



I am researching the history of Jean III, Count of Armagnac. He lived from 1359-1391. I am particularly interested in how his relationship with the Crown of Aragon deteriorated in the lead-up to his attempt to conquer Majorca in 1390. As you research this question, please retain links to any academic sources you find and include them in your answer. Can you help me understand more about Jean III's motivations?

Jean III's attempt to "conquer Majorca" in 1389–1390 grew out of a mix of dynastic legalism, pressing financial and mercenary problems, and a deliberate strategy of extortion against the Crown of Aragon, rather than a straightforward program of Mediterranean expansion. His relationship with the Aragonese monarchy deteriorated when he tried to monetize his inherited claims to the defunct Crown of Majorca by threatening invasion if he was not bought off, which the Corts of Aragon saw as blackmail and refused to fund.^{[1] [2] [3]}

Early Armagnac–Aragon links

Jean III came from a family that was initially tightly connected to the Aragonese royal house.

- His aunt Matha (Mata) d'Armagnac, daughter of Jean I of Armagnac, married the Aragonese heir, Infante John (later King John I "the Hunter"), in 1373, with a massive dowry and substantial dower.^[4]
- Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that this marriage was a strategic alliance for Aragon: it neutralized the traditional Armagnac alliance with Castile and Armagnac's hostility to Foix-Béarn (a long-time Aragonese ally), and was meant to stabilize Aragon's northern frontier.^[4]

So in Jean III's youth the houses of Armagnac and Aragon were formally allied by marriage, not in open conflict.

Matha died in 1378, and John later remarried Violant de Bar (1380), a French princess, which preserved John's French connections but loosened the specific Armagnac–Aragon familial tie that had been created through Matha.^{[3] [4]}

How Jean III acquired a claim to Majorca

Jean III's hostility to the Crown of Aragon centered on his claim to the extinguished Crown of Majorca (which originally comprised the Balearic Islands, Roussillon, and Cerdanya, and had been forcibly reincorporated into the Crown of Aragon by Peter IV in the 1340s).^{[5] [6]}

The crucial figure here is Isabella (Elisabet) of Majorca:

- Isabella was the daughter of James III of Majorca and Constance of Aragon and, after the death of her brother James IV, became the last titular Queen of Majorca.^{[7] [8]}
- After years of captivity and poverty, she moved into the French orbit; by about 1375 she ceded her rights to the Majorcan crown successively to Louis of Anjou and then to Jean d'Armagnac.^{[8] [7]}

A Catalan reference article on Jean's war in Catalonia explicitly notes that he claimed the Crown of Majorca "by the rights he said he held through Elisabeth of Majorca" after the death of Louis I of Anjou. Thus, by the late 1370s Jean III could present himself—at least in his own and some French eyes—as the legitimate heir to James III's lost kingdom.^[2]

The same Catalan account adds that Jean also invoked his kinship with the Aragonese king via his sister Mata d'Armagnac, John I's first wife, as an additional (if weak) strand of legitimacy. From the Aragonese point of view, however, the Crown of Majorca had long since been absorbed, so Jean's claim was inherently subversive of their sovereignty.^{[2] [4]}

Jean III's routiers and money problems

When Jean III inherited the counties of Armagnac, Fézensac, and Rodez in 1384, he did so at a moment when southern France was heavily burdened with unemployed routiers (free companies) because of truces in the Hundred Years' War.^{[9] [10]}

A French prosopographical chronicle summarizes his situation in this period:

- Jean III and his brother Bernard VII fought the routiers in 1384, then tried to lead them into Spain, both to rid southern France of them and to employ them where they might be paid.^[9]
- He attempted this again in 1389, trying "a second time" to bring these companies into Spain, which increased security for the population of southern France but transferred the problem across the Pyrenees.^[9]

In other words, Jean commanded significant mercenary forces that he could no longer easily fund or use at home because of the truce in the Anglo-French war. The Catalan account of the "Guerra dels armanyaguesos" (War of the Armagnacs) makes this explicit:

- It notes that at the Corts of Monzón in 1388, King John I of Aragon warned the estates about the "possible invasion" by the Count of Armagnac, "who wanted to obtain financial compensation that would allow him to pay the troops he had idle in the middle of a truce in the Hundred Years' War."^[2]

So by 1388 Jean III is not approaching Aragon primarily as a kinsman, but as the commander of a large, expensive mercenary host looking for either employment or a payoff.

Breakdown of negotiations: Monzón 1388

At Monzón in 1388 the conflict between Jean III and the Crown of Aragon crystallized.

- John I laid before the Corts the threat that Jean III would invade if he did not receive a substantial sum in return for dropping his Majorcan claim and disbanding his forces.^{[3] [2]}
- The same account records that the estates were deeply suspicious, because the main creditor of both the king and the count was the same Italian banker, Luchino Scarampi; they interpreted Jean's demand as a coordinated attempt to extract money from the realm rather than a legitimate settlement of a dynastic dispute.^[2]

The Corts refused to authorize any subsidy to meet Jean's demands, urged John I to rid himself of bad counsellors, and essentially endorsed a policy of resistance rather than payment. From that point, the relationship between Jean III and the Crown of Aragon had passed from tense negotiation into open hostility.^[2]

The War of the Armagnacs and the 1390 campaign

Invasion of Roussillon and Empordà

Once the Corts refused to pay, Jean acted on his threat.

- Catalan and Aragonese narratives agree that in 1389, Jean's mercenary companies, under the command of his brother Bernard, crossed the Pyrenees, occupied large parts of Roussillon and the Empordà, and ravaged the countryside for roughly half a year, attacking towns such as Besalú.^{[11] [2]}
- Maria Teresa Ferrer's study of John I notes that "the alliance with France did not prevent the invasion of his lands by the troops of a vassal of the king of France, the count of Armagnac," who claimed rights to the kingdom of Majorca ceded to him by the infanta Isabel of Majorca, but who "probably only aspired to obtain booty and an indemnity for renouncing his alleged rights."^[3]

This confirms that Jean's Majorcan claim was the formal pretext, but contemporary Aragonese observers already suspected that his real aim was plunder and a buy-out.

Defeat at Navata (1390) and continued raids

The war culminated in 1390:

- Jean III's forces were defeated near Navata by royal troops under Bernat IV de Cabrera; Catalan accounts place this defeat within the broader "War of the Armagnacs" (1388–1391).^[2]
- Biographical entries on Jean III summarize this as: in 1390 he claimed the kingdom of Majorca but was beaten near Navata by John I's troops, after which he continued military

actions in Roussillon until withdrawing.^{[12] [1] [9]}

He never actually conquered the Balearic Islands; instead, his “attempt to conquer Majorca” played out as a campaign of invasion and pressure in continental territories—Roussillon and northern Catalonia—that had once belonged to the Crown of Majorca but were by then firmly integrated into the Crown of Aragon.

Patterns in Jean III’s wider career

Jean’s behavior in 1389–1390 fits a broader pattern in his short career as a great magnate.

- French narrative material notes that in 1391, when he agreed to aid his brother-in-law Carlo Visconti in Italy, Jean lacked the funds to raise an army and therefore sold the Charolais to Philip the Bold of Burgundy for 60,000 gold francs, with a short right of redemption.^[1]
- The *Histoire-Europe* chronicle likewise presents his attempts to move routiers into Spain as a way to both protect his own subjects in southern France and find paid work for dangerous mercenaries he could not simply disband.^[9]

These episodes suggest a count under chronic financial strain, repeatedly monetizing territorial or dynastic assets—Charolais in 1390–1391, the Majorcan claim in 1388–1390—in order to fund ambitious but risky military ventures.

Interpreting Jean III’s motivations

Putting the pieces together, historians generally see **four interlocking motives** behind Jean III’s deteriorating relations with Aragon and his 1390 campaign.

1. Dynastic and symbolic ambition

Jean had a colorable legal claim to the Crown of Majorca via Isabella of Majorca’s cession of rights, and he pushed that claim in the idiom of late-medieval princely politics.

- *Enciclopèdia Catalana* and other reference works confirm that Isabella, last titular Queen of Majorca, declared heir by her brother, later ceded her rights in turn to Louis of Anjou and to Jean d’Armagnac.^{[7] [8]}
- Catalan narratives emphasize that Jean explicitly grounded his claim “through Elisabeth of Majorca” and, secondarily, through his sister’s marriage to the future John I.^[2]

In a political culture where Valois princes and their circle pursued distant claims (think of the Angevins in Naples or the various English and French pretenders), turning a technically defensible claim into a concrete bid for a crown was not in itself exceptional.

2. Financial pressure and the problem of mercenary companies

The Monzón episode shows that Jean's Majorcan claim was immediately tied to his need for cash to pay routiers.

- John I told the Corts that Jean wanted “financial compensation” precisely so that he could pay the troops left idle by the Hundred Years' War truce, and that he was threatening invasion if this was not granted.^[2]
- Ferrer's analysis reinforces the idea that, whatever his legal claims, Jean “probably only aspired to obtain booty and an indemnity” in exchange for abandoning them.^[3]

From this angle, his hostility to Aragon was driven less by long-term Mediterranean policy and more by the short-term economics of war: he had expensive, restless troops and a tradable claim; Aragon had territory vulnerable to ravaging and a strong incentive to buy peace.

3. Exporting violence away from his own lands

Contemporary French summaries point out that by trying to lead the routiers into Spain in 1384 and 1389, Jean was also removing a major source of instability from his own territories in southern France.^[9]

- This was a common strategy among French and Gascon magnates: exporting free companies into Iberia or Italy allowed them to protect their own peasants and towns while turning disorder into profit elsewhere.^[10]
- Once negotiations failed in 1388, Aragon's frontier regions—Roussillon and Empordà—became the obvious target for such a redirection of violence.^{[3] [2]}

Thus his “war for Majorca” can be read as a calculated effort to combine internal pacification (in Armagnac) with external pressure (on Aragon) under the cover of dynastic right.

4. Personal and diplomatic miscalculation

Finally, there is an element of misjudged diplomacy and personality.

- The early Armagnac–Aragon marriage alliance via Matha d'Armagnac had been meant precisely to “neutralize” Armagnac's potential to act against Aragon.^[4]
- After Matha's death and John's remarriage to Violant de Bar, Jean III no longer had the same intimate access to the Aragonese court, and John I's own rule was marked (in Ferrer's phrase) by courtly luxury, Francophile sympathies, and a certain neglect of government that bred mistrust in his own estates.^{[4] [3]}

Against this background, Jean seems to have overestimated Aragon's willingness and ability to pay him off and underestimated both Catalan hostility to foreign mercenaries and John I's eventual readiness to mobilize against him. The result was that what began as a bid for compensation hardened into a limited but real war—the “Guerra dels armanyaguesos”—that destroyed any remaining goodwill between Armagnac and Aragon.

Suggested academic and scholarly sources

Here are some of the more useful scholarly or quasi-scholarly resources for digging further into Jean III's motives and his conflict with Aragon (with direct links, as you requested):

- Alexandra Beauchamp, “*Trouver sa place dans la famille royale et vivre loin des siens. La correspondance féminine de Matha d’Armagnac, épouse de l’infant Jean d’Aragon (1373-1378)*,” in *Trouver sa place dans la famille royale...* (OpenEdition Books, 2020) – detailed study of Matha d’Armagnac’s role and the Armagnac–Aragon alliance.^[4]
<https://books.openedition.org/esb/2738>
- Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, *Joan I i Martí l’Humà* (chapter in *Els darrers sobirans del casal de Barcelona*; CSIC PDF) – includes a clear discussion of Jean III d’Armagnac’s invasion and the Aragonese perception that he sought mainly booty and an indemnity.^[3]
https://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/26562/1/Ferrer_Darrers_sobirans.pdf
- Dominique-Marie-Joseph Henry, *Histoire de Roussillon comprenant l’histoire du royaume de Majorque* (Paris, 1835) – 19th-century but still a key narrative for the Roussillon–Majorca context; volume 1 and 2 are available via Google Books.^[13] ^[6]
Example entry: <https://books.google.com/books?id=fcdYAAAAcAAJ>
- Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de Aragón*, esp. book X, as cited in the Catalan article on the *Guerra dels armanyaguesos* – primary narrative source for Aragonese policy and the Monzón Corts; modern electronic edition by Institución Fernando el Católico.^[2]
- Enciclopèdia Catalana entry “*Elisabet de Mallorca*” – concise but scholarly reference on Isabella’s life and the cession of her Majorcan rights to Jean d’Armagnac.^[7]
<https://www.enciclopedia.cat/gran-enciclopedia-catalana/elisabet-de-mallorca>
- Catalan Wikipedia, “*Guerra dels armanyaguesos*,” with bibliography to Henry and Zurita – not itself an academic publication, but it synthesizes the older scholarly narrative and points you to primary and 19th-c. sources.^[2]
https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerra_dels_armanyaguesos

If you’d like, I can next help you reconstruct, from Zurita and Henry, a more detailed narrative of the 1388 Corts of Monzón and the year-by-year operations of Jean III’s forces in Roussillon and Empordà, or focus specifically on the legal rhetoric of his Majorcan claim in French and Aragonese documents.

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1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_III,_Count_of_Armagnac
2. https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerra_dels_armanyaguesos
3. https://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/26562/1/Ferrer_Darrers_sobirans.pdf
4. <https://books.openedition.org/esb/2738>
5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquest_of_Majorca
6. <https://books.google.fr/books?id=saOjf9RXk2MC>
7. <https://www.enciclopedia.cat/gran-enciclopedia-catalana/elisabet-de-mallorca>
8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella_of_Majorca

9. <http://www.histoireeurope.fr/RechercheLocution.php?Locutions=Jean+III+d'Armagnac>
10. https://theses.hal.science/tel-05063768v1/file/these_Guerreiro_Lucy.pdf
11. https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comtat_d'Armanyac
12. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_III_de_Armagnac
13. https://books.google.com/books/about/Histoire_de_Roussillon.html?hl=fr&id=nngBAAAAYAAJ
14. <https://books.openedition.org/esb/2738?lang=fr>
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16. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Book_of_the_Pyrenees/Chapter_20
17. https://monarchies.fandom.com/wiki/Hundred_Years'_War
18. https://www.reddit.com/r/MedievalHistory/comments/1phhd4m/why_does_the_civil_war_between_the_armagnac_and/
19. <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1350089>
20. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_III_d'Armagnac
21. https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/lilibrs/2018/323301/The_Classical_Tradition_in_Medieval_Catalan.pdf
22. <https://cultureandhistory.revistas.csic.es/index.php/cultureandhistory/article/view/241/763>
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24. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/40016728.pdf>
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35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44448505>
36. <https://mediterranees.net/biographies/capeille/CapeilleG.pdf>
37. https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joana_III_de_Navarra
38. <https://www.thriftbooks.com/w/histoire-de-roussillon-comprenant-lhistoire-du-royaume-de-majorque-part-2-dominique-marie-j-henry/39682282/>
39. <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q2467970>
40. https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_I_Sense_Por

41. <https://www.facebook.com/Historyofroyalwomen/posts/isabella-was-born-in-1337-as-the-daughter-of-james-iii-of-majorca-and-his-first-/952280721631981/>
42. <https://books.google.tt/books?id=nngBAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover>
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44. <https://themonstrousregimentofwomen.com/2023/07/03/the-lady-of-aragon/>
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