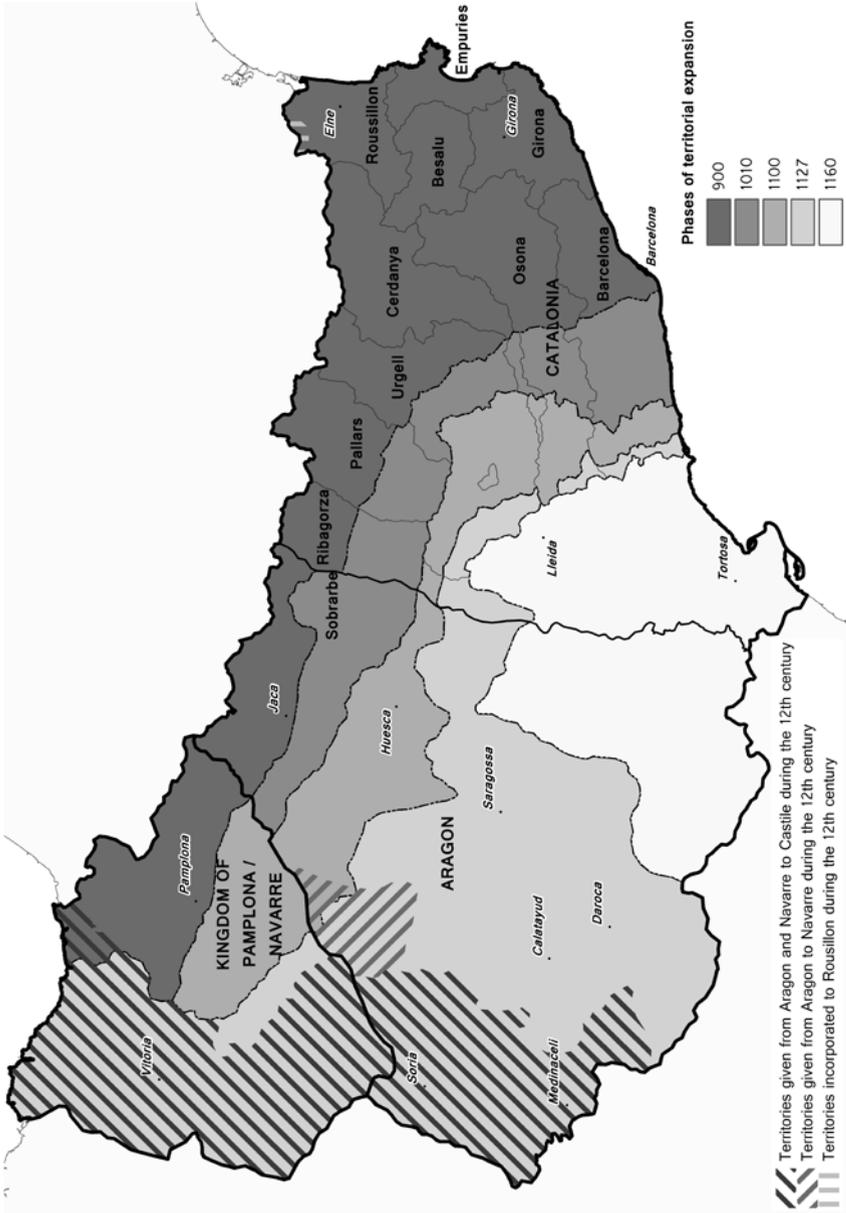


Aragon and the Catalan Counties Before the Union

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A chapter on the history of the medieval Crown of Aragon to 1137 necessarily suffers from a conceptual challenge: it could reasonably be argued that such a history can only begin at that date. In that year, Ramon Berenguer IV, count of Barcelona (1131–1162), was betrothed to the infant Petronilla, heiress of the Kingdom of Aragon, uniting in a single dynasty control over the two core lands of the confederation that would later be known as the Crown of Aragon. Use of phrases such as *Corona Aragonum* to refer to the confederation as a whole, however, appear only in the early fourteenth century, when James II, count of Barcelona and king of Aragon (1291–1327), replaced a dynastic union with a constitutional one. As for the constituent parts themselves, while Aragon as a coherent political entity is attested as early as the ninth century, “Catalonia” as a recognized region—as opposed to the collection of Eastern Pyrenean counties in various combinations—emerges at the earliest around 1120, in a Pisan chronicle. Political contacts between these two areas are rarely attested before the very end of the period, when they were as often as not in open conflict, and connections to Valencia and the Balearics were even rarer ... let alone to the Crown’s future Mediterranean possessions further east. Most of the lands north of the Pyrenees gained by the counts of Barcelona in this period were lost in the wake of the Albigensian Crusade.

Studying the “prehistory” of the Crown of Aragon thus requires navigating between the dangers of teleology on the one hand and factitiousness on the other, while suffering the occasional anachronism (such as “Catalan counties,” to be used here). The fact that the histories of Aragon and Catalonia before the confederation are usually told separately probably has less to do with these challenges than with strong regionalist traditions of historiography, backed by a modern linguistic divide. While there are good geographical, political, and even linguistic grounds for the division of Aragon and Catalonia, however, there is something to be gained from viewing them in parallel, as societies in the same region facing similar challenges and responding in similar ways.



MAP 3.1 *Aragon and Catalonia 800–1160.*
 MAP BY FLOCEL SABATÉ AND SERVEI CIENTÍFICOTÈCNIC DE CARTOGRAFIA I SISTEMES D'INFORMACIÓ
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