

James I of Aragon (1213–1276)

Subjects: Art

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James I, King of Aragon (1213–1276). He was the third king of the Crown of Aragon, which had come into existence through the union between Queen Petronila of Aragon (1157-1164) and the Count of Barcelona Ramon Berenguer IV (1137–1162). James I represents a milestone in the iconography of the Kings of Aragon, although this is due more to his successors' promotion of him rather than to his own efforts. In order to organise and unify his dominions after the conquests of Mallorca and Valencia, he immersed himself in legal work that consolidated his legislative power whilst still allowing his territories to retain a certain degree of autonomy. He carried out an essential monetary reorganisation in which his coinage retained its obverse but altered its reverse according to the place of issue. He never succeeded in being crowned, although he featured the crown prominently in his stamps and seals and, on some coins, he added the term *rex gratia Dei*. In addition, he revived the sword as a royal insignia, having proclaimed the right of conquest as the basis of his sovereignty.

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Due to the absence of a legitimate successor, James I became king of Aragon at the age of five after his father died in Muret in 1213. None of his contemporaries suspected that the child would become a legendary king. During his long minority he remained under the tutelage of the Templars in the castle of Monzón, while his uncle Sancho I of Roussillon, acting as regent at the orders of Queen Maria, and advised by a council of trusted Aragonese and Catalans, put down continuous rebellions by the Aragonese nobility, who even took the king prisoner in 1223.

During the 63 years of his reign, he expanded the Crown throughout the Mediterranean, earning himself the name of Conqueror, and he laid the social, political and economic foundations that stabilised the kingdom, whose finances had been ruined by his father Peter II (1196–1213).

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