

ACA, Joan I: *Bien Estar* Letter to the King of Navarre (21 March 1387)

Document Summary

A royal health bulletin (*bien estar* letter) from Joan I of Aragon to Charles III of Navarre, written in Aragonese Castilian from Barcelona on 21 March 1387 and sealed with the secret seal. Joan announces his recovery from a recent illness and reports that his wife Queen Violant, his firstborn son (styled *dalfin*), and the infantas are all in good health. The letter follows the standard formulaic structure of *bien estar* correspondence: a request for reciprocal news, a health report, an offer of service, and a valediction. Chancery notations indicate a similar letter was dispatched to the Queen of Navarre. The *iussio* clause records that the letter was issued by royal mandate, with a secretary's name that appears to be Pere de Beviure.

The letter is notable for its use of "dalfin" (*dauphin*) as a title for Joan I's firstborn son — almost certainly the infante Jaume (b. 1382, d. 1388) — reflecting French cultural influence at the Aragonese court, likely mediated by Queen Violant de Bar's Francophone background.¹

Reconciled Transcription

Muy caro hermano, por que deseamos saber de v(uest)ra salut e estamiento buenas nuevas, rogamos vos afectuosament que nos ende fagades [?] certificar [?] amenudo, z pa(ra) cosa de la qual hauremos muy grand plazer z consolacion. Del n(uest)ro vos placia saber, muy caro hermano, que, loado el nombre de Dios, somos desliurado z bien quito del accident que huviemos [?] en n(uest)ra p(er)sona; e otrosi n(uest)ra cara companyona la Reyna z el dalfin n(uest)ro primogenito e las infantas n(uest)ras fillas, por bien somos la m(er)ced de Dios z en buena disposicion de sus p(er)sonas. E si algunas cosas, muy caro hermano, vos son plazientes destas partes, embiad nos lo a dezir z complir lo hemos de muy buena voluntat. E sea Dios todos tiempos guarda v(uest)ra. Dada en Barch(in)ona dius n(uest)ro siello secreto a xxj dias de março del anyo M ccc lxxx vij.

Chancery notations:

Fuit missa Regi Navarre.

Simil(is) fuit fac(ta) Regine Navarre ux(or)is) sue.

D(omi)n(u)s Rex m(andavi)t

[...] P. de Beviure [?]

Annotated English Translation

Most dear brother,² because we desire to know of your health and condition³ and good news, we ask you affectionately that you cause us to be certified⁴ thereof frequently, for anything from which we would have very great pleasure and consolation. Of ours, may it please you to know, most dear brother, that — praised be the name of God — we are delivered and well free of the ailment⁵ that we had⁶ in our person. And likewise our dear

companion the Queen,⁷ and the *dalfin*⁸ our firstborn, and the infantas our daughters, by the grace of God we are well and in good condition of their persons.⁹ And if any things from these parts are pleasing to you, most dear brother, send word to us and we will fulfill them with very good will. And may God be your guard at all times. Given in Barcelona under our secret seal¹⁰ on the twenty-first day of March of the year 1387.

[*Chancery notations:*] It was sent to the King of Navarre. A similar one was made for the Queen of Navarre, his wife.¹¹

The Lord King ordered it. [...] P. de Beviure [?].¹²

Footnotes

1. Joan I's use of "dalfin" for his heir is a significant lexical borrowing. The French *dauphin* as a title for the firstborn son of a reigning sovereign had been formalized in France only in 1349 when the future Charles V received the Dauphiné. Its appearance in Aragonese royal correspondence this early — barely four decades later and in a non-French context — is a striking marker of French prestige culture at Joan I's court, consistent with the broader pattern of Francophone influence associated with Violant de Bar.
2. "Muy caro hermano": The standard epistolary address between kings of equal dignity bound by kinship or alliance. Joan I and Charles III of Navarre (r. 1387–1425) were brothers-in-law: Charles's sister Leonor married Joan's father Pere III. Charles III had himself only just acceded to the Navarrese throne (1 January 1387), making this exchange of health bulletins part of the expected diplomatic courtesies between newly reigning monarchs.
3. "Estamiento": Aragonese Castilian for *estado* (state, condition). The pairing "salut e estamiento" is formulaic.
4. "Fagades certificar" [?]: The expected chancery formula is "nos ende fagades certificar" (= that you cause us to be certified thereof). The verb form in the manuscript is not entirely clear; "fagades" is tentatively preferred over the HTR reading "grades avisar," but the passage remains uncertain.
5. "Accident": In medieval medical and chancery vocabulary, *accidens* / *accident* denotes a sudden onset of illness or a symptomatic episode, not an injury in the modern English sense. Joan I's health was a matter of political concern throughout his reign; the specific nature of this illness is not identified in the letter.
6. "Huviemos" [?]: The verb form is paleographically uncertain. The initial letter could be read as *b*, *d*, *h*, or *t*, but "huviemos" (= *tuvimos* / *habíamos*, we had/experienced) is the most likely Aragonese form in context. HTR read "duyemos," which is also possible but less standard.
7. "Nuestra cara companyona la Reyna": Violant de Bar (1365–1431), daughter of Robert I, Duke of Bar, and Marie de Valois. She married Joan as infante in 1380. "Companyona" (companion/consort) is a characteristic Aragonese term for the queen consort.
8. "Dalfin nuestro primogenito": Almost certainly refers to the infante Jaume of Aragon (b. 1382, d. 1388), Joan I's eldest son, who would die the following year at approximately age six. See note 1 above on the

significance of the French-derived title.

9. The syntax here is compressed and slightly irregular. The letter moves from the king's personal recovery to a collective health report: the queen, heir, and infantas are all in good health ("por bien somos la merced de Dios z en buena disposicion de sus personas"). The plural "sus personas" encompasses the entire royal family.
 10. "Siello secreto": The secret seal (*sigillum secretum*), used for personal correspondence and less formal administrative communications as distinct from the great seal (*sigillum majestatis*) used for solemn public acts. Its use here is appropriate for a *bien estar* letter.
 11. "Similis fuit facta Regine Navarre uxoris sue": A duplicate letter was prepared for the Queen of Navarre, i.e., Charles III's wife Leonor of Castile (m. 1375). "Uxoris sue" (= his wife) distinguishes her from any other Queen of Navarre (e.g., a dowager).
 12. The *iussio* notation "Dominus Rex mandavit" records that the letter was issued by direct royal command. The second line contains the name of the responsible chancery secretary, which appears to read "P. de Beuiure" — likely Pere de Beviure, though the reading is not fully certain. There may be an additional abbreviation or title preceding the name that is not resolved.
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Unresolved Ambiguities

1. "**Fagades [?] certificar [?]**" (**line 2**): Neither the initial reading ("grades certificar") nor the HTR ("grades avisar") is fully satisfying. "Fagades certificar" is supplied as the most formulaically expected reading, but the paleographic evidence is not conclusive. The initial letter group could be *f-a-g-a-d-e-s* or *g-r-a-d-e-s* in this hand.
2. "**Huviemos [?]**" (**line 5**): The verb form describing Joan's experience of the illness is paleographically ambiguous at its initial letter. "Huviemos" (Aragonese past tense of *haber*) is provisionally preferred, but "bivimos" (*viviamos*), "tuvimos" (*tuvimos*), and "duyemos" (HTR) all remain possible readings.
3. **Iussio — second line**: The secretary's name appears to be "P. de Beuiure" (= Pere de Beviure), but there may be additional text or a title preceding the name that is unresolved. The exact letter forms before "P." are unclear.