

# Joan I to Pope Clement VII, 12 March 1387

## Document Summary

**Source:** ACA, Cancillería, register [number not specified], ff. 24v–25r **Document type:** Royal letter of complaint, credence, and obedience to the Avignonese pope **Language:** Latin **Date:** 12 March 1387 (Barcelona) **Sender:** Joan I, King of Aragon **Addressee:** Pope Clement VII (Avignon) **Secretary:** P. de Beviure

Joan I writes to Clement VII to express continued dissatisfaction with the pope's response to repeated petitions — now quadruplicated — concerning honors for the king's servants. The most recent papal letter was delivered in connection with the sending of the cardinal's hat (*missionem capelli*) for the king's kinsman Jaume d'Aragó, formerly bishop of Valencia and now cardinal. Joan complains that papal clemency has only modestly satisfied his requests despite his persistent advocacy. He announces that he has committed further matters to ambassadors who will explain them orally (*oretenus*) before the pope. The letter closes with an elaborate declaration of filial obedience, offering the king's readiness to serve the pope as spouse of the holy Church and supreme pontiff, followed by the standard valediction and dating clause.

The letter is significant as evidence of Joan I's early diplomatic pressure on Clement VII in the weeks following his accession (January 1387), and for its explicit reference to the *missio capelli* — the dispatch of the cardinal's hat — as the occasion for the most recent round of papal-royal correspondence regarding Jaume d'Aragó's elevation.

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## Reconciled Transcription

Editorial conventions: [?] marks uncertain readings; [?word?] indicates a conjectural reading; [ms. unclear] flags passages where the manuscript is difficult to read. Abbreviations are silently expanded except where noted.

### f. 24v

Beatissime pater. Dudum iteratis et aliis postea supervenientibus quadruplicatis beatitudinis vestre litteras presentatis nobis per eorum latores, quarum dilatam nobis de nostris servitoribus permisset [?] honoribus, extremius adveniens fuit vltima presentata missionem capelli pro reverendo in Christo patre domino Jacobo divina providencia [?]-tior [?] nunc Cardinali tunc vero episcopo Valentino, consanguineo carissimo nostro, contentibus [?] quae proinde [?] nostris affectibus qui hoc multa instancia postulavimus, clemencia vostra nonnisi modicum [?] satisfecit. Eidem clementie egentius [?] cum nostris litteris responsivis prioribus datis latioribus [?] earum [?], et nunc [?] agimus gratias

### f. 25r

per istum novissimum portatorem [?furendas/fundendas?] humillimas et devotas, necnon super his certis nostris ambaxiatoribus, qui ad vestram eiusdem presenciam via uni[n]uata [?] dictat [?], quedam vestre beatitudini oretenus explicanda comisimus, quorum voces apostolicam sanctitatem vostram propterea nostra parte

condignis laudum preconiiis [?] exhortamur [?], sanctitas [?] ipsa benigne admittere et nobis rescribere quecumque pro vobis obsequiis et beneplacitis nunc poterimus et postea quandocumque dignetur, ad omnia eius promptos atque promptissimos nos esse sacrosancte [ecclesie?] et vobis eius sponso et summo pontifici gratanter [?] offerimus libentissime posse facturos quicquid rex catholicus domino Christo vitam [?] vobis fervurus [?] ac devotus filius parere poterit. Almam personam vestram conservet altissimus sane et incolumem [?] ecclesie sue per tempora longiora. Data Barchinone sub sigillo secreto nostro anulo subsignata. xii. die marcii anno a nativitate domini millesimo CCC lxxxvii.

Dominus Rex mandavit  
mihi P. de Beviure

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### **Annotated English Translation**

Most holy father.<sup>1</sup> Having long ago presented to us, through repeated and other subsequently arriving [letters], the quadruplicated letters of your Beatitude delivered by their bearers — the delay of which, concerning the honors [sought] for our servants, permitted [?]<sup>2</sup> — the very last [letter] arrived [and] was presented [in connection with] the sending of the [cardinal's] hat<sup>3</sup> for the reverend father in Christ, lord Jaume,<sup>4</sup> [by] divine providence [?],<sup>5</sup> now Cardinal, then however bishop of Valencia, our most dear kinsman. Being content [?] with which,<sup>6</sup> consequently [?], given our desires — which we requested with much insistence — your clemency satisfied only modestly.<sup>7</sup> Writing more needfully [?] to that same clemency with our responsive letters given to the earlier ones in broader terms [?] regarding them, and now we give thanks

through this most recent bearer, [sending/pouring forth?]<sup>8</sup> most humble and devoted [supplications], and moreover concerning these matters [we have entrusted instructions] to our designated ambassadors, who [are directed?] to your same presence by a [?continued/uninterrupted?] route,<sup>9</sup> [and] we have committed certain things to be explained orally to your Beatitude, whose voices [i.e., the ambassadors' words]<sup>10</sup> we urge [?] your apostolic sanctity on our behalf with worthy praises of acclaim [?]<sup>11</sup> — [that] your sanctity itself deign to benignly admit [them] and write back to us whatever [you wish] regarding your services and pleasures, both now as we are able and afterward whenever [you] deign.<sup>12</sup> To all things of the holy [Church?], [we declare ourselves] ready and most eager, and to you, her spouse and supreme pontiff,<sup>13</sup> we offer willingly — most freely declaring that we are able to do whatever a Catholic king,<sup>14</sup> owing [his] life to Christ the Lord [?], [as] your fervent [?] and devoted son, may be able to render.<sup>15</sup> May the Most High preserve your noble person, safe and unharmed, for the governance of his Church through longer times.<sup>16</sup> Given at Barcelona, under our secret seal affixed with our ring, on the 12th day of March, in the year of the birth of the Lord 1387.<sup>17</sup>

The lord King commanded [this letter] to me, P. de Beviure.<sup>18</sup>

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### **Footnotes**

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## Unresolved Ambiguities

1. **f. 24v, l. 3: *permisset* [?]** — The verb governing the clause about honors for the king's servants is unclear. *Permisset* ("had permitted"), *promisset* ("had promised"), and other readings remain defensible. The overall meaning of the sentence is recoverable, but the precise verbal form is not.
2. **f. 24v, l. 5: [?]-tior preceding *nunc Cardinali*** — A word or word-fragment at the beginning of the line, carrying over from l. 4. Possibly the end of a titular designation for Jaume d'Aragó or part of the *divina providencia* formula. Unresolved.
3. **f. 24v, l. 6: *contentibus* [?] / *proinde* [?]** — Jonathan's reading *contentibus* is adopted as the best available, but the syntactic connection to the surrounding clause is not entirely smooth. *Proinde* ("consequently") is conjectural, proposed over the manuscript reading *pervide* on the grounds of formulaic frequency, but the original reading may be correct.
4. **f. 24v, l. 7: *nonnisi modicum* [?]** — Adopted as the best reading producing coherent diplomatic Latin, but the manuscript is difficult at this point. Jonathan's reading *nominesdictimus* suggests a different word is present; the HTR offered *nomedicum*. All three readings attempt to capture roughly the same meaning ("only modestly / insufficiently satisfied"), but none is fully secure paleographically.
5. **f. 24v, l. 8: *latioribus earum* [?] / *et nunc agimus gratias* [?]** — The end of the f. 24v text remains uncertain. Jonathan's *laboribus errorem* and *e nunc agictius gratias* differ significantly from the adopted readings. The general sense — a response to earlier letters, followed by an expression of thanks — is clear, but the exact wording is not.
6. **f. 25r, l. 1: verb after *portatorem*** — The gerundive governing *humillimas et devotas* is illegible. *Furendas* (HTR) is not a standard Latin form; *fundendas*, *faciendas*, and other possibilities have been considered. The meaning ("through this bearer [we send] most humble and devoted [supplications]") is clear regardless.
7. **f. 25r, l. 2: *via uni[n]juata dictat* [?]** — The phrase describing the ambassadors' route or manner of dispatch is unclear in both transcriptions.
8. **f. 25r, ll. 4–5: *condignis laudum preconiiis exhortamur* [?]** — The transitional formula between the announcement of the ambassadors and the request for papal reception is reconstructed but not secure. *Preconiiis* is conjectural (over Jonathan's *prioruiis* and HTR's *proniis*); *exhortamur* is adopted from the initial transcription but not confirmed.
9. **f. 25r, l. 7: *sacrosancte [ecclesie?]*** — Jonathan's reading *ecciem sacrostem* is interpreted as *sacrosancte ecclesie*, but the exact form in the manuscript is uncertain. The reference to the holy Church is contextually necessary for the *eius sponso* phrase that follows to make grammatical sense.
10. **f. 25r, l. 8: *fervurus* [?]** — Likely a scribal form of *fervidus* ("fervent") or possibly *futurus* ("future"), but the exact reading is uncertain. *Fervidus* is preferred on grounds of diplomatic register.

11. **f. 24v, l. 4: *missionem capelli*** — The accusative case is confirmed by Jonathan. The syntactic relationship of this accusative to the surrounding clause (governed loosely by *presentata*? accusative of reference?) is not fully resolved, though the meaning is clear.
  1. The address *Beatissime pater* confirms Clement VII as the addressee. Joan I, like his father Pere III, supported the Avignonese obedience throughout the Western Schism. ↵
  2. The syntax of this opening period is extremely convoluted, characteristic of chancery Latin at its most subordinated. The precise meaning of *permisset* (or possibly *promisset*) in context remains unclear; the general sense is that Joan has received multiple rounds of papal letters, the most recent of which concerned the sending of the cardinal's hat for Jaume d'Aragó, and that he is dissatisfied with the pace or extent of the pope's response to his petitions regarding honors for his servants. ↵
  3. *Missionem capelli*: "the sending of the hat." The *capellum rubeum* (red hat) was the principal insignia of the cardinalate. Its formal dispatch by the pope to a newly created cardinal was a significant ceremonial and diplomatic event. The accusative *missionem* likely functions here as an accusative of reference or attendant circumstance, loosely governed by *presentata* — the last letter was presented in connection with the dispatch of the hat. ↵
  4. Jaume d'Aragó (Jacobus de Aragonia), grandson of Jaume II, was bishop of Valencia before his elevation to the cardinalate by Clement VII. The chronological notation *nunc Cardinali tunc vero episcopo Valentino* — "now Cardinal, then however bishop of Valencia" — confirms that by March 1387, his elevation had already taken place, and this letter references an earlier stage of the process. ↵
  5. The word or fragment preceding *nunc Cardinali* at the start of f. 24v, line 5 remains unresolved. It may be the tail of an extended ecclesiastical title for Jaume d'Aragó (e.g., a titular church designation) or the end of the *divina providencia* formula. ↵
  6. The reading of this phrase (*nostro contentibus quae*) is uncertain. The overall sense appears to be that Joan was initially content with the honor of the cardinalate for his kinsman, but that his broader requests — submitted with *multa instancia* — were only modestly satisfied. ↵
  7. *Clemencia vostra nonnisi modicum satisfecit*: a remarkably direct complaint for a letter to the pope. The formulation is diplomatically bold — Joan is telling Clement VII that papal clemency has done next to nothing to satisfy his repeated petitions. The *nonnisi modicum* reading, while not fully certain paleographically, is the most coherent interpretation of the manuscript and produces exactly the kind of calculated diplomatic pressure that the rest of the letter supports. ↵
  8. The verb governing *humillimas et devotas* (sc. *preces* or *supplicationes*) is illegible. Possibilities include *fundendas* ("pouring forth"), *furendas* (unattested), or another gerundive form. The meaning is clear regardless: the king is sending humble and devoted prayers/supplications through the bearer. ↵
  9. *Via uni[n]uata* [?]: possibly *via insinuata* ("by an indicated/announced route") or *via continuata* ("by a continued route"). The reading is uncertain; the sense is that the ambassadors are being dispatched to the papal presence. ↵
  10. *Quorum voces*: literally "whose voices," referring to the ambassadors. The ambassadors are authorized to speak on the king's behalf, and Joan exhorts the pope to receive their words favorably. ↵

11. This passage (f. 25r, lines 4–5) remains among the most difficult in the letter. The general sense is an exhortation to the pope to receive the ambassadors benignly and to respond favorably. The precise construction around *condignis laudum preconiiis* ("with worthy praises of acclaim") is uncertain — it may modify the manner of the exhortation or describe the honors the king offers in return. ↩
12. The conditional offer: the king stands ready to serve the pope's interests whenever the pope deigns to command him. This is standard diplomatic language of obedience, but the *nunc... et postea quandocumque* ("both now... and afterward whenever") carries a subtle implication that the pope has not yet deigned to make use of Joan's willingness. ↩
13. *Vobis eius sponso et summo pontifici*: "to you, her [i.e., the Church's] spouse and supreme pontiff." This is the theological and diplomatic apex of the letter. The pope is addressed in his dual mystical and juridical capacity — as mystical spouse of the Church (a standard ecclesiological metaphor) and as supreme pontiff. The *eius* refers back to the Church (*ecclesie*). Joan is declaring that his obedience extends to the full range of the pope's authority. ↩
14. *Rex catholicus*: Joan I's self-description as "Catholic king" here carries no connection to the later *Reyes Católicos* title formally granted to Ferdinand and Isabella by Alexander VI in 1496. In this context, it is a conventional expression of orthodox Christian kingship and filial obedience to the papacy, standard in royal correspondence with the Avignonese popes. ↩
15. The syntax of this final substantive clause is dense: the king offers himself most freely, declaring that he is able to do (*posse facturos*) whatever a Catholic king — devoted son of the Church, owing his life to Christ — may render to the pope. The awkward *fervurus* may be a scribal error for *fervidus* ("fervent") or *futurus* ("future"), though *fervidus* fits the context better. ↩
16. *Almam personam vestram conservet altissimus sane et incolumem ecclesie sue per tempora longiora*: standard valediction formula. The *almam* (noble/nurturing) modifying *personam* is somewhat unusual — more commonly *sanctam* or *beatam* — but attested. The *sane et incolumem* ("safe and unharmed") is reconstructed from the partially legible manuscript; the HTR's *sine in colume* is clearly a misreading of this formula. ↩
17. 12 March 1387. Joan I had acceded to the throne on 5 January 1387 upon the death of Pere III. This letter thus dates from barely two months into his reign and represents an early assertion of diplomatic continuity (and pressure) in the Crown's relationship with Avignon. The specification *sub sigillo secreto nostro anulo subsignata* ("under our secret seal affixed with our ring") indicates this was sealed with the king's personal seal rather than the great seal of the chancery, consistent with the letter's character as a piece of direct royal correspondence rather than a public instrument. ↩
18. P. de Beviure: a chancery secretary (*scriptor*) of Joan I. The formula *dominus Rex mandavit mihi* identifies the secretary who received the king's order to draft the letter. ↩