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978-1-107-09194-8 - The Rise and Decline of an Iberian Bourgeoisie:

Manresa in the Later Middle Ages, 1250–1500

Jeff Fynn-Paul

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Chapter 1*

INTRODUCTION

*Catalan urban institutions, the Catalan bourgeoisie, and
the late medieval crisis*

This is a work of medieval urban history. Its fundamental purpose is to tell the tale of a particular city and its inhabitants over the course of the long fourteenth century. The city is Manresa, in Catalonia. During the period covered by this history, Catalonia was the dominant province of the Crown of Aragon. The core patrimony of this dynastic polity lay in the north and east of the Iberian Peninsula, in an area defined by the geographical contours of the greater Ebro River basin. Manresa was one of approximately a dozen royal towns which regularly sent electors to the Catalan parliament during the era of King Pere III (1336–87).¹ Pere's half-century reign as the sovereign of the Crown of Aragon, and thus of Catalonia and the city of Manresa, forms the temporal backbone of our study. This study is based on a rich treasure trove of archival material, which yields unusually detailed information regarding the society, politics and economy of late medieval Manresa. Our sources shed light on the history of individual Manresan families, as well as on many subgroups of Manresan townspeople, including a number of occupational groups, women of all socio-economic strata and urban officeholders. They also enable a detailed reconstruction of Manresa's political institutions, and an in-depth exploration of the interaction between royal and urban political power as the so-called 'crisis' of the later medieval period unfolded.² The

¹ Following Catalan practice, King Peter IV of Aragon ('Pedro' in Aragonese, 'Pere' in Catalan), will be known as Pere III, since he held Catalonia by dint of his title Count of Barcelona, and he was the third count of the ancient House of Barcelona with that name. For a list of towns which sent representatives to the Catalan *Corts* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see José Ángel Sesma Muñoz, 'La oblación urbana en la Corona de Aragón (siglos XIV–XV)', in *Las sociedades urbanas en la España medieval: XXIX semana de estudios medievales, Estella, 15 a 19 de Julio de 2002* (Pamplona, 2003), pp. 151–93; p. 165. This table indicates that Barcelona, Lleida, Girona, Manresa, Cervera, and Vilafranca del Penedes were regular participants after 1323. Perpignan participated regularly from 1353. Tortosa, Vic, and Montblanc were also fairly regular participants. They were joined by a number of smaller centres such as Besalú, Camporodón, Puigcerdá, and Berga.

² In Catalonia, the tradition of 'decline' hearkens back to a seminal article by Pierre Vilar, entitled 'Le déclin catalan du bas Moyen Age: Hypothèses sur sa chronologie', *Estudios de Historia Moderna*, 6 (1956–9), 1–68. This is elaborated upon in Claude Carrère, *Barcelone centre économique 1380–1462*,

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economic data which may be teased from a variety of Manresan records lend themselves to an analysis of the far-reaching social and political implications of the fourteenth-century Catalan ‘financial revolution’, as well as to an analysis of quantitative socio-economic indices such as demographic trends, wages, prices, investment returns, rates of home ownership, food storage and living standards.³

The urban community conjured to life in the following pages was particularly vibrant during the long fourteenth century – not least because it was represented by leaders who exercised a considerable measure of political autonomy. The heart of the urban government after 1315 was a consulate consisting of an executive council of four or six *consellers*, and a group of some two dozen *jurats*, or ‘sworn men’, who served as an extended deliberative body.⁴ These men were the political voice of the city, which had about 7000 inhabitants prior to the Black Death of 1348, and about half as many afterwards. Even then, Manresa remained large enough to support a reasonably broad panoply of late medieval occupational types. Its grandest streets and plazas were home to wealthy lawyers, *rentiers*, merchants, and the capitalist chiefs of the cloth and leather industries, who lived side by side with notaries, grocers and apothecaries of middling means. Concentrated in the less fashionable parts of town were the modest homes of laboring craftsmen such as carpenters, weavers, and fullers; these men lived alongside many poorer householders who eked out livings as hunters, agricultural hands, porters, or guards. Manresa was also home to a substantial number of widow-householders of all socio-economic strata. Indeed, women headed nearly one sixth of the city’s households in 1408. Less visible to us were substantial numbers of servants and dependants whose presence must for the most part be guessed at, rather than glimpsed directly.

vol. II (Paris, 1967), Part III, pp. 655–954; and Carmen Batlle, *La crisis social y económica de Barcelona a Mediados del siglo XV*, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1973). Other influential works on this theme include J. N. Hillgarth, *The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire 1229–1327* (London, 1975), and Ramon d’Abadal i de Vinyals, *Pere el cerimoniós i els inicis de la decadència política de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1987). Many of these sentiments are echoed in Thomas Bisson, MCOA; Donald J. Kagay, ‘War Financing in the Late-medieval Crown of Aragon’, *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 6 (2008), 119–48; Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, *Entre la paz y la guerra: La Corona Catalano-aragonesa y Castilla en la baja edad media*, Anuario de estudios medievales, Anejo, 59 (Barcelona, 2005), esp. ch. 6; and Alan Ryder, *The Wreck of Catalonia: Civil War in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007). A crisis of the mercantile elites is proposed in Jaume Aurell i Cardona, *Els mercaders Catalans al quatre-cents: Mutació de valors i proces d’aristocratització a Barcelona, 1370–1470* (Barcelona, 1996). This topic is treated further in Chapter 4.

³ For a recent overview of the notion of a fourteenth-century Catalan ‘financial revolution’ see the introduction to Manuel Sánchez Martínez, *La deuda pública en la Cataluña bajomedieval* (Madrid, 2009), pp. 7–20. For more literature, see also Chapter 6, n. 1.

⁴ The government officials introduced here, including *consellers*, *jurats*, the bailiff, and the *veguer* are discussed and referenced at length in the next chapter.

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Despite the evident power of the consuls, all of these inhabitants remained subject to the royal bailiff, who represented the will of the king in the city, and whose jurisdiction was coterminous with the ‘parish’ of Manresa. The parish included the city itself plus the land within about two kilometers of its walls. But the Manresan community did not stop at the parish bounds; indeed the city was highly integrated with a wider hinterland, known as the Bages. By the fourteenth century the Bages was roughly coterminous with a royal administrative unit known as the *vegueria* of Manresa. This extended about 20 to 30 kilometers from Manresa in all directions, until it met the boundaries of neighbouring *vegueries*, which also corresponded with the urban ‘catchment areas’ of neighbouring regional capitals and the greater market towns, such as Cervera, Vilafranca and Vic. The *veguer* (Catalan for ‘vicar’ or ‘lieutenant’) was a royal official responsible for adjudicating property disputes involving royal subjects, particularly those arising in rural regions which did not have their own bailiff. The court of the *veguer* also acted as a chamber of appeals for the local bailiffs’ courts. The *veguer*, as the royal lieutenant in a given region, was also responsible for the levy and command of all royal troops in his jurisdiction. For these reasons, the limits of the *veguer’s* territory came to represent a watershed for local investment and other legal ties beyond which the costs of trade became significantly higher.

Outside the parish of Manresa, and a few other enclaves of royal and clerical power including the monastery of St Benet de Bages, the majority of the land in the Bages belonged by feudal tenure to a few dozen castellans. These were castle-lords whose small stone fortresses sat perched on high ground above the more substantial villages. As ‘*generoses*’, these castellans and their families maintained the legal right to be represented, and taxed, only with the consent of the second estate of the nobility, the *braç militar*, in parliament.⁵ Ancient traditions ascribed a further right to the private monopoly of jurisdiction and of violence in their territories, and although the latter right was being actively challenged during the fourteenth century by royal bailiffs, *veguers*, and urban officials, these rights proved highly resilient.

These ‘class’ differences between nobles and non-nobles in Catalonia led to the exclusion of nobles from political power in the cities. While nobles enjoyed many privileges, they were firmly barred by custom from

⁵ While commoners could sometimes hope to enter the ranks of the ‘gentry’ in late medieval England through lifestyle choices and economic gain, in Catalonia, the group of ‘*persons generoses*’ was much more strictly limited to people related to a knight or squire by birth or marriage. For England see Rosemary Horrox, ‘The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century’, in John A. F. Thomson (ed.), *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 22–44.

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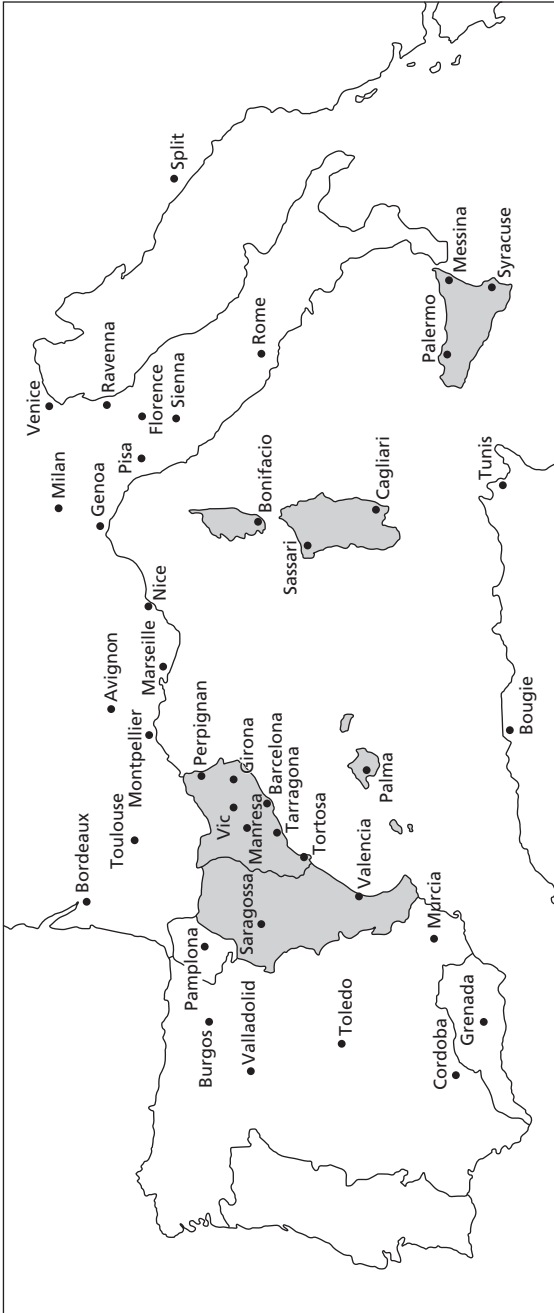
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holding urban office in the royal vills, and this custom remained in force until the sixteenth century.⁶ In part because of this stricture, the nobles of the Bages generally preferred to live outside the city walls, within their own patrimonies. However, the many services available within Manresa's city limits, its increasingly important status as a seat of royal administration, and the increased wealth of its urban elites, helped to ensure that regional castellan families nonetheless became enmeshed in a web of economic, political, and even familial bonds connecting them to the town and its inhabitants during the fourteenth century. And despite their noble status, the castellans were not clearly dominant in all these transactions. Meanwhile, many urban inhabitants maintained strong ties with the wider urban hinterland – especially so in the earlier decades of the fourteenth century. A significant fraction of Manresan householders were agricultural workers, many of whom held or rented small plots of land within walking distance of the walls. Urban elites, for their part, found it expedient to invest in rural land, or to lend money to rural people, since these activities provided an avenue to both profit and honour. Outside this regional economy and society, the Manresans were also very much a part of the wider world beyond the Bages. They imported animal skins and other raw materials from all over Catalonia; and they produced leather products, particularly shoes, for export to Barcelona, whence they would be shipped throughout the Mediterranean. Long-standing ties to the episcopal seat of Vic provided the impetus for a continual stream of interactions with the inhabitants of that town, which was in many regards a sister city to Manresa. Leading Manresan merchants built trade networks which stretched to Valencia, Mallorca, and beyond, and urban representatives regularly sat in council with the king himself, helping to deliberate on matters of international import during parliamentary sessions.

As part of the royal patrimony of Catalonia, Manresa belonged to that amalgam of feudal principalities known to historians as the Crown of Aragon. Although the union is named after the small, landlocked Kingdom of Aragon whose capital is Zaragoza on the Ebro River, by the later Middle Ages the Principality of Catalonia had emerged as the dominant territory in the union, in terms of demography, culture, politics, and economy. The origins of Catalonia can be traced to the genesis of the County of Barcelona in 801 CE, when Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious added the city and its surrounding territory to the 'Spanish March' of the Carolingian Empire. By the twelfth century, the Counts of Barcelona had succeeded in asserting dominance over a number of neighbouring Carolingian 'counties', forming the nucleus of the territory since known

⁶ More precise definitions of 'class' are introduced below, pp. 15–17.

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Map 1.1 The Crown of Aragon in 1410

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as Catalonia. In 1137, Count Ramon Berenguer IV of Barcelona married the then-infant queen Petronilla of Aragon, thus uniting the two regions under a single house. The House of Barcelona, which had been ruling its eponymous county in an unbroken line since 878, was to rule these two territories until the line went extinct in 1410. Although fourteenth-century monarchs of Catalonia such as Pere III ruled by virtue of their title ‘Count of Barcelona’, we will follow fourteenth-century Manresan practice by calling the Catalan rulers kings, rather than counts, or count-kings.⁷

By the reign of Pere III, the Crown of Aragon had expanded to include not only Catalonia and Aragon, but also the Kingdoms of Valencia and Mallorca; the latter included the trans-Pyrenean counties of Cerdanya and Roussillon. While the inhabitants of Aragon proper spoke Aragonese, a version of Castilian, the majority of the inhabitants of the Crown of Aragon, including those of Catalonia, Valencia, and Mallorca, spoke Catalan, which is more closely related to Occitan than to Castilian or French. According to some estimates, the landlocked kingdom of Aragon contained about 250,000 inhabitants in the early fourteenth century.⁸ The Kingdom of Valencia was home to about 200,000 inhabitants, including many Muslims known as *mudéjares*, who had remained after the Christian conquest of their capital in 1238.⁹ The Principality of Catalonia, with its capital at Barcelona, was home to about 500,000 inhabitants, and was thus more populous than Aragon and Valencia combined.¹⁰ In Catalonia, whose eastern half had long been far from the frontier, there were very few resident Muslims by the fourteenth century.¹¹ Beyond the

⁷ Manresan documents almost invariably refer to fourteenth-century rulers of Catalonia and Aragon as ‘El Senyor Rey’. Modern Catalan has changed the spelling of ‘Rey’ to ‘Rei’.

⁸ The spelling is Aragonese; but Catalan forms will be used for Catalan cities.

⁹ For a brief overview see David Nirenberg, ‘Muslims in Christian Iberia, 1000–1526: Varieties of Mudéjar’, in Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (eds.), *The Medieval World* (London, 2001), pp. 60–76. For a synopsis of the historiography on this group from a Valencian perspective, see Isabel A. O’Connor, *A Forgotten Community: The Mudéjar Aljama of Xàtiva, 1240–1327* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 6–27.

¹⁰ These are from MCOA, pp. 163–4.

¹¹ One major cause of social friction, however, was the *mals usos*, or ‘bad customs’, which gave the feudal lords of Old Catalonia a number of resented rights, such as the baldly named *ius malectrandi* or the ‘right of maltreatment’. The tenants subject to these rights were known as *remenças*. In 1388, due to heightened economic pressures on seigneurial incomes after the Black Death, social tensions between lords and *remenças* broke out into a conflict which in various forms would last for the better part of a century. Urban disturbances in that year might well have been related, but little has been done to confirm or deny such a link. Although the boundary between Old and New Catalonia was generally understood to be the Llobregat River, the peasants of the Bages region (even those slightly east of the Llobregat) were not subject to the *mals usos*, and thus the region was spared the worst excesses of the *remença* conflict. See Paul Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia* (Cambridge and New York, 1991).

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peninsular realms, Mallorca had been forcibly reunited to the Crown of Aragon by Pere III in 1344 after some fifty years of independence under a junior branch of the House of Barcelona. Sardinia was taken into the federation beginning in 1323, although it remained troublesome until 1409. Sicily had been ruled by another cadet branch since 1282, and the island kingdom remained formally independent until it reverted to the senior branch in 1409. But in 1410, King Martí I ‘the Humane’ of Aragon died unexpectedly, with his last surviving heir the King of Sicily having predeceased him in the previous year. After a lengthy judicial arbitration, resulting in the so-called Compromise of Caspé, the Castilian-born Fernando de Antequera was installed as King Fernando I of Aragon in 1412. This marked the inauguration of the new Aragonese House of Trastámara. Fernando’s son and successor, Alfonso V of Aragon (1416–58), was never easy with the idea of a Catalan lifestyle; he saw the Catalans as too protected by constitutional rights, and regarded them as somewhat ungovernable. In 1442, after a long struggle, he added the Kingdom of Naples to his dynastic realms. Alfonso became smitten with his new territory and moved his court to Naples, where he would become famous as a patron of a (distinctly absolutist) form of humanism.¹²

The Barcelona elite, for their part, had long enjoyed certain privileges stemming from their city’s position as the *de facto* capital of the Crown of Aragon, and as the ‘golden goose’ of the Aragonese monarchy. These privileges served as a model which was spread to other Catalan royal cities. Due in large measure to the commercial successes of the Barcelona merchants, and helped by the fact that the successful Barcelona institutions were spread to other regional urban centres, the Catalans had for centuries been the most prosperous people of the Crown of Aragon in per capita terms. Even in the mid-fifteenth century, after a period of palpable decline in Catalan mercantile fortunes, Alfonso V could expect to receive three times more revenue from Catalonia than from Valencia, and five times more from Catalonia than from Aragon.¹³ But Alfonso’s absentee reign aggravated fault lines in the social fabric at Barcelona, and tensions boiled over during the reign of his successor, the strongly Castileophile King Juan II (1458–78). A civil war, in which the principal adversaries were the king and the city of Barcelona, raged for the decade between 1462 and 1472. After several vicissitudes, the war ended in a royal victory. Perhaps the greatest casualty of the war was the prosperity of the Catalan cities, many of whom allied with

¹² For Alfonso’s career see Alan Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous: King of Aragon, Naples, and Sicily, 1396–1458* (Oxford, 1990).

¹³ The figures are taken from a royal subsidy. See MCOA, p. 163.

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Barcelona.¹⁴ Although Manresa was destined to share this fate, and undoubtedly fared much worse than the capital itself, one goal of the present study is to ameliorate what has traditionally been a negative, even fatalistic reading of the late medieval history of the Catalan cities.

THE SOURCES

Manresa was chosen as the basis of this study because it provides a number of definite methodological advantages. Because it was medium-sized, it was both large enough to be a full participant in the ‘urban’ culture of the Catalan royal cities, and yet small enough so that its society can be analysed with a reasonable sense of ‘completeness’ – although one would like to know more about the city’s poor, and our records say relatively little about the lives of those in clerical orders. Because Manresa was a fairly typical royal town, evincing economic practices, laws, and social mores similar to those found at cities such as Cervera, Vilafranca, Girona, Vic, Tarragona, and Lleida, one can be reasonably sure that, broadly speaking, the experience of Manresa was similar to that experienced by these other royal vills. And if the fourteenth-century history of Barcelona is still in want of a definitive history, the existence of a study of contemporary Manresa will make the experience of the capital and its burgher-citizenry that much more intelligible and meaningful.

But the most important methodological reason for studying Manresa as opposed to some better-known royal vill is undoubtedly the richness of its sources. One of the crown jewels of the rich legacy stored in the archives of Catalonia is the *Liber Manifesti* of 1408–11, a cadastral survey of 640 Manresan households, which is a particularly complete and detailed exemplar of a fiscal document that was relatively common in the cities of later medieval Catalonia and parts of Italy.¹⁵ The only survey which has been studied in a manner comparable to that presented in the following pages is the Florentine Catasto of 1427, as studied by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber in their famous monograph *Tuscans and their*

¹⁴ See Alan Ryder, *The Wreck of Catalonia: Civil War in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007).

¹⁵ For an overview of the *estim* in Catalonia, see Max Turull Rubinat and Jordi Morelló Baget, ‘Estructura y tipología de les “Estimes-Manifests” en Cataluña (siglos XIV–XV)’, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 35:1 (2005), 271–326. For the phenomenon in Italy, see David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, CT, 1985), pp. 6–25. See also Donald E. Queller, ‘The Venetian Family and the “Estimo” of 1379’, in Bernard S. Bachrach and David Nicholas (eds.), *Law, Custom, and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe: Essays in Honor of Bryce Lyon* (Kalamazoo, NJ, 1990), pp. 185–210.

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Families.¹⁶ The Manresan survey is perhaps, after the Catasto, the most detailed source for the patrimonies of individual urban households to survive from later medieval Western Europe. It was compiled on the order of the Manresan town councillors for the purpose of assessing the total worth of all citizens, between 4 November 1408 and 13 February 1411.¹⁷ Because it was the first complete *estim* document to survive at Manresa, it had to be compiled from scratch, like the 1427 Catasto, rather than through the utilization of existing documentation. While tallying gross worth, citizens' tax liabilities were figured on a formula which counted half of the value of their home, real estate and moveable goods. Money and investments, including interpersonal loans and money placed in *censals* and *violaris*, were however assessed at full value, as were slaves (see Figure 1.1). Unfortunately, the age of householders, and the number and age of their dependants, is not recorded, meaning that studies of marriage cohorts, household size, and sex ratios are not possible. But the names, occupations, and a detailed breakdown of assets and asset values enables us to detail the economic strategies of Manresan householders, 15 per cent of whom were women, to a degree unprecedented outside Tuscany.

Of singular importance is the fact that the *Liber Manifesti* contains entries relating to nearly all of Manresa's householders, including the very poorest.¹⁸ There is no cutoff point for householder wealth, and the entries at the low end of the economic spectrum include an ex-slave named Marta, whose worldly wealth amounted to about £15, and a number of destitute widows, including Guillmonetta, widow of Romeu Redon, whose total worth was £8.¹⁹ Many wealthy householders, by contrast, were worth between £1,000 and £4,000. That the list of householders is nearly complete may be deduced from the fact that the city's householders in the *fogatge* of 1365 numbered 691, while the 1408 survey counts 640 households. This represents only an 8 per cent reduction after years of plague, when much of Europe was losing at a much more rapid rate.²⁰ The social inclusiveness of the survey is also asserted by the Manresan archivist and historian Marc Torras Serra, whose brief but illuminating study of the *Liber Manifesti* independently serves to

¹⁶ Originally, David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Les toscans et leurs familles: Une étude du "catasto" florentin de 1427* (Paris, 1978); later published in English as Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*.

¹⁷ These dates are inscribed in LM.

¹⁸ Of 640 entries, 39 were entries for the estates of the recently deceased, which were being kept for minor wards by executors.

¹⁹ For Marta LM 43r, for Guillmonetta, LM 144r. ²⁰ See Table 7.1.

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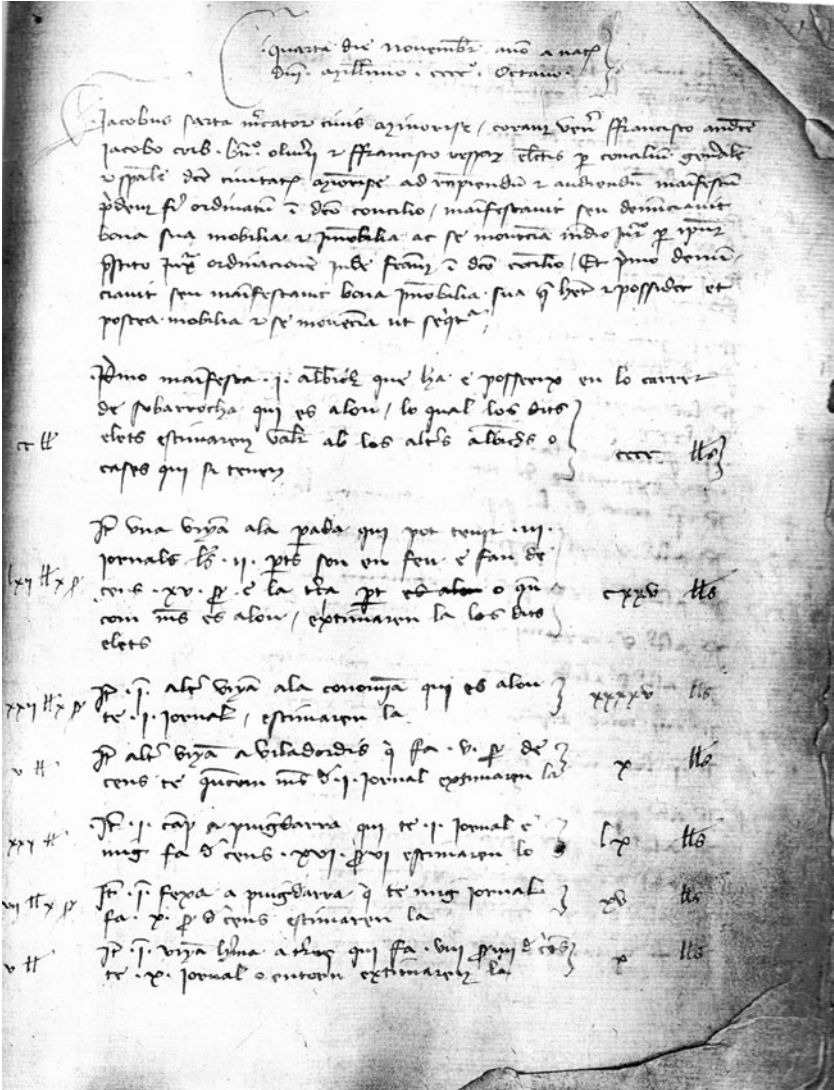


Figure 1.1 1408 Liber Manifesti. Entry of Jaume Sarta

corroborate many of the findings presented here.²¹ The survey did, however, exclude clerics and knights. We know from several sources that the

²¹ Marc Torras Serra, *La crisi del segle XV a Manresa: Una aproximació a partir dels Llibres de Manifests* (Angle, 1996). See p. 74 for his calculations on the total worth of Manresan patrimony. While Torras calculated a total gross wealth from the 1408 *Liber Manifesti* of £175,270, the