

Two Letters from Queen Violant de Bar to Officials and Embroiderers in Mallorca (13 March 1387)

Document Summary

These two companion letters, both dated 13 March 1387 and issued from Barcelona under the queen's secret seal, concern Violant de Bar's efforts to summon three embroiderers (*brodadors*) — Nicholau Torret, Johan Fabrega (son of Bernat [?] Fabrega), and Ffrancesch Clara — from the city of Mallorca to Barcelona to carry out textile works the queen has commissioned. Letter 1 is addressed to an unnamed official (likely the governor of Mallorca or a royal lieutenant) and orders him to compel the embroiderers to embark if they do not comply voluntarily with the queen's direct summons. Letter 2 is addressed to the three embroiderers themselves, offering fair compensation for their labor while threatening punishment for disobedience.

The letters are registered consecutively in the same folio and share an identical chancery subscription (*Domina regina mandavit*) attributed to P. de Besanta [?], with a validation mark reading *Vidit Pont[is]* [?]. The paired structure — a direct summons to the craftsmen coupled with a coercive mandate to local authorities — is a standard pattern in Aragonese royal correspondence when the crown needed to secure the services of skilled artisans from distant parts of the realm.

Source: ACA, Cancillería, Reg. [register number to be confirmed], f. 92r.

Reconciled Transcription

Letter 1 (to officials)

Com nos per obres necessaries a nos haguem grant necessitat de Nicholau Torret, Johan Fabrega fill d'en B[er]n[at] [?] Fabrega e Ffrancesch Clara, los quals son en Mallorques, pregam vos e manam expressament que en cas que per la letra nostra, la qual ab la present lus trametem, no puguen de continent, aquells forçets ab tots remeys recullir e venir a nos. E vos donats lus spatxament e endreça en la partença en manera que on pus breu se porà sien a nos per fer lo servey e obres a les quals los hauem necessaris. E en açò diligencia haiats e tant sobirana en manera ques haia que grahir [?], certifican vos que la tarda de la lur venguda sia a nos molt desplasent e imputariem ho a vos e a vostra negligencia e no cura. Dat[um] en Barch[ino]na sots nostre segell secret acostumat a XIII dies de Març l'any de la Nativitat de nostre Senyor Mil CCC LXXX set. Vidit Pont[is] [?].

Domina regina mandavit. P. de Besanta [?].

Letter 2 (to the embroiderers)

La Reyna

Per tant com nos hauem deliberat fer algunes obres en que vosaltres, los quals hauem oyt dir ser ffabres e entenents d'arts, son receptes [?] ens siurats [?] segons aquelles hauem ordenades e volem que façiam [?].

Manam vos que vista la present vingats a nos per fer nos les dites obres, certificant vos que nos de vostres treballs vos farem be satisfacer. E si per venir no caurets o no volrets, jatsia [?] que per altres remeys compellir puxa[m] [?], però encara volem vosaltres ser certs que per la inobediencia nos fariem punir en manera que a acoste cas [?] vos sia correcció e pena. Dat[um] sots nostre segell secret acostumat a XIII dies de Març l'any Mil CCC LXXX set. Vidit Pont[is] [?].

[Address:] Als feels nostres Nicholau Torret, Johan Fabrega e Ffrancesch Clara, brodadors de la Ciutat de Mallorca.

Domina regina mandavit. P. de Besanta [?].

Annotated English Translation

Letter 1

Since we, on account of works necessary to us, have great need of Nicholau Torret, Johan Fabrega son of en Bernat [?] Fabrega, and Ffrancesch Clara,¹ who are in Mallorca, we ask and expressly command you that, in the event that by our letter — which we send to them together with the present one — they cannot [be induced to come] immediately,² you compel those men by all available means to embark and come to us.³ And you are to give them dispatch and assistance in their departure, in such a manner that as soon as possible they may be with us to perform the service and works for which we need them. And in this matter exercise such supreme diligence that there will be cause for gratitude,⁴ for we certify to you that the delay of their arrival would be most displeasing to us, and we would impute it to you and to your negligence and lack of care. Given at Barcelona under our customary secret seal on the 13th day of March in the year of the Nativity of Our Lord one thousand three hundred and eighty-seven.⁵ *Vidit Pontis [?].*⁶

*The lady queen commanded it. P. de Besanta [?].*⁷

Letter 2

The Queen.

Inasmuch as we have resolved to have certain works made, for which you — whom we have heard said to be craftsmen and knowledgeable in the arts — are suited [?] and will serve us [?] according to those [works] we have ordered and wish to have done:⁸ we command you that, upon sight of the present letter, you come to us to carry out for us the said works, certifying to you that we shall cause you to be well compensated for your labors. And if you cannot or will not come,⁹ although we could compel you by other means,¹⁰ we still wish you to be certain that for disobedience we would cause you to be punished in such a manner that this case [?] may be to you correction and penalty. Given under our customary secret seal on the 13th day of March in the year one thousand three hundred and eighty-seven. *Vidit Pontis [?].*

[Addressed to:] Our faithful Nicholau Torret, Johan Fabrega, and Ffrancesch Clara, embroiderers of the City of Mallorca.¹¹

The lady queen commanded it. P. de Besanta [?].

Footnotes

Unresolved Ambiguities

1. **Father's name (Letter 1):** The abbreviation of Johan Fabrega's father's first name ("B.") could expand to either *Bernat* or *Bartomeu*. Both are common fourteenth-century Catalan names. Only external prosopographic evidence (e.g., other references to the Fabrega family in Mallorcan guild or notarial records) could resolve this.
 2. **"Diligencia haiats e tant sobirana..." passage (Letter 1):** The exact wording between *haiats* and *certifican vos* is uncertain. The reading offered (*e tant sobirana en manera ques haia que grahir*) is provisional. The general meaning — an intensifying admonition to exercise supreme diligence — is clear, but the specific construction could be read differently.
 3. **"Son receptes ens siurats segons aquelles hauem ordenades" (Letter 2):** The clause describing the embroiderers' qualifications and the queen's expectations remains partially illegible. *Son receptes* and *ens siurats* are both uncertain forms. Possible alternative readings include *son reputats* (are reputed) and *ens servats* (and you serve us / and you will serve us). Further manuscript consultation under different lighting or magnification would be valuable.
 4. **"Caurets" (Letter 2):** The precise morphological identity of this form is unclear. The contextual meaning ("you cannot [come]") is secure, but whether this derives from *caure*, from a contracted form of *poder*, or from another verb remains an open question.
 5. **"A acoste cas vos sia correcció e pena" (Letter 2):** The punishment formula. The reading *acoste cas* ("this case") is a best guess; neither the initial transcription nor the HTR produced a clean reading. The expected formula would be something like *que açò vos sia correcció e pena* ("that this be to you correction and penalty").
 6. **Scribe identifications:** Both "Vidit Pontis" (validation mark) and "P. de Besanta" (chancery subscription) are provisional readings. Cross-referencing against known scribes and officials of Violant de Bar's chancery in 1387 would help confirm or correct these identifications.
1. The three named individuals are *brodadors* (embroiderers) resident in the city of Mallorca, as confirmed by the address of Letter 2. The patronymic "fill d'en B. Fabrega" identifies Johan Fabrega as the son of one Bernat (or possibly Bartomeu) Fabrega — the manuscript abbreviation of the father's first name is ambiguous. On the honorific *en* before the father's name, see standard Catalan usage for non-noble respectful address. ↩
 2. *De continent*: "immediately, without delay." The construction *no puguen de continent* is slightly compressed; the full sense is "they cannot [be brought to come] immediately [by our letter alone]." ↩

3. *Recullir*: literally "to gather, to collect oneself," but in the context of maritime travel from Mallorca to Barcelona, it carries the specific sense of "to embark, to board ship." The queen is ordering the official to compel the embroiderers to take ship if they will not do so voluntarily. ↩
4. The passage between *diligencia haiats* and *certifican vos* is difficult. The phrase "e tant sobirana en manera ques haia que grahir" appears to mean "and [exercise] such supreme [diligence], in a manner for which there will be cause for gratitude" — i.e., the queen is both commanding diligence and implying that zealous compliance will be rewarded or at least noted favorably. However, the exact wording remains uncertain; see Unresolved Ambiguities below. ↩
5. 13 March 1387. Note that Joan I had acceded to the throne on 19 January 1387 following the death of Pere III (IV); this letter dates from barely two months into the new reign. Violant de Bar's early commissioning of decorative textile works is consistent with the establishment of a new royal household and its attendant material culture. ↩
6. *Vidit Pontis*: a chancery validation mark indicating the document was reviewed ("seen") by an official named Pontis (or de Ponte). Such marks are standard in Aragonese chancery registers. The reading remains slightly uncertain. ↩
7. *Domina regina mandavit*: standard chancery subscription indicating the document was issued on the queen's authority. The scribe or notary "P. de Besanta" (reading uncertain) is the registering official. ↩
8. This clause is the most problematic passage in Letter 2. The queen states that she has heard the three embroiderers described as *ffabres e entenents d'arts* — "craftsmen and knowledgeable in the arts." What follows — rendered here provisionally as "are suited and will serve us according to those [works] we have ordered and wish to have done" — is uncertain at the level of individual word forms. The key terms *son receptes* (accepted? received? reputed?) and *ens siurats* (will serve us? will follow?) do not resolve cleanly. The general sense — that the queen considers these men qualified for the work she has commissioned — is not in doubt. See Unresolved Ambiguities below. ↩
9. *Caurets*: the meaning here must be "you cannot" (i.e., you are unable), paired with *volrets* ("you will not," i.e., you are unwilling). The form is likely related to *caure* or possibly a dialectal variant of a form of *poder*. The pairing of inability and unwillingness is a standard legal doublet. ↩
10. *Per altres remeys compellir*: "to compel by other means" — i.e., through legal or administrative coercion. The construction frames the direct summons as a first resort, with the implicit threat that the official mandate of Letter 1 (addressed to the local authorities) provides the enforcement mechanism. ↩
11. *Brodadors*: embroiderers. The queen's need for skilled embroiderers from Mallorca — a major center of textile production in the medieval Crown of Aragon — is notable as evidence of Violant de Bar's early patronage of decorative arts. On the broader context of royal textile commissions in this period, the works in question may relate to furnishing the new queen's chambers, ceremonial vestments, or heraldic display. ↩