

Wilfred the Hairy

Wilfred or **Wifred**, called **the Hairy** (in Catalan: *Guifré el Pilós*),^[1] (died 11 August 897) was Count of Urgell (from 870), Cerdanya (from 870), Barcelona (from 878), Girona (from 878, as Wilfred II), Besalú (from 878) and Ausona (from 886). On his death in 897, his son, *Wilfred Borrell*, inherited these Catalan counties.

He was responsible for the repopulation of the long-depopulated no-man's land around *Vic* (the county of Ausona, a frontier between *Christian* and *Muslim*), the re-establishment of the bishopric of Vic and the foundation of the Monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll, where he is buried.

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Historical significance

Wilfred was the Catalan *Count of Barcelona* (878–897) who created the tradition of hereditary passage of titles. His son, Wilfred Borrell, inherited the county without any interruption and held it from 897–911.

A number of primitive *feudal* entities developed in the *Marca Hispanica* during the 9th century. They were generally self-sufficient and agrarian, but ruled by a small military elite. The pattern seen in Catalonia is similar to that found in similar border lands or marches elsewhere in Europe.

Wilfred	
Count of Barcelona	
 <div>Statue in Madrid, L. S. Carmona, 1750–53</div>	
Reign	878–897
Predecessor	Bernard of Gothia
Successor	Wifred II, Count of Barcelona
Born	Prades, Pyrénées-Orientales
Died	11 August 897
Buried	Monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll
Spouse(s)	Guinidilda
Issue	Emma <p>Wilfred II Borrell</p>

Traditionally the Count of Barcelona was appointed directly by the Carolingian (Frankish) emperor, for example the appointment of Bera in 801. The appointment of heirs could not be taken for granted. However, with the rise of strong counts such as Sunifred (fl. 844–848) and Wilfred, and the weakening of Carolingian royal power, the appointment of heirs eventually become a formality. This trend resulted in the counts becoming *de facto* independent of the Carolingian crown under Borrell II in 985.

Wilfred remained obscure until drawn into the historians' net by Sir Richard Southern, in *The Making of the Middle Ages*, 1953.

Origins

Wilfred was of Gothic lineage from the region of Carcassonne. Tradition claims he was born near Prades in the County of Conflent, now Rià, in Roussillon, France.

According to legend, he was the son of Wilfred of Arriaount (or Wilfred of Arri), a county near Prades. His father was murdered by Salomón and Wilfred became his avenger, killing the assassin.^[2] After the research done by French monks Dom De Vic and Dom Vaissete, authors of *Histoire Générale de Languedoc*,^[3] he is identified as the son of Sunifred I of Barcelona, count of many counties under Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald. Wilfred's mother may have been named Ermesende. Sunifred may have been the son^[4] of Belló, Count of Carcassonne during the reign of Charlemagne, or more probably, his son-in-law.^[5] Thus, as a descendant of Sunifred and his brother, Sunyer I, count of Empúries and Roussillon (834-848), Wilfred is considered to be a member of a Bellonid dynasty by Ramon d'Abadal and other historians.

Investiture

The Bellonid lineage lost its power when Sunifred and Sunyer died in 848, but was revived slightly by the appointment of Dela and Sunyer II, sons of Sunyer I, to the countship of Empúries in 862. Later, at an assembly at Attigny in June 870, Charles the Bald made their cousins, Wilfred the Hairy and his brother Miró (known as *the Old*), counts of Urgell and Cerdanya, and Conflent, respectively. For in that year, the poorly-chronicled Solomon, count of Urgell, Cerdanya, and Conflent, had died.

After becoming Count of Urgell and Cerdanya in 870, Wilfred received the counties of Barcelona, Girona, and Besalú in 878 from the Carolingian king of France, Louis the Stammerer. His reign coincided with the crumbling of Carolingian authority and unity. Wilfred was thus the last count of the Hispanic March appointed by the French king and the first to pass his vast holdings as an inheritance to his sons (albeit sanctioned by the monarch).

Wilfred came into possession of Barcelona through his service to Charles the Bald against the rebel Bernard of Gothia, Count of Barcelona, Roussillon, and numerous other Septimanian counties. Wilfred, Miró, their brother Sunifred (who became the Abbot of Arles), and Lindoí, the Viscount of Narbonne, marched against Bernard on behalf of King Charles and his son, Louis the Stammerer. In March and April 878, they defeated the nobles loyal to Bernard, including Sigebuto, Bishop of Narbonne, and expelled all partisan priests from the church.

At the Council of Troyes in August 878, presided over by Pope John VIII and King Louis II the Stammerer, Wilfred was formally invested as Count of Urgell and Cerdanya, Miró as Count of Conflent, Sunyer as Count of Empúries, and Oliba II as Count of Carcassonne. On 11 September 878, Bernard was dispossessed of all his titles. Bernard's former possessions were given to Wilfred (Barcelona with Ausona, Girona, and Besalú) and Miró (Roussillon). The counties of Narbonne,

Sunifred II
Sunyer
Miró
Rodolfo
Riquilla
Ermesinde
Cixilona
?Guinidilda

Father	<u>Wilfred of Arriaount</u> or <u>Sunifred, Count of Barcelona</u>
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Béziers, and Agde were separated from that of Barcelona. Sunifred was made Abbot of Arles, Riculf Bishop of Elna, and the Bishops of Urgell, Girona, and Barcelona were confirmed in their sees. Wilfred immediately ceded Besalú to his brother Radulph (878-920).

Intervention in Ausona

After the investiture of 878, Wilfred's lands stretched from Urgell and Cerdanya in the Pyrenees to Barcelona and Girona on the Mediterranean coast. This was the first time since the reign of his father (which ended in 848) that these different areas had been united politically and the only other time within the 9th century. The land between these regions—Ripollès, Vall de Lord, Berguedà, Lluçanès, the Plana de Vic, Moianès, Guilleries, and Bages—had long been depopulated due to the rebellion of Aissó in 827, but was considered territory belonging to the Count of Barcelona since 820, when it was given to Rampon upon the death of Borrell, the first Count of Urgell, Cerdanya, and Ausona.

Wilfred embarked on the process of repopulating these territories with immigrants from the heavily populated mountain regions—Pallars, Urgell, and Cerdanya—to which people had fled in the two centuries between the collapses of Visigothic and Carolingian authority. Wilfred's plan involved repopulating and subsequently annexing the counties to those he already controlled. Thus, Vall de Lord became part of Urgell and Berguedà part of Cerdanya. Wilfred re-created the County of Ausona from the remaining counties of Ripollés, Lluçanès, the Plana de Vic, and Guilleries—centred around the city of Ausa, a region which in ancient times had been ethnically and culturally distinct, inhabited by the descendants of the Ausetani. ^(ref is prob Lewis, A.R. - needs to be checked) To Ausona, Wilfred also attached Moianés and Bagés and their traditional capital, Manresa, which had historically been the region of the Lacetani. In 885, Wilfred designated a Viscount to control the County of Ausona in his absence as it formed the frontier with the Muslim Kingdoms to the south. The "County of Manresa" received special attention from King Odo, granting it the privilege of constructing defensive towers in 889 and 890, although it was actually part of Ausona.

Ecclesiastical reform

The ecclesiastic state of the region was no less isolated than its political state, with the parishes largely remaining outside of the universal hierarchy. Wilfred brought the parishes of Bergueda and Vall de Lord within the control of the nearby Diocese of Urgell. However, he had to re-establish the lapsed bishopric of Vic in Ausona. After consulting the Archbishop of Narbonne in 886, he was given permission to install Gotmar, a priest, as Bishop of Vic. The new bishop immediately set about restoring the repopulated city and its cathedral, which had been devastated and in ruins since the last Muslim conquest and the rebellion of Aissó.

The churches in the region during this period flourished gaining much power and privilege. This included the right for monks to elect their own abbots as espoused by Saint Benedict. Wilfred founded two new monasteries: Santa María de Ripoll (880) and Sant Joan de les Abadesses (885). The Abbey of Sant Joan de les Abadesses was founded in the Diocese of Vic by Wilfred and his wife Guinedilda to provide for their daughter Emma, who became the community's first abbess in 899 and was given immunity from lay jurisdiction by King Charles the Simple.

Carolingian crisis

When Louis the Stammerer died in 879 after a two-year reign, the kingdom was divided between his two young sons. Louis III received the ancient northern partitions of the Merovingian kingdom, Neustria and Austrasia (including the Lorraine). His second son Carloman received the southern partitions, Burgundy and Aquitaine (including Septimania). The problems plaguing the throne were exacerbated when both Louis (882) and Carloman (884) died soon after their

succession. Not wanting to crown Louis the Stammerer's remaining son, Charles the Simple, who was only five, the nobles of France looked about for a powerful man who could defend the land from the fearsome Vikings and their vicious raids on the Channel and Atlantic coasts.

At the Assembly of Ponthion (884), the Franks chose the Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Fat, who was already king of Germany and Italy. Charles, son of Louis the German, therefore became the first person since the death of Louis the Pious to reign over the entire realm of Charlemagne, his illustrious great-grandfather. He would also be the last.

Incapable of much, Charles was lethargic and probably suffered from epilepsy. In November 885, he raised a grand army to fight off the Norsemen besieging Paris, after two requests from the French nobility. However, he chose to buy the Vikings off, paying them to attack Burgundy (then in revolt) instead. He left Paris in December. He subsequently failed to deal with revolts in Swabia, Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia, and Bavaria. The nobles of the Empire deposed him in 887, and he died two months later in 888.

Charles' nephew Arnulf of Carinthia succeeded him in Germany, Berengar of Friuli succeeded him in Italy, and Odo, Count of Paris, succeeded him in France. Splinter realms also arose in Aquitaine and Burgundy. The breakdown of central royal authority and the dynastic changes broke the Holy Roman Empire and Frankish Kingdom apart. The Carolingian polity which empowered the counts at the beginning of the century was nonexistent by the end; the Counts were *de facto* independent—especially in the outlying regions, like the Marca Hispanica.

The crisis and the counts

In the great tradition of their family, Wilfred, Miró, Dela, and Sunyer II maintained their loyalty to the Carolingian monarchs until 888 and the death of Charles the Fat. Upon the death of Louis the Stammerer, however, this loyalty became largely nominal. When Louis's sons Louis and Carloman marched against Boso, King of Provence, the Catalan counts supported them, but did not join the campaign. This was a far cry from the prompt action the family had taken against Bernard of Gothia. The Counts became more interested in issues that directly affected them and did not attend the Assembly of Ponthion dealing with the Viking problem, which they regarded as meaningless to their domains. However they did visit the royal court in 886 to ask for privileges and precept to be granted to Teotario (Teuter), Bishop of Girona.

The Bellonid counts rejected Charles the Fat's successor, Odo, but they also did not rise in favour of Louis the Stammerer's surviving son, Charles the Simple. In the end, Odo was too absorbed with the Norsemen and those loyal to Charles the Simple to be bothered with the far south of the realm.

In 886, a presbyter named Esclua, taking advantage of the absence of Teotardo, Archbishop of Narbonne, had himself consecrated as Bishop of Urgell and expelled the titular Bishop Ingoberto with the tacit permission of Wilfred and Raymond I, Count of Pallars-Ribagorza. Esclua complicated the situation further by declaring himself metropolitan of Tarraconensis, separating his diocese (and others) from the Archbishopric of Narbonne. Now acting as metropolitan, Esclua promptly removed Servus Dei from the Bishopric of Girona.

Servus, who was consecrated by Teotardo, but had been rejected by Dela, Sunyer, and Wilfred, took refuge in the monastery of Banyoles. Esclua, with the help of the Bishops of Barcelona and Vic, consecrated Eremir (Hermemiro) as the new Bishop of Girona. In 888, Esclua resurrected the sees of Pallars and Empuries to repay Raymond, Sunyer, and Dela for their support.

At first Wilfred tolerated the dethronement of Ingoberto — there had been little love between them — but he could not allow the metropolitan pretensions of Esclua because of his friendship with Teotardo. The creation of independent dioceses was a method of securing political independence and Wilfred opposed this. He could not allow the lands under

his control to be affected by the nobility or the Church. However, there is no indication that he took any action, possibly because of other external issues (such as the Muslim presence to his south and west).

Death

By 884, the Muslims had become increasingly uneasy by the expansion of the Christian counties to the north. Wilfred had established defensive positions or castles in Ausona at Cardona, Bergueda, and Vall de Lord; some were even south of the River Llobregat in the Vall de Cervelló. Essentially the frontiers of Wilfred's counties had now extended too far to remain irrelevant.

The Muslim ruler Isma'il ibn Musa ibn Qasi fortified Lleida in response. Provoked by this, Wilfred attacked Ismail at Lleida. The attack however was a disaster. The historian Ibn al Athir describes the massacre of the attackers by the city's defenders. Buoyed by this success, Ismail's successor Lubb ibn Muhammad ibn Qasi attacked Barcelona in 897. Wilfred died in battle on 11 August 897. He was buried in the monastery at Ripoll.

Succession

The weakening of Frankish royal authority in the Hispanic March is principally the result of the establishment of hereditary succession of the counties rather than by choice of the monarch. In 895, Miró the Old died and his county of Roussillon passed, without interference from King Odo, to Sunyer II of Empúries. In fact, Wilfred himself was never confirmed by any monarch as Count of Ausona. The importance of this development in the Middle Ages cannot be overstated. As hereditary succession became the custom, it became accepted as law and the kings lost control over the counts. The counts had become sovereigns in their own dominions.

The lack, however, of a legal basis for inheritance led to various experiments in hereditary succession. When Wilfred died in 897, his counties were divided amongst his sons. Wilfred Borrell and Sunyer (oldest and youngest) ruled over Barcelona, Girona, and Ausona; Miró over Cerdanya and Conflent; and Sunifred over Urgell. It is uncertain whether this distribution was the intention of Wilfred, or a decision eventually reached by the brothers themselves.

Wilfred and Catalonia

Wilfred the Hairy has become a figure of importance for contemporary Catalan nationalists. Nineteenth century European Romanticism looked to the medieval world for references and links to modern national and cultural identities, and in the context of Catalan nationalism and its search for its historical foundations in a distant and idealised past, Wilfred soon arose as a figure of independence, the *de facto* founder of the House of Barcelona, and, by purported extension, one of the forefathers of the latter Catalonia.

One of the legends that has arisen around his person is that of the creation of the coat of arms from which the Catalan flag (the *Senyera*) derives today. After being wounded in battle (some versions say against the Moors; others, the Normans), the Frankish king Charles the Bald rewarded his bravery by giving him a coat of arms. The king slid Wilfred's blood-stained fingers over the Count's copper shield, and thus was the *Senyera* first born, with its four pallets in Gules on Or. As much as this legend is popular and extended, there is no historical evidence to support it.

Wilfred's actions as a Frankish vassal towards carving out his own domain from several counties and moving out of the sphere of influence of the Carolingian crown — coupled with his re-creation of the County of Ausona and the restoration of the Bishopric of Vic — laid out the territorial and patrimonial base for the House of Barcelona. As such, Wilfred has

retrospectively been identified with the creation of Catalonia, even though a written reference to such a territorial entity would not appear until more than two centuries later in the *Liber maiolichinus de gestis Pisanorum illustribus*, a 12th-century Pisan manuscript describing the raids of 1114 by Pisans and Catalans on the island of Mallorca.

Family

Wilfred married Guinidilda daughter of Baldwin I of Flanders. They had the following issue:

- Emma, Abbess of Sant Joan de les Abadesses, d.942
- Wilfred II Borrell, Count of Barcelona, Girona, Ausona
- Sunifred II, Count of Urgell
- Sunyer, succeeded Wilfred II
- Miró II, Count of Cerdanya
- Rodolfo, Bishop of Urgel, Abbot of Ripoll, d.940
- Riquilla
- Ermesinde, d. after 925
- Cixilona, a nun, d. 945
- [parentage not proven] Guinidilda; married Count Raymond II of Toulouse (d.923)

Appearance

The *Gesta comitum barcinonensium* reported that "...[h]e was hairy in places not normally so in men..."

Notes

1. *Guifré el Pilós* in Catalan. In the *Gesta Comitum Barcinonensium* he is called *Guiffredus Pilosus*, and other early medieval Latin spellings are *Vuifredus*, *Wifredus*, and *Guifredus*. The *Crónica de San Juan de la Peña* calls him *Guifré Pelloso*.
2. According to Ramon d'Abadal (*Els primers comtes catalans*, p. 14), this legend was first reproduced in the Medieval (13th century) chronicle of the counts of Barcelona, *Gesta Comitum Barcinonensium*, and it was repeated by Catalan historians until the 18th century. French historian Pierre de Marca was the first to define it as a "fable" in Chapter 30 of Book 3 of his work, *Marca Hispanica Sive Limes Hispanicus* (1688).
3. See Pierre Vilar (dir.), *Historia de Catalunya*, Vol. II, p. 164. Also Ramon d'Abadal, "La família catalana dels comtes de Carcassona. Genealogia de Guifré el Pilós", in *Els primers comtes catalans*, pp. 13-28.
4. As suggested by Ramon d'Abadal, *Els primers comtes catalans* (1958)
5. See A. Lewis, *The Development of Southern French and Catalan Society, 718-1050* (1965), Ch. 6, note 9 (<http://libro.uca.edu/lewis/sfcatsoc.htm>)

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Preceded by <u>Solomon I</u>	<u>Count of Urgell</u> 870–897	Succeeded by <u>Sunifred II</u>
	<u>Count of Cerdanya</u> 870–897	Succeeded by <u>Miro II</u>
Preceded by <u>Bernard II</u>	<u>Count of Barcelona</u> 878–897	Succeeded by <u>Wilfred II</u> <u>Borrel</u>

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