

1250: A Letter from the Regional Ruler al-Azraq to the Queen of Aragón

Eric Böhme



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Abstract: This article examines a letter from the Muslim regional ruler and rebel leader al-Azraq to the Queen of Aragón. The letter was written in the context of the first major uprising of Muslims in the Kingdom of València (1247–1258). Based on an analysis of the document's content, the article analyses the diplomatic etiquette that characterised the relations between the crown and the rebels. Moreover, it inserts al-Azraq's rebellion into the supra-regional context of the so-called "Reconquista," which reached a critical point around the middle of the thirteenth century.

Source

Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cartas árabes, n. 154, ed. María del Carmen Barceló Torres, Documentos árabes de Al-Azraq (1245–1250), in: *Saitabi. Revista de la Facultat de Geografia i Història* 32 (1982), pp. 40–41 [recto only], trans. Eric Böhme.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ نَبِيِّهِ
الْكَرِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. God bless His honourable prophet Muḥammad.

مولاي السلطانة الكريمة المويده المنصورة العميمة
المباركة الرينة دنة مولانا السلطان المويده المنصور ملك
الرومية ومملك شرق الأندلس من عبدكم وخدمكم
ومقبل يديكم المباركة الكريمة محمد بن هذيل الشهير
بالأزرق سلام كريم بر طيب مبارك على مقامكم
الشريفة ورحمة الله تعالى وبركاته

[To] My Lady, the honourable, supported [by God], victorious, all-embracing, blessed ruler (*sultāna*), the reina Dona (*al-rīna duna*) of our lord, supported [by God], victorious ruler (*sultān*), King of Christendom (*malik al-rūmiyya*) and King of the Šarq al-Andalus. [A letter] from your subordinate and servant (*min 'abdikum wa-ḥadīmikum*) who kisses your blessed and noble hands, Muḥammad bin Huḍayl, known as al-Azraq. An honourable, sincere, amicable and blessed greeting to your venerable Majesty. The mercy of God the Exalted and His blessings [be upon you].

اما بعد فالكتاب اليكم من حصن القلاع حماه الله
تعالى فالذين وجب به على العبد تعرفكم انه وصل
الى عبدكم وخدمكم ثقتمكم وخدمكم دون جوان
ذي مور به [م] كتوب من عندي مولانا السلطان

This letter [is sent] to you from the fortress of al-Qalā'a, may God the Exalted protect it. Among the things about which the subordinate (*al-'abd*) must inform you is that your confidant and servant Dūn Ġuwān dī Mūrah has reached your subordinate and servant (*'abdikum wa-ḥadīmikum*), bearing a letter from our lord the ruler (*al-sultān*), may God sustain

ايده الله فقرئناها وعلمنا ما فيها من البر والرعاية
والحفظ والعناية وامر ارسالنا اليكم

him. We have read it and understood what it contains in terms of sincerity, care, protection, patronage, and the command to send [an embassy in return] to you.

فاخذنا في الحركة والارسال اليكم فيما يكون فيه
خيراً ان شا الله فوجهنا اليكم ثقتنا قريتنا وابن خالتنا
ابي الحسن بن هذيل والقايد الاجل الاكرم الارفع
الاكمل الأفضل ابي القاسم بن هلال والقايد ابي
عمر عثم [ن] بن سهل اكرمهما الله فيرغب العبد
منكم ان يكون مكرومين ملحوظين عندكم وفي
بلادكم تحت كنفكم سائرين واردين حتى يقضي الله
ما فيه الخير ان شا الله وقد وصيت ثقتنا القايد ابي
القاسم اليكم ان يأخذ يدكم عنا ويقبله وقد وصينا
ما يقول لكم من الكلام فاعتمد عليه فانا أقوله وما
يخاطبكم به انا اخاطبوه فالله تعالى يقدم الخيارة ان
شا الله فهذا ما وجب به تعرفكم

We have set in motion the sending [of envoys] to you according to what is good therein, God willing. We send to you our confidant [and] relative, the son of our maternal aunt, Abū l-Ḥasan bin Ḥuḍayl, the most exalted, honourable, supreme, perfect and virtuous commander (*qā'id*) Abū l-Qāsim bin Hilāl as well as the commander Abū 'Amr 'Uṭma[n] bin Sahl, may God honour them. The subordinate asks you [to ensure] that they may be honoured and heard¹ by you and be under your protection in your lands when they come and return, so that God may fulfil what is good, God willing. I have instructed our confidant, the commander Abū l-Qāsim, to take your hand in our stead and kiss it. We have instructed him with what he tells you verbally, so trust in him, for I speak through him, and what he says to you I say to you. May God the Exalted give good things, God willing. That is what you need to know.

والسلام على مقامكم العليّ ورحمة الله وبركاته كتب
في رابع لشهر ذي حجة عام سبع وأربعين وستمائة.

Peace be upon your exalted Majesty, and the mercy of God and His blessings. Written on the fourth [day] of the month Dū [l-]Ḥiġġa in the year 647 [10 March 1250].

مولايّ السلطانة المويودة المنصورة الرينة دنة مولانا
السلطان أراغون حامه الله (...)

[To] My Lady, the victorious ruler supported by [God], the *reina Dona* of our lord the ruler of Aragón (*Arāġūn*), God save him (...).

Authorship & Work

[§1] The cited text forms part of a document now preserved in the archive of the Crown of Aragón, Barcelona. This document is a letter, written on paper by an unknown scribe in partially deficient or dialectal Arabic.² Both the script and the overall form of the document appear comparatively simple and unadorned. The most distinctive feature is the reversal of the

¹ The expression *malhūzīn* may also be understood in the sense of “giving official recognition” to the al-Azraq's envoys, but this is merely conjectural.

² This has already been remarked by earlier editors: Alarcon y Santón and García de Linares (eds): *Los documentos árabes*, vol. 1, n. 154, pp. 393–394. The transcription of the front page (recto) used here is based on the edition in Barceló-Torres, *Documentos*. I have corrected a few printing errors, made some additions in square brackets, and removed the line break markings. The largely “normalised” spelling adopted from this edition does not reflect all orthographic peculiarities of the manuscript for the sake of readability and comprehensibility. For example, I have added the diacritical dots enabling distinction between graphemes of the same type, which are missing in the original manuscript due to omission or fading. However, this approach does not affect the rendition of the letter's contents. For more detailed philological explanations of the relevant grammatical and orthographical phenomena cf. Institute of Islamic Studies, *Grammar*.

direction of writing at the bottom of the page, frequently used in Western Arabic diplomatic correspondence in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. However, in the present document the uneven division of space makes it difficult to read the last lines of text.³ The document was once folded several times, with one of the outer layers (indicated as verso in the text above) having an inscription that is now only barely legible.

[§2] The letter dates to 4 Dū l-Ḥiġġa 647, which corresponds to 10 March 1250 in the Gregorian calendar used today. The fortress (*ḥiṣn*) al-Qalā'a (today in the Vall d'Alcalá, Marina Alta, Alicante) is indicated as the letter's place of origin. It was sent by the Andalusian regional ruler Muḥammad b. Huḍayl "al-Azraq" (d. 674/1276), one of the leaders of the first great Muslim uprising in the Kingdom of Valencia in the 1250s. The content of the letter was most likely defined and authorised by him, whereas one or more unknown scribes from his chancery (*kitāba*) were probably responsible for the actual formulation of the text.⁴ The letter is addressed to the Queen of Aragón, who—although she is not mentioned by name—can be identified with Yolanda of Hungary (r. 1235–1251), then wife of King James I (r. 1213–1276).

[§3] Apart from a bilingual agreement with the Crown of Aragón issued in April 1245, this letter seems to be the only Arabic document which informs us about al-Azraq's political activities.⁵

Content & Context

[§4] The letter opens with the customary Muslim formulas, thus invoking God (*basmalā*) and praising the Prophet Muḥammad (*taṣliya*).⁶ It continues with an elaborate and respectful salutation of the addressee and introduces al-Azraq as the sender writing from the fortress of al-Qalā'a. He informs the queen that the royal envoy Dūn Ġuwān dī Mūrah (Don Joan de Mur/Mora/Muro) had previously reached him with a letter from James I, the contents of which he had acknowledged with favour. He has now complied with the king's request for a counter embassy by sending his cousin Abū l-Ḥasan b. Huḍayl as well as the commanders (*quwwād*) Abū l-Qāsim b. Hilāl and Abū 'Amr 'Uṭman b. Sahl. He asks that these envoys be granted the protection of the Crown on their journey through the Kingdoms of Valencia and Aragón. He also authorises a member of the delegation, Abū l-Qāsim, as spokesman to pay homage to the Queen and to speak to her about certain matters he has instructed the envoy to discuss. The letter concludes with frequently used Islamic blessings and the date of issue.

[§5] The significance of the short letter only becomes clear when it is placed within the broader context of political developments on the Iberian Peninsula, which are often summarised under the controversial term "Reconquista." The first half of the thirteenth century was marked by the competing efforts of the two major Christian powers, Castile and Aragón, to expand into the south of al-Andalus, which had been ruled by Muslims for centuries.⁷ In the east (*šarq*)⁸ of this

³ Illustrations of numerous other examples can be found in: Ministerio de Cultura (ed.): *El perfume de la amistad*; a detailed analysis based on three examples in Potthast, *Drei Fragmente*.

⁴ On the *kitāba*, see Burns, *Islam*, pp. 354–360, esp. 397–398; Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 422–431, 450; Buresi and Al-'Allaoui, *Chancellerie almohade*.

⁵ Potthast, *Drei Fragmente*, p. 409, attributes two additional letters (Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cartas árabes, n. 165–166) to al-Azraq or his entourage. However, they are still unedited, difficult to read, and cannot be assigned to this group with certainty. This probably explains why they have not been treated in historical research to date (see the references below). Due to lack of space, the present contribution cannot address this problem in detail.

⁶ For more details, see Potthast, *Diplomatischer Austausch*.

⁷ For an overview of these developments, see the standard work by Engels, *Reconquista*, and Jaspert, *Reconquista*.

⁸ The contemporary Arabic expression *Šarq al-Andalus* broadly refers to the eastern mainland of the Iberian Peninsula with the population centres of Valencia (*Balansiya*), Xàtiva (*Šāṭiba*) and Múrcia (*Mursiya*). It also included the Balearic Islands. See Guichard, *Sharḳ al-Andalus*.

region, the conquests of James I⁹ had massively changed the political situation from the late 1220s onwards. At least nominally, vast areas between Morella (*Qal'at Murīla*) in the north and Xixona (*Šiṣūna*) in the south formed part of the young Christian-ruled Kingdom of Valencia, itself one of the realms of the Crown of Aragón, shortly before the middle of the thirteenth century.¹⁰

[§6] Muḥammad b. Huḍayl al-Azraq was a petty Muslim ruler in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula. Due to the lack of reliable source material, we know nothing concrete about his early years. He first becomes tangible in April 1245 in the aforementioned agreement with the Crown of Aragón.¹¹ The remote and barely accessible mountainous region between the Serpis river valley and the coast of Dénia (*Dāniya*), where al-Azraq held sway over several strongholds, represented one of the last independent Muslim dominions in the *Šarq al-Andalus* at that time. In the winter of 1244/1245, King James I vainly tried to integrate this region into the Kingdom of Valencia by military force. In spring 1245 at the latest, pressing foreign affairs in Occitania and in contacts with the Papal Curia in connection with the preparation of the first Council of Lyon¹² forced him to come to terms with the Muslims quickly. To this end, he concluded a diplomatic agreement with al-Azraq, which stipulated the following conditions: the latter would hand over some of his fortresses to the Crown immediately, others after a moratorium of three years. Alcalá (*al-Qalā'a*) and Perpuxent (*Burbanġān*), however, would remain in his possession permanently.¹³

[§7] However, this pragmatic solution, intent on concluding the Valencian conquest in a timely manner, only briefly pacified the situation in the Crown's new realm. In the middle of 1247, al-Azraq began spearheading a resistance movement that sought to shake off Christian rule over the *Šarq al-Andalus* as swiftly as it had been imposed on the Muslim communities (Catalan: *aljama* > Arabic: *al-ġam*). Through the agreement concluded two years earlier, al-Azraq had possibly sought to buy more time for reorganising resistance against the invaders as not to give up his independence without a fight. Immediately after the beginning of the uprising in late summer 1247, he seized several fortresses in the south of the kingdom.

[§8] Completely surprised by these events, the Crown reacted hastily and with a heavy hand. King James I not only ordered the violent suppression of the uprising, but also the expulsion of all Muslims from the kingdom. These so-called Mudejars (Catalan: *mudèjars*, Castilian: *mudéjares* > Arabic: *mudaġġan*), however, made up the overwhelming majority of the population in the kingdom and, as tax-paying subjects and labour force, were indispensable both to the Crown and its subordinate Christian landowners. Therefore, it would hardly have been possible to enforce a large-scale expulsion throughout the kingdom. Nevertheless, the flow of refugees to safer regions in the south probably reached immense proportions.¹⁴ Despite their extraordinary harshness, these measures were unsuitable to bring about the rebels' surrender. On the contrary, it fueled the rebellion which spread throughout the entire kingdom: the rebels conquered about a dozen more fortresses, thus provoking a resolute military counterattack by the Crown. Probably as early as mid-1248, al-Azraq was forced to retreat to Alcalá (*al-Qalā'a*).

⁹ Catalan: *Jaume I*, Aragonese: *Chaime I*, Spanish: *Jaime I*, German: *Jakob I*.

¹⁰ See for example the syntheses by Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 175–202 and Torr6, *Naixement*, pp. 25–56.

¹¹ Burns, *Islam*, pp. 323–324; Burns and Chevedden, *Negotiating Cultures*, pp. 6–8.

¹² The Aragonese king played an important role at this council, held in June/July 1245, during which various measures ultimately directed against Islam were discussed and decided upon, including the deposition of Emperor Frederick II because of his relations with the "Saracens," a new crusade to the Middle East under the leadership of Louis IX, the introduction of a special tax for the financial support of the Holy Land and the sending of a papal envoy to the Mongols; see Roberg, *Lyon*, for an overview, and Smith, *Jaime I*, for the broader context.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the document, see Burns and Chevedden, *Negotiating Cultures*, pp. 3–59, as well as its edition on pp. 35–37 (Aragonese-Castilian text) and pp. 39–50 (Arabic text).

¹⁴ Details in Torr6, *Guerra*; a short version in Torr6, *Expellere Sarracenos*, pp. 78–83.

Until the end of 1249, the king succeeded in putting down the uprising in most regions. To some extent, James I owed this success to the support of Pope Innocent IV (sed. 1243-1254) who, at the king's request, had circulars and bulls distributed, which intended to give the enterprise the character of a crusade, at least formally.¹⁵

[§9] Almost nothing is known about the course of the military conflict in the following years. This is largely due to King James's refusal to report in more detail in his autobiographical *Llibre dels feits* about events that were as humiliating for him as they influenced his future policy.¹⁶ It seems likely that the Crown's harsh counterattack and the rebels' withdrawal marked a turning point in the development of the military situation. Probably because a conquest of al-Azraq's remote and barely accessible heartlands would have demanded excessive efforts, the confrontation came to a halt and calmed down in the following years. The rebels' retreat, which at its peak comprised about twenty fortresses, could resist mainly thanks to its contacts with the outside world, especially with the Kingdom of Castile: in July 1254, al-Azraq was even invited to personal talks with Alfonso X (r. 1252–1284), the son-in-law of James I, with whom he tried to conclude an alliance against the Crown of Aragón. Although this was never realised, the Castilian king's indirect protection and mediation enabled the rebel leader to wring an official truce from James I in the spring of 1257, at the latest.¹⁷ The channels of communication to the ruler of Aragón remained open as well. Written in 1250, i.e. two years after the beginning of the harsh suppression of the rebellion, the letter to Queen Yolanda discussed here and analysed in more detail below, provides prime evidence for this. However, at an unknown later date, al-Azraq also took advantage of the king's willingness to negotiate: under the pretext of peace negotiations, he lured James I and his escort into an ambush known as the *fet de Rugat* ("deed of Rugat"), from which the monarch only escaped narrowly.¹⁸

[§10] According to the account in the *Llibre dels feits*, a confidant in al-Azraq's entourage informed the king of a food shortage in the rebels' area of retreat, which he himself had promoted. This betrayal brought an end to the stalemate. As a result, James refused another truce and, in February 1258, set in motion a large-scale campaign to seize the rebel areas. By the end of May, the royal host was in a position to besiege al-Azraq's headquarters at Alcalá (*al-Qalā'a*). In view of his hopeless situation, the rebel leader was forced to abandon his resistance under the most honourable conditions possible. In the surrender negotiations, he had to agree to go into exile permanently. In return, the king conceded to him a small, strategically rather insignificant remnant of his former domain, which was to be held in the future in the name of al-Azraq by his brother Bassām and his nephew Abū Ġa'far b. Huḍayl. With this

¹⁵ On these events see Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 574–581; Burns, *Crusade*, pp. 80–101; Torró, *Guerra*, pp. 201–224, and Torró, *Naixement*, pp. 56–63. On the papal letters, whose concrete distribution and reception remains unclear, see Burns, *Lost Crusade*. Burns has repeatedly argued that the measures taken by the Curia to support the campaigns of James I against the Muslims in the *Šarq al-Andalus* (both in the years up to 1245 and 1248–1250) should be interpreted as "crusades." However, this interpretation remains disputed to date, see e.g. Torró, *Expellere Sarracenos*, p. 81 n. 29.

¹⁶ While the military campaigns of the years 1233–1245 are described in detail in more than 200 chapters, the events of the following two decades up to the campaign against Murcia (*Mursiya*) are treated in little more than fifteen, chronologically rather confused chapters: [King James I of Aragon], *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 361–377, pp. 388–402; English translation: *The Book of Deeds*, trans. Smith and Buffery, , cap. 361–377, pp. 271–282. On this problem in our context, see Burns and Chevedden, *Surrender Treaty*, pp. 525–527; and Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 571–572, 581.

¹⁷ Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 581–584; Torró, *Naixement*, pp. 59–61, 63–65; on Aragonese–Castilian relations in this context, see Burns, *Crusade*, pp. 102–105; on the broader context: Burns, *Warrior Neighbors*; and González Jiménez, *Jaime I*.

¹⁸ *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 375, p. 400; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 375, p. 280.

agreement, the nearly decade-long resistance of the rebels around al-Azraq came to an end in June 1258.¹⁹

[§11] When the Muslims of the Kingdom of Valencia rose up again against Christian rule almost two decades later (1275–1277), the former rebel leader returned to reconquer his old domain. According to King James's account, he led 250 mounted elite fighters to besiege Alcoi in the spring of 1276, but there met his own death in battle.²⁰

[§12] In the context of these briefly outlined events, al-Azraq's letter to Queen Yolanda represents an important source. It sheds light on the continuing communication between the two sides during the stalemate between the Crown and the retreating rebel group around al-Azraq that began around 1250, the course of which is deliberately ignored in the *Llibre dels feits* and is therefore difficult to trace: an authentic original document from the rebel leader's environment, the letter forms a counterweight to the king's tendentious report of his own deeds.

Contextualization, Analysis & Interpretation

[§13] Having outlined the letter's historical context, we can now analyse the document in more detail. The following discussion will concentrate on the style of the letter and the implications of the titles used, the possible circumstances of the diplomatic understanding, the role of the queen as addressee, the identity and the tasks of the envoys as well as the possible repercussions of their mission. At the end, the events surrounding al-Azraq's rebellion will be placed in the larger context of political developments on the Iberian Peninsula and in the western Mediterranean.

[§14] One cannot escape the impression that al-Azraq was well able to present himself as an eloquent and self-confident interlocutor who was familiar with the formal conventions of correspondence with a Christian queen. At first glance, the tone of the letter seems to stand in sharp contrast to the military conflicts of the previous and subsequent years, which were conducted with intransigence and harshness. Notwithstanding these circumstances, al-Azraq addresses Yolanda as "My Lady" (*mawlātī*) and "ruler" (*sultāna*), adding several adjectives of great respect. Her status as queen of Aragón is also referred to by calling her "Queen Lady" (Arabic: *al-rīna duna* > Old Catalan: *reina Dona*) "of our lord" (*mawlānā*), the "ruler" (*al-sultān*) and "King of Christendom and the East of Andalus" (*malik al-Rūmiyya wa-Šarq al-Andalus*). Like his wife, James I is not mentioned by name, but is showered with adjectives of praise as well.²¹ The address of the ruling couple on the top layer of the once folded letter repeats the vocabulary of the main text in a shortened form and adds the more pragmatic formula "Ruler of Aragón" (*sultān Arāgūn*), which is not used in the main text.

[§15] In contrast to these titles, the sender presents himself humbly as Muḥammad b. Huḍayl, "your subordinate and servant (*min 'abdikum wa-ḥadīmikum*) who kisses your blessed and noble hands," and refers to his epithet (*laqab*) al-Azraq, by which he was known.²² This modest

¹⁹ *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 373–377, pp. 398–402; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 373–377, pp. 279–282. Cf. also the analyses in Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 584–586 and Torró, *Naixement*, pp. 65–67.

²⁰ *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 556, pp. 520–521; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 556, p. 376; moreover Guichard, *Al-Andalus*, pp. 606–607.

²¹ Cf. the source text above: "mawlātī al-sultāna al-karīma al-mu'ayyada al-manšūra al-'amīma al-mubāraka al-rīna duna mawlānā al-sultān al-mu'ayyad al-manšūr malik al-rūmiyya wa-malik šarq al-Andalus (...)." The title *reina Dona* was a common form of address for queens in medieval Catalan, and was also used by James I himself, see, for example, *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 3–4, 7, 17–18, pp. 51–52, 55, 75; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 3–4, 7, 17–18, pp. 19, 21, 33.

²² Source text above: "min 'abdikum wa-ḥadīmikum wa-muqabbil yadaykum al-mubāraka al-karīma Muḥammad bin Huḍayl aš-šāhir bi-l-Azraq (...)."

self-designation falls short of the titles bestowed on him in the 1245 agreement. In the Arabic text, he features as “the most illustrious Wazīr, the noble, the highest, the most eminent, the most exalted Abū ‘Abd Allāh bin Huḍayl—may God honor him!”²³ In the Romance text, he is referred to as “Abū ‘Abd Allāh bin Huḍayl, vizier and lord of Alcalá.”²⁴ It is hardly surprising that, in later royal documents, he is merely referred to without any titles as “our traitor” (*traditor noster*).²⁵

[§16] The terms used in each case reflect the respective political circumstances. In the spring of 1245, the Infante Alfonso, the king’s eldest son, negotiated with an independent regional ruler who could not yet be defeated by military means, on an almost equal footing; five years later, a cornered rebel leader addressed the Queen of Aragón. Despite his continued resistance, al-Azraq had to acknowledge political realities at least formally, especially as he certainly hoped this would improve his position in negotiations with the Crown. Against this backdrop, it becomes understandable that he described himself as a “subordinate and servant” of the Crown equal to the royal envoy Don Joan de Mur/Mora/Muro, whereas he referred to James I, against whose rule the rebels had risen and who therefore now punished all Muslims with a heavy hand, as the “Ruler of Aragón,” and even granted him (titular) rule over the Muslim *Šarq al-Andalus*.²⁶

[§17] The other sections of the letter also provide valuable details that are not known from other sources. We learn, for example, that al-Azraq resided in Alcalá (*al-Qalā‘a*) in the spring of 1250. Obviously, the rebel leader felt confident enough to disclose this crucial information to the enemy, fully aware of the fact that this virtually impregnable stronghold provided a safe refuge. Moreover, the document testifies that the two warring parties had previously communicated with each other. We lack details about the royal envoy Don Joan de Mur/Mora/Muro and the content of the royal letter he delivered. However, it is rather unlikely that James I had only met his opponent with “sincerity, care, protection, patronage” as well as with the request for a counter embassy.²⁷ It rather seems as if al-Azraq and his advisors reacted to the customary phrases of courtesy which the monarch used to circumscribe threats, a stylistic device he also employed in communication with other negotiating partners.²⁸ That the king was still considering military options in addition to the exchange of envoys is suggested by his intensified communication with the Papal Curia in the spring of 1250. As a result, Innocent IV

²³ Burns and Chevedden, *Negotiating Cultures*, p. 48: “al-wazīr al-ağall al-ḥasīb al-arfa‘ al-asmā al-asnā Abū ‘Abd Allāh bin Huḍayl akramahu Allāh (...),” translation at p. 49. Concerning the title of vizier (Arabic: *wazīr*, Romance: *alguazil*), note that this and other official titles (e.g. *qā‘id* or *ra‘īs*) were no longer associated with clearly definable or delimitable competences in the thirteenth-century *Šarq al-Andalus*, see Burns, *Islam*, pp. 365–367, and, for further possible definitions of the term *wazīr*: Zaman, Eddé, Carmona, Lambton, İnalçik, *Wazīr*.

²⁴ Burns and Chevedden, *Negotiating Cultures*, p. 35: “Habuabdele Yvan Fudayl, alguazil et senor Dalcala (...),” translation at p. 37. Nothing concrete is known about the drafting of both text variants, but the editors (pp. 54–59) have deduced from various clues that the final version of the treaty was probably produced in the Infante’s chancery. It is nevertheless likely that al-Azraq and his advisors had a say on the titulatures used for the Muslim side and probably had asserted this right in the preliminary negotiations on the textual formulation.

²⁵ See for example Burns (ed.), *Diplomatarium*, vol. 2, n. 79, 85, pp. 70, 75: “Aladrachum traditorem nostrum (...),” n. 91, p. 80: “Aladrach proditorem nostrum (...).” The *Llibre dels feits* usually has only “al-Azraq” in various Catalan spellings.

²⁶ A similar conclusion is reached by Burns, *Crusade*, p. 99, and Torró Abad, *Naixement*, pp. 64–65.

²⁷ See the source text above: “mā fihā min al-barr wa-l-ri‘āya wa-l-ḥifẓ wa-l-‘ināya wa-amr irsālinā ilaykum (...).”

²⁸ For example, towards the *quwwād* of Bairén (*Bayrān*) in 1239, and Xàtiva (*Šāṭiba*) in 1243: *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 308, 334–335, pp. 354–355, 369–370; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 308, 334–335, pp. 244–245, 257–258. For Barceló-Torres, *Documentos*, p. 36, the preceding legation was merely “relacionada con un principio de conversaciones de paz, de las que nada sabemos (...).”

called on the clergy of the Crown of Aragón to recruit supporters for the king's campaign against the rebellious Muslims in their sermons in March of the same year.²⁹

[§18] The reason why al-Azraq sent the desired counter embassy to the queen rather than to the king is unknown. It seems possible that James I himself had asked him to do so in his previous letter, as his rather assertive wife had already been involved in important political and diplomatic matters several times in the past.³⁰ Whether the monarch credited her and her advisors with particular skills to resolve the military stalemate by diplomatic means or simply delegated the correspondence to her due to other obligations remains unclear.³¹

[§19] The envoys accredited by the letter remain difficult to grasp. They appear neither in the agreement of 1245 nor in the *Llibre dels feits* or any other source at our disposal. In any case, al-Azraq's decision to appoint as envoy a close relative, his maternal cousin, was well in line with common diplomatic practice. It is not known, whether this cousin, Abū l-Ḥasan b. Ḥudayl, went into exile with the former rebel leader after their resistance ended in 1258, or remained on the family estates left to him by the king. He does not appear in the comparatively rich diplomatic evidence. His two companions are defined as commanders (*quwwād*). We do not know, however, which specific roles they occupied within al-Azraq's domains. While the *qā'id* Abū 'Amr 'Uṭman b. Sahl possibly enjoyed less prestige than his companions, given that he is mentioned last and without any titles, Abū l-Qāsim b. Hilāl quite obviously took on the role of the delegation's leader and spokesman. We do not know why al-Azraq favoured him over his cousin, but the adjectives praising him identify him as a man of high rank. What all envoys certainly had in common was that they enjoyed al-Azraq's trust. Otherwise, they would hardly have been suitable candidates for such an important mission serving the rebels' aim of gaining concrete political advantages in a delicate situation. The designation of Ibn Ḥudayl as "our confidant" (*tiqatanā*) should probably also be interpreted in this light. Whether the envoys were qualified for the task on the basis of their language skills is likewise unknown. In any case, one can assume that they had a sufficient command of the language(s) of their addressees to be able to communicate independently on their journey. But they may also have been accompanied by interpreters who are not mentioned separately in the text, or else employed mediators at the queen's court. Yolanda herself certainly had to rely on such specialists in order to be able to understand the content of the Arabic letter addressed to her.³²

[§20] The phrases by which the *qā'id* Abū l-Qāsim is introduced as spokesman are especially remarkable. Before all else, he was to kiss the queen's hand as a sign of al-Azraq's deference to his royal interlocutor. This ritual, common in Latin-Christian court culture, had no equivalent in Muslim diplomacy, at least with regard to female dignitaries. It seems reasonable that it was perceived by the Christian and even the Muslim side as a symbolic confirmation of a still existing relationship of dependence between al-Azraq and the Crown.³³

²⁹ The relevant documents edited in Burns, *Lost Crusade*, n. VII–X, contain no reference to the concrete situation in the Kingdom of Valencia or to al-Azraq, however. On the disputed interpretation of the measures as a "crusade", see n. 15 above.

³⁰ Yolanda was involved in the secret negotiations on the surrender of Valencia (*Balansiya*) in 1238: *Llibre dels feits*, ed. Soldevila, cap. 276–277, pp. 335–336; trans. *Book of Deeds*, ed. Smith and Buffery, cap. 276–277, p. 227. As late as February 1249, she arbitrated in a dispute between her husband and the Infante Peter of Portugal, whose main issue was the expulsion of Muslim peasants from the latter's dominion in the north of the kingdom. The surviving charter finalising the reconciliation of both parties is edited in Burns, *Guerra*, Appendix I, and has recently been reinterpreted by Torró, *Expellere*, pp. 82–83.

³¹ For further information on the possible agency of the queen and her court, see Ponsich, *Petite filie*.

³² For broader considerations on the topic of language mediation, see Echevarría Arsuaga, *Trujamanes*, among others.

³³ On the possible implications of the formula *'abdikum wa-ḥadīmikum*, see Barceló-Torres, *Documentos*, p. 33, who suggested equating *ḥadīm* with "vassal" but did not adopt this terminology in her own translation of the

[§21] In the ensuing negotiations, Abū l-Qāsim was supposed to act as the embodied voice of al-Azraq, through which the rebel leader himself could communicate directly with the queen. The fact that the letter does not mention al-Azraq's concerns, which Abū l-Qāsim was to convey only orally, could have served as a precautionary measure in case the envoys did not reach their destination and the letter fell into the wrong hands.³⁴

[§22] The phrases used to introduce and close the main parts of the letter, "Among the things about which the subordinate must inform you (...)",³⁵ and "That is what you need to know",³⁶ once again illustrate the pragmatic approach that, leaving aside all courteous phrases and religious formulas, represents a main element of the short letter.

[§23] With regard to the progress of the events directly connected with the letter, many more questions remain open. It is quite certain that it did not remain a *lettre morte* and that the envoys actually set out and reached their destination. Otherwise, the document they carried would not have been preserved in the royal archives until today.³⁷ The rebels' central concerns and the progress of the negotiations they were to conduct personally at the queen's court remain a matter of conjecture. Considering the situation outlined above, it seems conceivable that they were to find diplomatic ways out of the deadlock and to resolve the conflict between the Crown and the rebels. However, the course of events in the following years, which we can only reconstruct vaguely, shows that the mediators on both sides succeeded only in the short term, if at all. The relationship between the conflict parties remained so tense that al-Azraq and his advisors even launched an—albeit unsuccessful—assassination attempt on the "King of the *Šarq al-Andalus*," who was to remember this so-called *fet de Rugat* for the rest of his life. Although tensions eased again during the truce of 1257, the determined campaign of James I in the following year finally brought an end to a conflict that had lasted almost a decade.

[§24] In sum, it should be emphasised once again that the letter sent by the rebel leader al-Azraq to the Queen of Aragón can be considered an important document in several respects. Apart from the treaty of 1245, it is the only authentic Arabic document to date that provides first-hand information about al-Azraq's diplomatic activities as well as the members of his inner circle. In view of the sparse surviving records for the decade of the first Muslim uprisings in the Kingdom of Valencia and especially concerning the stalemate of 1250-1258, the letter sheds a singular light on events and persons left unmentioned in the *Llibre dels feits*—probably deliberately. Moreover, the fact that the letter was composed by a Muslim regional ruler and his closest advisors allows us to draw conclusions about the view a small Muslim ruling elite held on Christian kingship in the *Šarq al-Andalus*. This view is reflected in the way this elite presented itself to the queen in the cited letter: it had to reconcile its self-perception with the contemporary political realities.

[§25] In the broader context of political developments in the western Mediterranean, the first large-scale uprising of the Mudejars in the Kingdom of Valencia under the leadership of al-Azraq can be seen as a regional symptom of larger developments that affected other regions of the southern Iberian Peninsula as well: the first half of the thirteenth century had been marked by massive territorial gains on the part of the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragón, which were pushing into the southern parts of the peninsula at that time. The decades that followed saw

document (p. 41). Owing to our lack of knowledge about the Andalusian-Arabic understanding of the Latin-European concept of vassalage, only vague conjectures on this subject are possible, however.

³⁴ The conception of envoys as the direct voice of their masters was widespread in Latin-Christian epistolary culture as well. As an introduction, see Deswarte, Herbers and Scherer (eds), *Frühmittelalterliche Briefe*.

³⁵ Source text above: "fa-alladīna waḡaba bihi 'alā al-'abd ta'arrufukum annahu (...)."

³⁶ Source text above: "fa-haḡā mā waḡaba bihi ta'arrufukum (...)."

³⁷ However, nothing is known about the history of the document's preservation. In contrast to many other Arabic documents, it has apparently never been translated into Latin or Romance languages, which may have facilitated the survival of the original. For further information on this topic, see Potthast, *Translations*.

repeated revolts by a Muslim population subjected to Christian rule. These uprisings were not confined to the Kingdom of Valencia (1247–1258, 1275–1277), but also shook the Castilian Kingdom of Múrcia (1263–1266). They were a cause for serious concern, especially due to the almost omnipresent rivalry between Castile and Aragón. This rivalry was a fact well known to Muslim leaders like al-Azraq, who frequently tried to play off both great powers against each other to their own advantage.³⁸ After the suppression of the Muslim uprisings, the respective Christian monarchs considerably intensified their efforts to consolidate their rule over the subjugated territories, so that, by the end of the century, the balance of power had been clearly established in favour of Christian rule.

[§26] For the Kingdom of Valencia as the youngest realm of the Crown of Aragón, the rebellion of al-Azraq can be considered largely under control from 1250 onwards. Nevertheless, al-Azraq's opposition continued to challenge the Crown. The stubborn resistance of a petty rebel leader, who had been outmaneuvered militarily but could not be defeated entirely, threatened to become a problem in foreign relations: King James I, who liked to present himself as a successful "conqueror" (Catalan/Aragonese: *conqueridor*, Castilian: *conquistador*) and champion of Latin Christendom in his relations with the Papacy and the great rulers of Latin Europe, risked losing his credibility if he seemed unable to keep his conquests under control. At a time when the Mongols were emerging as a hitherto unknown and threatening power on the eastern borders of the Euromediterranean, and imposing rulers such as Frederick II (r. 1198–1250) or Louis IX (r. 1226–1270) maintained intensive diplomatic and military relations with the Islamic sphere, the "international" prestige of the king of Aragón had to be preserved.³⁹

[§27] The events surrounding the Muslim uprising led by al-Azraq, which gave birth to the letter of 647/1250, thus fell into a period in which Christian rule over large parts of the Iberian south had been established, but not yet stabilised. Here as in other Mediterranean regions affected by European-Christian expansion, Muslims began to oppose a hitherto successful expansionist movement by military and diplomatic means.

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³⁸ In Múrcia, the rebel leaders also tried to play the kings of Aragón and Castile off against each other and even sought diplomatic understanding with the Papal Curia. Eventually, however, James I launched a military expedition in support of his son-in-law, Alfonso X, in the course of which the rebellions were put down by force. On these events, see the recent study by Maser, *Convivencia*.

³⁹ On the foreign relations of the Crown of Aragón under James I, see the classic synthesis by Engels, *König Jakob I.*; Smith, *Jaime I*; Ferrer i Mallol, *Panorama*; and Vela Aulesa, *Jaume I*.

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