The "Book of Deeds" is the first known autobiography by a Christian king. Its author was James I of Aragon (1213-76), known as 'The Conqueror', one of the great political figures of 13th-century Europe and a successful crusader. In his "Deeds", James describes the turbulent years of his minority, the thrilling capture of Majorca, the methodical conquest of the kingdom of Valencia, the reconquest of the kingdom of Murcia after Castile had failed to hold it, and many of the important events of his reign. While crusade and conquest of Spanish territory from the Muslims and Christian-Muslim relations on the frontier are central features of the account, the "Deeds" are also a treasure trove of information on the image, power and purpose of monarchy, loyalty and bad faith in the feudal order, the growth of national sentiment, and medieval military tactics. At the same time, the book presents a unique insight into the mind of a medieval ruler, the supreme example we possess of the fears and ambitions of a man at the very centre of events.

1. King asks for a description of Majorca

En Pere Martel, a citizen of Barcelona, who had great knowledge of the sea, invited me to dinner one day, and all the barons who were with me. Towards the end of dinner a conversation began among them. And I asked: "What kind of country is Majorca, and what is the extent of that kingdom?" They asked Pere Martel, because he was a shipmaster; and Pere Martel said that he would give an account of it, as he had been there once or twice. He supposed the island of Majorca to be about three hundred miles round. Minorca was on the side of Sardinia, facing the north-east; and Ibiza was towards Morocco. Majorca ruled over the other neighboring islands, and they did what the Lord of Majorca commanded. When dinner was over, they came before me, and said: "My lord, we have asked En Pere Martel about Majorca, and he has told us something we think will please you. It is a good-sized island, in the midst of other smaller islands, called Minorca, Ibiza, and Formentera, all of which are subject to the King of Majorca.

2. King Sails to Majorca

That was the beginning that I made of the crossing to Majorca; and I appointed a day in the middle of May for all to be at Salou. On that day I myself was there, and remained till the beginning of September waiting to cross, and for ships and galleys to come to me; and so I waited till the fleet was complete. Part of it was at Cambrils; the greater part, with which I was, in the port of Salou and on the shore; the rest at Tarragona, for most of the ships belonged to that place. And the fleet was this: there were twenty-five full-sized
ships, and eighteen *taridas*, and seventeen galleys, and a hundred *brices* and *gallots*; and so there were in all a hundred and fifty large vessels, besides small *barques*.

3. King Describes Majorca From the Sea

And I went little by little up to the hill of Portupi, and from thence saw Majorca in the distance, and it seemed to me the finest city I had ever seen, and those who were with me thought the same.

4. King Identifies Majorca’s Districts

And that they who shall see this book may know how many districts there are in Majorca, they are fifteen. The first is Andrayig, and Santa Ponça, Bunyola, Soler, Almerug, and Polença; these are the greatest mountains of Majorca, looking towards Catalonia. And these are the districts in the plain: Montueri, Canarossa, Incha, Petra, Muro, Ffelenig, where the castle of Santtueri is, Manacor, and Arta In the district of the city are now fifteen markets; in the time of the Saracens there were twelve.

5. Jews as Intermediaries between Christians and Jews in Majorca

After that, when the Saracens saw that they could not maintain the defense, they sent us a message to say that they wished to speak with a messenger of ours, provided he were one in whom I and they could put trust. So after taking the advice of the bishops and the barons in the camp, they said to me [151] that since the Saracens wished to parley, I could not refuse, and that it was good that some one should go to them. I then sent thither Don Nuño, with ten of his own retainers on horseback, and a Jew of Saragossa, who knew Arabic, as interpreter; the name of this latter was Don Bahihel.

6. King Describes Troubles at Sea

The transport was fit to carry horses; the other vessels carried his stores, and in this way we reached Pollença. Don Rodrigo brought thirty knights well provided with all necessary arms and stores. Don Athó de Foces, moreover, hired a "cocha" from Bayonne. When at sea the "cocha" made a great deal of water, so that at two or three places they caught the water in little pans; they caulked the holes as well as they could with tow, and the crew endeavored to reach land either in Catalonia or Majorca. And this "cocha,"
(ship) in which Don Athó de Foces and Don Blasco Maça and their companies of knights were coming, had to return through stress of weather to Tarragona, for the wind drove them there; they thought they would all perish, for the "cocha" (ship) made a good deal of water and was old, so that they had hardly got their baggage and horses out when she foundered and went down in the sea

7. King Sails to Majorca Before Going on Crusade to Request Aid

Before starting for the East, I went to Majorca, to see if there was any shipping there, and to ask the people of the town if they would help me in my expedition. I crossed over with one galley and a "sagetia," or smaller vessel.

8. King Rescues Shipwrecked Genoese

After passing that winter in Aragon I returned to Catalonia, where news came to me, at Barcelona, that the King of Tunis was going to cross to Majorca, and was getting ready, and capturing ships and men of the Pisans and Genoese. I was at Tarragona on the appointed day, and indeed before it, and set about chartering ships and transports (tarides), besides a galley in which I myself went, to get news of the Saracens if they were already at Majorca. The ships and the transports (tarides) were fitted for carrying three hundred knights; two hundred and fifty came, and with fifty more who were collected there (at Tarragona), the number of three hundred was completed. We weighed anchor, took to the oars, and went out to sea. By sail and oars we got at noon of the second day to Soller, where we found a Genoese ship at anchor. When they saw us coming in, they were frightened beyond measure, but when they saw my flag they knew that the galley was mine; the sailors threw themselves into a fishing-boat, and came to us.