

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 58
Queen Urraca Encounters Some Difficulties

Hello again, and welcome to another year of podcasting. We left the last episode in summer of the year 1120. As there was a lot going on, and it's been a while, let's do a quick recap.

King Alfonso I of Aragon, the King of Leon and Castile, is currently away from his kingdom, campaigning to the east, and an extremely successful campaign it has been. He has managed to conquer the city of Zaragoza, and his current plan is to push further, all the way to the Mediterranean coast, and attempt to take Valencia from the Muslims.

Meanwhile, back in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, his estranged wife Queen Urraca is unable to take advantage of King Alfonso's absence because there is a truce in place preventing her from doing so. The main power-players in the Christian north are Queen Urraca, whose aims are to consolidate her rule over Galicia, support the claim of her son Alfonso Raimundez to inherit the throne of Leon and Castile, and to boot her sister off the throne of Portugal, and possibly take Portugal for herself. I'm sure Queen Urraca dreams wistfully of ruling over Galicia and Portugal while her sister, Queen Theresa of Portugal, lies weeping, defeated and humiliated, in a corner somewhere.

Standing in the way of Queen Urraca achieving this dream is Queen Theresa of Portugal, who has managed so far to hold on to her throne and the Kingdom of Portugal, which she created for herself. Queen Theresa also had the audacity to make some recent moves into Galicia, by commencing a very public affair with the son of the most powerful nobleman in Galicia, the nobleman being Count Pedro Froilaz and his son being Fernando Perez. Queen Theresa's son, Alfonso Enriquez, is shaping up to be a power-player in his own right, and as we saw in the last episode he isn't afraid to oppose his mother if he believes she has stepped out of line.

The other main player is Queen Urraca's son, Alfonso Raimundez, who is the current ruler of Toledo. Alfonso Raimundez is being ably supported and advised, not so much by his mother, but by the elderly archbishop of Toledo, Archbishop Bernard, and by the powerful Galician nobleman Count Pedro Froilaz. Like Alfonso Enriquez of Portugal, Alfonso Raimundez is becoming a power-player in his own right and is not afraid to stand against his mother, Queen Urraca, when it's in his interests to do so.

The complete wildcard in this already complex political situation is the archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, Archbishop Gelmirez. Archbishop Gelmirez is an astute, energetic, and ambitious man who has a knack for making friends in high places. His most prominent friend is now in a very high place indeed, having just been elevated to the Papacy, ruling as Pope Callixtus II. As Queen Urraca is about to discover, Archbishop Gelmirez is not a man who should be underestimated.

Now, when we left the last episode, Queen Urraca was returning from a successful campaign in which she had managed to secure a goodly chunk of northern Portugal from her sister Theresa. While travelling back northwards to Galicia, Queen Urraca decided to build on her victorious momentum by reducing Archbishop Gelmirez down to size. She made the Archbishop her prisoner, and advised the administrators of Santiago de

Compostela that she would only release him if the Archbishopric forced itself further under Queen Urraca's thumb, and if it conducted an inquiry into breaches of authority by the Archbishop. No doubt believing that she had dealt both her sister Queen Theresa and Archbishop Gelmirez blows from which they would struggle to recover, Queen Urraca basked in the golden rays of victory which were surrounding her, and that's where we left her in the last episode. Unfortunately for Queen Urraca, she should know by now that her golden rays of victory don't tend to last, and are frequently followed by cold shadows of defeat, and, well, that's what's just about to happen.

The administrators of Santiago de Compostela considered Queen Urraca's demands, but instead of caving in to their Queen, as was expected, they decided to oppose her. As pointed out by Bernard Riley in his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", the demands made by Queen Urraca were just too wide-sweeping and too forceful. If she had been a little more subtle and diplomatic about her power-play, she may have succeeded, but the Archbishopric decided that it just couldn't hand its power over to Urraca, so it decided to defy her.

After taking a few days to consider what had just taken place, and to assess the ability of Queen Urraca to force through her demands, her son Alfonso Raimundez decided to leave Santiago de Compostela and joined the forces of Count Pedro Froilaz, who had set up camp outside the town. With the Queen's forces now depleted, riots broke out on the streets of Santiago de Compostela. Queen Urraca attempted, without success, to quell the unrest.

Embarrassingly, only eight days after having taken Archbishop Gelmirez as her prisoner, she was forced into a complete back-down. She released the Archbishop from her custody, dropped all the demands she had made in Santiago de Compostela, and made her way back to the Royal Court at Leon. Archbishop Gelmirez then met with Queen Theresa, Alfonso Raimundez, and Count Pedro in an attempt to reassert his power and plan the best way forward.

This left Queen Urraca in a spot of bother. She hadn't gained anything from her imprisonment of Archbishop Gelmirez and was now worried about the backlash it might cause in ecclesiastic circles. Pope Callixtus, in particular, was unlikely to be impressed when he heard that Queen Urraca had imprisoned his friend and ally, and Queen Urraca was forced into damage control mode. While she was work-shopping the best way to clean up the mess that she had created, she received a visit from her son's chief adviser, a man who himself was highly regarded in the upper echelons of the Church, Archbishop Bernard of Toledo. Whatever Archbishop Bernard said to Queen Urraca must have been rather persuasive, because shortly after the meeting Queen Urraca transferred control of a large chunk of territory in the centre of the Kingdom of Leon to her son, likely in a move to leverage him away from the plotting which was taking place in Galicia.

Now, the distance between the northern part of the Iberian peninsula and Rome is quite considerable, and news took a while to make its way between the two regions back in the 12th century, so the report that Queen Urraca had taken Archbishop Gelmirez prisoner in the summer of 1120 didn't reach Pope Callixtus until October. A furious Pope Callixtus dispatched a Papal Legate, Count Boso, to the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, bearing letters from the Pontiff to Queen Urraca, Archbishop Bernard, Alfonso Raimundez, and a bunch of local bishops. Just so everyone was clear exactly what Pope Callixtus thought about the matter, the letters ordered Queen Urraca to release Archbishop Gelmirez immediately and restore his estates, powers, and possessions. Unaware that the

Archbishop had already been released, Pope Callixtus also stipulated that, should Queen Urraca refuse to release the Archbishop, then the Papal Legate and bishops from across the Iberian peninsula were to hold a Church Council in which Queen Urraca was to be excommunicated, and the Kingdom of Leon and Castile placed under interdict.

It took a few months for the Papal Legate to travel to the Kingdom of Leon and Castile and distribute the letters. Then, in spring of the year 1121 a Council was called at Santiago de Compostela, at which Archbishop Gelmirez would be present, along with Queen Urraca and the Papal Legate. Now, unfortunately, we don't know an awful lot about what transpired at this Church Council. What we do know is that, if there was a clash between Queen Urraca and Archbishop Gelmirez at this Council, well the Archbishop emerged as the clear winner. Queen Urraca was forced to hand back all of the castles and property she had confiscated from the Archbishop, and he emerged with his authority fully restored. It's worth noting that this was the same level of authority which Queen Urraca had deemed to be a massive overreach just six months earlier. Archbishop Gelmirez and the Papal Legate decreed that a further meeting was to be held in August of 1121 at Sahagun, and it was at this meeting that the Church would decide the fate of Queen Urraca and the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. A panicked Queen Urraca immediately dispatched an embassy to Rome to argue her case before Pope Callixtus, but due to the tyranny of distance the meeting of August took place before her embassy had reached Rome.

The Church Council which was held in Sahagun in August was small, and was stacked with bishops aligned with Archbishop Gelmirez. The more independent bishops and those aligned with Archbishop Bernard of Toledo, along with Archbishop Bernard himself, weren't present. The outcome, of course, was predetermined. Although Queen Urraca had fully complied with all the demands made by Pope Callixtus in his letters of October 1120, the Kingdom of Leon and Castile was to be placed under interdict. Bernard Riley notes that while Queen Urraca wasn't present, and while she wasn't even personally mentioned in the documentation which emerged from the meeting, the aim of the interdict was clear: it was to brand Queen Urraca as a monarch who had lost the favour of the Church and who was ripe for replacement.

Now, unfortunately for Archbishop Gelmirez, this wasn't a conclusion which had been reached by his friend Pope Callixtus II. On the 3rd of November in the year 1121, prior to the interdict coming into effect, Pope Callixtus nullified it. Now, in his reasons for overturning the decision of his Papal Legate and his friend Archbishop Gelmirez, Pope Callixtus didn't mention Queen Urraca at all. Instead, it seems that the Pope had been swayed by arguments advanced by Archbishop Bernard of Toledo on behalf of the Pope's nephew, the now 16-year-old Alfonso Raimundez. The arguments must have been persuasive, as the Pope's decision clearly indicated the rise in power of Archbishop Bernard and the lowering of the influence of Archbishop Gelmirez. Instead of Archbishop Gelmirez heralding the beginning of the end of the reign of Queen Urraca, Queen Urraca was able to carry on her rule essentially unchanged, although seriously in debt to both her son and Archbishop Bernard of Toledo.

Meanwhile, while Queen Urraca had been fully occupied by her conflict with Rome, Queen Theresa of Portugal had taken advantage of Queen Urraca's preoccupation by invading southern Galicia. Her campaign was astonishingly successful, so successful in fact that it looked like she might have a shot at taking much, if not all, of Galicia and annexing it to the Kingdom of Portugal. This, of course, would have been intolerable for Queen Urraca, so in early March of 1122 Queen Urraca travelled to Galicia in the company of her son Alfonso Raimundez and a number of bishops to see if she could sort something out. What they

ended up sorting out was an arrangement which suited Theresa much more than Urraca, in that a sizeable portion of southern Galicia would be ruled jointly by Urraca, Theresa, and Alfonso Raimundez.

Theresa further consolidated her inroads into Galicia in summer of the year 1122 when she arranged for her daughter to marry one of the brothers of Theresa's own lover, Fernando Perez, meaning that Theresa became the mother-in-law to her lover's brother, which must have been a little bit confusing. I guess I don't need to mention the fact that, had the tabloid press been around in northern Spain during the 12th century, it would have been having an absolute field day with all the shenanigans going on.

It took Urraca a year of careful diplomatic ground-laying before she could push back against Theresa, but push back she did. In March of the year 1123, with the tacit approval of Archbishop Bernard and Archbishop Gelmirez, Queen Urraca marched into Galicia and imprisoned Count Pedro Froilaz and some of his sons, confiscating a portion of their lands and claiming it for the Crown. It's likely that the cooperation of Alfonso Raimundez and Archbishop Bernard in this venture was obtained after an undertaking by Urraca of a promise to assist the armies of Toledo to conquer an area of strategic importance to the northeast of Toledo. In December of the year 1123 the armies of Leon besieged the fortress of Sigüenza. A few months later, Sigüenza and the nearby fortress at Medinaceli and Atienza were also under Queen Urraca's control. This meant that one of the main Roman roads leading from Cordoba into northeastern Spain was now out of Muslim hands. It also placed a handy blocking point between Alfonso of Aragon's newly acquired territory in Zaragoza and the region of Toledo.

Talking about Alfonso of Aragon, What has he been up to? Well, you have to tune in next time to find out. Until next time, bye for now.

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