

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 57
Queen Urraca Makes Some Moves

Hello again. Last time we saw King Alfonso of Aragon, assisted by various armies from across the Iberian peninsula and from across France, defeat the Taifa of Zaragoza, which surrendered to him in December of the year 1118.

Now this, I guess I don't need to point out, was a big deal. As stated by Joseph O'Callaghan in his book "A History of Medieval Spain" and I quote, "The conquest of Zaragoza was an accomplishment almost as significant as the fall of Toledo in 1085. For several centuries, Zaragoza stood as the northernmost bastion of Islam in the peninsula and effectively blocked any Christian advances south of the Ebro. Now the Christians stood astride the river and soon began to move southward in preparation for the eventual conquest of the Kingdom of Valencia" end quote.

The conquest of Zaragoza raised the profile of King Alfonso of Aragon significantly and contributed to the nickname which was later bestowed upon him, that nickname being "Alfonso the Battler". Now I have avoided calling Alfonso of Aragon "Alfonso the Battler" because, to my mind, it doesn't translate that well over to English. In Australia, at least, "battler" has the connotations of someone struggling against adversity, with the odds stacked up against them. The actual term "battler" as ascribed to Alfonso of Aragon doesn't mean that at all. It means someone who has engaged in lots of battles. Apparently, by the end of his life, Alfonso of Aragon will have racked up no less than 29 wins on the battlefield, an achievement which is very impressive and which deservedly saw him earn the title "Batallador" in Spanish. So if you see a reference to "The Batallador" or to "Alfonso the Battler", that's King Alfonso I of Aragon, the conqueror of Zaragoza.

Now, as we stated in the last episode, once he had Zaragoza under his belt, Alfonso of Aragon had no intention of stopping there. His aim was to push all the way to the Mediterranean coast, then turn southwards and conquer Valencia. For an encore Alfonso then had plans to take his victorious army to the Holy Land to conquer Jerusalem.

Now, unfortunately, we will be leaving King Alfonso in Zaragoza for the next little while. This is our last episode for 2022, the last episode before I leave on my annual summer break, so we will see how King Alfonso fares in his push to the coast when we return in February of 2023.

The expansion of Christian territory into Zaragoza, and the pursuit of an aggressive policy against the Almoravids which had the Christians dreaming of pushing all the way to the Mediterranean coast and down to Valencia, had an effect on the politics of the Christian north. Due to the truce currently in place between Queen Urraca and King Alfonso of Aragon, Urraca is unable to take advantage of the absence of Alfonso of Aragon to make any moves into the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. However, Queen Urraca still has plenty of enemies left in the Christian north, and while King Alfonso is occupied in Zaragoza Urraca will be doing her best to score some hits against some of those enemies.

In the absence of King Alfonso of Aragon, the current power-brokers in the Christian north are, of course Urraca, who was stuck in Galicia and wants more power, but is restricted as to what she can do due to the terms of the truce currently in place between herself and her

estranged husband, Alfonso of Aragon. The elderly archbishop of Toledo, Archbishop Bernard, is becoming increasingly influential as he works to advance the interests of the young ruler of Toledo, Urraca's son Alfonso Raimundez. Archbishop Bernard will ally himself to Urraca, but only when he views it as being beneficial to Alfonso Raimundez. Bishop Diego Gelmirez of Santiago de Compostela, the man with whom Urraca shared her humiliating take-down by the people of Santiago de Compostela back in Episode 55, is getting increasingly restless in Santiago de Compostela and is about to form a strong bond with the new pope, Pope Calixtus II, who, as we discussed in Episode 55, was Guy of Burgundy and brother to Raymond of Burgundy, Urruca's late husband. Urraca, quite rightly, will become increasingly concerned that Bishop Gelmirez will use his ties to Pope Calixtus to undermine Urraca's authority in Galicia. Finally, there is Queen Theresa of Portugal, who is proving to be a total thorn in Urraca's side. Urraca had likely hoped that the Almoravids or her own Galician forces would have defeated Queen Theresa by now and wiped the new Kingdom of Portugal off the map, but no, Theresa is still swanning around in her kingdom, fully enjoying her time in the sun as the Queen of Portugal.

The recent success of Alfonso of Aragon in Zaragoza has upped Theresa of Portugal on Urraca's enemy list because the territory now under the control of Alfonso of Aragon is rather impressive, stretching all the way across the Christian north through Aragon and down into Zaragoza. The front-runner to be heir to this kingdom is currently Urraca's son, Alfonso Raimundez, but Theresa's son, Alfonso Enriquez, also known as "Alfonso of Portugal", has a claim as well. And after all, both Alfonso Raimundez and Alfonso Enriquez share the same amount of royal blood, with both being the grandsons of King Alfonso VI. In order to secure her son's claim to the throne, Urraca would like to crush the Kingdom of Portugal, and to be honest Urraca would like to crush the Kingdom of Portugal for purely personal rather than political reasons. She dislikes Theresa and would like to see her defeated and dethroned. Urraca would also like to see Bishop Gelmirez cut down to size in Santiago de Compostela. If Urraca could achieve both these goals, she would be the dominant political player in the Christian north, in the absence of Alfonso of Aragon of course, and her dominance would pave the way for her son, Alfonso Raimundez to succeed to the throne of Leon and Castile.

So, how did Urraca go about achieving her goals? Well, it started off very badly, when Urraca's lover, Count Pedro Gonzalez, was imprisoned inside a castle twenty kilometres from the city of Leon. The man who imprisoned Urraca's lover was someone who knew her very well, a man called Guter Fernandez, who had previously served as her chief steward. The reason why Guter Fernandez decided to imprison Count Pedro Gonzalez had to do with the Count's increasing influence in the royal court. By this time, it's likely that Urraca had borne two children to Count Pedro, who had extensive land holdings in Castile. Count Pedro had begun calling himself the Count of Castile, and rumour had it that the children he had fathered with Urraca may one day make a play for the throne of Leon and Castile. All of this made other powerful landowners in Castile rather nervous, and one of these powerful Castilian landowners was Urraca's former chief steward, Guter Fernandez.

Now, clearly Urraca couldn't just stand by while her ex-steward imprisoned her current lover and father of two of her children, so she moved her forces to Leon to try to deal with the issue. Things didn't go as planned, and Urraca was even briefly besieged inside the Royal Palace at Leon by Guter Fernandez's forces in July of 1119. Urraca did manage to recover and break free, but the incident was seen as another in an increasingly long line of embarrassing incidents which undermined her authority.

The excessive boasting by Count Pedro that one of his children with Urraca, and not Alfonso Raimundez, would become the future ruler of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile was taken seriously enough that Archbishop Bernard of Toledo wrote to the new pope, Pope Calixtus, pointing out that the Pope's nephew's claim to the throne of Leon and Castile may indeed be under threat.

While Urraca was grappling with these issues, Queen Theresa was making moves into Galicia. She had commenced a love affair with a man from a prominent Galician noble family, a man called Fernando Perez, who was the son of Count Pedro Froilaz. Now we've met Count Pedro Froilaz as before, but it's probably time to do a quick refresher on him, just to prove what a big deal it was that Queen Theresa of Portugal had struck up a relationship with one of Count Pedro's sons.

So, Count Pedro Froilaz had spent his childhood in the Royal Court of King Alfonso VI, and by the year 1090 was supporting the rule of Raymond of Burgundy in Galicia. Count Pedro's influence and power grew in Galicia until he was acknowledged as the dominant nobleman in the region, a position which was reinforced by the fact that when Alfonso Raimundez was born he was handed by Raymond of Burgundy and Urraca to Count Pedro, so that he could be raised in Count Pedro's household. Count Pedro was one of the power-brokers behind the decision to crown Alfonso Raimundez as the King of Galicia, and at the current point in time is still a staunch supporter of and adviser to Alfonso Raimundez, and is still the most powerful man in Galicia. So for Queen Theresa of Portugal to very publicly strike up a relationship with Fernando, Count Pedro's second eldest son, was a big deal. The relationship was meant, on a political level, to undermine Urraca and to indicate Theresa's willingness to extend her influence out from Portugal into Urraca's territory in Galicia. Worryingly for Urraca, rumours were circulating that Queen Therese's relationship with Fernando Perez, and by association the extension of her influence into Galicia, came with the support of the now Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, Archbishop Gelmirez.

With Theresa and Archbishop Gelmirez ganging up against her in her domain of Galicia, it was time for Urraca to spring into action. So she gathered a fighting force and, in the company of her son Alfonso Raimundez, she marched into Galicia in spring of the year 1120. She enjoyed some successes against allies of Fernando Perez in west Galicia then, fresh from these victories, she took her troops to Santiago de Compostela, where she bestowed some regal authority on the Church and on some ecclesiastic property in the town.

Then she asked Archbishop Gelmirez to accompany her on a military campaign against Queen Theresa of Portugal. This put the Archbishop in a bit of a bind. Faced with a direct request from Queen Urraca, and with her son and heir to the Kingdom of Leon and Castile glaring at him from over his mother's shoulder, Archbishop Gelmirez was forced to put his recent alliance with Queen Theresa to one side and head to Portugal to attack it.

The campaign was stunningly successful. Queen Urraca and her forces campaigned around northern Portugal, attacking Theresa's troops and meeting with Theresa's enemies. It turned out that Theresa had many enemies in northern Portugal. Her relationship with Fernando Perez had not been received at all well by many noble families in the north of her kingdom, and without needing to do much convincing at all Urraca was able to rally them to her side. At one stage, Queen Theresa found herself besieged inside one of her castles by Urraca's troops. Theresa was eventually forced further southwards and Urraca reaped the gains. In the middle of the year 1120 she granted a charter to the

Archbishopric of Braga in northern Portugal, a move which effectively meant that Urraca viewed Braga as part of her realm. In his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", Bernard Riley states that the charter was confirmed by Archbishop Gelmirez and Alfonso Raimunde, as well as a number of influential noblemen from the border region between Galicia and Portugal. There is also an indication that Queen Theresa's own son, Alfonso Enriquez, also recognised the charter, effectively recognising Urraca, and not his mother Queen Theresa, as the ruler of northern Portugal.

To place the cherry on top of her victorious pie, as Queen Urraca made her way triumphantly back to Galicia, she decided to make Archbishop Gelmirez her prisoner. She then sauntered into Santiago de Compostela and informed the chapter of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela that she was revoking the authority she had granted to the Archbishopric and that she was confiscating all of its castles. She would only release the Archbishop from her custody if the administrators of Santiago de Compostela recognised her authority and conducted an inquiry into breaches of authority by the Archbishop. Unfortunately, the chronicles don't describe what Urraca did next, but I'd like to think that she poured herself a drink, sank into a comfortable chair, put her feet up, and smiled smugly at everyone around her.

Unfortunately, we will need to leave Urraca enjoying her successes, and revisit her in a couple of months when, spoiler alert, her moves against the Archbishop backfire. I'm on my summer break now until February, so I wish you all a happy festive season, and I hope you all stay safe and well until we meet again in February. Remember, if you want something to listen to in the meanwhile, you can always pop over to Patreon, where I am part-way through a lengthy series on the Hussite Wars and the Crusade against the Hussites. If you sign, up for \$1 per month, you can also get access to the extensive back catalogue of episodes, so that should give you something to listen to. Until 2023, bye for now.

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