

Peter IV of Aragon (1336–1387)

Subjects: Art

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Peter IV king of Aragón (1336–1387). He was the seventh king of the Crown of Aragon, and father of Juan I (1387–1396) and Martín I (1396–1410), the last members of the dynasty to take the throne. When Martín died, the Trastámara branch occupied the throne of the kingdom. Peter IV was dazzling in his ability to use art as a tool of authority and sovereignty. With the aim of exalting the dynasty, he patronised various enterprises, among the most important of which was the abbey of Santa Maria de Poblet, which he intended to be a burial place for himself and his successors, a wish that was fulfilled, without exception, down to Juan II, the predecessor of the Catholic Monarchs. A perfectionist and zealot, he endowed important religious events with profound political significance, and promoted works of great symbolism such as the genealogy of the new *saló del tinell*, or the *ordinacions de la casa i cort*, to which he added an appendix establishing how the kings of Aragon were to be crowned.

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On the death of Alphonse IV (1327–1336) in Barcelona, the kingdom of Aragon passed into the hands of the prince Peter, nicknamed the Ceremonious for his interest in the due magnificence of the institution he represented and in the palatine entourage, which he organised with care and attention to detail.

He was born on 5 September 1319 in Balaguer. No one foresaw that he would attain the crown: he was the second son and the kingdom then belonged to his uncle James, the first son of James II (1291–1327). James's renunciation of the throne meant that Alphonse, Count of Urgell and Peter's father, became the rightful heir, and this, added to the death of Alphonse's first-born son shortly afterwards, meant that Peter became the legitimate successor. Being in his seventies, he was so weak in health and physically puny that, as he would say in the *Crònica de Pere el Cerimoniós* written in his own hand and which covers his entire reign and that of his father, King Alphonse IV: "neither the midwives, nor those who attended our birth, thought we could live" ^[1].

Energetic and strong-willed, he increased the power of the monarchical institution, intervened in important foreign conflicts, and extended his dominions by incorporating Sicily, seizing Roussillon and dispossessing the Mallorcan king Jaume III (1324–1349) of his island kingdom. The chronicler Zurita summed up his complex personality: "While this prince was of the weakest and most delicate composure of body, he was also of the most ardent spirit and of incredible promptness and liveliness and of great vigour and execution in all that he undertook, and of spirit and courage for any undertaking and strangely ambitious and haughty and very ceremonious in preserving the royal authority and pre-eminence" ^[2].

He compared himself to James I (1213–1276), whom he admired with fervour. He considered that he shared several similarities with his predecessor, such as the protection of Providence, similar military exploits and certain biographical facts. His reign was the second longest reign of the Crown of Aragon, after that of the acclaimed Conqueror.

References

1. Pedro IV. *Crònica*. Les quatre grans cròniques, 3rd ed.; Soldevila, F., Ed.; Selecta: Barcelona, Spain, 1983; chap. 1 par. 40.
 2. De Zurita, J. *Anales de Aragón*; Institución Fernando el Católico: Zaragoza, Spain, 1998 (1562); lib. X, chap. XXXIX.
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