

# How to achieve Metropolitan status in many, not so easy steps

Laurin Herberich, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

When pope Paschalis II. died in January of 1118 and was succeeded by a seeming supporter of Santiago, Diego Gelmírez must have almost seen himself at the end of his stubborn efforts. Since his appointment as bishop of Santiago de Compostela in 1102 he had tried to obtain the Metropolitan status for his bishopric. But neither his time as the guardian of Alfons, the later VII. and son of Urraca of Castile and León, nor him taking advantage of the rivalry between the archbishoprics of Braga and Toledo seemed to have brought him closer to the fulfilment of his wish. Visibly excited he therefore sent no less than four embassies to Gelasius.<sup>1</sup>

But he had cheered to soon. In March the new pope put a new bishop in charge of the bishopric of Braga, which had been vacant for a year, and thereby a new obstacle in the way of the elevation of Santiago.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless Diego sent his first embassy in early summer. His envoys reached Gelasius II. in the middle of June, but the pope interrupted their proposal and turned them down for the moment.<sup>3</sup> After this failure, a papal letter not even pretending to be hopeful and a second unsuccessful embassy, it's surprising that the third one left at all in summer of 1118. But Diego stayed stubborn.

His nephew Pedro, prior of the Cathedral canons, and the cardinal Pedro Díaz set out to Gelasius II. equipped with a lot of gold and the intent to convince him to elevate Santiago.<sup>4</sup> But they didn't have the most promising prospects from the start. At sea "*pirate Hismahelitarum*" blocked the way, on land the henchmen of Alfons the "Batallador" were lurking, because he had denied Santiago his "*per regnum suum transeundi licentiam*".<sup>5</sup> Embassy number three was therefore left with nothing but to travel "*latenter et sub specie peregrinorum*".<sup>6</sup> A reason for this was also the amount of 120 ounces of gold in the form of altar fragments, which they were supposed to carry for provision- and persuasion purposes.<sup>7</sup> After his departure "*uterque Petrus*" was able to evade the "Batalladors" henchmen, but a little later both Pedro and Pedro got captured by them. As if being taken prisoner and delay weren't enough, they also got robbed of everything: the 120 ounces of gold, their horses and clothes. After three or four days Alfons' henchmen decided to let Pedro, the cardinal, go. Pedro, the prior and nephew of the stubborn bishop of Santiago, had to stay as a hostage.<sup>8</sup> Shortly afterwards the former met, now equipped almost in the same way as a real pilgrim, a less than enthusiastic pope in Magalona, who was so appreciative of his efforts, that he put off the cardinals request for elevation again.<sup>9</sup> But Diego refused to give up.

---

<sup>1</sup> VONES (1999), LexMA 3, Sp. 1000–1001; VONES (1980), S. 289–293, 303, 311–312, 332–337, 344–345, 351, 366.

<sup>2</sup> VONES (1980), S. 351–353, 356. He did this to get ahead of the former bishop Mauritius of Braga and now anti-pope Gregory VIII. in drawing up support for his cause in his former area of influence.

<sup>3</sup> VONES (1980), S. 352, 354. The *Historia Compostellana* has Gelasius II. say the following: „*Videlicet Bracarensum ecclesiam archiepiscopatu vultis spoliare et beati Iacobi ecclesiam sublimare [...]*“ (HC, II, 3,258, S. 2658, f. 62rb.).

<sup>4</sup> VONES (1980), S. 355–357.

<sup>5</sup> FALQUE REY (1988), S. 227, Z. 33–37.

<sup>6</sup> FALQUE REY (1988), S. 227, Z. 39–40.

<sup>7</sup> FALQUE REY (1988), S. 227, Z. 41–54, 59. For two embassies had already been well equipped with it and the bishops coffers were now empty, the first and smaller golden altar front of Santiago had to serve as piggy bank.

<sup>8</sup> FALQUE REY (1988), S. 228, Z. 60–78.

<sup>9</sup> FALQUE REY (1988), S. 228, Z. 78–85. VONES (1980), S. 356–357.

After he had been excluded from the next council by a pope probably annoyed by his stubbornness, Diego himself set out in December 1118. But also the fourth embassy didn't have exactly the desired outcome. In Sahagún cardinal Deusdedit, who had been sent ahead, told him, that the "Batallador" was still blocking their way and that the bishop risked being robbed, if he kept moving ahead.<sup>10</sup> Additionally Gelasius II. had died. Having lost his best shot at obtaining Metropolitan status in seventeen years so close to the finish line, blocked from moving ahead and under threat of being robbed, Diego must have thought, that all these years of his stubbornness didn't pay off after all. But stubbornness always pays off. One month later at the court of Queen Urraca he received the news, that his co-guardian of many years, Guido of Vienne, had been elected as the new pope Calixt II., who would elevate Santiago de Compostela to Metropolitan status two years later.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that these years were challenging on their own, is left out for narrative purposes by the *Historia Compostellana*.<sup>12</sup> A stringent narrative is in retrospect oftentimes the packaging of frustrating situations, that were brought to an end rather by stubbornness. Even if we might feel this Christmas like Diego Gelmírez in 1118, we should keep in mind, that current setbacks do not mean, that stubbornness can't fulfil longterm wishes and that even holidays under Covid circumstances are better than those in the snow of Galicia, blocked by the "Batallador" and in danger of being robbed by him.

---

<sup>10</sup> This he had experienced himself, when Aragonese soldiers searched him for papal bribes, of which they already had relieved more than one embassy this year.

<sup>11</sup> VONES (1980), S. 357–359.

<sup>12</sup> VONES (1980), S. 342–343, 365; VONES (1999), *LexMA* 3, Sp. 1000–1001. The whole story of the elevation to Metropolitan status, which took place on the 27.10.1120, can be found in: FALQUE REY (1988), S. 220–235. The thirteenth century *Historia Compostellana* is the most detailed account of the history of the north-western area of modern day Spain in the first half of the 12th century. The chartular chronicle commissioned by Diego Gelmírez († 1140), realised by different editors and kept until roughly 1139 combines translation-, foundation- and miracle-reports and a variety of other forms of historical transmission with legitimising intent. These elements are intertwined with a meticulous and tendentious description of the deeds of Diego Gelmírez.