

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 55
Portugal

Hello again. Last time we saw a truce formulated between the warring parties in the Christian north. Basically, at the time of the signing of the truce in the year 1117, Queen Urraca held Galicia, Alfonso of Aragon maintained his position as the King of Leon and Castile, and Urraca's young son Alfonso Raimundez controlled Toledo. The truce was set to run for a period of three years, but as we mentioned at the end of the last episode, it will actually be renewed every three years until Urraca's death in the year 1126.

So, while things are settling down in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, let's pop over to Portugal to see what's been happening there. Now, as we stated in the last episode, during the period between the death of her husband Count Henry of Portugal in the year 1112 and the signing of the truce in the year 1117, Countess Teresa of Portugal pretty much kept to herself, staying put in Portugal while the other players butted heads and struggled for power. Once the truce was signed though, Teresa made her move, and her move was to declare herself to be the Queen of Portugal. In effect, she was proclaiming Portugal to be not part of Leon and Castile, but a kingdom in its own right, a kingdom which had her, Teresa, as its monarch.

Now, as Bernard Riley states in his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", this was a bit of a weird and unexpected move. Like Galicia and Castile, Portugal had always been considered to be part of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. While Portugal today is a country distinct from Spain with its own language and culture, this wasn't the case back in the year 1117. The language spoken in Portugal was also spoken in Galicia, and while the residents of Portugal did have their own Portuguese identity, it wasn't any more distinct than that of the Galicians and Castilians. Before the year 1117, Teresa likely viewed herself as a princess of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, and as a possible contender for the position of Queen of Leon and Castile, a title which she began using back in Episode 53, much to the annoyance of her half sister and actual Queen Urraca.

I think it's safe to say that Teresa really wanted to be a queen. Following the death of her husband and the signing of the truce it was pretty clear that she had no chance whatsoever of becoming Queen of Leon and Castile, so the only real way of turning Countess Teresa into Queen Teresa was to break the County of Portugal away from the Kingdom of Leon and Castile and declare it to be its own kingdom. The fact that Alfonso Raimundez had been recently crowned as the King of Galicia probably helped Teresa to make her decision, although there is no indication that Alfonso Raimundez intended Galicia to act as its own kingdom separate from Leon and Castile.

Anyway, the transition of Portugal from a County to a Kingdom didn't happen with any fanfare or lavish ceremonies. No, Teresa simply began calling herself the "Queen of Portugal" in May of the year 1117, and by November of that year she was styling herself as the Queen of Portugal, and no one really stopped her.

As Bernard Riley points out though, the first question which emerged was: how big was this new Kingdom of Portugal? The County of Portugal had just been a sort of administrative region under the umbrella of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, and its territory had just been considered to be the land around the town of Porto. So, to put it

another way, the new Kingdom of Portugal had no set boundaries. As stated by Bernard Riley it was, and I quote “as large as Teresa could make it, and no larger than Urraca could prevent” end quote.

Of course, to the north of Portugal lay Galicia, and to its south was the territory of the Almoravids, so Teresa was going to need to push back against incursions by both Galicia and the Muslims, lest her Kingdom shrink to nothing. This was quite a pressing problem for the new Queen, who after all had her eight year old son and possible future King of Portugal, Alfonso, to think of when ensuring that the boundaries of her new Kingdom were as extensive as possible. As at the time when Teresa declared herself to be the Queen of Portugal in the year 1117, the new Kingdom of Portugal really only consisted of two main towns, Porto and Coimbra, and the land around those towns. Both towns were located on the banks of major rivers, Porto on the Douro and Coimbra on the Mondego River, and Portugal claimed all the land in the river valleys and in the mountainous regions to the east, where the rivers began flowing down to the coast.

Two additional towns to the south, Lisbon and Santarem, had been part of Christian territory at the height of the reign of King Alfonso VI, but both had since been lost to the Almoravids. However, in spring of the year 1117, it suddenly became clear that the Almoravids weren't happy with just claiming the towns of Lisbon and Santarem. They intended to push northwards into the heart of Portugal.

What happened in spring of the year 1117 to make these intentions apparent? Well, the ruler of the Almoravids, Ali Ibn Yusuf, made one of his rare trips away from his base in Morocco. He travelled to the Iberian peninsula and ordered the Almoravid forces to march northwards into Portugal and take the city of Coimbra. The Muslim forces obeyed his command, and in late June of the year 1117 they arrived at Coimbra and besieged it for three weeks. However, fortunately for Queen Teresa and the residents of Coimbra, its defences held and the Almoravids were forced to retreat back southwards.

In his book “The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain”, Bernard Riley points out that, although no one was actually aware of it at the time, the siege of Coimbra marked the pinnacle of Almoravid power in the Iberian peninsula. This marks their deepest push into Christian territory, and despite the fact that they failed to take Coimbra, the Almoravids now hold as much territory as they ever will. For the Almoravids it will be all downhill from here and their territory will soon begin to shrink.

While the Almoravids are on the offensive, someone else is also on the move in the Christian north, that person being Urraca. Urraca attempted to push southwards into Teresa's territory, no doubt trying to take advantage of the fact that Teresa would have been fully occupied dealing with the Almoravid threat, then attempted to consolidate her hold over Santiago de Compostela, a move which backfired spectacularly. The trouble with Santiago de Compostela, as far as Urraca was concerned, was the fact that the Bishop of Santiago de Compostela, Bishop Diego Gelmirez, was an extremely ambitious man who didn't like being told what to do, and certainly wasn't happy to operate under Urraca's thumb. However, Bishop Gelmirez was currently in a spot of bother in Santiago de Compostela. The administrators of the town had decided that they didn't want to be told what to do by their ambitious Bishop, so they had set up their own government in Santiago de Compostela, a government which was not answerable to the Bishop. While the Bishop was fruitlessly attempting to reassert his authority, Urraca decided to take advantage of the weakness of the Bishop's current position to meet with the Bishop and attempt to assert her own control over both the town and the Bishopric of Santiago de Compostela. So

Urraca travelled to Santiago de Compostela in June of the year 1117 to meet with Bishop Gelmirez.

Now, the fact that Queen Urraca had travelled to Santiago de Compostela, and was currently meeting with their unpopular Bishop, set alarm bells ringing for the current administrators of the town. Seriously worried that power was about to be taken from them and placed either in the hands of the Bishop or directly to Queen Urraca, some of the townsfolk decided to launch an attack on the Episcopal Palace where the meeting was taking place. Fearing for their safety, Urraca and Bishop Gelmirez fled to a new bell tower which had recently been erected as part of the new Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which was currently under construction. This, though, was a bad move. The townsfolk set fire to some wooden scaffolding, which surrounded the bell tower, and with nowhere else to go, Urraca, the Bishop and their entourage were forced to come down from the tower. The townsfolk, apparently now in a frenzy of outrage, set upon the group and violently attacked them. In the mayhem which followed, the Bishop managed to escape unharmed and fled the scene, although two of his advisers, including his brother, were killed in the fighting.

What happened to Queen Urraca? Well, in an utterly humiliating display, she was captured, then stripped of her clothing. In a scene worthy of a Game of Thrones episode, she was forced to stand naked in front of her captors while they pelted her with objects including rubbish, stones, and other unpleasant items. Sensing that things had gone far enough, some of the more sensible townsfolk intervened and de-escalated the situation. Urraca was allowed to put her clothes back on, and after she had promised there would be no reprisals against her attackers she was allowed to leave the town physically unscathed, although both her dignity and her peace of mind must have been lying in tatters.

Once she was safely outside the town, Urraca decided to ignore her promise not to punish the townsfolk. She gathered her own Galician troops, and they were soon joined by an army from Toledo under the joint command of her son Alfonso Raimundez and Count Pedro Froilaz. Bishop Gelmirez, seething about the death of his brother, also joined the forces. They then settled in for a siege of the town of Santiago de Compostela. After only a short while, the town's administrators realised the futility of their position. With no supplies having been set aside to get them through a siege, with no army to speak of, and with no prospect of any outsiders coming to their aid, it was pretty clear how things were going to go. Deciding to spare the citizens of Santiago de Compostela from the horrors of a lengthy stint with no food, the administrators of the town decided to surrender.

What happened to the administrators? Well, considering the ordeal they had just put her through, Urraca was surprisingly merciful in the punishment she dealt out to them. Control of the town was taken away from them and returned to Bishop Gelmirez. One hundred men who were directly involved in the attack on the bell tower had their property confiscated by Queen Urraca and were then expelled from the town.

All in all though, the outcome for Urraca was pretty poor. She had journeyed to Santiago de Compostela with the goal of ousting Bishop Gelmirez from power and asserting her own authority over the town. Instead, she had been thoroughly humiliated in front of everyone, and had ended up solving all of the Bishop's problems for him, ensuring that the Bishops control over Santiago de Compostella was absolute. Oops.

This won't end up being totally to Urraca's disadvantage though. Having effectively installed Bishop Gelmirez as the sole ruler of Santiago de Compostela, the Bishop was

now indebted to Urraca, and will use his ambitions and his energy to raise the prestige not only of Santiago de Compostela but of wider Galicia, until his death more than twenty years later, in the year 1139.

The rise of Santiago de Compostela and of Bishop Gelmirez was assisted by the fact that a man called Guy of Burgundy, who was the brother of Urraca's late husband Raymond of Burgundy, and therefore uncle to young Alfonso Raimundez, will be elevated to the Papacy in the year 1119, becoming Pope Calixtus II. Pope Calixtus raised the Bishopric of Santiago de Compostela to an Archbishopric in the year 1120, greatly elevating the status of the town and of now Archbishop Gelmirez. The new Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was open for business in the year 1122, and although work will continue on the building for many years to come, the magnificent structure cemented the town's place as one of the premier pilgrimage destinations in Europe, further increasing the wealth and prestige of the town. So it wasn't such a bad outcome for Urraca after all.

Urraca did in fact bounce back from the humiliating event which took place at the base of the bell tower. The following year, 1118, saw her take to the field once again, leading a large force southwards to the town of Segovia, which was in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile to the north of Toledo. While she was present in Segovia, Archbishop Bernard of Toledo travelled there to meet her, as did the newly elected Archbishop of Braga, who was intending to be formally consecrated by Archbishop Bernard. Bernard Riley points out that this was actually quite remarkable. Braga was just to the north of Porto, and most definitely inside the new Kingdom of Portugal. The new Archbishop of Braga was from a powerful Portuguese family, and the fact that he had effectively recognised Queen Urraca's authority and not Teresa's, meant that Teresa had lost a great deal of support in the north of her new Kingdom. It also indicated that Archbishop Bernard of Toledo acknowledged Urraca's authority as Queen as well, a position which was endorsed by the fact that, after the meeting, Archbishop Bernard led some of the men in Urraca's army on a successful campaign to the south against the Almoravids.

We will leave events in the west of the peninsula for the moment, because next time we are heading eastwards. Join me next time for an epic campaign, pitching the Christians against the Muslims in the city of Zaragoza. Until next time, bye for now.

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