

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 65  
Succession Drama Part 2

Hello again. Last time we began to examine the fallout from the death of Alfonso of Aragon. Alfonso of Aragon's odd decision to leave his kingdom to be split between three military orders in Jerusalem was ignored by power-brokers inside the Kingdom of Aragon, who decided to instead raise Alfonso of Aragon's brother to the throne. So Alfonso of Aragon's brother, Ramiro Sanchez, has made the dizzying transition from monk to king and has become King Ramiro II of Aragon. At the end of the last episode he was racing off to Zaragoza to secure it for the Aragonese crown.

Another king has arisen in the north. Eager to shake off its absorption by Aragon, Navarre has declared itself to be once again a kingdom in its own right and has a newly appointed monarch, King Garcia Ramirez IV, who may well be viewing himself not only as the new King of Navarre but as the King of Aragon as well. Not to be outdone, King Alfonso VII of Leon and Castile is currently heading towards Aragon and Navarre at the head of a large army keen to stake his claim to the kingdoms, while down in the corner to the south the new young ruler of Catalonia, Count Ramon Berenguer IV, is rubbing his hands together, keen to take advantage of the death of his enemy, King Alfonso of Aragon.

So put simply, it's a mess. Everything is up in the air and really anything could happen. So what does happen?

Well, it goes a little something like this. By November in the year 1134, around the same time as Ramiro II of Aragon was moving into Zaragoza, King Alfonso VII and his army arrived at the town of Najera, which was located in Navarre, just over the border from Castile. By this time Najera had already recognised the new King of Navarre, Garcia Ramirez, but after meeting with the King of Leon and Castile, the noblemen of Najera realised the futility of maintaining that allegiance and instead declared for the King of Leon and Castile, which in turn prompted many other towns in the region to do the same. In this manner, without having raised a sword or done any damage whatsoever, King Alfonso VII managed to secure for himself all the territory to the west of the River Ebro, a region which had traditionally belonged to Navarre then Aragon.

King Alfonso VII was in an extraordinarily strong position here. He had the army of Leon and Castile at his back and was more than capable of taking on and defeating both the new king of Navarre and an untried monk with no military experience, which is exactly what Ramiro II of Aragon was. Facing up to the reality of the situation, Ramiro II of Aragon came to terms with King Alfonso VII, pledging the entire former Taifa of Zaragoza to him in return for King Alfonso's agreement to recognise him, Ramiro II, as the true King of Aragon. At Christmas time, King Alfonso VII entered triumphantly into the city of Zaragoza, and as Bernard Reilly notes in his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", a charter granted by King Alfonso VII to the cathedral at Zaragoza, was recognised and confirmed not only by the Bishop of Zaragoza but by a raft of bishops, archbishops, and political leaders from across the wider region, including Count Alfonso Jordan of Toulouse, with the result that most of southern France, as well as those in the Christian north, acknowledged that Zaragoza was now part of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile.

Meanwhile, poor Ramiro II of Aragon was scrambling to find allies and people of political influence who would recognise his claim to the throne of Aragon and help him regain his hold over territories ruled by Alfonso of Aragon, which seemed to be rapidly slipping from his grasp. In the end, in a sign of just how desperate things had become, the only ally whom Ramiro II was able to secure, and who was willing to formalise ties with the new King of Aragon, was the only other desperate and completely friendless ruler in the Iberian peninsula, the new King of Navarre, Garcia Ramirez. In January of the year 1135 the new King of Aragon and the new King of Navarre met and agreed to formalise their alliance. Garcia Ramirez of Navarre pledged homage to King Ramiro II of Aragon, in return for Ramiro II of Aragon recognising the claim of Garcia Ramirez to the throne of Navarre.

So far, the clear winner, in the post Alfonso of Aragon scramble for territory, is King Alfonso VII of Leon and Castile, with the new King of Navarre a distant runner-up, and with the new King of Aragon limping along behind in the distance. Still waiting on the sidelines to see how things panned out was the Count of Barcelona.

In recognition of his newfound power and dominance, King Alfonso VII decided to have himself crowned as Emperor. Why has the King of Leon and Castile decided that he needs a more lofty title, which appropriately indicates his dominance, not just over Leon and Castile, but over a much wider region? Well, because the post Alfonso of Aragon mash-up has worked in his favour to such an extent that King Alfonso VII now counts amongst his vassals not only the new Kings of Navarre and Aragon, but also Count Alfonso Jordan of Toulouse and the Lord of Montpellier in southern France. Count Ramon Berenguer IV has also pledged allegiance to King Alfonso VII, as has a man called Sayf al-Dawla, the last Muslim King of Zaragoza, who recently accompanied King Alfonso VII on a military campaign into Almoravid territory. So, in effect, King Alfonso VII now controls territory far beyond the boundaries of the realm of Leon and Castile, stretching across the entirety of the Christian parts of the Iberian peninsula, with the exception of Portugal, and over the Pyrenees into France, which is the reason why he felt the need to add a new title to his resume, that of Emperor. King Alfonso VII was crowned Emperor on Sunday, the 26th of May in the year 1135 in the cathedral at Leon, receiving an imperial crown, robes, and a sceptre.

Now, looking over towards all of this with interest and more than a little concern was Pope Innocent II. You might remember that prior to the death of Alfonso of Aragon, the Kingdom of Aragon was a vassal of Rome, and perhaps the decision by Alfonso of Aragon to pledge his kingdom to three military orders in Jerusalem had been done with the knowledge of, and perhaps even the encouragement of, Pope Innocent II. Was Pope Innocent happy to see the Kingdom of Aragon go not to a bunch of Holy Orders in Jerusalem but to Alfonso of Aragon's brother, who has now pledged allegiance not to Rome but to King Alfonso VII, who has styled himself as an Emperor? No, Pope Innocent was not, and he decided that this unfortunate turn of events needed to be addressed immediately.

He sent word to the Iberian peninsula that the terms of Alfonso of Aragon's will needed to be recognised as valid and needed to be followed, meaning that the new kings of Aragon and Navarre needed to take off their crowns and hand them over to a bunch of monks in Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, the new kings of Aragon and Navarre weren't inclined to do this. Not only were the kings of Aragon and Navarre not keen to play along with the directive from Rome, absolutely no-one wanted to see Aragon, Navarre, and Zaragoza turned over to three religious orders in Jerusalem, with a result that absolutely no-one took any notice whatsoever of the Pope's demand that the terms of the will be followed.

That left King, sorry Emperor Alfonso VII in a very strong position, and it left the kings of Aragon and Navarre holding onto their crowns, but only just. King Ramiro II of Aragon was in a particularly precarious position. No-one, and this likely included King Ramiro himself, was sure of the new King's ability to lead an army and defend his claim to his crown on the battlefield. The fact that he had meekly handed Zaragoza over to King Alfonso VII in preference to defending it against Muslim incursions kind of indicates his own lack of confidence in his military prowess. If he lacked military skills, the only real way left for him to cling to power was via the use of diplomacy, so King Ramiro II scrambled to cement his hold on power via diplomatic means. This was going to be no easy task. He didn't really have much to offer. There was one single thing however, which King Ramiro II had in his favour, and he was going to need to play this single card for all it was worth.

What was the sole bargaining chip left to the new King of Aragon? Well, due to the fact that he had until recently spent his adult life as a monk, Ramiro had never married, so the new King of Aragon, although aged in his forties, had a vacancy left open for a Queen, and his advisers quickly scanned the region for a promising candidate. Ideally, the new Queen would come with some sort of powerful alliance which would bolster the chances of Aragon surviving as a kingdom and not being swallowed up by Barcelona, Navarre, or one of King Alfonso VII's other allies. So it had to be somewhere which wasn't vassal to Leon and Castile, and which could stand up to Leon and Castile and protect the right of Aragon to continue to exist. There was really only one candidate who fulfilled these requirements: the sworn enemy of Alfonso of Aragon, the Duke of Aquitaine. Fortunately for everyone, Duke William IX of Aquitaine had a sister, Agnes of Poitiers, who was in need of a husband. Agnes was promptly married to King Ramiro II of Aragon early in the year 1136, and later that same year she gave birth to their first child, a girl whom they named Petronilla. With the line of the Kings of Aragon set to continue, and with a powerful new ally in the form of the Duke of Aquitaine in his corner, King Ramiro II sighed in relief and sat back, relaxing, while learning the ropes of ruling his kingdom.

Now, although everyone is very happy to learn that the new line of Aragonese rulers is set to continue, there is one tiny little problem. It would have been much better for Aragon's security had Petronilla been a boy baby instead of a girl baby. With a question mark of legitimacy already hanging over King Ramiro II of Aragon there is no way that his daughter would be able to contemplate succeeding to the throne and ruling Aragon in her own right as Queen and sole monarch. Nope, that's not the way things worked back in those days. The Kingdom of Aragon needed to be ruled by a king not a queen, so King Ramiro was forced to stop relaxing and to instead embark on a new frantic round of diplomatic negotiations, because whomever became the future husband of baby Petronilla would become the new King of Aragon and would inherit a kingdom, so it was extremely important that the right person was chosen.

To reinforce the importance of the matter, the Almoravids, keen to take advantage of King Ramiro's lack of military experience and his preoccupation with securing his throne and succession, had begun raiding into Aragonese territory and were beginning to make some solid gains.

It was imperative therefore, that King Ramiro quickly hitch his baby daughter to a man who would then have a stake in ensuring that the Kingdom of Aragon remained intact so that he could inherit it, someone who could take the task of forcing the Muslims out of the Kingdom of Aragon out of King Ramiro's inexperienced hands. Unsurprisingly, quite a few people put up their hands to claim baby Petronilla and become the future ruler of Aragon. Duke William of Aquitaine was very keen to secure Aragon for Aquitaine, but was

hampered by the awkward fact that baby Petronilla was his niece, and therefore couldn't really be betrothed to any of Duke William's close relatives. There are indications that Alfonso VII of Leon and Castile attempted to convince King Ramiro to betroth Petronilla to King Alfonso's son, Sancho, although King Alfonso wasn't able to turn his full attention to the proposal, as Alfonso Enriques of Portugal was raising strife in Galicia and King Alfonso was busy campaigning in the north-west to address the threat.

The winner ended up being probably the most obvious candidate. The new young Count of Barcelona, Ramon Berenguer IV put his hand up to be betrothed to baby Petronilla. Putting aside the slightly awkward fact that Aragon and Catalonia had been enemies since before anyone could remember, this was a perfect match. Count Ramon Berenguer had already proven that he was more than capable of defending not only Catalonia but Aragon as well from Muslim incursions, and as Aragon's neighbour, Catalonia was a better cultural match for Aragon than Leon, Castile or Aquitaine.

As an indication of just how happy he was with the situation and with his new future son-in-law, in the year 1137 King Ramiro II of Aragon formally surrendered the Kingdom of Aragon to the Count of Barcelona, burdening Count Ramon Berenguer IV with the task of the military defence of Aragon and its administration, while King Ramiro was left to rule as King in name only, with everyone clear that as soon as King Ramiro died the Kingdom of Aragon would pass to Barcelona.

How will this change the dynamics of politics in the region? Well, you'll need to join me next time to find out. Until next time, bye for now.

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