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Document Summary

Field	Details
Document type	Royal mandate / prohibitory letter
Issuer	Joan I of Aragon
Addressee	Count of Empúries (<i>caro consanguineo</i>) and his officials, their lieutenants, and deputies
Date	April 19, 1387
Place of issue	Barcelona
Language	Latin
Scribe / Chancery notation	Francesc ça Costa (vice-chancellor)
Subject	Prohibition of the illicit arming of a galiot in the maritime territories of the County of Empúries (Tossa [?] / Cadaqués and other coastal places), and mandate to the Count and his officials to prevent the same, under penalty of royal wrath and legal proceedings

Reconciled Transcription

Johannes rex. Egregio Comiti Impuriarum nostro caro consanguineo, dilectis et fidelibus suis officialibus et eorum locatenentibus et quibuslibet ipsorum. Salutem et dileccionem. Relatu digno multorum nobis fidedignorum [?] didicimus quod pridem ex locis de Tossa [?] vel Cadaques ac aliis partibus maritimis Comitatus Impuriarum aliquos tam de gente militari quam alios motu temeraria presumptione conantes absque nostro legitimo permissu [fuerunt?] quandam galiotam armare [?] in [/cum] ea aliis [?] genere nacionum dampnosas predas et violencias exercere [?] ut fama refert per quas subditis [nostris?] [dampna?] inferre [possent?] et premissos [?] dei per quos noverint [?] dampna nostro ditioni subiectos [?] se ad actum ponent [?] absque dubio redundare. Nos igitur quibus [?] decet commodis [et?] premissorum [?] in quaque perpetrata [?] utique precaveri singulari cura invigilare [et?] nobis gratum [?] quod

nobis fuisset [?] preservare huiusmodi tempore salubrius ante lesionem providere cupientes [?] vobis et cuilibet vestrum ad quem vel quos ista spectare videantur sub pena nostre ire et indignacionis nostrarum [?] ac penarum contra talia atentantes [impositarum?] iure [et?] usancio [?] ostendi [?] per positas [?] vobis [et dicto domino? [?]] precipiendo mandamus quod dictam galiotam armari non permittatis sed omnino ea prohibeatis si nobis vultis gratum prestare. Et vos tenore presencium inhibemus quod [?] que vobis absque iussu nostro non liceat de[sistatis?] [et si?] ea prohibicionem [non?] feceritis si vero [?] contra vos et bona vestra tanquam contra rem publicam dampnificantes et vetita faventes ac iure prohibitoris transgressores ut ius et ratio statuerit absque dubio procedemus. Datum Barchinone xix die Aprilis Anno a nativitate domini M^o CCC^o LXXXVII^o. Francescus ça Costa.

Annotated English Translation

Joan, king.(1) To the distinguished Count of Empúries,(2) our dear kinsman, and to his beloved and faithful officials and their lieutenants and each one of them. Greeting and love.

By the worthy report of many trustworthy persons(3) we have learned that recently, from the places of Tossa(4) or Cadaqués and other maritime parts of the County of Empúries, certain persons—both of military class and others—moved by rash presumption and attempting, without our legitimate permission,(5) to arm a certain galiot,(6) have undertaken / are undertaking with it to commit harmful raids and acts of violence against people of [various] nations, as rumor reports, through which [raids] they may inflict [damages] upon [our] subjects;(8) and [we have learned] that the aforementioned [acts], as those who perpetrate them should know, undoubtedly redound to damage upon those subject to our dominion.(9)

We therefore, to whom it is fitting to watch over with singular care the interests of our subjects and indeed to guard against the perpetration of the aforementioned [harms], and [to whom] it is pleasing to preserve [the peace] and at this time to provide more wholesomely before injury [occurs],(11) desiring [to act accordingly]—to you and to each of you whom these things are seen to concern, under penalty of our wrath and indignation and of the penalties imposed(12) against those attempting such things, [as set forth] by law and custom,(13) commanding, we mandate that you shall not permit the said galiot to be armed but shall entirely prohibit it, if you wish to render us a pleasing service.(14)

And by the tenor of the present [letters] we further prohibit you(15) [from permitting] those things which are not permitted to you without our command.(16) And if you shall not have carried out this prohibition, [know that] in truth we shall without doubt proceed against you and your goods, as against those damaging the commonwealth(17) and favoring prohibited things and as transgressors of prohibitory law,(18) as law and reason shall determine.

Given at Barcelona, the 19th day of April, in the year of the Lord's birth 1387. Francesc ça Costa.
(19)

Footnotes

1. The intitlatio uses the abbreviated form *Johannes rex* without the full royal style. This is standard for mandates addressed to magnates and their subordinates within the Crown of Aragon.
2. The Count of Empúries at this date was Joan I d'Empúries (d. 1401), a member of a cadet branch of the royal house of Barcelona-Aragon, hence the form of address *caro consanguineo* (dear kinsman). The County of Empúries, encompassing much of the northern Catalan coastline including the ports of Roses, Cadaqués, and other harbors, was a semi-autonomous lordship whose maritime jurisdiction was a recurring source of tension with the crown.
3. The opening formula of the *narratio* is partially damaged or difficult to read. The reconstruction "by the worthy report of many trustworthy persons" (*relatu digno multorum nobis fidedignorum*) draws on both transcription attempts; the exact word forms remain uncertain. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 1.
4. The first toponym is uncertain. My reading is *Tossa* (Tossa de Mar), but the HTR output reads *Roses*. Both are coastal towns within the County of Empúries. Roses, with its deeper harbor, may be the more plausible site for equipping a galiot, but Tossa is not impossible. The second toponym, *Cadaques* (Cadaqués), is agreed. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 2.
5. The phrase *absque nostro legitimo permissu* ("without our legitimate permission") reflects the crown's assertion of sovereign prerogative over the arming of vessels, even within the semi-autonomous territories of the County of Empúries. The arming of warships without royal license was a recurrent concern in the western Mediterranean; unlicensed corsair activity could destabilize diplomatic relations and expose the crown to reprisals from foreign powers.
6. A *galiota* (galiot) was a small, light galley typically crewed by 15–25 oarsmen, widely used in the western Mediterranean for both legitimate patrol and corsair activity. The HTR reads *galeam* (galley), a larger vessel; *galiotam* is preferred here as more consistent with the scale of an illicit arming in a small port. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 3.
7. The verb form governing the arming of the galiot is the most consequential textual uncertainty in the document. My initial transcription suggested an infinitive construction (*armare* — "to arm," describing an ongoing attempt). The HTR suggests a completed action (*fuerunt... armatam* — "was armed," describing a *fait accompli*). The syntax of the surrounding clauses favors a completed or at least well-advanced arming: the perpetrators are described as already committing raids (*predas et violencias exercere/exercent*) "with it" (*cum ea*), implying the vessel is already at sea. However, the mandate itself prohibits the

arming (*armari non permittatis*), which could suggest the process is not yet complete. Both readings are defensible. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 4.

8. The clause *per quas subditis [nostris?] [dampna?] inferre* is partially reconstructed. The sense is clear—the raids inflict damages upon royal subjects—but the exact words following *subditis* are uncertain.
9. Lines 9–10 of the manuscript are heavily uncertain in both transcriptions. The translation offered here represents the most plausible reconstruction of the general sense: the king states that these illicit acts undoubtedly redound to damage upon those subject to his dominion (*nostro ditioni subiectos*). The HTR's *ditioni* is tentatively accepted. The word-level transcription of this passage should be considered unreliable without archival verification. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 5.
10. The participial preamble to the *dispositio* (lines 10–13) is the weakest section of the entire transcription. The general sense—that the king, exercising singular care for the public good and wishing to prevent harm before it occurs—is clear from the formulaic structure of such preambles, but the specific word forms are heavily uncertain. Key phrases tentatively identified include *singulari cura invigilare* ("to watch over with singular care"), *commodis... precaveri* ("to guard against [harm to] the interests [of subjects]"), and *ante lesionem providere cupientes* ("desiring to provide before injury [occurs]"). See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 6.
11. The phrase *salubrius ante lesionem providere* — "to provide more wholesomely before injury" — is a standard expression of the royal duty of preventive governance, framing the king's intervention as prophylactic rather than punitive.
12. The specific penalties referenced here (*penarum contra talia atentantes*) likely refer to existing statutory or customary penalties against unlicensed arming of vessels, possibly rooted in the maritime ordinances (*ordinacions*) of the Crown of Aragon or the *Constitucions de Catalunya*. The exact wording of this clause remains uncertain.
13. *Iure et usancio* — "by law and custom." If this reading is correct, the king invokes both written law (*ius*) and customary practice (*usancia* / Catalan *usança*) as the basis for the penalties. The reading *usancio* is uncertain. See Unresolved Ambiguities, item 7.
14. *Si nobis vultis gratum prestare* — "if you wish to render us a pleasing service." This is a standard formula of courteous but firm command, couching a royal mandate as a request for the addressee's voluntary compliance. In practice it carries the full force of a royal order.
15. *Tenore presencium inhibemus* — "by the tenor of the present [letters] we prohibit." This formula introduces a secondary and more direct prohibition beyond the initial mandate. The *inhibicio* is a formal legal instrument of the Aragonese crown, carrying specific procedural consequences for non-compliance.

16. The clause *que vobis absque iussu nostro non liceat* — "those things which are not permitted to you without our command" — reinforces the king's claim that the arming of vessels in the County of Empúries requires explicit royal authorization. This is a pointed assertion of sovereignty over a territory whose count enjoyed considerable autonomy.
 17. *Contra rem publicam dampnificantes* — "those damaging the commonwealth." The invocation of *res publica* frames the Count's potential non-compliance not merely as disobedience to a royal command but as harm to the public good, a significantly graver charge in Aragonese constitutional discourse.
 18. *Vetita faventes ac iure prohibitoris transgressores* — "those favoring prohibited things and transgressors of prohibitory law." The *sanctio* classifies potential non-compliance under two headings: active assistance to the wrongdoers (*vetita faventes*) and violation of the king's prohibition itself (*transgressores*). Both categories would expose the Count and his officials to legal proceedings (*procedemus*), implying prosecution before a royal tribunal.
 19. Francesc çà Costa served as vice-chancellor (*vicecancellarius*) of the Crown of Aragon under Joan I. His name as the authenticating chancery notation confirms the document's provenance within the royal chancery. The date of April 19, 1387 places this document approximately three and a half months into Joan I's reign (Joan succeeded his father Pere III on January 5, 1387). The early date may reflect the new king's assertion of maritime sovereignty in a territory whose lord, as a royal kinsman and powerful magnate, might have tested the limits of a new and as-yet-unestablished royal authority.
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Unresolved Ambiguities Flagged for Archival Verification

1. **Opening formula of the *narratio* (line 3):** The exact wording between *dileccionem* and *didicimus* is uncertain. My initial reading was *Relatu digno multorum nobis facto cum querela*; the HTR offered *Ad clarum digno multorum nobis fidedignorum relatione*. The reconstruction in the edition (*Relatu digno multorum nobis fidedignorum*) is a plausible hybrid but requires verification. The presence or absence of *cum querela* (with complaint) has interpretive consequences — it would indicate a formal legal complaint rather than merely informal reports.
2. **First toponym (line 4):** *Tossa* (my reading) or *Roses* (HTR). The initial letter is ambiguous in the manuscript. *Roses* is a more significant port, but both lie within the County of Empúries. Verify against the manuscript.
3. **Vessel type (line 7):** *Galiotam* (galiot — my reading) or *galeam* (galley — HTR). The distinction matters: a galley implies a larger and more costly operation, while a galiot

suggests a smaller corsair venture. The illegality of the operation might point toward either reading.

4. **Verb form governing the arming (lines 6-7):** Active infinitive (*armare* — "to arm," suggesting an ongoing or planned action) or past participle with auxiliary (*fuerunt... armatam* — "was armed," indicating a completed action). This is the most consequential textual ambiguity for the document's interpretation: whether Joan I is intervening to prevent an arming or responding to one already carried out. The *dispositio's* prohibition (*armari non permittatis*) might support either reading.
5. **Lines 9-10 — Damage and jurisdiction clause:** The passage describing how the illicit acts redound to damage upon royal subjects is very poorly legible in both transcriptions. The reconstruction is based on formulaic parallels rather than secure readings. The presence of *ditioni* (dominion/jurisdiction) — if correct — is a significant assertion of royal sovereignty over the County's maritime affairs.
6. **Lines 10-13 — Participial preamble to the *dispositio*:** This entire passage is reconstructed largely from formulaic expectation rather than secure paleographic readings. The specific terms in which the king frames his duty of care and his motivation for intervention cannot be established without returning to the manuscript under magnification.
7. **Line 15 — *Usancio*:** If this reading is correct, the king invokes customary law alongside written law (*iure et usancio*), which may have implications for the legal basis of the crown's maritime jurisdiction in the County of Empúries. The reading is uncertain.
8. **Line 16 — "vobis et dicto domino/domine":** Both the transcription and HTR are uncertain about the phrase immediately before *precipiendo mandamus*. The HTR reads *dicte domine* (to the said lady), which is puzzling in context. *Dicto domino* (to the said lord, i.e. the Count) would make better sense but is also uncertain. If *domine* is correct, it might indicate a co-addressee not otherwise identified. Alternatively, the entire phrase may be misread. Verify against the manuscript.