

Letter of Queen Violant de Bar to the Duke of Burgundy

ACA, Cancellaria — 15 March 1387

Document Summary

A letter missive from Queen Violant de Bar to her uncle Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, dated 15 March 1387 from Barcelona. Written in Catalan, in the early weeks of Joan I's reign. The letter has three purposes: (1) to exchange news of health, reporting that the king is convalescing from an illness and expected to recover fully; (2) to urge the duke to support certain unspecified requests that have been communicated to him by a senior female figure in Violant's family (identified as *la senyora nostra [?]*ra molt reverent); and (3) to affirm Violant's commitment to the duke's honor. The closing formula and subscription indicate it was issued under the queen's secret seal and written by the scribe Barthomeu Sirvent.

Final Reconciled Latin [Catalan] Text

Molt car oncle. Per tal car desijam continuament ab fervent desig saber vostra sanitat e bo estament, vos pregam affectuosament que per vostres letres nos en vullats certifficar tota vegada que en avinent vos sia. E farets nos en gran plaer que molt vos grahirem. E car sabem que us plau semblantment saber la nostra, vos notificam que som sana e en bona disposicio de nostra persona, e que'l senyor Rey marit e senyor nostre molt car es en tal e tanta convalescencia de sa malaltia que se spera dins breu esser guarit perfectament, gracies a nostre senyor deu. Item oncle molt car sapiats que nos havem escrit a la senyora nostra [?]*ra* molt reverent d'algunes coses que tenim fort a cor e de les quals ella vos deu haver escrit clarament per ses letres, on vos pregam que donant plena fe a les dites sues letres vullats dar lloc e fer tant com en vos sia que ço que en ha fet saber vinga a bona conclusio segons nos desijam. E referme·us molt car oncle ab plena fiança tot ço que fer puxam per vostra honor. E la sancta trinitat vos tinga en sa guarda e us fassa prosperar segons vostres vots. Dada en Barchinona sots nostre segell secret acostumat a xv dies de Març de l'any MCCCLXXXvij.

ffuit directa dux Burgundie

Domina R[egina] ma[ndavit] / Bartho[meu] Sirvent

English Translation

Most dear uncle.¹ Because we desire continually, with fervent desire, to know of your health and good estate, we ask you affectionately that by your letters you would certify us of it every time that it may be convenient for you. And you will do us a great pleasure, for which we will thank you greatly. And because we know that it likewise pleases you to know of ours,² we notify you that we are well and in good disposition of our person, and that the lord King, our most dear husband and lord,³ is in such and so great a convalescence from his illness that it is expected he will within a short time be fully recovered, thanks to our lord God. Likewise, most dear uncle, know that we have written to our most reverend lady [?]*ra*⁴ about certain matters that we hold strongly at heart,

and about which she must have written to you clearly by her letters; wherefore we ask that, giving full faith to her said letters, you would give way and do as much as is in your power so that what she has made known may come to a good conclusion, as we desire. And we affirm to you,⁵ most dear uncle, with full confidence, everything that we can do for your honor. And may the Holy Trinity keep you in its guard and cause you to prosper according to your wishes. Given in Barcelona under our accustomed secret seal on the fifteenth day of March of the year 1387.⁶

[Directed to the Duke of Burgundy.]

The Lady Queen commanded [this letter]. Barthomeu Sirvent [wrote it].⁷

Footnotes

Unresolved Ambiguities

1. **The identity of *la senyora nostra [?]/ra molt reverent*.** This is the central open question. The visible letters, the damage to the manuscript, and the political context all need to be weighed together. Marie de France, Duchess of Bar, remains the most historically plausible candidate for the person described, even if the surviving letter-forms do not straightforwardly confirm the reading *mare*. Further comparison with other letters in this register — particularly any that name the same figure explicitly — may resolve the question.
 2. **The nature of the *algunes coses que tenim fort a cor*.** The letter deliberately avoids specifying these matters, relying instead on the intermediary's letters to convey the substance. This is consistent with chancery practice for sensitive political or financial negotiations. Given the date (early 1387) and the addressee (Burgundy), these could relate to any number of matters: the consolidation of Violant's dower rights, diplomatic alignments in the context of the Schism, or French-Aragonese dynastic interests.
 3. **"a xv dies" vs. "a .v. dies."** I have retained xv (15 March) based on my reading of the manuscript, but the HTR read only v (5 March). If other documents in the register can be correlated with the queen's itinerary, this dating question could be settled externally.
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1. The addressee is identified in the *directio* as the Duke of Burgundy — i.e., Philip II "the Bold" (r. 1363–1404). Philip was the uncle of Violant de Bar through the French royal family: Violant's mother Marie de France was the daughter of Jean II of France, making Philip (also a son of Jean II) Marie's brother and Violant's maternal uncle. The address *molt car oncle* confirms this familial relationship and is consistent with the register of Violant's other correspondence with Burgundy. ↩
 2. I.e., "our health" — *la nostra* refers back to *sanitat* from the preceding clause. ↩

3. Joan I of Aragon, who acceded to the throne upon the death of his father Pere III (IV) on 5 January 1387. The reference to his illness and convalescence is significant: Joan I was known to suffer from recurrent illnesses throughout his reign. In March 1387, barely two months into his rule, this report of the king's illness and expected recovery situates the letter within a politically sensitive moment when the stability of the new reign was still being established. ↩
4. This is the most significant unresolved reading in the document. The word preceding *molt reverent* ends clearly in *-ra*, but earlier letters are obscured by damage to the manuscript. The HTR output read *mare* ("mother"), which would identify this figure as Marie de France, Duchess of Bar (d. 1404), Violant's mother — a reading that is attractive on historical grounds, since Marie would have been a natural intermediary between Violant and her Valois relatives. However, the visible final letters *-ra* do not match *mare* (which ends *-re*). One possibility is that the word is an abbreviation of *manera* ("manner"), which would yield the phrase *la senyora nostra [manera?] molt reverent* — though this produces awkward syntax. Another possibility is that the word is *mare* written with a final *-a* (*mara*), perhaps reflecting scribal variation or a copying error, though this form is not standard in Catalan. A further option is that the word is a different term entirely whose earlier letters have been lost to the damage. Identification of this figure — almost certainly a senior woman in Violant's French family network who was in a position to communicate directly with the Duke of Burgundy — is important for understanding the political content of the letter, since the unspecified *coses que tenim fort a cor* ("matters we hold strongly at heart") were evidently being pursued through this intermediary. ↩
5. *Refermar* — "to affirm, to confirm." The construction *referme-us* ("we affirm/confirm to you") is a standard epistolary formula pledging the sender's continued commitment to the addressee's interests. ↩
6. 15 March 1387. The date places this letter approximately ten weeks after Joan I's accession (5 January 1387) and during the period when Violant was actively consolidating her networks with her French relatives. Barcelona was the principal seat of the court in these early months of the reign. ↩
7. Barthomeu Sirvent served as a scribe (*escrivà*) in the queen's chancery. The subscription formula *Domina Regina mandavit* ("The Lady Queen commanded [it]") followed by the scribe's name is the standard form for letters issued on the queen's direct authority. ↩