

ACA, Cancillería, Reg. 1751, f. 37r

Document Summary

Document type: Royal letter (*lletra closa*) from Joan I of Aragon to Mossèn Jacme, an *oficial d'armes* (herald/officer of arms) **Language:** Catalan **Date:** 1 April 1387, Barcelona **Seal:** Sealed with the king's *segell secret* (privy seal); countersigned with the *petit anell* (small ring seal)

Synopsis: Joan I writes to Mossèn Jacme reminding him of the unsatisfactory response made by the messengers of Barbastro when the king received them at Zaragoza the previous year (1386) and urged them to furnish a prompt gift (*do coninent*). The king has now sent a credence letter (*letra de creeça*) to the *jurats* and *pròhomens* of Barbastro, entrusted to Mossèn Jacme, who is instructed to convey the king's demand that they make good on what they have failed to deliver. If they comply, the king will consider himself well served and will have reason to favor them; if they do not accept what the king requires, Mossèn Jacme is to produce a written instrument (*carta*) as evidence of their refusal.

Context: This letter falls in the opening weeks of Joan I's reign (Pere III died 5 January 1387). The reference to a prior encounter at Zaragoza "last year" (*entany*) likely relates to negotiations during the final months of Pere III's reign or the period immediately surrounding Joan's accession, when urban communities across Aragon were being pressed for financial contributions. The dispatch of an *oficial d'armes* as bearer of a credence letter underscores the formality and urgency of the demand. Barbastro, an important town in Upper Aragon (Sobrarbe/Ribagorza region), would have been a target for royal revenue extraction in the context of the new reign's consolidation.

Reconciled Transcription

Lo Rey.

Mossèn en Jacme, nous membra ara quan de nos propre que féssem menció de la escusa desplazent [?] que entany nos fon feta a Çaragoça per los missatges de Barbastre, quan los aempram qu'ens servissen d'algun do coninent. E recordans-nos e en quina mana principalment per aquell fet nos podem encarregar en ells, mas no volríem [?] reduyr a memòria lo fallir [?] de vostres [?] promeses, maiorment perque per tals que poden haver reparo. Per que nos escrivim als jurats e pròhomens de Barbastre ab letra de creeça a vos comanada, per virtut de la qual nos mana que·ls digats de part nostra que fossen d'aquèst [?] en tal mana que reparen ço que han fallit, axí com dit és, e nos nos tenem d'ells per ben servits e haja rahó de haver-los recomanats en lurs oportunitats. E a açò hàgats la carta que sabets en cas que no acceptassen [?] lo suy [?] que per nos volrà. Dada en Barçelona sutz nostre segell secret primer dia de abril de l'any MCCCLXXXVII. Sotsignada ab nostre petit anell.

Annotated English Translation

The King.

Mossèn Jacme,¹ it comes to mind now when, of our own initiative,² we made mention of the displeasing excuse³ that was given to us last year⁴ at Zaragoza by the messengers of Barbastro, when we urged them to serve us with some prompt gift.⁵ And recalling this, and in what manner we can principally charge them on account of that affair — though we would not wish to bring to memory the failure⁶ of your⁷ promises, especially since they are such as can be remedied — for which reason we write to the *jurats* and *pròhomens* of Barbastro by a credence letter entrusted to you,⁸ by virtue of which we command that you tell them on our behalf that they should henceforth⁹ act in such a manner that they repair what they have failed to deliver, as aforesaid, and [that] we will consider ourselves well served by them and will have reason to hold them recommended in their opportunities.¹⁰ And for this purpose you shall have the written instrument¹¹ that you know of, in case they should not accept what will be required by us.¹² Given at Barcelona under our privy seal, the first day of April of the year 1387. Countersigned with our small ring seal.¹³

Footnotes

Unresolved Ambiguities

1. "**la escusa desplazent**" [?] — Word boundaries remain uncertain. Could be *escriptura de plazent* (HTR reading) or *escusa desplazent* (preferred on contextual grounds). Verification against the manuscript under magnification or UV light would help resolve the stroke count of the first word.
2. "**lo fallir**" [?] — The substantive after the article *lo* is paleographically uncertain. *Fallir* (failure), *falre*, and *falses* are all possible. The masculine singular article favors a substantivized infinitive (*lo fallir*).
3. "**vostres**" vs. "**nostres**" [?] — The initial letter of the possessive is difficult to distinguish. Context favors *vostres* (your); see footnote 7.
4. "**no volríem**" vs. "**no volrem**" [?] — Conditional (*volríem*) vs. future (*volrem*). Both are grammatically possible; the conditional ("we would not wish") is slightly more diplomatic in register.
5. "**fossen d'aquèst en tal mana**" [?] — The phrase after *fossen* is unclear. Interpreted as a temporal adverb ("henceforth"), but the exact form is uncertain.

6. "lo suy que per nos volrà" [?] — The word *suy* is not clearly legible. See footnote 12.
7. **Identity of Mossèn Jacme** — The addressee has not been identified. An *oficial d'armes* named Jacme active in April 1387 should be traceable through the registers of the *Cancillería* or the household accounts (*Mestre Racional*).
1. The letter is addressed to "Mossèn en Jacme," a knight serving as an *oficial d'armes* — a royal herald or officer of arms who could serve as a formal envoy. The "en" is an honorific particle standard in Catalan address. The capital J is written over the "en" in the manuscript. The individual has not been securely identified prosopographically; further research in the *Reg. 1751* and related registers may clarify which Jacme held this office in early 1387. ↵
2. "De nos propre" — literally "from our own [will/initiative]," emphasizing that the king raised the matter voluntarily, not in response to a petition. ↵
3. "La excusa desplaçent" — this reading remains somewhat uncertain. The HTR read *escriptura de plazent*; the word boundaries in the manuscript are ambiguous. My preferred reading, *excusa desplaçent* ("displeasing excuse"), yields the strongest contextual sense: the messengers offered an unsatisfactory excuse when pressed for a financial contribution. ↵
4. *Entany* — "last year," i.e., 1386. Joan was at Zaragoza in the later months of 1386, during the final phase of Pere III's reign. This likely refers to negotiations with Aragonese towns for financial support during or around the political transition. ↵
5. *Do coninent* — a prompt or immediate gift/donation. *Do* (from Lat. *donum*) is the gift; *coninent* (from Lat. *continens*) means "prompt, immediate, without delay." The phrase implies the king sought an ad hoc financial contribution rather than a scheduled tax payment. ↵
6. "Lo fallir de vostres promeses" — the reading of the substantive is uncertain. I read *fallir* (the failure/failing); the HTR suggested *falre*, which is not standard. *Faltes* (falsehoods) is also paleographically possible but less likely given the masculine singular article *lo*. ↵
7. The possessive (*vostres* vs. *nostres*) remains uncertain. "Your promises" (those of the people of Barbastro, conveyed via Mossèn Jacme) fits the rhetorical context better: the king reminds his envoy of the promises Barbastro's representatives made. "Our promises" is grammatically possible but would imply the king acknowledges his own unfulfilled commitments, which does not suit the letter's accusatory tone. ↵
8. *Letra de creença a vos comanada* — a credence letter entrusted to Mossèn Jacme. A *lletra de creença* authorizes the bearer to speak on the king's behalf; its contents are supplemented by oral instructions that the bearer delivers in person. The letter to the *jurats* would have accompanied this *lletra closa* as a separate document. ↵

9. "Fossen d'aquèst en tal mana" — the exact reading of the phrase after *fossen* remains uncertain. I interpret *d'aquèst [en avant]* as "from this [point forward], henceforth," a common temporal construction, though the manuscript is difficult here. The HTR read *d'aquest*; other possibilities include *d'aquén* (from here). ↵
10. "Haver-los recomanats en lurs oportunitats" — to hold them recommended/favored when occasions arise. This is a standard piece of royal diplomatic language: the promise to "remember" loyal subjects when distributing patronage, offices, or other favors. ↵
11. *Carta* — here, a formal written instrument or notarial act, not simply a "letter." The king instructs Mossèn Jacme to have this document ready in case Barbastro refuses, presumably to create a legal record of their non-compliance that could justify further royal action. ↵
12. "Lo suy que per nos volrà" — this passage is uncertain. *Lo suy* could be a form of *lo seu* (that which is his/theirs, i.e., what pertains to them) or possibly *lo suit/sèu* (a variant of *ço que*, that which). The sense appears to be: "in case they do not accept what will be desired/required by us." ↵
13. *Sotsignada ab nostre petit anell* — countersigned with the king's small ring seal (*anell*), a mark of personal royal authentication distinct from the *segell secret* (privy seal) under which the letter was sealed. The use of both the privy seal and the ring seal indicates a letter of some formality, though below the level of the *segell major* (great seal) used for solemn public acts. ↵