

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 54
Truce

Hello again. Last time we saw things get messy in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. Really messy. The collapse of the marriage between Urraca of Leon and Castile and Alfonso of Aragon prompted supporters of baby Alfonso - sorry, Alfonso Raimundez - to mobilise in Galicia, while Count Henry of Portugal began to test whether or not he could seize the throne for himself. We left the last episode in spring of the year 1112. Alfonso of Aragon had managed to maintain his grip on power and was attempting to rule as the King of Leon and Castile. However, opposition to his reign was growing. Queen Urraca was now based in Galicia and had thrown her support behind her young son, Alfonso Raimundez, who had been crowned as the King of Galicia.

Keen to make the most of the unrest brewing around Alfonso of Aragon, Urraca directed the armies of Galicia to march to Astorga, which was currently under the control of Count Henry of Portugal. The plan was to meet Count Henry and his armies in Astorga and formulate a strategy to defeat Alfonso of Aragon. Alfonso of Arragon then marched his armies to Astorga and besieged the town. Alfonso of Aragon was unable to take Astorga, but Count Henry of Portugal died in the fighting.

Basically, for the next few years things will be at a sort of stalemate. Alfonso of Aragon remained in Leon, ruling as the King of Leon and Castile. Queen Urraca decided to go one better than her estranged husband. She began calling herself not only the Queen of Leon and Castile, but Queen of the entire Iberian peninsula, signing her correspondence with the Latin phrase "Totius Hispaniae Regina", which according to Google Translate means "Queen of all Spain". Despite her lofty title Queen-of-Everything Urraca was pretty much confined to Galicia, where she ruled on behalf of her son Alfonso Raimundez over to the west of the Iberian peninsula. Countess Teresa of Portugal kept to herself and did her best to ignore both Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon.

For the next few years, Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon will be constantly attempting to outmanoeuvre each other and gain advantage for themselves, while doing their best to trip the other one up. Like passionate but unskilled chess players, they will shift their pieces across the board, installing bishops and local rulers loyal to their cause while trying to remove the other player's men from the game. While the game kept both Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon fully occupied, the frontier provinces, particularly the territory of Toledo, were left to manage the Almoravid threat as best they could on their own.

In the year 1113, while the governor of Toledo was doing his best to counter repeated invasions by the Almoravids into the territory around Toledo, Urraca scored some hits against Alfonso of Aragon, managing to take a bunch of towns along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela from her estranged husband, including the important town of Burgos. She even had time to send some men southwards to assist in the defence of Toledo. A clearly worried Alfonso of Aragon sent a message to Urraca in Burgos, offering to renew their marriage. As Bernard Riley notes in his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", this reveals that Alfonso was pretty concerned about the weakness of his position. There was some public support for rebooting the marriage between the warring couple, but most of the noblemen who supported Urraca opposed the move, so it was shelved.

Urraca seemed to hit a bit of a winning streak after this. She regained a bunch of territory in Leon and was just about to see whether she could extend her reach over to Toledo when she made a couple of errors. The Bishop of Burgos died in the year 1114, and Urraca attempted to install her preferred candidate as the new bishop. This caused a revolt amongst the administrators of Burgos, who were so incensed by the move that they flipped the town back to Alfonso of Aragon, who promptly installed his own brother as the new Bishop of Burgos. The influential town of Sahagun observed these events and also switched allegiance to Alfonso of Aragon. This started a sort of domino effect, until by spring of the year 1114 all the gains Urraca had recently made were rolled back, and she was forced back to Galicia.

Undeterred, in the year 1115 Urraca once again attempted to have her preferred candidate installed as the Bishop of Burgos. In October, she called a Council of the Realm, although to be more accurate it was more like a council of the nobility of Galicia rather than from the wider peninsula. At this council she managed to get the support of notable attendees, such as the Bishop of Santiago de Compostela, to seek support from Rome for her position. The Abbot of Sahagun was then promptly dispatched to Rome to plead her case to Pope Paschal II.

While this was all taking place something completely unexpected was happening in Toledo. A new military commander, a man called Oriel, had taken over command of the Christian armies in Toledo, possibly with the support of Alfonso of Aragon, and was actually doing a really good job. Not only had he managed to secure the defences of the territory of Toledo, he was actually confident enough to go on the offensive, raiding deep into Almoravid territory in Cordoba. These raids were astonishingly successful. Oriel's forces even managed to defeat and kill the Governor of Cordoba in battle. Then, three months later, the Christians defeated and killed the new Governor of Cordoba, who was the son of the man they had killed three months earlier. Five months later, the latest new Governor of Cordoba was also defeated by the Christians in battle, although unlike his two predecessors he did manage to escape with his life.

By the year 1116, things were pretty much at exactly the same point for Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon as they had been three years earlier. Urraca was in Galicia, Alfonso was struggling to hold on to the throne of Leon and Castile, and Teresa was in Portugal, ignoring them both. However, events were about to shift.

For his part, Alfonso of Aragon was beginning to get restless. For the past three years, he had been completely preoccupied with trying to secure the throne of Leon and Castile. As such, he had been seriously neglecting the Kingdom of Aragon and had missed countless opportunities to go on the offensive against the Almoravids. Recent successes by the Christians in Toledo had shown that the Almoravids could be defeated in the field, and Alfonso of Aragon was absolutely itching to have a crack at them. His preferred occupation was that of military commander rather than political player, and he was super keen to get back to the battlefield.

At the same time as Alfonso of Aragon was gazing wistfully off into the distance, dreaming of military success against the Almoravids, Urraca was beginning to score some hits. The Abbot of Sahagun returned triumphantly from Rome with news that Pope Paschal had ruled in Urraca's favour. The administration of, not only the town of Burgos but also Sahagun, then caved in to Urraca's demands and switched sides back to her. Keen to capitalise on her success, Urraca hit the campaign trail, while her son Alfonso Raimunde,

who was now eleven years old, accompanied one of Urraca's military commanders on a mission to push back against troops from Aragon who were stationed in Leon.

Things didn't go all her way, though. Like Alfonso of Aragon, she struggled to completely win over the people she had forced to her side, and also, embarrassingly, when she was campaigning to the south near the borders of Portugal, Urraca was briefly caught in a surprise attack by her sister Teresa, and was even besieged in a castle for a short time before managing to break free and head back to Galicia.

Basically all of this led Urraca to the conclusion that to properly defeat and secure the entire Kingdom of Leon and Castile was going to be a huge endeavour, for which she didn't really have the resources, manpower, or equipment. Even if she were able to gather enough men to defeat Alfonso of Aragon and take Leon and Castile, actually holding it for any length of time was going to be a massive challenge. So, with Urraca's ambitions slamming up against the solid wall of reality, and with Alfonso of Aragon increasingly wishing he had the time to return to the battlefield, both sides were ripe for formulating a truce, and in the year 1117 that's exactly what happened.

Now, there were two important precursors to the formulation of the truce between the warring factions, and both of them took place in the year 1116. The first came at the instigation of Urraca, and it was actually one of her more savvy moves. Concerned that she was locked into a sort of stalemate in Galicia and wanting a circuit-breaker to jump start events in her favour, Urraca called a Council of her realm at Sahagin in October of 1116, in which she proposed a division of territory for the players on her side of the conflict. Put simply, she proposed allocating the entire former Taifa of Toledo to the now eleven-year-old Alfonso Raimundez, while quietly keeping the northwestern section of the Iberian peninsula, Galicia, for herself. This was kind of a triumph of diplomatic politicking on Urraca's part, a move which would have made her father proud. Urraca, of course, didn't really control Toledo. It was more appropriately seen as part of Alfonso of Aragon's realm. However, Alfonso of Aragon was completely tied up with putting out the never ending spot-fires of discontent in Leon, and he just wasn't in a position to mobilise to force the supporters of Alfonso Raimundez out of Toledo.

As for young Alfonso Raimundez and his supporters, they were completely and utterly stoked about the offer. Toledo was a massive prize, much more important and much more exciting than Galicia. It had the advantage of being associated with being a Christian conquest against the Muslims. It was the legacy of Alfonso Raimundez's much-admired grandfather Alfonso VI, and as the ancient capital of the Visigoths it ticked all the boxes for those who wished to see Alfonso Raimundez rise to power. Of course, eleven-year-old Alfonso Raimundez would not be expected to rule Toledo on his own. He had a raft of powerful and influential men who advised him, including (incredibly) the original Archbishop of Toledo, the now rather ancient Archbishop Bernard, who had served King Alfonso VI, then Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon, and was now willing and apparently able to bestow his wisdom and guidance upon Alfonso Raimundez, and will do so until his death in the year 1125 at the ripe old age of 75. Of course, with the King of Galicia, which was Alfonso Raimundez's formal title, now out of Galicia and fully occupied along with all of his advisers in Toledo, Queen Urraca was left with a clean slate in Galicia, free to do whatever she wanted, within reason, without having to constantly look over her shoulder at her opponents.

The second factor which kick-started the signing of the truce was Papal intervention by Pope Paschal II. Rome was all for supporting Christians in battles against Muslims, but it

seemed to Pope Paschal that the Christian monarchs of the Iberian peninsula were focused more on fighting amongst themselves instead of against the Almoravids. In the year 1116, Pope Paschal appointed Cardinal Boso of Sant'Anastasia to act as his legate, to visit the Iberian peninsula, work out what the issues were between Urraca, Alfonso of Aragon, and Alfonso Raimundez, and fix them. Cardinal Boso dutifully travelled to the Iberian Peninsula and did a quick tour of the Christian territories, visiting Barcelona, Leon, Santiago de Compostela, and many towns in between, meeting with the senior clerics of the regions, trying to get a fix on the problems. The Papal legate didn't go so far as to arbitrate on the dispute directly with the monarchs themselves, but he did manage to resolve some of the disputes which had become collateral damage in the fighting between Urraca and Alfonso of Aragon, namely the question of who should be bishop in Burgos and Sahagun.

The legate was able to come to an arrangement which seemed to please everyone, then he let it be known that it was Rome's view that it was time for a truce to be formulated between the warring monarchs. And that's exactly what happened. A truce was enacted in 1117 which saw Urraca effectively control Galicia, Alfonso Raimundez held Toledo, while Alfonso of Aragon kept most of Leon and Castile. The truce was set to run for three years, but will in fact be renewed every three years until Queen Urraca's death in the year 1126.

So with the drama between Urraca, Alfonso of Aragon, and Alfonso Raimundez simmering down, I think it's a good time to jump over to Portugal and see what's been happening over there. Join me next time when we do exactly that. Until next time, bye for now.

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