled by the local baileys, though as we will see, the king could intervene. Whether or not the baileys were responsible for damages over the amount pledged as security by a corsair is unknown.

When the corsairs did contravene a royal order they were brought before either the local bailey, or if the transgression had caused a major incident they could be brought before the king. Such was the case of a group from Castellion and Albecia who were given ten days after receiving the letter from Alfonso II to appear and give cause for having attacked Genoese shipping and then selling the loot at Tarragona. The letter is dated 22 February 1286 and is a good example of the problems corsairs could cause.¹³ The crown had undertaken a policy of using trade incentives and threats to Genoese trade to manipulate the commune's behavior to the detriment of the Angevins, whom the crown was fighting for control of Sicily.¹⁴ The policy had been very effective, but the actions of the corsairs indiscriminately attacking Genoese shipping could have upset the careful planning. It is little wonder then the king became involved and demanded an accounting from the captains.

Most of the matters associated with the corsairs were handled by the local baileys, though the crown seems to have reserved the right to issue the actual license. An example of this can be seen in a royal order dated 7 January 1281. The bailey of Barcelona had petitioned to force Peter Sanchus to secure the arming of a *leny* (a light galley) with his personal goods, as was customary. Peter III replied that since the *leny* would be sailing with the fleet that Peter Sanchus should not be required to provide a deposit.¹⁵ The letter is of interest for it shows that managing of the corsairs was handled by the baileys and that they were responsible for enforcing the regulations involving the corsairs. It also shows that vessels considered to be operating with the fleet, even if privately armed, were not governed by customs applied to the corsairs.

While this system provided the crown with an inexpensive method for harassing its opponents and even generated some income, it was not necessarily a good system for controlling the coastline. This would become apparent in years proceeding and during the mudéjar revolt of 1275 – 1278. One of the many problems confronting the crown was that of the smuggling *cosas vedadas*, or prohibited goods. These included arms, horses, wood, iron and grain. It was certainly a problem by 1273 when James I issued a letter to the bailey and other officials of Majorca and Ibiza to allow “Romeo of Casteleto knight admiral and magister Bonifacio, captain of the ship and galleys armed in Denia and their associates” to keep any men and goods, be they Christian, Muslim or Jewish, of smugglers they captured.¹⁶ The letter specifically mentions “victuals, arms or other prohibited goods” the smugglers were carrying to “the lands of the Saracens.” These two individuals and their associates are mentioned again in a license granted 27 March 1273 in which they are permitted to arm a ship, a galley and a *leny* specifically to intercept Saracens “or any other *Hispananos* carrying arms, victuals or other prohibited goods to the lands of the Saracens.”¹⁷

What is important about both of these letters is that the crown is specifically trying to use the corsairs to control smuggling. Both letters are quite clear in what is expected of the corsairs and what type of shipping they are specifically to target. The crown had specially waived its ‘fifth’ in apparent attempt to keep the Romeo and Bonifacio focused on the task. What is also important is the mention of the admiral in the letter of January 25th. The fact that Peter Sanchus was a “knight admiral” suggests that the office of admiral was beginning to become involved in protecting the coastline.

If the above seems a strange statement to infer the admiral was not generally concerned with the protection of the coast, one has to remember that up to this point the position of admiral had been temporary, unlike in Castile or the Kingdom of Sicily. Up to this period the appointment of an

¹² L.V. MOTT, *Sea Power*, cit., p. 66.

¹³ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 63, fol. 65v

¹⁴ L.V. MOTT, *Trade as a weapon during the War of the Sicilian Vespers*, in “Medieval Encounters” Special Edition 9, 2004, 2/3, pp. 236-243.

¹⁵ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 42, fol. 205v. The letter is dated 25 January 1273.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Registro 19, fol. 95v

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Registro 21, fol. 116

admiral had been temporary and for a specific operation. From 1231 to 1264 there is no record of any admiral being assigned to the fleet. Undoubtedly someone had been appointed to command the blockade of Valencia in 1238, but there is no record of it or documents pertaining to an admiral until the appointment of Peter Fernández, the future Peter III, as admiral of the fleet galleys against the Saracens dated 6 February 1264. He was apparently replaced by Peter of Bisbal on 5 May 1265.¹⁸ The next mention of an admiral is not until that of Romeo of Casteleto in 1274 in the above mentioned document. Even in that case the document a few months later dated March 27th does not address him as ‘admiral’. The two documents indicate a blurring or certain confusion as to how to deal with the issue of contraband. The two documents certainly are word similar to the earlier ones for corsairs and of admiral Casteleto and magister Bonifacio certainly were part of a *societas* typical of corsairs. Moreover, the wording is clear that the vessels armed were not royal vessels, but private ones. Yet clearly the office of the admiral was involved, if tangentially, in this effort to control smuggling.

All of this smuggling appears to have been part of the tensions leading to the revolt of 1275 by the Muslim population in sympathy with Marinid invasion of Castile. Though few survive, the privateering licenses issued during this period all focus on controlling the contraband coming and going from Valencia. A license issued to William Molinari and James Quarrius of Valencia on 6 April 1277 is very similar to that given to Romeo of Casteleto, except that Peter III demands his customary fifth of any spoils.¹⁹ As with the other licenses, William and James are permitted to seize the goods and vessel of any Christian, Jew or Muslim caught with prohibited goods. The evidence that this type of license, designed to curb smuggling, was a direct result of the revolt is that the licenses following the revolt all reverted to the old pattern of simply granting permission to attack “enemies of the Cross” and make no mention of interdicting *cosas vedadas*. Typical of this is a license that was granted to Peter of Villafalech, dated 26 July 1280, allowing him to arm a *barca* of 24 oars at Tortosa for use “against enemies of the Cross” on the proviso that he return to Tortosa at the end of his voyage.²⁰

Though the evidence is not clear, it appears that the reason the crown no longer needed to use corsairs to control smuggling was that the office of the admiral had expanded in scope and authority. By the end of the *mudéjar* revolt in 1278 the office of the admiral was becoming increasingly involved in the management of the ports and more importantly, a permanent position. The first indication of the changing status comes in August 1277 with the appointment of Peter of Queralt as *Almirall general de las Galeras*.²¹ The appointment made Peter of Queralt the representative of the king with the power to engage in war or to sign treaties as if the king himself was present. While this appears to give Peter of Queralt the title of admiral, in fact the appointment is only for a specific operation and actual control of the fleet is given to one William of Marsella, who is given the title of *Almirall tot la feyt de la mar*. It is William of Marsella who has control over the naval operations and authority ‘sobre los cómits and sobre tots las altres de los galeres.’

The reason for the apparent dichotomy between *Almirall general* and *Almirall* was this previously mentioned ambiguity concerning the function and the power of the admiral. By 1277 the uprising in Valencia had mushroomed into a major revolt and it became apparent that the insurgents were receiving help from North Africa. It must have also become clear that the use of corsairs to interdict this traffic was not the complete solution to the problem. The appointment of Peter of Queralt coincided with a major offensive against the Mahgrib to cut off the support flowing from the Berbers into Valencia by either treaties or by threats. The text of the document shows that Peter of Queralt was to control the political and strategic objectives of the operation, while William of Marsella was in charge of the logistical and tactical aspects. In the strict definition of the title of admiral, it was William of Marsella who was the commander of the fleet. The division of authority, the

¹⁸ R. GALLOFRÉ, J. TRENCHS, *Almirantes y vicealmirantes de la Corona de Aragón*, in “Miscel·lania de Textos Medievals”, 5, 1989 (Barcelona, Consell Superior d’Investigacions Científiques), pp. 128-130.

¹⁹ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 39, fol. 182

²⁰ This is a clear case were it is a royal *barca* that is being fitted out for a corsair as it is referred to as “barcham nostrum armatam”. *Ibid.*, Registro 48, fol. 98

²¹ *Ibid.*, Reg. 40, fol. 5v. J. ZURITA, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, Zaragoza 1977 (Institución “Fernando el Católico”), bk. 4, chap. 4.

timing of the appointment, and the fact neither Peter nor William are given any general powers within the kingdom indicates that the office of admiral was still an essentially temporary position, though that would soon change.

That Peter of Queralt, and William of Marsella for that matter, held their offices for only that particular operation is made clear by the naming of Conrad of Lancia to the office of the admiral in May 1278.²² The appointment of Conrad of Lancia marks the first assignment of a Hohenstaufen refugee from Sicily to command the fleet. A number of influential officials and nobles had fled from Charles of Anjou and taken refuge at the Aragonese court. They brought with them knowledge and administrative techniques of the Hohenstaufen court, particularly in regards to managing maritime and naval affairs. Conrad of Lancia was an experienced commander and would prove himself in 1279 by defeating ten Muslim galleys with the same squadron that took his brother-in-law Roger of Loria on a diplomatic mission to Tunisia.²³

The appointment of Conrad of Lancia is of interest for it marks a distinct change in the language concerning the authority of the office that closely approaches the formula used by Hohenstaufen notaries. Unlike the previous appointments, this one now includes the stock phrase authorizing him to administer justice with regards to matters 'as much civil as criminal' involving anyone within the fleet. This phrase is virtually identical to that found in the *Capitula* of Frederick II.²⁴ The word for admiral has changed from the early spelling of 'almirallus' to 'almiratus', which closer approximates the spelling 'ammiratus' found in the *Capitula*. More importantly, Peter III 'concedes to you [Conrad of Lancia] fully in our kingdom and dominion the office of admiral.' This statement implies that unlike the earlier appointments, which were to specific squadrons for specific campaigns, the office now encompassed the entire realm and was more than a temporary position. Another indication that the duties of the office were expanding appears in two orders of September and October 1278 to Conrad of Lancia as admiral to unload the merchandise from the ships of Genoese merchants.²⁵ The entries suggest that by this time the office of admiral had responsibilities concerning the control of maritime trade and was no longer limited to specific naval operations.

This involvement of the office of the admiral continued under Conrad's successor, James Perez, the natural son of Peter III, who was named admiral 8 September 1280.²⁶ In an order dated 8 July 1280, Peter III orders James Perez not to interfere with Bernard Gardelli in the arming at Tortosa of any ship, *leny* or galley that he desired.²⁷ The document is of interest because it shows that the admiral now had the authority to insert himself into areas that previously had been the sole concern of the baileys. The involvement of the admiral in both the handling of the corsairs and in port matters shows the office's influence had grown substantially since 1275. The changes brought about by the *mudéjar* revolt prepared the Crown of Aragon for the War of the Sicilian Vespers, which would bring further changes and stretch the maritime commitments of the Crown of Aragon even farther. How far the influence of the office of the admiral extended in Valencia and Catalonia, especially after the Privileges of the Unions in 1284, still requires research. For fiscal and political reasons the office of the admiral in Catalonia and Valencia would never attain the power the same office in Sicily would under Roger de Loria.

By 1282 the Crown of Aragon had become a major maritime power in the Mediterranean and the level of both its commercial and naval activities had increased substantially. The broadening maritime commitments simply dictated that one individual be put in command of the kingdom's naval and maritime assets. Moreover, *ad hoc* measures to control the nearly 900 kilometers of coa-

²² ACA, *Cancillería real*, Reg. 40, fol. 95r. MARQUÉS DE LAURENCÍN, *Los Almirantes de Aragón*, Madrid 1919, p. 20. The document has been transcribed by the Marqués de Laurencín without a reference. It should be noted that the transcription has the date as 1268 when in fact the actual document is dated 1278.

²³ R. MUNTANER, *Crònica*, in *Les quatre grans cròniques*, ed. F. SOLDEVILA, Barcelona 1983, chap. 19. J. ZURITA, *Anales*, cit., bk. 4, chap. 8.

²⁴ J.L.A. HUIILLARD-BRÉHOLLES, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, Paris 1852, 5, p. 579.

²⁵ J.E. MARTÍNEZ FERRANDO, *Catálogo de la documentación relativa al antiguo reino de Valencia*, Madrid 1934, 2, nums. 438, 448.

²⁶ R. GALLOFRÉ, J. TRENCHS, *Almirantes y vicealmirantes*, cit., p. 130.

²⁷ ACA, *Cancillería real*, Registro 48, fol. 74v

stline had proven to be inadequate. The revolt of the *mudéjars* in Valencia in 1275 drove this point home and accelerated the development of the office of the admiral.