

Catalonia's Mediterranean Expansion: *An Instance of Colonialism?*

Preface

The historiography of Catalonia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is concise in its assessment of overseas expansion. However, it is apparent that not all historians agree on what Catalanian expansion means, and what expansion meant to Catalonia. The terminology used to describe the principality during expansion is widely discrepant. The terms, *empire*, *imperial*, and *colonial* carelessly appear in texts written about Catalonia as though they represent commonly accepted facts, e.g., 'the Catalans held a Mediterranean *empire*.' However, the casual application of such terms fails to acknowledge their full implications.

In his article, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," J.N. Hillgarth¹ argues against the use of the term, *empire*, claiming that it does not describe the reality of the situation experienced by Catalonia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Hillgarth's article, unique in its attempts to understand and clarify the terminology that describes the principality, strikes at the heart of the issue, calls into question the validity of such common terms, and provides an opportunity for further investigation into the nature of the Catalan expansion.

¹ J. N. Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," *The English Historical Review* (London: Longman, 1975)

Introduction

The terms, *colonialism* and *colonialist*² are most commonly employed to describe the invasive and acquisitive foreign policies of Western powers³ as early as Spain's conquest of the New World in the sixteenth century. *Colonialism* is understood to be a foreign policy which elevates a host nation above a territory through military domination. Within this relationship the host uses the subjugated territory for economic gain and political power, implementing various methods of dependency ruler-ship over the territory to insure a strong connection between host and subject. Although *colonialism* is most often associated with descriptions of nations in the modern era, the term is often used to describe the Crown of Aragon and its systematic expansion into the Western Mediterranean Islands during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

It is not hard to understand the appearance of the terms *colonialism* and *colonialist* in the scholarship of Catalonia's expansion. On a superficial level, the Catalan expansion does strike a number of similar chords with the Western colonial powers. The location of the kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula gave the Catalonians the opportunity to extend their hegemony throughout the Mediterranean. Confronted with the unsettling reality that there was no more continental land that they could acquire⁴ without encroaching upon the Kingdom of Castile-Leon, the Crown of Aragon, powered by the

² As defined "A political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world... The purposes of colonialism included economic exploitation of the colony's natural resources, creation of new markets for the colonizer, and extension of the colonizer's way of life beyond its national borders." Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica Online. e.d., s.v. "Colonialism, Western."
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/126237/colonialism>. (accessed March 14, 2011)

³ This is a reference to Early Modern and Modern Colonialist States, like England, Holland, or France.

⁴ The Treaty of Cazorla (1179) divided the peninsulas Muslim territories between Aragon and Castile. *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael E. Gerli (New York: Routledge, 2003), s.v. "Prelude to Alarcos."

Catalans,⁵ began to expand its borders using the Mediterranean as its medium for conquest. The subjugation of vast areas of the Mediterranean world through conquest has prompted many historians to use the term, *colonialism*, as a defining attribute of the Catalan expansion.

Following the precedent set by Hillgarth, I will examine the validity of the term *colonialism* when describing the Catalan expansion of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In order to provide a coherent assessment, I will examine the conquest of four Mediterranean territories, Majorca, Valencia, Sicily, and Sardinia, using them as case studies to determine if Catalonia's expansionist tendencies warrant the distinction of *colonialist* traits.⁶

Sources

*The Grand Catalan Chronicles*⁷ are the foundations for the study of Catalan expansionism during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁸ These sources are

⁵ The Kingdom of Aragon-Catalonia is often viewed as a single cohesive unit, however the Aragonese and the Catalans considered themselves distinct and individual societies held together only through politics. The duality of the kingdom can be seen in the difference of title given to their common ruler: each society used their own linguistic translation of the king's name; thus King Pedro III of Aragon was also known as Pere II Count of Catalonia. The king's generational suffix, i.e. Pedro III of Aragon is also Pere II of Catalonia, also belies the separateness of the two groups. This manifestation of duality in the king's appellation can cause a lack of clarity; so for simplicity's sake; this essay will use the Catalan nomenclature. In addition, Catalonia will be synonymous with Aragon-Catalonia when addressing the Crown as a whole. This choice is a reflection of my agreement with the suggestion it was the Catalans who were the true engine behind the Crown's territorial expansion. See Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 3.

⁶ To provide a comprehensive discussion, this essay examines the reigns of Jaume I and Pere II, spending less time on Jaume II, and briefly touching on Alfons II.

⁷ The following texts make up the Chronicles: Bernat Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, Trans. F.L. Critchlow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928); Jaume I King of Aragon, *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon*, Trans. Damian Smith and Helena Buffery (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003); Pedro IV, *Chronicle*, Trans. Mary Hillgarth (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980); Ramón Muntaner, *The Catalan Expedition to the East: from the Chronicle of Ramon Muntaner*, (Barcelona: Barcino; Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2006)

inherently biased, as they were written to serve the needs of the Crown of Aragon and reflect the sentiments of its authors, who were not impartial on the subjects being discussed. However, the *Grand Catalan Chronicles* are an indispensable resource for constructing a successful argument about the nature of the Crown of Aragon. In addition, the contemporary history of the Crown of Aragon, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*,⁹ remains a vital support.

Modes of Conquest

Because of the connection of this topic to the geographical features of Europe, the role of nature in the greater narrative of the Catalan expansion must be acknowledged. Fernand Braudel first developed this idea with his theory of macro-history.¹⁰ Instead of viewing the Mediterranean Sea as a barrier working in concert with the Pyrenees to separate the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of the continent. Braudel viewed the sea as a vital connecting thread and an active force rather than a passive one in the territorial expansion of the Catalans. Braudel wrote, "Mediterranean life is such a powerful force that when compelled by necessity it can break through the obstacles imposed by hostile terrain."¹¹ Through conquests in the Mediterranean, the Catalans transformed the Mediterranean into a "liquid asset," employing it as a vital "source of wealth," and

⁸ This investigation will draw on the Chronicles of King Jaume I, Bernat Desclot, and Ramon Muntaner; the *Chronicle* of Pedro IV may receive reference, however its focus falls outside this paper's timeframe.

⁹ Lynn H. Nelson Trans., *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña: A Fourteenth-Century Official History of the Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991)

¹⁰ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean: and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

¹¹ Ibid.

exchange.¹² For example, the geographic location of the Balearic Islands made them a perfect maritime trade hub between the Latin West, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Islamic Maghreb. Documents in the cathedral archive in Barcelona refer to regular commercial interactions between the Balearic Islands and Barcelona prior to the conquest of Jaume I.¹³ From an economic standpoint, exerting their control over Mallorca and incorporating its extensive trade, could only benefit the Catalans.

In order to take advantage of the connective capacity of the Mediterranean Sea, the Catalans required a fleet capable of both maritime trading and naval force. The Barcelona Navigation Act of 1227,¹⁴ and Improvement of Harbor Facilities in Barcelona, 1243,¹⁵ are examples of King Jaume I's initiative to create a formidable presence in the Mediterranean for the benefit of the principality. Perhaps the greatest contribution to the Catalan maritime exchange was King Jaume I's creation of the *Consulat del Mar* in 1258.¹⁶ The *Consulat del Mar* was imbued with the power to provide defense, make improvements on its ports, hear maritime cases, and regulate imports, exports, and customs. In addition to the presence of a strong civilian fleet, the Catalans boasted a

¹² Silva O. Busch, *Medieval Mediterranean ports: the Catalan and Tuscan Coasts, 1100 to 1235* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), IX.

¹³ David Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium: The Catalan Kingdom of Majorca*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107.

¹⁴ Provided economic protection and regulation for merchants involved in maritime exchange. See Roy C. Cave & Herbert H. Coulson, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History* (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1965), 156-157.

¹⁵ Provided regulation for construction and maintenance of maritime trade infrastructure. See Cave and Coulson, *Medieval Economic History*, 158-159.

¹⁶ Stanley S. Jados, *Consulate of the Sea and Related Documents* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975).

formidable and well-organized naval force,¹⁷ which played a central role during Catalonia's numerous conquests, thanks to its admirals such as Roger of Lauria, who "never lost a single naval engagement, despite being significantly outnumbered on several occasions."¹⁸ Thus, with its superior navy, which thrived off the quantity of spoils gained through victory, Catalonia had a dominating presence in the Mediterranean.¹⁹

In addition to its naval developments, Catalonia's military expansion on land experienced unrivaled success, swelling the principality's borders with the accumulation of new land titles throughout the Mediterranean. The foundation of this powerful military came from its rigid organization, which compartmentalized the force into specialized units.²⁰ The primary van²¹ for instance, was made up of Aragonese knights²² who were generally mounted and heavily armored and provided an initial shock to the attack. A cavalry strike "could often decide the battle," as its "effect on the foot soldiers could be devastating owing to the impetus, position, and protection which the horse provided the

¹⁷ "[Pere II] had to pay for this enterprise by levying new taxes and – and extraordinary measure – selling salt mines." Lawrence V. Mott, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean: the Catalan-Aragonese Fleet in the War of the Sicilian Vespers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 25.

¹⁸ "One of the most competent and underrated admirals in the annals of naval warfare." Mott, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean*, 2.

¹⁹ Muntaner, *The Catalan Expedition to the East*.

²⁰ For further analysis see Paul Douglas Humphries, "Of Arms and Men": Siege and Battle Tactics in the Catalan Grand Chronicles (1208-1387)," (*Military Affairs* v.49 (1985): 6), 174.

²¹ The company of soldiers at the front and center of a force. See Ibid.

²² These knights were often contracted to participate in battle in return for spoils, or were obligated to participate as a duty to their vassal lord.

knight.”²³ Essential as the Aragonese cavalry was, however, it was the Catalan military’s unique light infantry units that were the engines behind its success.²⁴

These soldiers that are called Almogavars are men who live for naught save only warfare, and they dwell not in towns nor in cities but in mountains and in the forests. And they fight continually with the Saracens and make forays within their land for a day or two, pillaging and taking many Saracens captive, and likewise their goods whereby they live. And they suffer many hardships such as other men could scarce endure. And at times they pass two full days, if need be, without food and they eat of the herbs of the field, and this they do without harm to themselves. ...And these men are exceedingly strong and are swift to flee or pursue, and they are Catalans and Aragonese and Saracens.²⁵

Traditionally, *colonialist* states relied upon the strength of their military and governmental institutions to insure dominance over a holding. While these elements are common attributes of the modern *colonial* state, they do not define *colonialism*; they only help describe the policies of an expanding state. The evidence provided by the *Grand Catalan Chronicles* shows that the Catalans had a powerful military force, both land-based and naval. Along with this military capability, the Crown’s government created institutions like the *Consulat del Mar* to help maintain and mediate the principality’s expansion. The creation of a strong navy and the foundation of maritime administrative institutions were undertaken as a way for the Catalans to take advantage of the impetus for expansion provided by the Mediterranean. As a result, these institutions were employed as a way to maintain and protect the Catalan’s overseas territories. In the case of Catalonia, the appearance of these elements does not provide sufficient evidence to warrant the term *colonialism*, it only helps describe the nature of Catalonia’s expansion.

²³ Warfare tactics of the time preordained that these orchestrated shock attacks often rendered little success, as it was common to fight “shock with shock.” Humphries, “Of Arms and Men”: Siege and Battle Tactics in the Catalan Grand Chronicles (1208-1387),” 175.

²⁴ *The Grand Catalan Chronicles* include a number of detailed accounts of ‘superhuman’ feats of arms. See Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 98-99 and Chapter XXXI.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

Conquests of King Jaume I:²⁶ Majorca and Valencia

Case Study One: Majorca²⁷

In 1229, King Jaume I (1213-1276) invaded the island kingdom of Majorca, one of the last bastions of Muslim power bordering the Latin West. Jaume I's military power and nautical aptitude were manifestations of his crusading legacy²⁸ as corroborated by the king's own memoir, *The Book of Deeds*. Pere I, Jaume I's father, had previously conceived of the Majorcan expedition, and had even made strides to receive a papal grant of crusade.²⁹ His untimely death during the Albigensian Crusade³⁰ enabled Jaume I to take up his father's project and exert his power over new territory in the name of the True Faith. Such a crusade would win the king favor within the Christian World, and bring the king closer to God through the act of violent struggle against the infidel population of Mallorca.³¹ Furthermore, under the banner of crusade, King Jaume I would be able to demonstrate that he was a decisive and capable warrior king, a quality held in high regard during this time, and an issue which he addressed before the *Cort*.³²

²⁶ Jaume I also conquered Murcia in 1266, but returned it to his son-in-law, Alfonso X of Castile, whose forces had been overrun a rebellion of Muslims inhabitants. A significant number of the subsequent Christian settlers of Murcia came from the lands of Jaume I.

²⁷ Mallorca will be used to reference the island unless in a direct quote. Majorca will be used in the context of the kingdom, both Muslim and Catalan. For a discussion of nomenclature see Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium*, XIX.

²⁸ In the name of Christianity, Jaume I's grandfather, Alfonso I, the Battler, conquered vast territories in the Muslim South of the peninsula.

²⁹ Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium*, 7.

³⁰ *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael E. Gerli (New York: Routledge, 2003), s.v., "Albigensian Crusade, The."

³¹ "The worthy King [Jaume], wishing to emulate his predecessors, began to wage war against the Saracens... his intention of destroying the Saracen nation and converting it to the faith of the Cross... it was agreed here that King [Jaume] should go to the Kingdom of Mallorca, and wrest it from the hands of the Saracens." Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 64.

³² Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 70-71.

To suggest religious motivations as the sole explanation for this conquest oversimplifies its dynamic quality. *The Book of Deeds* makes known that the economic value of the Balearics strongly informed Jaume I's decision. Taking control of this Western Mediterranean maritime trade hub would greatly increase the worth of the king and his subjects.³³ The Balearics, which lay a short distance from the Iberian coast, acted as an essential trading post between the Latin and Muslim worlds, and trade between the Catalans and the islands had been common prior to the Catalan invasion. Aside from the inherent geographical trade advantage of the Balearics, the conquest would provide essential wealth to the king and his vassals through property acquisitions and the inevitable spoils of war. The economic motivation of the invasion is further supported by the nobility's desire to contract an accord with Jaume I that would divide and distribute gained wealth fairly to the participating nobility.³⁴ This accord demonstrated not only the level of investment in the conquest by the nobility, but more importantly, demonstrated that the economic value of the conquest was not a secret.

Jaume I's victory over Muslim Mallorca fulfilled both of the conquest's objectives: the successful defeat of the infidel Muslims and the introduction of the True Faith, which placed Majorca under the direct rule of the House of Aragon. However, the reality of the situation was certainly much different than these banner objectives suggest. There were three aspects of the post-war period in Mallorca that must be considered. First, because of the scale and violence of the conquest, Jaume I introduced a harsh policy of reprisal against the Muslims who had participated in the defense of the island or

³³ Ibid, 70.

³⁴ Ibid, 79.

those who did not accept the Catalan rule: they were to be imprisoned, enslaved, or slaughtered.³⁵ However those who willingly accepted the authority of Jaume I were treated with mercy and allowed to live within the territory in semi-freedom.³⁶ Although King Jaume I offered mercy for willing recognition of his authority, this policy marked the end of Mallorca's Muslim vitality; Mallorca quickly became a predominantly Christian territory containing a negligible Muslim minority.³⁷ This harsh policy also set precedent for the remaining Balearic Islands, which would be included in Jaume I's Majorcan kingdom with minimal effort.³⁸ Second, was the repartition of wealth and property following the victory that not only helped strengthen Jaume I's relationship with his vassals, but also helped to re-populate and revitalize the wounded territory. By distributing half of the gained land to the participating nobles, per the contractual obligation of the accord, Jaume I insured continued investment in the territory. With the remaining 'royal half,' Jaume I attempted to draw settlers to the island, offering his own share as incentive.³⁹ Jaume I's outreach to settlers was extended to both Christians and Jews, which furthered the diminishment of a Muslim presence in Majorca. Finally, Jaume I mandated that the new territory would be included in his territory, but not as part of the Crown of Aragon. This is seen in the separation of Majorca in the king's titles.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid, 130.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium*, 31.

³⁸ He famously forced Menorca's ruler into a peace accord by the use of evening campfires to suggest that a large Christian had landed and was preparing for war. See Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 131.

³⁹ J.N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250-1516: Volume I 1250-1410, Precarious Balance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 27.

⁴⁰ "The noble [Jaume], by grace of God, King of Aragon, and of Majorca, and of Valencia, Count of Barcelona and of Urgell." The title of Majorca is not incorporated into Jaume I's title of King of Aragon, remaining a separate entity. Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 381.

Case Study Two: Valencia

In 1238, the Catalans led an attack against the Muslim city-state of Valencia. Much like the conquest of Majorca, Valencia offered King Jaume I an opportunity to further his aims of expansion through religious crusade.⁴¹ King Alfonso I established the policy of Catalan re-conquest of the Muslim south, having invaded and conquered the Muslim territories around Valencia, yet Valencia itself had not been conquered and remained a Muslim land, a fact that was exploited by Hugh de Forcalquier in an attempt to sway Jaume I's decision for conquest.⁴² *The Book of Deeds* implies that the expedition against Valencia was based on crusade ideology, a policy of expansion begun by Jaume I's predecessors.

The crusade against Valencia (1232-1245) concluded with a treaty of peace between the Muslim King Zayyan and Jaume I. After years of bitter warfare, it was clear that Valencia could not continue to defend itself against the relentless forces of Jaume I. To prevent any more harm to the Muslim population, King Zayyan proposed surrender to Jaume I on the condition that no Muslim would be mistreated or separated from personal wealth.⁴³ In return, the Muslims were required to vacate their properties within the city,

⁴¹ For further analysis see Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 139 sect. 129 footnote 8. The "project of the conquest of Valencia," predated the conquest of Majorca. Included in this analysis is a reference to the Vatican's involvement with the conquest, which was declared a crusade by pope Gregory IX. Also See Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 123 endnote 257. "Operations against Valencia began in 1232, when pope Gregory IX granted its conquest the status of a crusade, and Jaume and his men took the customary crusader oath."

⁴² "Might you and we not begin something over here, in this Kingdom of Valencia, which has always stood before you as a frontier to your lineage, and which they have always struggled to conquer and never been able to gain." Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 137.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 228.

and move into Valencia's surrounding districts, where they could live as renters from their new Christian landlords.⁴⁴ Those Muslims who wished, and had the means to flee were given the opportunity to do so without fear of aggression. Those who could not afford to leave were assimilated into Jaume I's kingdom as his direct subjects, and lived alongside the Christian and Jewish settlers.⁴⁵ Jaume I had succeeded in his ambitions to attain the Kingdom of Valencia, however the Muslims' conditional surrender was at odds with the wishes of Jaume I's nobles.⁴⁶ The redistribution of seized land and property of the district of Valencia was initially modeled after the repartition of wealth in Majorca⁴⁷ and was intended to repay the nobles for their loyalty, but the guaranteed protection of Muslim wealth⁴⁸ meant the lost possibility of distributing wealth to satisfy the nobles and of recouping the money spent to fund the war. Unlike the spoils of war, land could not easily be converted into tangible wealth. Even after the distribution of land,⁴⁹ the resettlement of the kingdom by Christians had little success, and for centuries Valencia retained a Muslim majority.⁵⁰

Jaume I's motivations to conquer Majorca and Valencia were heavily influenced by his desire to continue the crusade. However, they also reflected the need to provide income and honor for the Crown. Both Majorca and Valencia were economically

⁴⁴ Olivia R. Constable, *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 213.

⁴⁵ See Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 228, Footnote 103.

⁴⁶ "The nobles were again furious because [Jaume I] had taken the city without their help, without an opportunity for battle or plunder, and increased his own power at their expense." Ibid, 229 footnote 105.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 231 and 233.

⁴⁸ Christians who violated the agreement were harshly punished. Ibid, 230.

⁴⁹ Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 216.

⁵⁰ Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 28.

valuable, bringing significant domestic and export value to the Crown. The Balearics' economic significance derived from the role they played as a trading hub and bridge to Islamic North Africa, as well as from their salt and silver mines.⁵¹ Although their production of raw materials for export was not fully developed, "The Majorcans... undoubtedly drew much wealth from the exploitation of the salt-pans of Ibiza."⁵² Valencia was an agricultural center that produced a variety of crops consumed throughout the kingdom and in foreign markets, "[Valencian merchants] might trade across the Mediterranean... in the rice and luxury fruits ... that [this] region produced."⁵³ The agricultural innovations brought to the kingdom from the Islamic world⁵⁴ helped Valencia produce water-intensive crops, like rice, almonds, figs, olive oil, and wine. This agricultural bounty was acknowledged by Jaume I's Charter of Peace with the territory, which included a detailed description of Valencia's agricultural capacities and proposed taxation.⁵⁵ In addition to its agricultural worth, Valencia had a developed textile industry which produced cloth, silk, handicrafts, and paper for export.⁵⁶ By conquering "ports of great importance in the Balearic Isles and the Muslim Kingdom of Valencia," Catalonia had become a Mediterranean power.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ibid, 33-40.

⁵² David Abulafia, *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean, 1100-1500* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1993), XI 198.

⁵³ Ibid, XI 198.

⁵⁴ Ibid, III 120.

⁵⁵ Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 214.

⁵⁶ Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 33-40.

⁵⁷ Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 17.

With the conquests of Majorca and Valencia, King Jaume I gained possession of economically valuable territories, as well as the opportunity to extend the reach of Catalan hegemony. Yet the evidence suggests that the conquered lands of Majorca and Valencia did not constitute *colonialist* holdings. Jaume I's decision to keep the Kingdom of Majorca separate from the greater Catalan principality meant that the conquered territory retained its independence. Jaume I did not view Majorca as subservient, but rather as a sovereign territory capable of increasing his own power. Although incorporated into the king's titles, Valencia maintained independence through distinct law codes, separate from the Aragonese. Had these conquered territories been viewed as *colonial* holdings, they would not have retained the independence and individuality provided for them by Jaume I.

Conquest of Pere II⁵⁸

Case Study Three: Sicily

To explain the Catalan presence on the Island of Sicily, it is necessary to understand prior events. Catalan control over the island kingdom came after the outbreak of the War of the Sicilian Vespers,⁵⁹ a conflict begun by the revolt of the Sicilians⁶⁰ against French occupation, and the brutal unjust rule of Charles of Anjou.⁶¹ The

⁵⁸ Pere II was the son of King Jaume I, and ruled the kingdom from 1276 to 1285.

⁵⁹ 1282

⁶⁰ The revolt was provoked by a company of French soldier that "came towards the noble ladies and laid their hands upon their breasts..." and raised a hand against the noblemen who came to the women's defense. See Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 37.

⁶¹ For list of grievances against Charles of Anjou and justification for popular revolt against French occupation see Ibid, 53.

communities of Sicily agreed to expel the French by means of force. Rallying behind the cry of "Death! Death! Death! to the wicked Frenchman,"⁶² the Sicilian rebels slaughtered thousands of French.⁶³ Additionally, the Sicilians sent Pere II a request for intervention,⁶⁴ citing Pere II's natural lordship over Sicily through blood.⁶⁵ At the outbreak of the revolt, Pere II was on an expedition in North Africa,⁶⁶ an effort to place the Catalans within striking distance of the Island of Sicily.⁶⁷ Pere II's ties to Sicily made an intervention on the island justifiable,⁶⁸ and the revolt provided an opportunity to extend Catalan power. King Pere II's arrival on the island began an extended period of conflict between the Catalans, France and the Vatican⁶⁹ over the true lordship of the island.⁷⁰ As a result of the

⁶² Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 39.

⁶³ "The total number of French slaughtered in all parts of Sicily at this time is estimated at no less than twenty thousand persons." See Ibid, 39, Footnote 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 50.

⁶⁵ "Pedro's right to Sicily was through his wife, Constanza, daughter of Manfred of Sicily (1258-1266)." Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 72, Footnote 285.

⁶⁶ "The King of Aragon had gathered his armies at the port of Tortosa to go to Alcoll and to Constantina, no man could learn from the King what he was about to do or where they were to go, for this secrete was guarded with great jealousy, thereof no man knew save only the King." Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 37. Also see 51, Footnote 2.

⁶⁷ Pope Martin IV declined Pere II's crusade request in North Arica corroborates this notion. "I thought not that a King of so feeble strength could have crossed over into Barbary nor undertaken so great a feat of arms... moreover, inasmuch as the King hath failed from the beginning to make known to me his venture, he shall have no aid from me now." Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 48.

⁶⁸ "His position certainly put him within a short distance of Sicily. This is probably why Martin IV refused [Pere's] request for crusading indulgences and money after arriving in the Maghreb. While [Pere] was not making any progress in his crusade, neither were his men lacking or supplies. The expedition to the Maghreb may have been genuine, but it also put [Pere] in an excellent position to intervene swiftly in Sicily if the opportunity presented itself." Mott, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean*, 26.

⁶⁹ Martin IV was a Frenchman and an ally of Charles of Anjou- Charles, who had helped Martin IV ascend to the seat of power in the Vatican.

⁷⁰ "The King of Aragon doth speak to thee and doth command us to say to thee that thou deliver over to him the Kingdom of Sicily which is his land and the land of his sons and which thou hast held most wrongfully, under thy sway. And the people of Sicily who are grievously oppressed by thy rule have sought

conflict, Pope Martin IV excommunicated Pere II, stripped him of his titles and honors, and placed his entire realm under ecclesiastical control. Martin IV also ratified an indulgence absolving sins in return for participation in a crusade against the Catalan leader.⁷¹

Unlike Jaume I's conquest, the Catalans did not conquer a 'native' population as a way to bring the territory into their domain. Instead they fought the French overlords. As the natural lord of the island, King Pere II is believed to have played an active role in fomenting the popular revolt against Charles of Anjou.⁷² King Pere II risked his authority and the well-being of his subjects⁷³ to incorporate Sicily, the vital producer and exporter of essential cereals, to the growing Western Mediterranean territories. Cities like Barcelona and Ciutat Mallorca were reliant on the grain, which helped fill the disparity between production and demand.⁷⁴ Such imports did not solve the problem of feeding growing populations, but they did ease agricultural pressure. Sicily's grain production and export was a major asset which the Catalans could translate into greater power and wealth through trade.

Like Jaume I's decision to maintain Majorca as an independent kingdom, Pere II incorporated only the title of the Sardinian kingdom into his own holdings, using the

the aid of the King of Aragon. Wherefore, the King desireth to save them, as he would his own people of his realm." Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 69.

⁷¹ Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 78-79.

⁷² "There can be no doubt that the [North African] expedition was ultimately directed against Charles of Anjou's Kingdom of Naples and Sicily." Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 253.

⁷³ "On 21 March 1283 Martin IV had formally deposed Pere II as a rebel against the papacy, the overlord of Sicily. He urged Philippe III of France to invade Pere's realm as those of a deposed enemy of the church. Philippe's younger son, Charles of Valois, was named King of Aragon by the Pope, Jaume II of Majorca now had an excuse to ally himself with France against his brother and overlord." Ibid, 254-255.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 105.

island's heritage and tradition to bolster his own power. Pere II believed that a separate and equal Kingdom of Sardinia made his position as king more powerful. Thus, the territorial equality of this land contradicts the subservient nature inherent in *colonialism*.

Conquest of Alfons II and Jaume II

Majorca Continued

It is important to understand the dynamics of the kingdom after the death of Jaume I. Shortly after assuming the crown of Aragon-Catalonia, Pere II, disregarded his father's wishes, and forced his brother, Jaume of Majorca, into an agreement of fealty and homage to him and his heirs.⁷⁵ During the Catalan intervention in the War of the Sicilian Vespers, Jaume of Majorca, who believed such an accord was unjust, failed to provide his brother with the aid required by the agreement. In addition to this breach of agreement, Jaume of Majorca gave his support to the King of France and Charles of Anjou, enemies of Pere II, as a way to strike back at his brother.⁷⁶ Jaume of Majorca gave Pere II just cause for actions against the Kingdom of Majorca.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 124, Footnote 274.

⁷⁶ "I am so aggrieved at the wrongs which my brother hath done me that I will answer thee forthwith and without further parley. I now declare that I do hereby give over to thee my whole realm and all my sovereignty on sea and land, and that thou mayest do and say and command within my Kingdom even as within thine own." Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 228.

⁷⁷ "Whensoever the ruler of Catalunya, count of Barcelona shall for any cause be assailed by his enemies or when he shall make attack upon his enemies...and when the said ruler, count of Barcelona, shall have need for aid and shall have called upon the men of his land for help...then all men...who are of age and able to combat, as soon soever as they have heard the warning or beheld the signal fires, shall hasten to his aid as speedily as thy may be able. And if any man should fail to bring the aid which he might give him n such warfare, he shall forever forfeit the lands which he holds of the said ruler." Ibid, 236.

Alfons II⁷⁸ ascended to the throne of the Kingdom of Aragon-Catalonia in 1285⁷⁹ in the midst of the dispute with Jaume of Majorca. The aid given to the French was seen as a direct challenge to the crown of Aragon-Catalonia⁸⁰ and a breach of contract between a lord and his vassal, thus, justifying Catalan intervention into the territory.⁸¹ At the time of his death, King Pere II was preparing to sail against his brother, with the “the intent and purpose... to cross over in person with all his host to the Island of Mallorca... and to possess himself by force or favor of that island.”⁸² The death of his father, King Pere II, placed Alfons II at the head of the expedition to regain hegemony over the rebellious island kingdom. The *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña* places Alfons II in Mallorca, having successfully “wrested the Kingdom from his uncle,” when he learned about the death of his father, the king. Except for a minor expedition to the Island of Menorca, “to follow in the praiseworthy footsteps of his predecessors,”⁸³ the action against Jaume of Majorca represented the extent of Alfons II’s overseas expansion. Although Alfons II

⁷⁸ Pere II’s Son.

⁷⁹ Pere II left Alfons II the territories traditionally included in the Kingdom of Aragon-Catalonia. Pere II gave the newly incorporated Kingdom of Sicily to his younger son, Jaume II, wishing for the brothers to rule in collaboration with each other. See Hillgarth, “The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327,” 29.

⁸⁰ Jaume of Majorca supported the King of France in the Crusade against Catalonia. “Don [Jaume] his brother had broken the covenants agreed upon by them both, whereof... and had dealt treacherously with him...” Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 374.

⁸¹ See Previous quote. Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, 236.

⁸² Ibid, 373.

⁸³ Alfons II successfully expelled the remaining Muslim population. Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 87.

was not the dominant force for overseas expansion that his father and grandfather were, his significant contributions to the principality took place from within.⁸⁴

Case Study Four: Sicily Continued and Sardinia

After the death of Alfons II, King Jaume II⁸⁵ of Sicily (1291-1327) took power of Catalonia and incorporated Sicily into the holdings of Aragon. During his reign over the Catalan principality, King Jaume II attempted to consolidate the crown's power and form a cohesive Catalan territory. To this end, the king was obligated to re-establish various relationships that had previously been strained, most importantly Catalonia's relationship with the Vatican. On 20 June 1295, Jaume II and representatives of the Roman Pontiff, Pope Boniface VIII, signed the Peace Treaty of Anagni, a document that mandated the Catalan "abandonment of Sicily to the papacy"⁸⁶ and the return of Majorca to Jaume II's uncle, Jaume of Majorca, to be held "as a vassal of Aragon."⁸⁷ In return, Boniface VIII promised Jaume II, "the renunciation by France of the papal donation of the crown of Aragon to Charles of Valois, and the lifting of papal censures on that crown and its subjects," as well as the "solemn investiture of the title of the Kingdoms of Sardinia and Corsica."⁸⁸ Although Jaume II was unable to maintain direct control over Sicily, the

⁸⁴ Alfons II's major contributions to the kingdom came from his ability to prevent a schism within the kingdom lead by Aragonese nobles against the Catalan state. See Ibid, 126, Footnote 319.

⁸⁵ Pere II's second son.

⁸⁶ Jaume II also became a Vassal of the Pope, and was made to wage war Federico, the newly selected Catalan King of Sicily.

⁸⁷ Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 30.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

island remained within the Catalan sphere of influence.⁸⁹ The acquisition of Sardinia and Corsica in 1297 represented the last major territorial addition to the Catalan principality.⁹⁰ Although the incorporation of these central Mediterranean islands came at the expense of the crown's control over Sicily, they were significant gains for the Catalans, and represented a step toward greater Catalan hegemony.

The bounty of Sardinia was well known to the Catalans before the island's acquisition and, like Sicily, Sardinia was a common destination for Catalan and Majorcan merchants. This fertile Mediterranean island, like Sicily, produced large quantities of grain, which were exported throughout the Mediterranean.⁹¹ In addition to grain, Sardinia had valuable quantities of salt, coral, and silver, which were in high demand by the Catalans.⁹² With generous economic privileges, Sardinia provided Catalan merchants an opportunity to earn vast personal wealth.⁹³ Soon after acquiring Sardinia, the Catalans established an "administrative and commercial monopoly" and a "system of taxation based on that of Catalonia" and imposed a monetary system exclusive to Catalonia.⁹⁴ Catalonia's commercial interest in Sardinia transformed the island's economy through exploitation of its natural resources.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ In accordance with his agreement with Pope Boniface VIII, Jaume II relinquished political power over Sicily in 1295, however, Federico, Jaume I's younger brother, retained the crown of Sicily.

⁹⁰ To obtain the title of Sardinia, the Catalans were required to vanquish the Pisan overlords.

⁹¹ See, Busch, *Medieval Mediterranean Ports*, 20. Also Abulafia, *Commerce and Conquest*, I 6, VII 61.

⁹² Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 46.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 35.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

⁹⁵ Abulafia, *Commerce and Conquest*, 2.

The evidence yielded in the study of the Sardinian acquisition is the most controversial of the four case studies. Much of the evidence appears to point to Sardinia as a true *colonialist* holding. Thus the application of the terms, *colonialism*, and *colonialist*, to describe Catalonia's expansion would be justified. Because of this, the acquisition of Sardinia seems to diminish the validity of this paper's argument, because it contradicts Catalonia's previous expansion policies. However, the Sardinian acquisition should not be considered a definitive act of *colonialism*. As proffered by name and title, Jaume II did not abandon his predecessors' expansionist policies and the Kingdom of Sardinia remained a semi-independent kingdom held under the House of Aragon. Thus, Sardinia, like Majorca, Valencia, and Sicily, defines Catalonia as expansionist, denying credence to the terms, *colonialist*, or *colonialism*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, each conquered territory provided an essential element for continued success of the House of Aragon. Valencia, Sicily, and Sardinia produced vital corps for the survival of the growing population, while Majorca and Catalonia's prominent maritime exchange granted access to the world market. The territories provided opportunity for the merchants of the kingdom to gain wealth. In return for their cooperation with the principality, merchants were often granted privileged access to the Catalan trading market.⁹⁶ However, the recipients of privileges became tied to future obligations, which limited their freedom.⁹⁷ Often, the value of a territory was not understood throughout the kingdom. For example, the Aragonese nobility was "only

⁹⁶ Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 35.

⁹⁷ Abulafia, *Commerce and Conquest* XI 186.

interested in expansion by land” often withholding their assistance to “any enterprise of which they could not see the direct profit.”⁹⁸ The Mediterranean Islands’ values were not only economic; their strategic importance was emphasized by the Catalans.⁹⁹ King Jaume I understood the interdependence of his territories, and hoped that the fraternal bonds between Pere II and Jaume of Majorca would be strong enough to tie the kingdoms together in cooperative harmony.¹⁰⁰

The 1250 iteration of Jaume I’s will split the Crown of Aragon into three parts, giving equal portion to each of his sons. Alfons, the eldest, was to receive Aragon, Pere II, Catalonia and Valencia, and Jaume, Majorca.¹⁰¹ By partitioning his land among his legitimate heirs, Jaume I demonstrated unprecedented equality, and showed that the sum of his kingdoms was not greater than any individual kingdom.¹⁰² This policy was continued by Pere II and Alfons II, who wished to maintain a separation between the Kingdoms of Aragon and Sicily.¹⁰³ The rejection of primogeniture by Jaume I, Pere II and Alfons II gives clear evidence that the conquered territories were not viewed as subservient holdings intended only to enrich the Kingdom of Aragon or the County of Barcelona. Each was an equal contributor to the greater success of the House of Aragon.

⁹⁸ Hillgarth, “The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327,” 3.

⁹⁹ Ibid , 46.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, 124, Footnote 274.

¹⁰¹ Jaume I, *The Book of Deeds*, 379, footnote 221.

¹⁰² With the premature death of Alfons, an egalitarian partition of territory was no longer feasible, and the Catalonia and Valencia added to the territory of the Kingdom of Aragon, while the Kingdom of Majorca received the lands of Southern France.

¹⁰³ “... The wills of his father and brother, which had declared the separation of Aragon and Sicily.” Hillgarth, “The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327,” 30.

Their incorporation into the House of Aragon was meant to raise the status of those who claimed rule over the land. For Jaume I, Pere II, and Alfons II, power came from control over kingdoms with equal status to the Kingdom of Aragon.¹⁰⁴ This is perhaps the most fundamental distinction between the Crown of Aragon during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and a colonial power. *Colonialism* describes power gained through the dominance of a conquered territory, which is made to be dependent on its host. To say that Jaume I's rejection of primogenitor was his greatest error,¹⁰⁵ is to transpose the modern ideal of an expansionist power onto a thirteenth century reality, and to misunderstands the king's vision for his kingdom, a vision that was emulated by his successors.

In Hillgarth's critical analysis, the term, *empire*, is used as a way to describe the extended power of the Catalan principality, and is rooted in his assessment of the available data on the subject. He concludes that the evidence, which informs the application of terminology, is too circumstantial to facilitate such a weighted term.¹⁰⁶ Although the criticism of terminology seems to distract from the real goal of an historian, the historian is reliant on the terminology to correctly describe a conclusion. In this sense,

¹⁰⁴ This can be seen in the enumeration the king's of separate titles, e.g. Pere III king of Aragon, of Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia and Corsica. And count of Barcelona, Roussillon and Cerdagne. Pedro IV, *Chronicle*.

¹⁰⁵ See "Errors of Jaume's Reign." Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 250.

¹⁰⁶ "The theories advanced in recent year to account for the rise of Catalonia-Aragon and for the Catalan expansion into the Mediterranean suffer from the imbalance between the relatively rich political evidence and far poorer economic sources. They also often attempt to make out Catalan policy as far more consistent than it was. Successive Kings of Aragon pursued different policies and different policies were followed by the same ruler at different periods. Few clear general policies can be discerned historians are apt to seize on the rare occasion when general aims are stated in the contemporary sources and use these statements to explain the policies of a long reign or a series of reigns, without considering the context in which the statements were made." Hillgarth, "The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229-1327," 2.

Hillgarth's criticism serves a greater purpose, providing a catalyst to further scrutinize the implementation of charged phraseology.

Following the example set by Hillgarth, this essay examined Catalonia's Mediterranean expansion to determine if it fits the characteristics of a *colonialist* state. In this investigation, I observed the conquests of the Western Mediterranean lands, as described by Catalan protagonists, in order to draw a conclusion about the common application of the term *colonialist*. As individual case studies, the conquests provided vital information about the principality's motivation for expansion, and what the incorporated territory meant to the kingdom. Using this method, it is clear that similar elements define the term *colonialism*, and describe Catalan expansion. Yet it would not be prudent to ignore the discrepancies. The conquests of Majorca, Valencia, Sicily, and Sardinia all represent Catalonia's substantial expansion of power, however, the evidence shows that this project of expansion does not signify *colonialist* tendencies. Thus Catalonia's expansion should not be described as *colonialism*. The evidence shows that to use the term, *colonial*, forces Catalonia's foreign policy into a definition that it does not properly fit.

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