

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 53
Family Dramas

Hello again. Last time we saw King Alfonso VI leave the narrative after a long, eventful, and highly successful period of rule. His parting shot, in a bid to curtail the influence of the Burgundians in the Royal Court, was to arrange for his eldest legitimate daughter and effective heir Urraca to marry King Alfonso I of Aragon. However, the marriage hit stormy waters almost immediately. Urraca and Alfonso were clearly incompatible, with both having strong personalities and both used to getting their own way. Worryingly, it seemed clear, after only a few months of marriage, that the chances of the union producing any children were pretty much zero. That being the case, the Burgundian faction inside the Royal Court went into overdrive, doing all it could to put an end to the marriage.

At the end of the last episode, as King Alfonso of Aragon was returning from an unsuccessful attempt to quash a rebellion in Galicia, Rome had condemned the marriage on the basis of consanguinity, due to the fact that both Alfonso and Urraca shared the same great grandfather. As a consequence, Urraca had been persuaded by the Archbishop of Toledo, and some other senior bishops, to agree to abandon her marriage. However, when Alfonso of Aragon arrived back in Leon, he refused to play ball. Instead of agreeing to the dissolution of the marriage, as had been expected, he refused outright to relinquish his claim to the throne of Leon and Castile.

However, Alfonso of Aragon had no time to sit around in Leon arguing his position because he was urgently required back in the military field. Why did King Alfonso need to race back into battle? Well, because his defeat of the King of Zaragoza, al-Mustain, in battle in the last episode, had set off a chain of events which was threatening to spiral out of control. The Almoravids, who had been allied with al-Mustain, had refused to recognise al-Mustain's successor, a man called Abd al-Malik. Abd al-Malik had then fled to a fortress in Zaragoza, but unable to muster enough support to secure his ascension to the throne without the support of the Almoravids, he had capitulated. In fact, Abd al-Malik hadn't just surrendered himself to the Almoravids, he effectively handed over the entire Taifa of Zaragoza.

So the Almoravids now controlled all of Al-Andalus, save for the former Taifa of Toledo. Deciding to take advantage of their success, the Almoravids invaded Toledo and besieged the city of Toledo for nine days. However, the city refused to surrender and the Almoravids eventually withdrew.

It was at this time, during the last half of the year 1110, that things started to get really messy. It was now common knowledge that Urraca wanted to end her marriage to Alfonso of Aragon, and it was also common knowledge that Alfonso wanted it to continue. As various bishops from across Leon and Castile travelled to Rome to urge Pope Paschal II to nullify the marriage, different factions inside the Kingdom began to make their moves.

The most dominant of these factions were the Galicians, who are throwing their support behind baby Alfonso's claim for the throne, and Count Henry of Portugal, who was keen to take advantage of the uncertainty around the throne to advance his own interests. In fact, briefly, at the beginning of the unrest, it looked like both of these factions may unite. A count in Galicia, Count Pedro Froilaz, approached Count Henry of Portugal to garner his

support, then went on the offensive against Queen Urraca's allies in Galicia. He enjoyed some early successes but ended up backing down, as support for the Queen in southern Galicia proved to be more steadfast than he had anticipated.

The failure of the campaign to defeat Queen Urraca in Galicia saw Count Henry of Portugal make the journey to Leon at Christmas in the year 1110. Rumours began circulating around this time that Queen Urraca had opened negotiations with Count Froilaz with a view to fast-tracking five year old baby Alfonso's future rise to power, perhaps by formally including him in the government of the realm once he came of age. All of this intrigue, and the jostling between Count Henry and supporters of baby Alfonso for the throne, made King Alfonso I of Aragon concerned about his own position. Deciding that he needed to assert his own claims, King Alfonso of Aragon took the bold step of marching his forces to Toledo in April of the year 1111, and taking possession of the city of Toledo. With the situation now giving every indication of deteriorating into a state of civil war, Count Henry travelled back to his original home province in Burgundy to try to gather some fighting men to strengthen his claim for the crown.

However, in his absence, supporters of baby Alfonso made their move. Actually, we should stop calling him baby Alfonso now, firstly because he's no longer a baby but around six years old, and secondly because he's about to be crowned as King, so we'll call him by his lengthier actual name, Alfonso Raimundez. Young Alfonso Raimundez was transported with the appropriate amount of pomp and circumstance to Santiago de Compostela, where he was formally anointed and crowned as the King of Galicia. His mother, Queen Urraca, wasn't present at the ceremony, but in his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", Bernard Riley speculates that the coronation must have taken place with Queen Urraca's tacit approval.

Queen Urraca, it appears, has been busy making some moves of her own. Before her father had formulated his unfortunate plan to marry her off to King Alfonso of Aragon, Queen Urraca had come up with her own ideas about whom she should marry. The man she wanted to marry was Count Gomez Gonzalez, an ambitious nobleman from Castile who had styled himself as the "Count of Castile", although there is some dispute as to whether he was actually entitled to call himself that. Anyway at some point, maybe in the year before her marriage to Alfonso of Aragon, Urraca began a relationship with Count Gomez and may even have borne a child to him. By the middle of the year 1110 Count Gomez was publicly voicing his support for Urraca's claim to become the sole ruler of Leon and Castile, and by the year 1111 he had pledged military support to Urraca against her husband, Alfonso of Aragon.

It turns out that, at this point in time, so by autumn of the year 1111, Urraca needed all the military support she could get her hands on, as Count Henry of Portugal had returned from Burgundy with a fighting force and had formed an alliance with Alfonso of Aragon. The two sides faced off in the first battle of the civil war in October of the year 1111. The combined forces of Alfonso of Aragon and Count Henry of Portugal emerged victorious, and in a devastating blow for Urraca, Count Gomez was killed in the fighting. With her primary military supporter now dead in battle, Urraca needed a new alliance and needed one quickly, so she sent a delegation to Count Henry, offering to share power with him if he split from Alfonso of Aragon and joined his forces to hers. An offer to jointly rule the Kingdom of Leon and Castile was too tempting for Count Henry to refuse, so Count Henry, and the Portuguese and Burgundian fighters under his command, switched sides and joined with Urraca's forces to launch an attack on Alfonso of Aragon, who was forced to

retreat to a fortress in Portugal. With Alfonso of Aragon safely contained, the new allies met to formalise their new alliance.

You would have to say that Teresa, wife of Count Henry, was completely chuffed with the idea that her husband was now on track to become King of Leon and Castile. In anticipation, Countess Teresa of Portugal began calling herself Queen Teresa, much to the annoyance of her sister and actual queen, Urraca. Anyway, as part of the new alliance, Urraca agreed to hand the strategically significant town of Zamora, in the heart of the Kingdom of Leon, to Count Henry. As Count Henry marched happily off to take possession of Zamora, Queen Urraca suggested that herself and "Queen Teresa" leave Count Henry and travel further north to Sahagun. Teresa agreed, and the two queens hit the road.

Now it's safe to say that at this point in time Urraca was pretty unhappy with Teresa. Teresa's support for Urraca had always been lukewarm at best, and now, with just a faint whiff of the crown being blown in Count Henry's direction, Teresa was suddenly full of herself and styling herself as queen. So Urraca decided to sell her out. She sent a message to her estranged husband, Alfonso of Aragon, at his fortress in Portugal and told him to take his armies and march as quickly as he could to Sahagun, where Teresa of Portugal would be waiting to be captured. Even though Alfonso covered the ground to Sahagun in an impressively short time, he wasn't quite speedy enough. By the time he arrived at Sahagun to capture Queen Teresa, she had already left, and the only queen waiting for him was Queen Urraca. Urraca seems to have become a little daunted by Alfonso at this stage, and seems to have had second thoughts about destroying the alliance between herself and Henry and Teresa and aligning herself with Alfonso. In a haze of confusion and indecision, Urraca rode off to Galicia while Alfonso travelled to Leon to reassert his position as the King of Leon and Castile.

You would have to say that at this point in time, King Alfonso VI must have been turning in his grave, or more accurately, in his stone sepulchre, completely appalled by the absolute mess his children have managed to make of things.

Anyway, Urraca remained in Galicia, the region in which she enjoyed the most support. She then abandoned her previous alliance with Alfonso of Aragon and decided instead to support the claims of her young son, Alfonso Raimundez, to the throne of Leon and Castile. The supporters of Alfonso Raimundez and his mother Queen Urraca then combined in Galicia and decided to travel to Leon to place Alfonso Raimundez on the throne. Urraca and her son left Galicia and were travelling with the armies of Galicia to Leon when they were ambushed, a few kilometres west of the city of Leon, by the forces of Alfonso of Aragon. They were resoundingly defeated, but Urraca and Alfonso Raimundez managed to escape and made their way back to Galicia.

Sensing that outright victory might not be far away, Alfonso of Aragon then reached out to Count Henry of Portugal and formulated an agreement with him, based on the one he had already made with Urraca. Basically, this meant that Alfonso of Aragon recognised Count Henry of Portugal as the legitimate ruler of Portugal and of two regions inside the Kingdom of Leon, Zamora and Astorga. With a swagger in his step, Alfonso of Aragon returned to Leon to resume his rule.

So, let's just take stock for a minute and see how the main players have ended up. As at the end of the year 1111, Count Henry was the ruler of Portugal, Zamora and Astorga, Alfonso Raimundez was the King of Galicia, Urraca was kind of hanging around in Galicia,

ruling it on her son's behalf, and Alfonso of Aragon was now King of Leon and Castile and Aragon. Woohoo!

But unfortunately, things weren't as good as they sounded for Alfonso of Aragon. Most of the noblemen and power-brokers inside the Kingdom of Leon and Castile were not happy at all about being ruled by the upstart, blow-in King from tiny Aragon. Count Henry seemed to sense trouble ahead for Alfonso of Aragon, so early in the year 1112 he reached out to Urraca in Galicia, and they agreed to support each other should Alfonso of Aragon struggle to maintain his grip on power.

Then, by spring in the year 1112, it became clear that Alfonso of Aragon was, in fact, struggling to hold on to power. With enemies apparently popping out from every corner of Leon and Castile, Alfonso of Aragon resorted to stationing Aragonese troops in the major towns across the two kingdoms. He then expelled the Bishops of Leon and Burgos from their respective cities, and took the Bishop of Toledo prisoner, along with Bishops from three other cities.

With unrest growing, Urraca marched with the armies of Galicia out to meet Count Henry in Astorga. A bunch of noblemen from Leon and Castile pledged allegiance to Count Henry and Urraca, prompting Alfonso of Aragon to march his armies to Astorga to besiege the town. Alfonso of Aragon attempted repeatedly to attack Astorga, but its defences held. However, there was one notable casualty from the fighting. On the 22nd of May in the year 1112, Count Henry of Portugal died from wounds he received while defending Astorga.

Join me next time as the family drama and the struggle for the throne of Leon and Castile continues. Until next time, bye for now.

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