

= Berengaria of Castile =

Berengaria ( Castilian : Berenguela ; 1179 or 1180 ? 8 November 1246 ) was Queen of Castile in 1217 and Queen consort of León from 1197 to 1204 . As the eldest child and heir presumptive of Alfonso VIII of Castile , she was a sought after bride , and was engaged to Conrad , the son of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa . After his death , she married her cousin , Alfonso IX of León , to secure the peace between him and her father . She had five children with him before their marriage was voided by Pope Innocent III .

When her father died , she served as regent for her younger brother Henry I in Castile until she succeeded him on his untimely death . Within months , she turned Castile over to her son , Ferdinand III , concerned that as a woman she would not be able to lead Castile 's forces . However , she remained one of his closest advisors , guiding policy , negotiating , and ruling on his behalf for the rest of her life . She was responsible for the re @-@ unification of Castile and León under her son 's authority , and supported his efforts in the Reconquista . She was a patron of religious institutions and supported the writing of a history of the two countries .

= = Early family life = =

Berengaria was born either in 1179 or 1180 , in Burgos . She was the eldest daughter of King Alfonso VIII of Castile and Eleanor of England . Those who cared for the young infanta were generously rewarded . Her nurse , Estefanía , received land from Alfonso and Eleanor on her retirement in May of 1181 . Another nurse , Elvira , received a similar retirement gift in 1189 at Berengaria 's request .

As the eldest child of king Alfonso and Eleanor , she was the heiress presumptive of the throne of Castile for several years , because many of her siblings who where born after her died shortly after birth or in early infancy , so Berengaria became a greatly desired partner throughout Europe .

Berengaria 's first engagement was agreed in 1187 when her hand was sought by Conrad , Duke of Rothenburg and fifth child of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa . The next year , the marriage contract was signed in Seligenstadt , including a dowry of 42000 Maravedí . Conrad then marched to Castile , where in Carrión the engagement was celebrated and Conrad was knighted . Berengaria 's status as heir of Castile when she inherited the throne was based in part on documentation in the treaty and marriage contract , which specified that she would inherit the kingdom after her father or any childless brothers who may come along . Conrad would only be allowed to co @-@ rule as her spouse , and Castile would not become part of the Empire . The treaty also documented traditional rights and obligations between the future sovereign and the nobility .

The marriage was not consummated , due to Berengaria 's young age , as she was less than 10 years old . Conrad and Berengaria never saw each other again . By 1191 , Berengaria requested an annulment of the engagement from the Pope , influenced , no doubt , by third parties such as her grandmother Eleanor of Aquitaine , who was not interested in having a Hohenstaufen as a neighbor to her French fiefdoms . Those fears were neutralized when the duke was assassinated in 1196 .

= = Marriage to Alfonso IX = =

In order to help secure peace between Castile and León , Berengaria married Alfonso IX of León , her first cousin once removed , in Valladolid in 1197 . As part of the marriage , and in accordance with Spanish customs of the time , she received direct control over a number of castles and lands within León . Most of these were along the border with Castile , and the nobles who ran them in her name were allowed to seek justice from either king in the event of being wronged by the other . In turn , these knights were charged with maintaining the peace along the border in the queen 's name .

Berengaria and Alfonso IX had five children :  
Eleanor ( 1198 / 1199 ? 1202 ) .

Constance ( 1200 ? 1242 ) , a nun in the Abbey of las Huelgas .

Ferdinand III ( 1201 ? 1252 ) , King of Castile and León .

Alfonso ( 1203 ? 1272 ) , Lord of Molina and Mesa by his first marriage . He married , first , Mafalda de Lara , heiress of Molina and Mesa , second , Teresa Núñez , and third , Mayor Téllez de Meneses , Lady of Montealegre and Tiedra , by whom he was the father of María of Molina , wife of King Sancho IV of León and Castile .

Berengaria ( 1204 ? 1237 ) , married John of Brienne , King of Jerusalem .

Starting in 1198 , Pope Innocent III objected to the marriage on the grounds of consanguinity , though the couple stayed together until 1204 . They vehemently sought a dispensation in order to stay together , including offering large sums of money . However , the pope denied their request , although they succeeded in having their children considered legitimate . Her marriage dissolved , Berengaria returned to Castile and to her parents in May 1204 , where she dedicated herself to the care of her children .

= = Between queenships = =

Though she had left her role as queen of León , she retained authority over and taxing rights in many of the lands she had received there , including Salamanca and Castroverde , which she gave to her son Ferdinand in 1206 . Some of the nobles who had served her as queen followed her back to the court in Castille . The peace which had prevailed since her marriage was lost , and there was war again between León and Castille , in part over her control of these lands . In 1205 , 1207 , and 1209 , treaties were made again between the two countries , each expanding her control . In the treaties of 1207 and 1209 , Berengaria and her son were given again significant properties along the border , including many key castles , including Villalpando . The treaty in 1207 is the first existing public document in the Castilian dialect .

In 1214 , on the death of her father , Alfonso VIII of Castile , the crown passed to his only surviving son , Berengaria 's 10 @-@ year @-@ old brother , Henry I. Their mother Eleanor assumed the regency , but died 24 days after her husband . Berengaria , now heir presumptive again , replaced her as regent . At this point internal strife began , instigated by the nobility , primarily the House of Lara . They forced Berengaria to cede regency and guardianship of her brother to Count Álvaro Núñez de Lara .

In 1216 , an extraordinary parliamentary session was held in Valladolid , attended by such Castilian magnates as Lope Díaz II de Haro , Gonzalo Rodríguez Girón , Álvaro Díaz de Cameros , Alfonso Téllez de Meneses and others , who agreed , with the support of Berengaria , to make common cause against Álvaro Núñez de Lara . At the end of May the situation in Castile had grown perilous for Berengaria , so she decided to take refuge in the castle of Autillo de Campos , which was held by Gonzalo Rodríguez Girón ( one of her allies ) and sent her son Ferdinand to the court of his father . On 15 August 1216 , an assembly of all the magnates of Castile was held to attempt to reach an accord that would prevent civil war , but disagreements led the families of Girón , Téllez de Meneses , and Haro to break definitively with Álvaro de Lara .

= = Queen of Castile = =

Circumstances changed suddenly when Henry died on 6 June 1217 after receiving a head wound from a tile which came loose while he was playing with other children at the palace of the Bishop of Palencia . His guardian , Count Álvaro Núñez de Lara , tried to hide the fact , taking the king 's body to the castle of Tariego , although it was inevitable that the news would reach Berengaria .

The new sovereign was well aware of the danger her former husband posed to her reign ; being her brother 's closest agnate , it was feared that he would claim the crown for himself . Therefore , she kept her brother 's death and her own accession secret from Alfonso . She wrote to Alfonso asking that Ferdinand be sent to visit her , and then abdicated in their son 's favor on 31 August . In part , she abdicated as she would be unable to be the military leader Castile needed its king to be in that time .

= = Royal advisor = =

Although she did not reign for long , Berengaria continued to be her son 's closest advisor , intervening in state policy , albeit in an indirect manner . Well into her son 's reign , contemporary authors wrote that she still wielded authority over him . One example was how she arranged the marriage of her son with princess Elisabeth of Hohenstaufen ( known as Beatriz in Castile ) , daughter of Duke Philip of Swabia and granddaughter of two emperors : Frederick Barbarossa and Isaac II Angelos of Byzantium . The wedding took place on 30 November 1219 at Burgos . Another instance in which Berengaria 's mediation stood out developed in 1218 when the scheming Lara family , still headed by former regent Álvaro Núñez de Lara , conspired to have Alfonso IX , King of León and King Ferdinand 's father , invade Castile to seize his son 's throne . However , the capture of Count Lara facilitated the intervention of Berengaria , who got father and son to sign the Pact of Toro on 26 August 1218 , putting an end to confrontations between Castile and León .

In 1222 , Berengaria intervened anew in favor of her son , achieving the ratification of the Convention of Zafra , thereby making peace with the Laras by arranging the marriage of Mafalda , daughter and heiress of the Lord of Molina , Gonzalo Pérez de Lara , to her own son and King Ferdinand 's brother , Alfonso . In 1224 she arranged the marriage of her daughter Berengaria to John of Brienne , a maneuver which brought Ferdinand III closer to the throne of León , since John was the candidate Alfonso IX had in mind to marry his eldest daughter Sancha . By proceeding more quickly , Berengaria prevented the daughters of her former husband from marrying a man who could claim the throne of León .

Perhaps her most decisive intervention on Ferdinand 's behalf took place in 1230 , when Alfonso IX died and designated as heirs to the throne his daughters Sancha and Dulce from his first marriage to Theresa of Portugal , superseding the rights of Ferdinand III . Berengaria met with the princesses ' mother and succeeded in the ratification of the Treaty of las Tercerías , by which they renounced the throne in favor of their half @-@ brother in exchange for a substantial sum of money and other benefits . Thus were the thrones of León and Castile re @-@ united in the person of Ferdinand III , which had been divided by Alfonso VII in 1157 . She intervened again by arranging the second marriage of Ferdinand after the death of Elisabeth of Hohenstaufen . Although he already had plenty of children , Berengaria was concerned that the king 's virtue not be diminished with illicit relations . This time , she chose a French noblewoman , Joan of Dammartin , a candidate put forth by the king 's aunt and Berengaria 's sister Blanche , widow of King Louis VIII of France . Berengaria served again as regent , ruling while her son Ferdinand was in the south on his long campaigns of the Reconquista . She governed Castile and León with her characteristic skill , relieving him of the need to divide his attention during this time .

= = Patronage and legacy = =

She met with her son a final time in Pozuelo de Calatrava in 1245 , afterwards returning to Toledo . She died 8 November 1246 , and was buried at Las Huelgas near Burgos .

Much like her mother , she was a strong patron of religious institutions . She worked with her mother to support the Abbey of Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas . As queen of León , she supported the Order of Santiago and supported the Basilica of San Isidoro , not only donating to it , but also exempting it from any taxes . She re @-@ established the tradition of Leónese royal women supporting the Monastery of San Pedro de Eslonza , last performed by her great @-@ grand aunt , Sancha Raimúndez .

She is portrayed as a wise and virtuous woman by the chroniclers of the time . She was also concerned with literature and history , charging Lucas de Tuy to compose a chronicle on the Kings of Castile and León to aid and instruct future rulers of the joint kingdom . She herself was discussed in the works of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada , whose work was sponsored by her son Ferdinand , and Juan of Osma , who was chancellor of Castile under Ferdinand .

= = Ancestry = =