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"With Honour and Victory": The War Activity of the Archbishop of Tarragona Pero De Urrea and the Sacred Protection

Eduard Juncosa Bonet

Abstract
The main purpose of this chapter is to analyse the involvement of the archbishop of Tarragona Pero de Urrea in different military campaigns, as well as the relationship he maintained over time with the papacy, the monarchy and the archdiocese he governed. Despite accusations of treachery and piracy, the victories he claimed against the "infidels" –achieved, according to the prelate himself, "with the help of God and the intercession of the blessed Saint Thecla"– earned him a lasting reputation that endured for centuries.

Keywords
War; Crusade; Mediterranean; Crown of Aragon; Catalonia; Tarragona; 15th century; Pero de Urrea; Saint Thecla.

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"WITH HONOUR AND VICTORY": THE WAR ACTIVITY OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF TARRAGONA PERO DE URREA AND THE SACRED PROTECTION

Eduard Juncosa Bonet*

I. Introduction

Over several centuries, a large pennant adorned with the papal arms hung prominently in the central nave of the cathedral of Tarragona. For a long time, it was believed that this banner had flown victoriously during the battle of Lepanto (1571). However, certain key details suggest that it was made just over a century earlier. On both sides of the three-metre-high banner, alongside the tiara and the keys of St. Peter, patriarchal coats of arms are painted in the lower corners, attributed to the archbishop of Tarragona and patriarch of Alexandria Pero de Urrea.[1]

Pero Ximénez de Urrea belonged to one of the most prominent noble lineages of the Kingdom of Aragon. He was a recognised illegitimate son of Pero Ximénez de Urrea – viscount of Rueda and lord of Épila, a fervent supporter of Ferdinand of Antequera during the Interregnum (1410-1412).[2] His stepbrother, Lope

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[1] J. Serra i Vilaró, "El pendón del arzobispo de Tarragona Pedro de Urrea," *Butlletí Arqueològic. Reial Societat Arqueològica Tarraconense* 31-32 (1950): 175-182; J. Villanueva Astengo, *Viage literario a las Iglesias de España* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851), t. XX, 17-18; E. Morera Llauradó, *Tarragona Cristiana. Historia del arzobispado de Tarragona y del territorio de su provincia: Cataluña la Nueva* (Tarragona: Diputació de Tarragona, 1997 [1954]), t. III, 185-186; R. López-Monné, *La catedral i la ciutat de Tarragona. Història d'una relació* (Tarragona: Arola Editors - Fundació privada Mútua Catalana, 2024), 209-211.

[2] P. de Funes, *Recopilación del linaje de la Casa de Urrea* (manuscript from the ducal House of Híjar-Aranda, c. 1530), f. 10r.

Ximénez de Urrea, took part in the conquest of Naples, served as viceroy of the Two Sicilies and as grand chamberlain of King Alfonso the Magnanimous.[3]

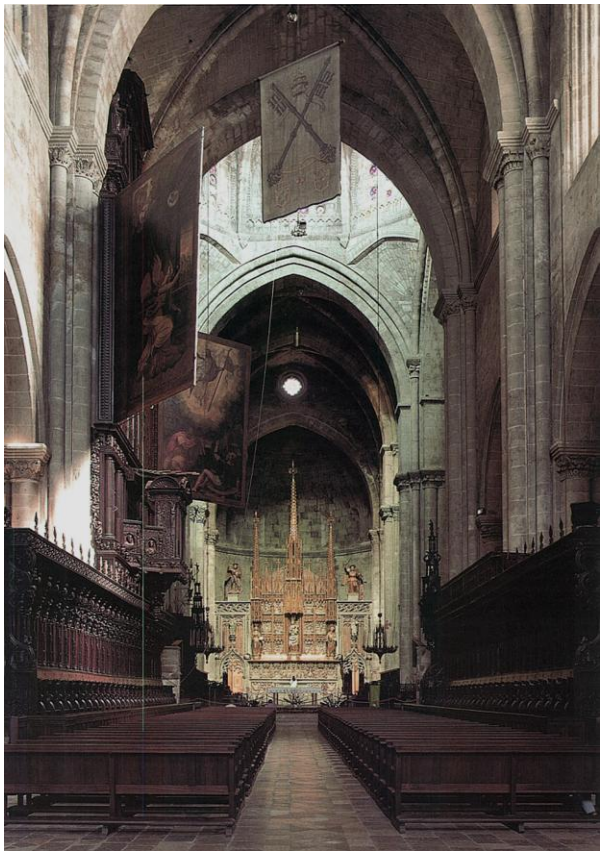


Fig. 1. View of the central nave of Tarragona Cathedral
with Pero de Urrea's pennant hanging in a prominent position (c. 1990)
[Wikimedia Commons]

Born in Saragossa at an unknown date, Pero de Urrea was canon and treasurer of the See of Tarragona, canon and major prior of the cathedral of San Salvador in Saragossa until his appointment as archbishop of Tarragona – one of the most important archdioceses of the Iberian Peninsula – on 24 June 1445. His elevation to the dignity of metropolitan without having previously occupied any other episcopal see indicates a high degree of protection for his person,

[3] The most comprehensive study of his reign is still A. Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Aragon, Naples, and Sicily, 1396-1458* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). See also the articles in the monographic "Alfonso el Magnánimo y su tiempo," *Debats* 104 (2009/2).

likely owing to his noble lineage, one of the staunchest defenders and most loyal collaborators of the Trastámara dynasty on the throne of the Crown of Aragon.[4]

Described as a "man more inclined to arms than to letters,"[5] it is precisely his warrior profile that will be the focus of this chapter.

II. Pero de Urrea's Participation in the Crusade Against the Turks

The Fall of Constantinople on 29 May 1453 marks one of the most significant turning points in world history. This event not only heralded the end of the Byzantine Empire, but also marked the rise of the Ottoman Empire as a dominant power in the Mediterranean basin.

Following news of the conquest of Constantinople, Pope Nicholas V sought to organise a great crusade against the Turks. However, his efforts garnered limited support,[6] and the plan ultimately failed. Despite this setback, his successor, Calixtus III, made the crusade the main objective of his pontificate.[7]

The election of the Valencian Cardinal Alfons de Borja to the papal throne on 8 April 1455 was largely influenced by several factors: his advanced age, the

[4] On his figure and prelature, see J. Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi de la Santa Església Metropolitana i Primada de Tarragona* (Tarragona: Diputació de Tarragona, 1985 [c. 1660]), vol. II, 111-121; E. Morera Llauradó, *Tarragona Cristiana. Historia del arzobispado de Tarragona y del territorio de su provincia: Cataluña la Nueva* (Tarragona: Diputació de Tarragona, 2001 [1955]), t. IV, 57-66; L. Pagarolas i Sabaté, "Pero Ximénez de Urrea," in *Història de la Generalitat de Catalunya i dels seus presidents (1359-1518)*, dir. Josep M. Solé i Sabaté (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya - Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2003), vol. I, 165-169.

[5] Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi*, 111.

[6] C. Marinescu, "Le Pape Calixte III, Alfonse V et l'offensive contre les Turcs," *Bulletin de la Section Historique de l'Académie Roumaine* 19 (1935): 77-87; M. Navarro Sorní, *Calixto III Borja y Alfonso el Magnánimo frente a la cruzada* (València: Ajuntament de València, 2003), 23-26.

[7] On Pope Calixtus III see, among others, L. Pastor, *History of the Popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and other original sources* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & CO., Ld., 1891), vol. II, book III; J. Sanchis Sivera, "El obispo de Valencia don Alfonso de Borja (Calixto III), 1429-1458," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 88 (1926): 241-313; G. Hofmann, "Papst Kalixt III. und die Frage der Kircheneinheit im Osten," in *Miscellanea G. Mercati* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1946), vol. III, 209-237; J. Rius i Serra, *Regesto ibérico de Calixto III* (Barcelona-Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1948); P. Brezzi, "La politica di Callisto III. Equilibrio italiano e difesa dell'Europa allà metà del sec. XV," *Studi Romani* 7 (1959): 31-41; M. E. Mallet, *The Borgias. The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Dynasty* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969); S. Schüller-Piroli, *Die Borgia Päpste Kalixt III. und Alexander VI.* (München: Oldenbourg, 1980); M. Batllori i Munné, *La familia de los Borjas* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1999); M. Navarro Sorní, *Documents per a la història d'Alfons de Borja, papa Calixt III* (València: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 2008); Ó. Villarroel González, *Los Borgia. Iglesia y poder entre los siglos XV y XVI* (Madrid: Sílex, 2013).

interference of the King Alfonso of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, and the rivalry between the Colonna and Orsini factions, which divided the College of cardinals.[8] Nevertheless, the pope always held a firm conviction that his election was a result of Divine grace rather than political manoeuvring. He viewed his accession to the See of Peter as a providential mission entrusted to him by God.[9]

Throughout his reign, the new pope made it clear that he wanted to be "the protector and champion of Christianity against the Turks," considering his election as a providential mandate to fulfil this aim.[10] Upon his election, Pope Calixtus took a solemn vow before the altar of the chapel where the conclave was held. In this oath, the pope promised the Holy Trinity, the Virgin, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and the entire "heavenly host" to dedicate himself wholly – even at the cost of his own life if necessary – to the reconquest of Constantinople (taken and ruined by Mehmed II "as punishment for the sins of men"). His vow also encompassed the liberation of Christian captives from the infidels, and the exaltation of the Catholic faith, including the eradication of "the diabolical sect of the reprobate and faithless Mohammed"[11] in the East.

"Hoc vovi Deo. Ut fidei hostes perderem elexit me"[12] was precisely the motto that the pope engraved on a medal commemorating his vow to liberate

[8] The pope was crowned the following 20th April. One of King Alfonso the Magnanimous's emissaries to attend the ceremony and pay tribute to Calixtus III was the archbishop of Tarragona, Pero de Urrea. In this regard, see Morera, *Tarragona Cristiana*, t. III, 184.

[9] In fact, the election of Calixtus III as pope was against the odds ("de quo minor erat expectatio populi," stated in his memories Pope Pius II). A few decades earlier, the famous preacher Vicent Ferrer had predicted that Alfons de Borja would become Pope and canonise him: "My son, I congratulate you; remember that you are called to be one day the ornament of your country and of your family. You will be invested with the highest dignity that can fall to the lot of man. I myself, after my death, shall be the object of your special honour. Endeavour to persevere in your virtuous course of life": ed. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 326.

[10] There are many documentary testimonies praising the pope's commitment: "misser Alfonso de Borgia, primo cardinale de Valencia et ora nominato Kalixto papa tercio … è persona multo intelligente e virtuosa, et affectata a la impresa contra li turchi et altri infideli per deffensione et augmento de la catolica fede" [Tr. "monsignor Alfons de Borja, first cardinal of Valencia and now nominated Calixtus Pope the third … is a very intelligent and virtuous person and is involved in the enterprise against the Turks and other infidels for the defence and increase of the catholic faith"]: Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), Cancelleria (C), reg. 2798, ff. 158-159; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 51.

[11] Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 346. The news of Cardinal Borja's election was met with great jubilation in the city of Valencia ("fon una tan gran alegria en la present ciutat que los vivients no havien vista tal cosa"), and three days of festivities were held: Arxiu de Protocols del Corpus Christi (APCC), Protocol 9541, Jaume Vinader, s./f.; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 56.

[12] Tr. "I made this promise to God. He chose me to destroy the enemies of the faith".

Constantinople from the Turks. This served as a testament to his faith in the mission entrusted to him by Divine providence.[13]



Fig. 2. Commemorative medal of Pope Calixtus III [Numista CC BY-SA]

Despite the lukewarm response and even outright indifference of Western European nations, which were deeply divided by internal discord, Calixtus III remained resolute in his determination to fulfil his oath by giving a new and powerful impulse to the crusade, setting the defence of Christianity against the infidels as the first priority.[14] To advance the expedition, the pope imposed tithes to fund the crusade, sent preachers to proclaim it, and sent nuncios and legates to rally support from Christian princes.[15]

A few weeks after his coronation, on 15 May 1455, the pope published the bull "Ad summi apostolatus apicem," which confirmed all the graces and indulgences granted by Nicholas V to those who would take part in the crusade. The bull also designated 1 March of the following year as the departure date for all those setting out against the "enemies of Christendom". On 8 September, Calixtus III personally conferred the cross on cardinals Alain de Coëtivy and Juan de Carvajal as well as on the archbishop of Tarragona, Pero de Urrea, who

[13] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 19. According to L. Pastor (*History of the Popes*, vol. II, 438), the medal was struck to commemorate the victory of the papal squadron over the Turks at Mitylene (August 1457).

[14] It was said of him that: "The pope speaks and thinks of nothing but the crusade": ed. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 348). See also Marinescu, "Le Pape Calixte III," 84.

[15] Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 352-358.

was tasked with hastening to the aid of the Christian islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas with a naval force.[16]

The pope's preferred candidate to command his fleet was the Venetian Angelo Morosini. However, he was a prisoner of the Genoese, who held him captive until his execution. Consequently, the pontiff nominated Pero de Urrea. According to the bull of appointment, Urrea's selection was based on his extensive knowledge and experience in maritime affairs, his leadership abilities, wisdom in command, military skill, and his esteemed qualities of humanity, prudence, and prestige.[17] Nonetheless, it is likely that Urrea's appointment was also influenced by the desire to gain favour with the King of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, to whom the archbishop was both an adviser and a trusted confidant.

On 23 September 1455 – the feast of St. Thecla –, the pope blessed and entrusted the banners to be carried by the ships of the fleet. One pennant featured the image of that saint (to whom the cathedral of Tarragona is dedicated), another depicted St. Peter, and the remaining three bore the pope's arms. Archbishop Urrea immediately set sail with the five galleys, though they were insufficient to carry out his mission properly. However, the pope did not wish to delay his expedition so that the news of his departure would reach the East, thereby encouraging Christians and instilling fear in the Turks. By the end of November 1455, the papal fleet was still anchored in the port of Syracuse, awaiting reinforcements and more favourable sailing conditions. Unfortunately, the destination of the expedition – which gradually expanded – was not what the pope had originally intended.[18]

The Christian prince most vocal in proclaiming his desire to crusade was Alfonso the Magnanimous, former sovereign of Pope Calixtus.[19] While the intentions of the pontiff and the king initially seemed to align, this common enterprise soon became a source of conflict between them.

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[16] Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 348; Marinescu, "Le Pape Calixte III," 90; Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 26. This solemnity took place in the church of St. Peter, and the pope showed the greatest devotion and shed many tears during the whole event. Pope Calixtus named Pero de Urrea patriarch of Alexandria.

[17] Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), Registri Vaticani, 454, f. 245v; ed. O. Rinaldi, *Annales Ecclesiastici* (Paris: Ex typis consociationis Sancti Pauli, 1880 [c. 1660]), tome XXIX, 36-37.

[18] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 103-108 and 114; P. Paschini, "La flotta di Callisto III (1455-1458)," *Archivio della R. Società Romana di Storia Patria* LIII-LV (1930-1932): 177-254.

[19] The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople encouraged the expansion of the End of the World psychosis, which was reinforced by Byzantine prophecies linking it to the fall of that city. In this context, Alfonso the Magnanimous was identified with the apocalyptic monarch of the Last Days. In this regard, see E. Juncosa Bonet, "El rei Alfons i la promoció de la magnanimitat," in *Capitula facta et firmata. Inquietuds artístiques en el Quatre-cents*, coord. M. Rosa Terés (Valls: Cossetània Edicions, 2009), 148-149.

The strategy devised by Calixtus III to achieve his goals was based on the coordinated action of a considerable armed force on both land and sea, aiming to force the Turks to divide their troops and make them more vulnerable. Meanwhile, immediate assistance was to be provided to the Christian regions under the greatest threat (the Aegean islands and the Albanian coast) by directing some ships there to support the Christian resistance.[20]

For his part, Alfonso the Magnanimous's attitude towards the crusade was closely tied to the great political and economic interests he pursued in the eastern Mediterranean basin, which he sought to use as a means of advancing his own interests. After several postponements,[21] on 1 November 1455, King Alfonso received the cross in a solemn ceremony in Naples's cathedral and publicly pledged to join the crusade,[22] but his plans were focused on Albania, which faced grave danger following the defeat of Berat. The monarch skilfully wielded his vow to take part in the crusade, adjusting his enthusiasm as

[20] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 15-29. See also Paschini, "La flotta," 177-254.

[21] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 92-98.

[22] This is how the Milanese orator at the Neapolitan court recounted the ceremony to the duke of Milan: "In questa gloriosa festa de Ogni Sancti passata la serenissima maestà del re, siandogli prima conceduta e presentata la bulla da la santità del nostro signore in la forma che luy rechedeva, poxo la solempne celebratione de la messa e molte altre digne cerimonie … presente tuto questo popullo, ha preso molto devotamente e vigorosamente da lo reverendissimo patriarcha de Alexandria, delegato apostolico, lo sacro e triumphale signo de la sanctissima croce per andare a la impresa contra el turcho. E poy la sua maestà, molti signori, cavaleri e gentilhomini, molti etiamdio archiepiscopi, vescovi, prelati e altre persone, che credo pasasseno lo numero de più de dua milia, le qualle questa matina hano receuto questo sancto signo, et era tanta la multitudine a prendere la croce che per fine a XXI hora nuy stessemo in la ghesia … La santità del nostro signore non gli limita tempo in le bolle a andare a questa impresa, ma gli commete de andare quanto più presto e habelmente el gli poterà andare" [Tr. "On this glorious feast of All Saints' Day the most serene majesty of the king, having first been granted and presented with the bull by the holiness of our lord in the form that he requested, after the solemn celebration of Mass and many other dignified ceremonies … all this populous being present, took very devoutly and vigorously from the most reverend patriarch of Alexandria, apostolic delegate, the sacred and triumphal sign of the most holy cross to go to the enterprise against the Turk. And then his majesty, many lords, cavalrymen and gentlemen, many archbishops, bishops, prelates and other people, who I believe numbered more than two thousand, who this morning received this holy sign, and there was such a multitude taking up the cross that by the end of the 21st hour we were in the church … The holiness of our lord does not limit him time in the bulls to go to this enterprise, but commissions him to go as soon and well as he can go"]: Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASM), Fondo Sforzesco, Potenze Estere (SPE), *Napoli*, 195, 25-26; Naples, 8 November 1455; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 141. See also Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 359-360; Marinescu, "Le Pape Calixte III," 87-88.

circumstances required.[23] If the pope wanted the Aragonese-Napolitan fleet to join his own, he would need to offer compensations, such as recognising the succession rights of the monarch's illegitimate son in the Kingdom of Naples, providing vacant episcopal sees in the Crown of Aragon, or surrendering the apostolic tenth of his realms.[24]

From the outset, Calixtus III did not align with King Alfonso's plans, and rejected most of his demands. What the sovereign initially considered to be excessive prudence on the part of the old pope, later proved to be a deep aversion and implacable opposition in several areas.[25] Regarding the crusade, they both reproached and blamed each other for failing to do enough and for hindering its progress, each pursuing their own initiatives and often showing their misgivings.[26]

For example, the king was very angry when the pope forbade the Archbishop of Tarragona, Pero de Urrea, legate of the papal fleet against the Turks, from meeting with the king. The prelate respected the order, which only served to inflame the monarch's ire:

> And also sending the pope some galleys to Rhodes and having deputed as legate an archbishop, brother of the viceroy and deputy of the king, he ordered him not to come to the king's majesty in any way; and since he was in Gaeta with the galleys sent by the king to speak to him, he excused himself not to come … for which the king was greatly disturbed.[27]

In any case, the archbishop's loyalty to the pope was broken after a few months, as we will see below. Likewise, King Alfonso's stance on his collaboration with

[23] When the king made the decision to take his vow to wage war against the Turks, he told the members of his council that he was doing so "offerint a Déu la vida, libertat, stat e regnes, puix per Ell los tinch e posseexch" [Tr. "by offering to God my life, liberty, state and kingdoms, since it is through Him that I hold and possess them"]: ed. Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 90. See also A. Beccadelli, *Dels fets e dits del gran rey Alfonso* (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1990 [c. 1455]), 290-295; J. Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2003 [1579]), book XVI, chapter 33.

[24] For further details, see Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 29-79.

[25] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 240-241.

[26] See for instance Navarro, *Documents*, docs. 93 (Naples, 16 August 1455), 104 (Naples, 29 August 1455), 127 (Naples, 10 October 1455). See also Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 86-89.

[27] ASM SPE, *Napoli*, 195, 50-56; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 134 (Naples, 22 October 1455): "E anche mandando el papa certe galee a Rodi e habiando deputato per legato uno arcivesco, fratello del vicerè e subdito del re, gli commesse che per modo alcuno el non venisse da la maestà del re; e siando luy a Gaeta cum le galee rechesto dal re che·l gli venisse a parlare, se excusa de non potere venire … de che lo re molto se n'è alterato".

the crusade also changed, at least outwardly. At the end of March 1456, Alfonso the Magnanimous wrote an autograph letter in Catalan to Pope Calixtus III apologising for not being able to go on the crusade personally, but promising that the fifteen galleys pledged to accompany the papal fleet for a year would be ready soon. The humble and submissive tone of the royal letter, along with the commitment it conveyed, pleased the pope to such an extent "that of sweetness he wept".[28] After several months, the king's fleet had still not sailed, so the pontiff urged him to fulfil his pledge.[29]

In the meantime, the pope stripped the archbishop of Tarragona of his captaincy, accusing him of having committed very serious offences: "of that reprobate archbishop of Tarragona and his cohort, who sail in a piratical manner offending God, bringing disgrace upon the Apostolic See and ourselves, scandalising many, insulting and contemptuous of the Catholic faith, and disturbing all of Christianity".[30]

Pero de Urrea, Antoni Olzina and Antonio de Frescobaldi, instead of employing the vessels which had been procured with money raised for the crusade to fight the Turks, attacked the Genoese, and waged war against the ships from other Christian powers. The archbishop of Tarragona disregarded the pope's orders to direct his fleet toward the island of Chios, instead remaining in the waters of the Strait of Sicily where he plundered passing ships under the

[28] "che de dolceza el piangeva": ASM SPE, *Roma*, 43, 222; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 165; Roma, 5 April 1456. The king's promise had been set out at the end of the previous year by his ambassador to the Roman Curia, as is noted in his memorial: ACA, C, reg. 2697, ff. 168v-169r; ed. ibidem, doc. 152 (Venosa, 8 December 1455).

[29] Navarro, *Documents*, docs. 168 (Rome, May 1456), 177 (Rome, July 1456). See also Rinaldi, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, t. XXIX, 61-62.

[30] "illius reprobi archiepiscopi Terraconensis et sequatium, que ~~vagant~~ navigant more piratico in Dei offensam, opprobium Sedis Apostolice atque nostrum, et in scandalum pluriorum, fideique catholice vilipendium et contemptum ac totius cristianitatis turbationem": AAV, Arm. XXXIX, 7, f. 37v; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 178; c. 9 July 1456. The bull by which the pope removed the archbishop of Tarragona from the captaincy general of his fleet was issued on 15 April 1456; it is published in part in Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 544-545: "concessionibus sibi per nos factis uti nescientes seu potius ingratitudinis vitio excecati uti nolentes ac eorum temeritatis cornua extra eis datos limites improbe extendentes nonnullos christianos invaserunt ipsosque eorum rebus, bonis, navibus et navigiis indebite spoliarunt ac alia plurima nephanda perpetrarunt propter que capitaneatu … et aliis commissis officis merito privandi existent" [Tr. "not knowing how to take advantage of the concessions we had made to them, or rather not wanting to take advantage of them because of the vice of ingratitude, and extending the horns of their recklessness beyond the limits we had given them, they invaded some Christians and plundered their things, goods, ships and boats, and committed many other nefarious things for which they are deprived of the captaincy … and other offices entrusted to them"]. On this issue, see also Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 179.

pretext that they were carrying goods forbidden to the infidels.[31] As soon as the first faint rumour of these events reached the ears of the pontiff, he immediately sent urgent protest letters to King Alfonso the Magnanimous:

> Oh, traitors! Your ships might have defeated the Turks, raised up the Christians of the East, and delivered Hungary from the danger which threatens her. Instead of this, you have shamefully betrayed us with the help of our own money. The vengeance of God and of the Holy See will surely overtake you! Alfonso, King of Aragon, help Pope Calixtus! If you refuse, you will incur the wrath of heaven![32]

Although Pero de Urrea was removed from his position as captain general of the papal fleet,[33] in a subsequent brief, the pope agreed to pardon his serious offences and allowed him to remain part of the navy. By compensating for his detestable actions with good service, the pontiff hoped Urrea could regain his favour.[34]

The archbishop of Tarragona continued to form part of the papal fleet until the end of May 1457, when he returned to Naples with his galley and offered his service to Alfonso the Magnanimous, who used his vessel in the war against Genoa.[35]

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[31] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 114-119.

[32] Tr. and ed. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 365-366.

[33] Ludovico Trevisano (or Scarampi), patriarch of Aquileia, was appointed the new captain of the papal fleet to replace Pero de Urrea.

[34] "Volumus igitur harumque serie facultatem tibi damus, ut satisfacto per dictum archiepiscopum et alios prefatos, illis venetis, ianuensibus ac aliis de eisdem querelantibus, de pecuniis, rebus et bonis, quibus se spoliatos asserunt, si pro utilitate classis nostre tibi faciendum videbitur, possis eidem archiepiscopo et ceteris salvum conductum dare et eos assecurare, ut bene serviendo et operando, mala commissa et detestabilia bonis et gratis serviciis compensando ad gratiam nostram reduci valeant" [Tr. "We therefore wish, and by this document grant you the authority, that – once satisfaction has been given through the aforementioned archbishop and others to the said Venetians, Genoese, and others making complaints on the same matters, concerning the money, goods, and property which they claim to have been despoiled of – you may, if it seems beneficial to our fleet, grant safe-conduct to the said archbishop and the others, and assure them, so that by serving well and acting diligently, by offsetting the wrongs and detestable acts with good and loyal service, they may be able to return to our favor"]: AAV, Arm. XXXIX, 7, f. 34v; ed. Navarro, *Documents*, doc. 193; Rome, 18 August 1456. See also Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 366-368; Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 142-143.

[35] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 113 and 119; J. M. Madurell i Marimon, *Mensajeros barceloneses en la corte de Nápoles de Alfonso V de Aragón, 1435-1458* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1963), doc. 514.

The previous summer, the papal fleet joined the galleys armed by King Alfonso in Sicily and together they sailed towards the East. Prior to their departure, the pope issued a bull to all patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and abbots urging them to encourage prayers, fasting and penance among their congregations, while also focusing on the spiritual reform of the faithful under their care. On the first Sunday of the month a solemn procession of supplication was to be held to avert the danger of the Turks, accompanied by a Mass "contra paganos," during which the following prayer was to be recited: "Almighty, everlasting God, to whom all power belongs, and in whose hand are all the rights of all nations, protect Thy Christian people and crush by Thy power the pagans who trust in their fierceness". Indulgences were attached to the performance of these devotions, granted for these prayers. Furthermore, in all churches, between noon and vespers, one or more bells were to be rung daily for the recitation of three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys.[36] Beyond the papal demands, some Catalan cities instituted a perpetual feast in honour of St. George,[37]

> so that, through the virtue of the said glorious knight monsignor Saint George, captain of the House of Aragon and of the Principality [*of Catalonia*], the excellent lord king blessedly regnant, entrepreneur of the conquest of Constantinople, and his vassals, may obtain victory and destruction of that son of iniquity called the Great Turk and his vassals, to the praise and exaltation of the holy Catholic faith.[38]

The Christian fleet achieved some modest victories, even regaining three Aegean islands from the Ottomans, but it did not cause serious damage to the Turks, as its forces were insufficient. Meanwhile, in Hungary, the Crusader troops fought an uneven battle with the Turkish armies, inflicting on them a spectacular defeat at Belgrade in mid-July. The news of this victory reached Rome on 6 August 1456, and the pope, seeing it as the work of Divine providence, regarded it as a

[36] Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, 400.

[37] On the importance of St. George in the late medieval Crown of Aragon, see S. M. Cingolani, *Sant Jordi. Una llegenda mil·lenària* (Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2014).

[38] "per ço que migençant la virtut del dit gloriós cavaller monssenyor Sent Jordi, capità de la Casa d'Aragó e del Principat, lo dit excel·lent senyor rey beneventuradament regnant, emprenedor de la conquesta de Constantinopla, e los seus vasalls obtinguen victòria e termini d'aquell fill de iniquitat apellat Gran Turc e de sos vasalls, a laor e exaltació de sancta fe Cathòlica": ed. Santiago Sobrequés i Vidal, "Sobre el ideal de cruzada en Alfonso V de Aragón," *Hispania: Revista española de historia* 47 (1952): 251-252. See also Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 125.

miracle worthy of celebration. In remembrance of the triumph, attributed more to the grace of God than to human courage,[39] the pontiff declared the date as the day of the Transfiguration of Christ. Curiously, it was on 6 August two years later that Pope Calixtus III died unable to realize his dream.[40] A few weeks before, King Alfonso the Magnanimous had also died.

Upon returning to his archdiocese, Pero de Urrea justified his prolonged absence to the clergy by recounting his struggles against the infidels in parts of Turkey, and his fight for the honour of God and the maintenance and defence of the Catholic faith. The prelate claimed to have returned to his Church "with honour and victory," achieved through Divine help and the intercession of the blessed St. Thecla, patron saint of the city and of the *Tarraconensis* diocese.

In his statement, the archbishop emphasised the countless expenses he had to incur, going into debt and parting with a considerable amount of patrimony. Bearing in mind the purpose for which he had to do so, Pero de Urrea requested that the members of the cathedral chapter and other diocesan clerics provide financial assistance to offset his losses. After a brief colloquy, in which they expressed their joy at his return and at the victory and honour achieved by his lordship, and considering the immense efforts he had undertaken, the clerics presented the archbishop with a silver plate weighing one hundred and ten marks as a memorial of the triumph, a gift that the entire diocese would celebrate.[41]

[39] See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. II, doc. 73.

[40] Navarro, *Calixto III Borja*, 149-154; Villarroel, *Los Borgia*, 59-69.

[41] "Nós, en Pere, per la divinal miseració de la sancta sglésia de Tarragona Archebisba, al universal e amat clero de la ciutat et diòcesis nostres et singulars de aquella, salut et dilectió. Recomptat per nós al dit clero que com per honor de Déu e de mantenir e de defensar la fe cathòlica hajam vaccat per dos anys e mes en les pars de Turquia contra los pèrfidos infahels per defensar la fe cristiana ab innumerables despeses, que no solament de pecunies de rendes, más de argent e altres obres nos siam haguts a desaxir, retornats ab la ajuda de ntre. sor. Déu e intercessió de la Benaventurada madona Sancta Tecla patrona nostra, ab honor e victória en nostra sglésia deguéssem pensar e veure los insuportables treballs e despeses per nos sostengudes e com allegats nostres degudament subvenir en aquellas, e oyda per lo dit clero la dita exposició justa per lur sor. feta, hagut poch colloqui entre ells ab no poca alegria de la tornada e de la vitória e honor a la sglésia de Tarragona per sa Reverendíssima senyoria guanyada, moguts de la acostumada devoció e voluntat aguda a lur senyor e prelat, esent bé serts dels grandíssims treballs personals e despeses moltes sopartades e fetes per sa Reverendíssima paternitat, considerat devot respecte proseguir, li és estat forçat alienar la sua vaxella de l'argent, vehent tant principal e prelat metropolità sens argent no poder estar a sa honor liberalment e graciosa com a fahels súbdits li han presentada una vaxella de cent deu marchs d'argent, obrat, no res menys per memòria de la venguda de tanta victòria, de la qual tota la diòcesis se deu rahonablement alegrar, confiant de sa acustumada cleméncia, li han demanat e supplicat fos de sa mercè otorgar al dit clero algunes gràcies contengudes en una cèdula scrites": ed. Serra, "El pendón del arzobispo," 178-179.



Fig. 3. Detail of the predella of the altarpiece of St. Thecla in Tarragona Cathedral (Pere Joan, c. 1430)
[Photograph by Rafael López-Monné. All rights reserved]

III. Thecla of Iconium, a Protective and Bellicose Saint

Thecla of Iconium, a revered Christian martyr venerated as a saint by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, is celebrated for her unwavering faith and courage in the face of persecution. Believed to have lived during the 1st century AD, her story is primarily preserved in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a Christian apocryphal text. Although the historical details of her life remain uncertain, the account of her devotion and bravery has inspired generations of Christians. Saint Thecla's significance lies not only in her personal sanctity, but also in the groundbreaking role she played in early Christianity, particularly in advocating the active participation of women in the faith.[42]

[42] See Á. Narro (ed.), *Vida y milagros de santa Tecla* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2017).

Thecla was born in Iconium (modern-day Konya, Turkey), and she was betrothed to a wealthy young man named Thamyris. Her life took a dramatic turn when she encountered the apostle Paul, whose preaching profoundly moved her. According to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, she made the radical decision to abandon her marriage plans in favour of following Paul and embracing the Christian faith. This decision faced fierce opposition, especially from her family and the local authorities. Despite being condemned to death by burning, Thecla miraculously survived, and her subsequent escape further cemented her status as a symbol of Christian resilience and divine protection.

After these events, she decided to go to Antioch with St. Paul, where she found a new family in Tryphonia, a wealthy woman, and a community of devoted women. But, once again, she had to overcome obstacles: the judge Alexandros, in love with her, wanted to take her by force and Thecla defended herself. For this, she was condemned to the wild beasts for attacking a nobleman. The bears and lions turned on each other, leaving the proto-martyr unharmed. The judge then ordered her to be thrown into a lake with aquatic beasts. As she entered the water, she baptised herself and the ferocious creatures died. Seeing that no harm came to Thecla despite these tortures, she was finally released. From then on, she preached the word of God until her death in old age. Another version of the hagiography recounts that Thecla was pursued by two men who sought to rape her. They chased her, and just before they were about to catch her, the earth opened up and swallowed her.[43]

The narrative of Thecla's life is deeply intertwined with themes of virginity, faith, and defiance against societal norms. Thecla's actions – such as performing miracles and preaching the gospel – demonstrate her role not only as a follower of Christ, but also as an active participant in the spread of Christianity. Her courage in the face of danger and her unwavering devotion earned her widespread veneration among early Christians, particularly in regions like Asia Minor and Syria, where her legend flourished. But the cult of St. Thecla also reached the western Mediterranean, where she became the patron saint of the city and Church of Tarragona.[44]

The first preserved document explicitly mentioning St. Thecla in relation to the old imperial capital is Pope Urban II's fundamental bull "Inter primas Hispaniarum urbes," issued in Capua on 1 July 1091. This source made the

[43] B. Amorós Òdena, "Santa Tecla, patrona de Tarragona: vida i llegenda," *Kesse* 47 (2013): 12-17.

[44] A. Puig i Tàrrech, "The Cult of the Female Proto-Martyr and Apostole Saint Thecla in Hispania," in *Thecla: Paul's Disciple and Saint in the East and West*, ed. Jeremy W. Barrier et al. (Bristol: Peters, 2017), 240-282; M. Pérez Martínez, "*Sancta Virgo Thecla*. The Origins of the Cult of Thecla in Tarragona," in ibidem, 304-326.

restoration of the Church of Tarragona's metropolitan dignity after nearly four centuries under Islamic rule.[45]

During the medieval centuries, devotion to the saint grew increasingly widespread and deeply rooted. Thecla became the epicentre of the festive liturgical celebrations, a cohesive figure for the city's inhabitants and a protector and ally during times of great upheaval. Beyond the Provincial Councils,[46] and the fundamental role played by Art,[47] one of the most impactful events was the arrival of the relic of the virgin proto-martyr's arm in 1321. It was brought to Tarragona after a successful diplomatic mission to the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia promoted by King James II of Aragon.[48]

The importance of the spectacular reception of the relic at both an institutional and popular level led to the establishment of the solemn celebration of the octave of St. Thecla from 1359, as well as the publication of the "Ordinacions de Santa Tecla" (1370), putting the importance of the celebration of the patron saint's festivity on a par with that of Corpus Christi.[49]

In addition to all this, a widely circulated legend, dating back to at least the early fifteenth century, recounted how the saint appeared to King Peter the Cerimonious shortly before his death in 1387. Giving the king a slap in the face, Thecla demanded the restitution of the patrimony that the monarch had seized from the archbishop of Tarragona's temporal jurisdiction over the city and its

[45] L. J. McCrank, "Restauración canónica e intento de reconquista de la sede tarraconense (1076-1108)," *Cuadernos de Historia de España* 61-62 (1977): 145-245; E. Juncosa Bonet, *Estructura y dinámicas de poder en el señorío de Tarragona. Creación y evolución de un dominio compartido* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2019 [2015]), 71-108.

[46] J. M. Pons i Guri, "Constitucions conciliars tarraconenses (1229-1330)," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* XLVII (1974), 65-128; ibidem, XLVIII (1975), 241-363.

[47] In this regard, see E. Liaño Martínez, "El retablo mayor de la catedral de Tarragona," in *L'arribada del braç de Santa Tecla en el 700 aniversari*, coord. Maria Bonet and Joan Menchon (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2023), 61-84; E. Lozano López, "*Vidit dominum in specie Pauli [...]* Tecla i el frontal d'altar de la catedral de Tarragona," in ibidem, 85-99.

[48] M. Serrano Coll and E. Lozano López, "The Translation of the Relic of Saint Thecla (1321): The Religious and Urban Context," in *La cattedrale nella città medievale: i rituali*, ed. Vinni Lucherini and Gerardo Boto (Roma: Viella, 2020), 285-309; E. Juncosa Bonet, "*Pro honore dicte sedis et vestri*. La missió diplomàtica per a l'obtenció de les relíquies de santa Tecla," in *L'arribada del braç de Santa Tecla en el 700 aniversari*, coord. Maria Bonet and Joan Menchon (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2023), 13-38; J. Bertran i Luengo, "L'entrada del braç de Santa Tecla de 1321: inici de la teatralitat del cicle de Santa Tecla, el Corpus i les entrades espectacularitzades en la Corona d'Aragó," in ibidem, 101-111.

[49] A. Tomás Ávila, *El culto y la liturgia en la catedral de Tarragona, 1300-1700* (Tarragona: Institut d'Estudis Tarraconenses "Ramon Berenguer IV," 1963), 143-159 and 171-185; F. Español Bertran, "Santa Tecla i Tarragona: la construcció d'un culte civic," in *L'arribada del braç de Santa Tecla en el 700 aniversari*, coord. Maria Bonet and Joan Menchon (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2023), 131-147.

hinterland. The legend is enlightening as it reflects the peak of tensions between civil and ecclesiastical powers over territorial control.[50]

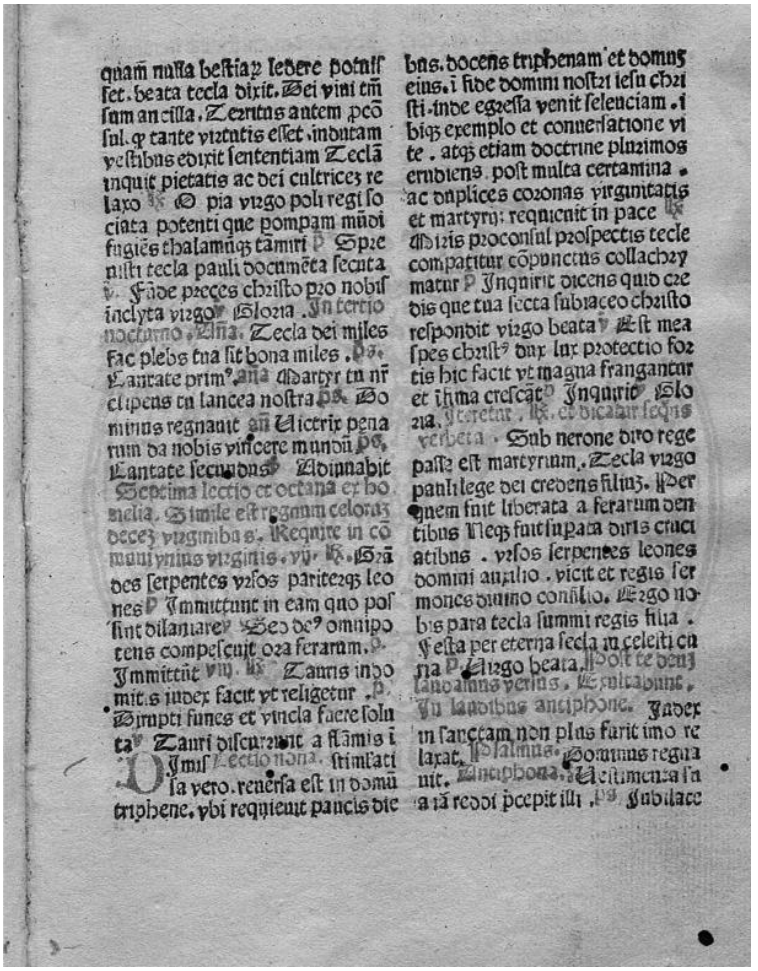


Fig. 4. Breviary of Archbishop Pero de Urrea (1484).
[ACCT, Catedral, *Breviari de Pere de Urrea*, image 862. All rights reserved]

However, despite some earlier evidence during the Christian conquests of the kingdoms of Valencia and Mallorca in the thirteenth century, Thecla's role as protector in war did not acquire significant prominence until the episode recounted above. It should be added that, in this respect, the Breviary of

[50] E. Juncosa Bonet, "La bofetada de Santa Tecla al Rey Pedro el Ceremonioso: el reflejo legendario de las luchas por el control jurisdiccional de Tarragona," *En la España Medieval* 33 (2010): 75-96.

Archbishop Pero de Urrea, preserved in the Chapter Archive of Tarragona Cathedral, is of special interest.[51]

In the prayers and sermons associated with the Mass on the patron saint's feast day, Thecla is lauded with virtues and achievements befitting her status as a virgin proto-martyr. Among the most striking descriptions are: "Thecla, soldier of God, make your people good soldiers. Martyr, you are our shield, you are our lance. Victress of sorrows, give us victory over the world".[52] This language is full of bellicose imagery that aligns seamlessly with the intercession that the archbishop attributed to the saint during the campaigns in the crusade against the Turks.

IV. Pero de Urrea and the Catalan Civil War

Barely a couple of years after Pero de Urrea's return to the archdiocese he presided over, his war activity regained great importance in the context of the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472).[53] The two factions, the royalists who supported John II of Aragon and the Catalan constitutionalists, disputed the extent of royal rights in the principality of Catalonia.

One of the main triggers of the conflict was the imprisonment of Prince Charles of Viana – accused of conspiracy – by order of his father. Among the representatives of the Catalan institutions to plead with the monarch to end his son's captivity was the archbishop of Tarragona, who proclaimed the following speech addressed to King John:

> If justice, most serene prince, and reason demand that your son Charles be deserving of punishment, we by no means attempt, though you are his father, to beg your pardon. For if paternal love and natural compassion do not move or incite you to pardon him, in vain shall we attempt to ask for it in our speech. Especially since among us authority must be held more by true reason than by effeminate pity.
> We knew him through you, all fidelity and obedience, as king and true lord, are due to you and not to him. What moves us should

[51] Arxiu Capitular de la Catedral de Tarragona (ACCT), Catedral, *Breviari de Pere de Urrea* [un. cat. 4275].

[52] "Tecla, Dei miles, fac plebs tua sit bona miles. Martyr, tu noster clipeus, tu lancea nostra. Victrix penarum, da nobis vincere mundum".

[53] See S. Sobrequés i Vidal and J. Sobrequés i Callicó, *La guerra civil catalana del segle XV* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1973); A. Ryder, *The Wreck of Catalonia: Civil War in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

move you, though no love surpasses paternal love; likewise, what we try is as if someone were to spur a swift horse. You must be willing to forgive your son more than we are. But we cannot suffer or bear it with sorrow that, since we hear it from everyone everywhere, you have fallen into cruelty, after abandoning the clemency in which you were ahead of other princes. What, then, can it be that prompted you to revolt against your own flesh and blood? Almost all love their offspring, favour them, and protect them from injury. What could be weirder than for a father to send his son to prison? So, since this is laid before our eyes, and to rage against a son, as well as against oneself, seems to us unnatural, we wish to know what guilt or what detestable crime Charles has committed to deserve imprisonment. You have over him a double jurisdiction, one, as a father, is common to you with the humblest men, the other, as a king, is common to you only with kings. But neither one nor the other seems to us that you should exercise against Charles.

Certainly we fear the future and I know not what atrocious disaster and calamity our minds forebode to these kingdoms. We cannot in so great an affliction repress tears; a deep sorrow torments and wounds us vehemently, and the more so because we are all ignorant of the cause of so sudden a change. Moreover, though we may wish to deceive ourselves, we cannot convince the people that Charles has contrived against you anything worthy of imprisonment. We all know that you, a few months before, willingly and favourably disposed, had forgiven Charles all his wrongs; but we are ignorant what can now impel you to arrest him. To me, most serene prince, although I would like to say many things, pain prevents me, hurts me and makes me weep when I consider with what rejoicing and festivities you celebrated in Barcelona the reconciliation with your son and to what madness and confusion we have returned. It only remains to ask you and, by the immortal God, to beseech you that these most opulent kingdoms that your ancestors left you by right of blood, that you try to preserve them in peace and that, in order to defeat external enemies more easily, you avoid internal wars as long as you can.[54]

[54] Ed. J. Fernández Cacho, *Gonzalo García de Santa María, Vida de Juan II de Aragón. La guerra en Cataluña de 1461 a 1472* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2020), 100-103: "Si iusticia, serenissime princeps, et ratio expostulant, ut Karolus filius tuus poena dignus sit,

The king responded by justifying his decision with different arguments,[55] and ended his speech with some very harsh words in reference to his own son: "I wish I had never begotten him or, as soon as he was born, he would have been carried from the maternal womb to the grave".[56]

nequicquam conamur, cum pater sis, abs te veniam exorare. Si enim paternus amor et naturalis caritas te non movent aut pungunt ut eius misereri debeas, frustra nos oratione id impetrare nitimur. Eo vel maxime quod apud nos plus vera ratio quam effeminata pietas est auctoritatis habitura. / Nos eundem per te cognovimus, fides omnis atque obedientia tibi tanquam regi et vero domino debetur, non illi. Quod nos movet te movere deberet, cum enim nullus amor vincat paternum; quicquid conamur perinde est ac si quis pernici equo calcaria adigeret. Ad clementiam erga filium pronior quam nos esse debes. Non possumus tamen pati et moleste non ferre, cum audiamus ab omnibus passim, te immanitatem quandam, deposita clementia qua ceteros principes antecellebas, induisse. Quid enim esse potuit quod te ut in tua viscera converteres impulit? Fere omnes amant suam sobolem, fovent, tutantur ab iniuria. Quid ergo admirabilius quam quod pater in carcerem filium coniiciat? Cum igitur haec ante oculos nobis proposita sint et contra naturam videatur, sicut in se ipsum saevire in filium, scire optamus quae tanta culpa quodue crimen tam detestabile fuerit Karoli, ut carcere dignus videatur? Tu in eum duplicem iurisditionem habes, una quod pater tibi cum quibusque infimis hominibus, altera quod rex cum solis regibus communis est. Neutram autem ut in Karolum exercere debeas nobis videtur. / Nos futura quidem timemus et nescio quid pesimae aerumnae et calamitatis regnorum nostrae mentes praesagiunt. Non possumus in tanta afflictione lacrimas vincere; intestinus dolor nos vehementer coquit et exulcerat, eo vel maxime quod causam tam repentinae novitatis omnes ignoramus. Quin esti nos ipsos fallere velimus, tamen plebi persuadere non possumus Karolum quicquam dignum carcere adversum te fuisse machinatum. Scimus omnes laeto vultu et grato animo paucis ante mensibus te Karolo omnia errata pepercisse. Ignoramus autem nunc quid ad eum capiundum te impellere potuerit. / Me autem, serenissime princeps, plura dicere volentem impedit dolor et exulcerat lacrimarique cogit considerantem qua ex iocunditate et quibus ex ovationibus ob reconciliationem tuam cum filio Barchinonae celebratis, in quam calamitatem et perturbationem animorum recidimus. Solum te deprecari restat et per inmortalem Deum obsecrare ut regna haec opulentissima quae tui maiores iure sanguinis tibi reliquerunt, in pace conservare velis; atque, ut facilius exteros hostes superare possis, intestina bella, quoad fieri poterit, caveas".

[55] The King alleged that Prince Charles "in meque nuper machinatus est, ut Dignitatem et statum meum regium elevet. Omnia et cariora quam vita mea esse videntur. Saluti meae insidiari non cessat. Exultat si quid nobis adversum accidit; contristatur si quando nobis fortuna arridere videtur. Cum rege Castellae … quem capitalem mihi hostem esse non ignorat, arctissimam ut me everteret copulavit amicitiam" [Tr. "conspired against me to undermine my royal dignity and status. Everything seems to be dearer to him than my life. He never ceases to lurk against my integrity. He rejoices if some misfortune befalls us, he grieves if fortune ever seems to smile on us. With the King of Castile, [...] who is my greatest enemy, he has made a very close alliance to destroy me"]: ed. Fernández, *Gonzalo García de Santa María,* 102-104.

[56] "Vtinam eum nunquam genuissem, aut initio nativitatis fuisset de utero translatus ad tumulum": ibidem, 104.

Despite this, John II finally agreed to free his eldest son. Prince Charles passed through Tarragona after his release. He asked to see the relic of St. Thecla's arm and worshipped it many times. In the same way, he wanted to see the predella of the high altar of the cathedral up close, where he listened with delight to the explanation of the martyrdoms suffered by the apostle proto-martyr, sculpted in polychromed alabaster by Pere Joan. Archbishop Urrea was probably not in the city, in order to avoid encountering the prince, who died shortly afterwards in Barcelona.[57]

It was in this context that the Capitulation or Concord of Vilafranca del Penedès was subscribed. This landmark treaty was signed on 21 June 1461 between Queen Juana Enríquez – acting on behalf of her husband, King John II of Aragon – and the delegates appointed by the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. The charter saw the monarchy accepting nearly all the demands of the rebellious institutions of the principality. Among its clauses, it was stipulated that the king could not initiate civil and criminal proceedings without the endorsement of the Catalan institutions. Additionally, the ruler was prohibited from entering Catalonia without their permission.[58]

Tensions between the monarchy and the Catalan authorities grew, partly fuelled by the rumour that the widely admired Prince of Viana, who was increasingly regarded by the population as a saint with miraculous powers, had been poisoned.

As events continued to unfold to the detriment of King John, Pero de Urrea chose to switch allegiances and become one of the sovereign's main allies. At the outbreak of the war, it was once again the archbishop of Tarragona who delivered a new speech worth noting:

> Although on many occasions, most serene prince, you have proven the ancient loyalty of the Catalans, this juncture, however, does not guarantee the security of your position. What does not happen in many years usually happens in an instant. It is true that an uprising of the people is not to be feared, but neither is it to be disdained. The fact that they have taken up arms openly declares that they wish to separate from you. By defending our lives, we shall lessen the danger that threatens us. Far be it from us to encourage your subjects any further by our fear. There is nothing to be feared, for

[57] Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi*, vol. II, 111-112.

[58] On the Capitulation of Vilafranca, see F. Foronda, *El espanto y el miedo. Golpismo, emociones políticas y constitucionalismo en la Edad Media* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2013), 160-171. For an overview of the reign of John II, see J. Vicens Vives, *Juan II de Aragón (1398-1479): monarquía y revolución en la España del siglo XV* (Pamplona: Urgoiti editores, 1953).

> this fortress is protected by nature and by human artifice, and we also have enough people and soldiers. So, in my opinion, we must wait to see what course the matter takes. Your departure without taking leave, as it is said, will be sufficient cause for the outbreak of war, for in your absence they will commit reckless acts sooner than if you were present. I only know this, and experience has taught me, that in the end he will be victorious in the war who is not inclined to or afraid of rumour and revolt, but rather he who can control the fears produced by them.[59]

Not heeding advice, King John II decided to leave Lleida to avoid being assassinated by the conspirators. From that moment on, the Archbishop Pero de Urrea followed the king's armies, pledging to offer his life and wealth to the service of the royal cause.[60] After having put up intense resistance, the city of Tarragona was one of the first places to succumb to the king's forces in 1463:

> the king went on to lay siege to Tarragona; and the captains having recognised the siege and defences of that city, it seemed [*to the king's captains*] to be inexpugnable because it was sited on a steep, rocky hillside and surrounded by very strong walls that the passage of many centuries had not availed to wear them away and because it was on the sea from which it could very easily receive help. There survived some towers and walls of Roman buildings founded on boulders so huge that it seemed impossible they could be moved

[59] Ed. Fernández, *Gonzalo García de Santa María,* 112-113: "Quamquam multis in rebus, princeps serenissime, priscam fidem Catalanorum expertus es, ea tamen res nullam statui tuo securitatem promittit. Quod in compluribus annis non accidit, puncto accidere interdum solet. Populorum quidem tumultus formidandus non est, verum nec idcirco despiciendus. Hos a te aperte deficere velle declarant arma per eos capta. Periculum imminens nostram tutando vitam longe minus faciamus. Nihil timendum nostra formidine subditis tuis maiorem animum faciamus. Nihil timendum est, cum atrium hoc et natura et arte munitum sit, abundemus quoque gente atque militibus. Quapropter expectare iudicio meo debemus quem exitum sit res habitura. Hinc enim sic hospite, ut aiunt, insalutato discedere causa erit belli inchoandi, citius enim, te absente, quamcumque agredientur temeritatem, quam si praesto fueris. Hoc unum scio experientiaque doctus sum, eum demum in bello victoriem fore qui non ad omnem auram tumultumque movetur ac pavet, sed fortitudine animi incussos timores tolerare potest".

[60] "Fortunas autem nostras vitamque tibi offerimus, ut libet, uti poteris": ed. Fernández, *Gonzalo García de Santa María,* 154. Due to his favourable stance toward the royalist cause, Pero de Urrea was declared an "enemy and defier of the Principality of Catalonia" by the deputies of the *Generalitat*. See J. M. Sans i Travé (dir.), *Dietaris de la Generalitat de Catalunya* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1994), vol. I, 172.

by the machines and skill neither of those times nor those men, and their mines and caverns reached to the shore.[61]

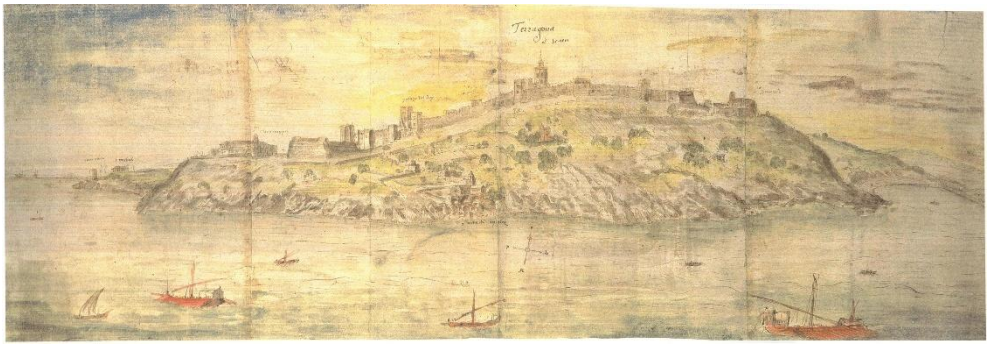


Fig. 5. View of Tarragona from the sea (Anton van den Wyngaerde, 1563) [Wikimedia Commons]

After several assaults, the inhabitants of the city began to fear that persevering in their resistance would lead to devastating looting and slaughter, so they turned to the archbishop to negotiate a surrender. Once conquered, Tarragona became the seat of the royal court and council for the rest of the war.

Upon his return, the prelate punished several insurgents and acted harshly against the rebellious towns around the capital.[62] The actions of the archbishop of Tarragona, who served as captain of the royalist armies in several campaigns,[63] were decisive at different points in the conflict, which ultimately ended with the Capitulation of Pedralbes on 24 October 1472.

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[61] Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, book XVII, chapter 44: "pasó el rey a poner cerco sobre Tarragona; y habiéndose reconocido por los capitanes el sitio y defensas de aquella ciudad, parecióles ser inexpugnable por estar puesta en una áspera ladera de rocas y cercada de muros fortísimos que no había podido consumir la antigüedad de tantos siglos y estar sobre la mar en tal sitio que puede recoger el socorro muy fácilmente. Duraban algunas torres y muros de edificio romano fundados sobre tan disformes y grandes peñascos que no parecía que podían ser movidos por máquinas y artificio ni destos tiempos ni destos hombres, y sus minas y cavernas llegaban a la mar".

[62] For further details, see Sobrequés and Sobrequés, *La guerra civil catalana*, vol. I, 397-399; Ryder, *The Wreck of Catalonia*, 134-135.

[63] For instance, "en lo any 1469 ere aquest archebisbe general de la gent de guerra que dit senyor rey tenia en lo Panadès en frontera de Barcelona, y se portà molt bé en aquest càrrech, defensant dels enemichs la terra y vilas se li avien encomenades, y fent entrades y mal en las enemigas" [Tr. "In the year 1469, this archbishop was general of the troops that the said king had in the Penedès, on the border of Barcelona, and he behaved very well in this position, defending the land and towns that had been entrusted to him from the enemies, and launching incursions and doing harm in the enemy ones"]: ed. Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi*,

V. Epilogue

Despite the long episcopate of Pero Ximénez de Urrea at the head of the archepiscopal See of Tarragona (1445-1489) – the longest ever held by any archbishop in the diocese –, he did not hold any Provincial Council. Apart from some devotional objects (vestments, cloaks, candles, a cross and a mitre rich in precious stones), and the institution of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Pero de Urrea's main legacy in the cathedral was the impressive choir stalls, whose construction he promoted. However, the archbishop was unable to complete the payment of the high price stipulated (65,000 *sols*.) as he was heavily indebted to his creditors, even after the auction sale of his personal property following his death.[64] It was precisely in the choir where the prelate chose to be buried according to his will.

Although the chronicles describe him as a "very valiant prelate," "man of merit in his prudence, speech and dignity," "a magnanimous and eloquent man," or "man of good governance,"[65] there are also controversial allegations surrounding him. The most serious accusation concerns his supposed niece, Margarita de Urrea. In a lawsuit filed by the Grand Prior of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem in 1505, when Margarita was elected prioress of the convent of Alguaire, she was identified in the legal proceedings not as the archbishop's niece, but as his daughter. Furthermore, she was accused of having had incestuous relations with her father, the late archbishop-patriarch.[66]

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vol. II, 113. See other examples in Fernández (ed.), *Gonzalo García de Santa María,* 181, 209, 227 and 267, or in A. de Bofarull i Brocà, *Anales históricos de Reus* (Reus: Edicions del Centre de Lectura de Reus, 2007 [1845]), t. I, 141-149.

[64] See I. Companys Farrerons and N. Montardit Bofarull, *El cadirat del cor de la Seu de Tarragona. Història i iconografia dels medallons* (Tarragona: Ind. Gràfiques Gabriel Gibert, 2000); A. P. Martínez Subías, "S'ornamenten, cobreixen i moblen espais," in *La catedral de Tarragona*, coord. Francesc Roig Queralt (Tarragona: Arola Editors - Fundació privada Mútua Catalana, 2024), 323-331; López-Monné, *La catedral i la ciutat*, 211-214.

[65] The quotations are taken respectively from J. Sánchez Real (ed.), *El Archiepiscopologio de Luis Pons de Icart* (Tarragona: Real Sociedad Arqueológica Tarraconense, 1954), 145-146; Fernández (ed.), *Gonzalo García de Santa Maria*, 113; Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi*, vol. II, 111.

[66] J. Miret i Sans, *Sempre han tingut béch les oques. Apuntacions per la historia de les costumes privades* (Barcelona: Impr. F. Badia, 1905), 75-81: "és molt cert que la prioressa que vuy és no és estada canònicament elegida per les raons següents: primo, perquè no és legítima y natural, abans és filla del patriarcha de Tarragona Don Pedro de Urrea … e lo que és pijor e fama pública, que lo patriarcha, son pare, la emprenyà e que la una filla és filla del dit patriarcha y és la que vuy és monja en dit monestir, que són coses que han greument ofès a Déu y la fan inhàbil de la dignitat prioral" [Tr. "it is very certain that the current prioress has not been canonically elected for the following reasons: firstly, because she is not



Fig. 6. Choir stalls in Tarragona Cathedral (Francisco Gomar, 1479-1493)
[Photograph by Rafael López-Monné. All rights reserved]

Alongside his episcopate, Pero de Urrea was appointed ecclesiastical deputy of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia during the triennium 1446-1449, royal chancellor (1454-1480), and played an active role in the crusade against the Turks, as well as in the development of the war against Genoa and the Catalan Civil War. All of this suggests that he was more a man in the service of the monarchy – in spite of his fluctuating positions according to the circumstances and his personal interests – than in the service of the Church.[67] Perhaps this explains the succinct epitaph that covers his sepulture in the cathedral:

legitimate and natural, but is the daughter of the patriarch of Tarragona, Don Pero de Urrea … and, worse still, public rumor held that the patriarch, her father, impregnated her, and that one of Margarita's daughters is also the daughter of the said patriarch, and is the one who today is a nun in the said monastery, which are things that have seriously offended God and make her unfit to hold the dignity of prioress"]: ibidem, 78. Such slanders have been challenged by some authors, like E. Morera (*Tarragona Cristiana*, vol. IV, 66), who considered it to be mere hearsay.

[67] "Era muy alentado para las cosas de la guerra, y diestro en su política y manejo" [Tr. "He was highly encouraged in the things of war, and skilful in his politics and management"]: Villanueva, *Viage literario*, t. XX, 17.

*Hic iacet R[*everendissi*]mus in Christo Pater d[*omi*]nus Petrus de Urrea, Patriarcha Alexandrinus et archiepiscopus Tarraconensis, qui fecit hunc chorum. Obiit autem nona die septembris anno D[*o*]m[*i*]ni 1489.*[68]

In any case, the devotion he showed throughout his life to the patron saint of his archdiocese (St. Thecla) is evident in several ways, to the point of making her the intercessor and protector of the war campaigns in which this "pirate archbishop" took part.

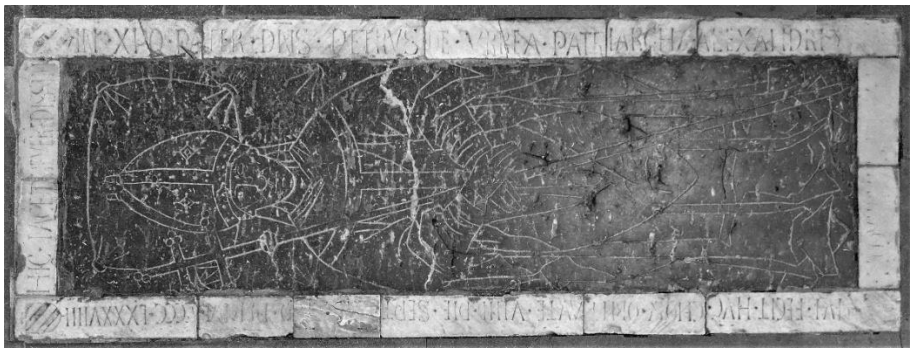


Fig. 7. Sepulchral slab of Archbishop Pero de Urrea in the presbytery of Tarragona Cathedral [All rights reserved]

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[68] Ed. Blanch, *Arxiepiscopologi*, vol. II, 121. [Tr. "Here lies the Most Reverend Father in Christ, Lord Peter Urrea, Patriarch of Alexandria and Archbishop of Tarragona, who made this choir. He died on the ninth day of September in the year of our Lord 1489"].

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