

A photograph of a stone building with a turret on the left. The turret has a conical roof with a weather vane. A flag with blue, yellow, and red vertical stripes is flying from a pole attached to the building. The building is made of rough-hewn stone and has a small arched doorway. In the background, there are hills with sparse vegetation.

A HISTORY OF ANDORRA IN ELEVEN KEY EPISODES

OLIVER VERGÉS PONS

English language translation
by **Maruxa Relaño**



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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATION BY
MARUXA RELAÑO

History of Andorra in eleven key episodes
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INTRODUCTION

If we look at the historical evolution of Western Europe over the last five hundred years, it would appear almost impossible that a small independent state, with a land area of a mere 468 square kilometers, could exist in the heart of the Pyrenees. The country in question is Andorra, and it could well be considered a historical anomaly, especially given the fact that its northern and southern borders meet those of the large adjacent countries of France and Spain. Throughout modern times, both countries had two of the strongest monarchies in Europe, and so it is doubly strange that these centralizing and conquering powers allowed the survival of a territory such as Andorra. But history teaches us that everything has a reason and an explanation, and so it is with Andorra.

The complicated political context faced by the Principality of Andorra in the eighteenth century gave rise to a history of its own, the account of which was collected by Antoni Fiter i Rossell (1748) in the pages of his famous *Manual Digest*. The Muslims, we are told, conquered the Andorran valleys, but Charlemagne later freed them, returning Andorra to the orbit of Christian Europe. There is even an apocryphal document from the twelfth century that states that, after drawing the

boundaries of the Andorran territory, Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious exempted the inhabitants from all tributes except imperial taxes and granted the population the right to administer its own justice.

In order to survive between two great monarchies, Andorra endowed itself with its own mythical history, a history that conferred on Andorrans a past and an idiosyncrasy of their own vis-a-vis their Spanish and French neighbors.

In spite of this Andorran mythology, the history of the principality is actually much more prosaic, a matter of coincidence, luck and a certain highland stubbornness, than the culmination of a glorious, preordained destiny. In no way does this detract from the facts of Andorran history, far from it. There are no better or worse histories; there is simply a history that must be known if one wishes to understand one's present.

The telling of this history is the rationale behind the pages that follow. It is our wish to reach a broad, non-specialist public, while maintaining the necessary historical rigor as we examine the past, highlighting the key episodes that allowed Andorra to become what it is today, a free and sovereign state. There are eleven dates, eleven moments in history when a particular event or decision meant the survival as an entity of the Valira valleys and contributed to making the territory what it is today.

We shall not examine the history of Andorra before it was Andorra, that is, the historical period before the political entity that constitutes the country came into being. It is true that people have lived in these valleys

since prehistory, as evidenced by the sites of Balma de la Margineda in Sant Julià de Lòria and Roc de l'Oral in Encamp. We also know, thanks to Polybius, that when the Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed the Pyrenees with his elephants, the area was inhabited by Andosins, a people of Iberian-Basque origin, perhaps a subgroup of the Ceretani, a population native to Cerdanya. But this is not the history of Andorra. It is, in any event, the history of the geographical area that is present-day Andorra.

Our aim in these pages is to trace only the steps that have given rise to the country that Andorra is today, so that anyone who wishes to delve into the history of these valleys, whether they live here or not, can understand the why, the where and the how of what they are seeing and experiencing.

Throughout these pages, we will discover the first documentary mentions of Andorra; we will learn about the creation of the Andorran Episcopal domain; the role played by the Caboet, Castellbò and Foix families in the history of the Valleys; and about the shared sovereignty known as *Pariatge*; we will discuss how the representative government body known as the Land Council began to take shape; why France's head of state is, at the same time, co-prince of Andorra; how the Valleys remained independent throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the significance of the New Reform; the changes the country underwent in the mid-twentieth century; and at what point Andorrans finally became masters of their own destiny.

Doubtlessly many things will remain unsaid, but we

believe that these episodes will serve to illuminate what Andorra is and how it arrived at its present configuration.

As we shall see, with the exception of the year 1000, when the inhabitants of the Valleys opposed feudalization of the territory, and 1419, when they committed to having their own representative council, Andorrans have rarely taken an active part in the events that would shape their destiny. The fate of Andorra has often been played out far from the principality, and it has sometimes depended more on luck, chance and the balance of external powers than on the express will to strengthen the independence of the territory. In this respect, the overall context of Western Europe, as well as the internal realities of France and Spain, are the key to understanding the history of Andorra.

We hope that the events discussed here, which span a period of a thousand years in Andorran history—from the first documents that mention the country in the ninth century to the day when Andorrans became masters of their future in 1993—will serve to explain what Andorra is.

You cannot walk into the future without knowing who you are, and you cannot know who you are without a glance back at where you came from.

1000



Beatus of La Seu d'Urgell. Archive of the Diocese of Urgell.

The first documents that speak of Andorra and the account of how the inhabitants of the Valira valleys destroyed the castle of the Count of Bragafolls, thereby avoiding the seigneurial division of the territory while maintaining a direct link between heads of household and feudal lords.

Both legendary history and the national anthem of the Principality of Andorra recount that Emperor Charlemagne liberated the Andorran valleys from Muslim dominion and bestowed on the inhabitants their own legal status. This, one could say, is the legend of the founding of Andorra and, like all legends, it is only partially based on reality. It is true that the Andorran territory passed into the hands of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century, together with Urgell and Cerdanya. At that time, however, Andorra was accountable to the Counts of Urgell, delegates of the Frankish emperors and monarchs, and neither the Valira valleys nor their inhabitants had a distinct status differentiating them from other counties. In fact, it is not until the ninth century, and especially at the end of the tenth, that we begin to encounter the first documented reports that recognize Andorra as a specific territory, a territorially delimited area, though this does not mean the valleys were independent at this point.

The first documents that mention Andorra

In the year 711 the Moors entered the Iberian Peninsula and, in a relatively short period of time, they conquered

it from north to south. The Visigothic Kingdom that had dominated the entire region for two centuries disappeared in a matter of years. The Pyrenees proved no barrier to the advance of the Moors, who quickly consolidated their control over Narbonne. As the Muslim army proceeded northward, however, it started to encounter the resistance of the Franks. Little by little, warriors from beyond the Pyrenees pushed southward, and the Moors lost Narbonne in 759. The Franks made a definitive move south of the Pyrenean mountain range around the year 785, establishing Carolingian rule over the territories of Urgell, Cerdanya and Girona. At this moment, Andorra also ceased to be part of the Muslim world and became a territory of the Frank monarchy. Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, the Andorran valleys belonged to the County of Urgell and had no territorial status of their own: they were one of several dominions belonging to the counts. In fact, not even the Andorran parishes were the property of the bishop at this point.

One of the first mentions of Andorra as a defined territory dates from the year 843, when Emperor Charles the Bald bestowed on Sunifred I, Count of Urgell and Cerdanya, various properties, including the Andorran valleys. By the second half of the ninth century, we find one of the first documents that recognizes Andorra as a territorial jurisdiction known as *pagus*. The document was a precept from King Charles the Bald, dated 860, recognizing the possessions held by the bishop of Urgell at the time and, in addition, confirming the collection of several tithes levied on the Andorran valleys. It should

be noted that at this time, the counties —or earldoms— were a group of pagus and territories united under the sovereignty of a count, and Urgell was no exception. Andorra, or the Andorran pagus, was one of these territorial units held under the sovereignty of the Lords of Urgell.

Towards the end of the tenth century, the main focus of interest for the Counts of Urgell, both politically and economically, lay on the border with the Muslim world. Little by little, the county rulers began to shed their northernmost properties, a process that clearly benefited the bishops of La Seu d'Urgell and the Viscounts of Urgell. In 988, the bishops exchanged several of their properties in central Catalonia for other counties located to the north, in Andorra; and in 989 the viscounts purchased the valley of Castellbò. As of that year, 988, the bishops became lords of the villages of Laurèdia, Santa Coloma, Andorra, Ordino and other unspecified places in the Andorran valley, a fact that is reflected in other important documents of the period. These land grants, purchases and exchanges at the end of the tenth century presage the future history of Andorra, as the beneficiaries will become the two great powers that will clash over hegemony in the Pyrenees during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Moreover, the act of consecration of the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell —a document presumed to be false, dated in the year 819 but written towards the beginning of the eleventh century— mentioned the Episcopal domain that included, among others, the parishes of the valley of Andorra; that is to say, the parishes of

Laurèdia, Andorra, Santa Coloma, Massana, Ordino, Encamp and Canillo. The same is true of the bull that Pope Sylvester II delivered to Bishop Sal·la of La Seu in the year 1001, which also recognized the Andorran domains of the bishop. What is interesting about these documents is that they present Andorra as a specific territory, comparable, for example, to the territories of Berga, Pallars, Ribagorça and Urgell. There is no question that Andorra belonged to the county of Urgell, but doubts exist as to whether the Andorran valleys were then a specific territorial entity of its own.

The destruction of the Castle of Bragafolls

Throughout the tenth century, as the old Carolingian empire disintegrated, the territorial princes of Western Europe began to impose their law. Although local differences existed, the fact remained that the phenomenon of seigneurial organization and patrimonialization was widespread, and this gave rise to a social, political and economic model known as feudalism. Among other things, this practice gave feudal lords the power to exercise firm control over the eminently peasant population and to collect rents. Perhaps one of the images that best represented this new reality was the building of castles that were used by the powerful to impose their control on dependent territories and the peasantry.

The Castle of Roc d'Enclar, in Andorra, was built in late antiquity for defense purposes, during the tumultuous period that followed the end of the Roman Empire, in the

time of the Germanic migrations and the arrival of the Muslims. Around the tenth century, as Lords of Andorra, the counts were the owners of the castle. Nevertheless, Count Borrell II of Barcelona and Urgell had another fortification built, Bragafolls, the exact location of which is not known, although it is generally believed to have been situated on an elevated point in the present parish of Sant Julià de Lòria, or perhaps south of the parish of Andorra la Vella. The castle was built in order to enable the Counts of Urgell to subjugate the communities of the Andorran valleys through the collection of rents. Although we know little of what took place at that time, it appears that Andorrans, fearing the establishment of a strong lordship over the valleys where they live, destroyed the castle at the end of the tenth century. We do know, on the other hand, that in the twelfth century the Castle of Enclar was in ruins. It would seem likely, therefore, that around the year 1000, amid a generalized process of seigniorial division and subjugation of peasant communities, Andorrans reacted by resisting the designs of counts and lords.

As the counts were essentially interested in the border with the Muslim world to the south, the problems that the valleys experienced during this period only reinforced their decision to rid themselves of these domains and turn them over to the bishopric. While Andorra remained an important transit point, Lleida and Balaguer were much more appealing conquests for the counts; hence the inhabitants of the Valira valleys had their way.

One of the main effects of the destruction of Bragafolls and the little interest shown by the counts in asserting their

rule in Andorra was that, unlike their neighbors north and south of the Pyrenees, the Andorran communities managed to avoid being subjected to arbitrary feudal rents and simply continued the payment of tributes from the Carolingian period. In this context, households and families were directly accountable to the lord of the eminent domain of Andorra, a situation that persisted until the conflicts between the bishops of Urgell and the Foix-Castellbò families upended the situation in the Valira valleys and the entire Pyrenees. The bishops of Urgell, for their part, seemed to learn the lesson and, rather than building castles in an attempt to impose their rule, chose to exercise caution when dealing with Andorra.

TIMELINE

c.980. Destruction of the Castle of Bragafolls, date unknown.

985. Sacking of Barcelona by Almanzor and his army.

988. End of Carolingian dynasty. Hugh Capet, king of France

—Borrell II exchanges his allodial titles in Andorra for others from Bishop Sal·la.

993. Death of Count Borrell II. Beginning of the rule of Ermengol I in Urgell.

996. Otto III crowned Holy Roman Emperor.

999. Beginning of the reign of Pope Sylvester II.

1009. Beginning of the civil war in Al-Andalus that will end the Caliphate in 1031.

1010. Death of Count Ermengol I and of Bishop Sal·la.

A History of Andorra in eleven key episodes

How did Andorra become the sovereign state it is today? What was the significance of the destruction of the Castle of Bragafolls? What roles have the bishops of Urgell, and the Caboet, Castellbò and Foix families played in Andorran history? What exactly is the Pariatge and what did it mean for the Principality of Andorra? What about the *Manual Digest*? To what extent have the inhabitants of the Valira valleys been the protagonists of the history of their country?

This short history of Andorra addresses these questions in an informative, non-specialist manner, while maintaining the necessary rigor in its approach to the study of the past. It does so by narrating eleven episodes that will enable the reader to understand Andorra and how it has managed to survive as a free and sovereign state.

These eleven key dates correspond to particular events or decisions that meant the very survival of Andorra as an entity and contributed to making the territory what it is today. A thousand years are chronicled here by describing the most important moments in the country's history.

