

From the ‘History of Spanish Events’ by Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada

The author of this work was one of the key figures of Spanish history in the thirteenth century. Born in Navarre c. 1170, and educated at Bologna and Paris, he was appointed Bishop of Osma in Castile in 1207, and soon afterwards in 1209 chosen as Archbishop of Toledo and appointed as chancellor of the kingdom of Castile, though he was deprived of this last post on the accession of Ferdinand III in 1217. He was appointed as papal legate to Spain at the Lateran Council of 1215, in which he took a prominent role. He had a long and active episcopate, being notable as a church builder and as patron of the new universities of Palencia and Salamanca, before his death in June 1247 while returning from Innocent IV’s Council of Lyon. His history was written between 1237 and 1243, although whether the archbishop was the sole author or, given his many other responsibilities, rather the director of a team of writers is arguable. ¹ The history has been seen as more or less the official history of Ferdinand III’s court, celebrating the union under that king of the two separate kingdoms of Castile and León: however, it has also been suggested that his first and foremost concern was his own see of Toledo and its primacy within the Church in Spain, and that the view he expressed in his history was essentially local and parochial. ² Notwithstanding this, it was a popular and well-read work – some twenty thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts survive, not all of them from Spain either. There was, for example, a copy in the library of Edward II of England in 1320 (which had probably earlier come from his mother Eleanor, the great-great granddaughter of Alfonso VIII). ³

*The extracts below from Books VII and VIII of his History have been translated from Roderici Ximenii de Rada, *Historia de Rebus Hispanie sive Historia Gothica*, ed. Juan Fernandez Valverde (*Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis* 72, Turnhout 1987), pp. 234-6, 248-80.*

¹ Peter Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (Oxford 1993), pp. 350-1.

² For the contemporary disputes about the primacy, see Linehan, *History and Historians*, pp. 327-49

³ Seymour Phillips, *Edward II* (New Haven & London 2010), p. 58.

(14) How Calatrava was given to the Abbot of Fitero and about the death of King Sancho

After these events, King Sancho came to Toledo, and rumour grew that the Arabs were coming to Calatrava with a great army.⁴ The brothers of the Knighthood of the Temple, who were holding the fortress of Calatrava, fearing that they would be unable to withstand the violence of the Arabs, went to King Sancho, and begged him to take back the fortress and town of Calatrava, since they lacked the ability to resist the Arabs, nor could any among the great men be found who was willing to risk the danger of defending that place. However, there was at that time present in the royal town [*Toledo*] a man of religion, Abbot Raimundo of Fitero,⁵ and with him was a certain monk who was called Diego Velasquez, a nobleman who had formerly a valiant warrior, born in the region of Burgos and who had from his boyhood been brought up with King Sancho. Seeing that the king was worried about the danger facing Calatrava, he persuaded the abbot to ask the king for Calatrava. Although the abbot was at first reluctant, he finally agreed to the request of his monk, the former knight, and going to the king sought Calatrava from him. And although some people thought him foolish, finally the king agreed, since this was pleasing to God. The abbot and the monk promptly went to Archbishop Juan, who was then ruling over the church of Toledo.⁶ Hearing their holy plan, he gave thanks to God, immediately provided help from his property, and had it preached publicly that all those going to the aid of Calatrava would deserve pardon for all their sins. Such a stir was created within the city that there was scarcely anyone who did not either go in person or donate horses, arms or money for its assistance. And King Sancho immediately gave the town and fortress of Calatrava to the abbot and St. Maria of Fitero to hold in perpetuity. With the Lord as their guide, the abbot and the monk Diego Velasquez went to Calatrava. The Almighty so disposed it that the army of the Arabs, about which the rumour had developed, did not appear. But now many people whose devotion had been stirred, of restrained way of life which encouraged military expertise, joined their order, and they promptly began to wage war and inflict slaughter upon the Arabs, and with the help of God this venture prospered in the hands of the monks. The abbot then returned to his monastery, and returning to Calatrava brought with him herds and flocks and other animals, with which at this time Fitero was abundantly supplied, and a multitude of warriors, whose

⁴ Sancho III, King of Castile 1157-8.

⁵ A Cistercian monastery in Navarre, founded in 1141, the site of which was transferred to Fitero in 1152.

⁶ John, Archbishop of Toledo 1152-66.

wages and upkeep he provided, leaving behind only the feeble and sick to whom he entrusted the service of the monastery. As I have heard from those who witnessed this, the abbot brought almost twenty thousand sheep with him. He was the first abbot of Fitero; on his death he was buried in a township called Ciruelos, near Toledo, where, so it is said, God worked many miracles through him. Diego Velasquez survived him for some time, and indeed I remember having seen him. He died in the monastery of San Pedro in Gumiel,⁷ and was buried there, may he rest in peace. After King Sancho had given Calatrava to Fitero, ‘he completed in a brief space of time many things, for his soul was pleasing to God’, and thus the Lord hastened ‘to lead him from the midst of iniquity’, and to give to him a realm that was not impaired.⁸ He died in Toledo on 31st August; the course of a year put an end both to his rule and his life, for he ruled for one year and twelve days. He was buried next to his father in the cathedral of Toledo.

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(26) The Notable Deeds of the Noble Alfonso and the Capture of Cuenca

Now let us return to the history of the noble Alfonso. Although thanks to the loyalty of his men, the loss of his kingdom was made good, he was, however, still subject to the attacks of his paternal uncle.⁹ After this, the noble King Alfonso waged war against his maternal uncle King Sancho of Navarre.¹⁰ He took from him Logroño, Navarrete, Entrena, Grañón, Cerezo, Briviesca, and almost everything as far as Burgos which his uncle had seized during his childhood. After this dispute arose between him and King Alfonso of Aragon,¹¹ and he took from the latter a castle called Ariza. This came about through the efforts of a nobleman called Munio Sanchez, who took the castle and gave it to the noble King Alfonso. After this, however, strengthened by the Almighty, he turned his hand against the infidels, to wage war for the Faith. He smote them with his strong hand, and drove them back with his greatness of heart. He gave their cities over to the fire, and cut down their orchards of delight. He filled the land with fear of him, and constrained the Arabs by his coming. He destroyed the strongholds of ambushers and extended the bounds of the faith. He

⁷ Near Burgos.

⁸ *Wisdom*, 4: 13-14.

⁹ Fernando II, King of León 1157-88.

¹⁰ Sancho VI, King of Navarre 1150-94.

¹¹ Alfonso II, King of Aragon 1162-96.

besieged Cuenca, a fortress of the Arabs, and hemmed it in with many works. He set up many siege engines around it, nor did he spare them day or night. He lacked food and clothing, but his royal heart strengthened him. He neglected seductive delights, but was zealous for the name of glory. His foresightedness exalted him, and royal steadfastness directed him, until he so constrained those who were besieged that his enemies begged for mercy. They sent envoys to the Almohads and words of sorrow to the Arab race. The hard-hearted listener shut his ears and denied them help. The fear of battle confounded them, and the smell of battle terrified them. The reputation of the king closed the sea, and his name prevented them crossing, until the fortress of Cuenca was surrendered to him and its towers were made subject to him.¹² Its rocks were made into roadways, and its rough terrain into plains. He took possession of it after great labours, and raised it to be a royal city. He established a cathedral of the Faith there, and the name of bishop was exalted therein. He settled various different people there, and united them together in one sizeable population. He established a garrison of courage in it, and exalted the royal reputation there. He made peasants subject to it, and enriched it with fertile pastures. He increased the height of its walls, and strengthened its defences. The number of its inhabitants increased and so did those who inhabited its territory. The former inhabitant wondered at it, and its appearance frightened the Arabs. Its strength lay in its cliffs and it was abundantly provided for by the flow of its rivers. It gloried in its prince, and its holiness was increased by the dignity of its cathedral. It rejoiced in pastures for its sheep, and was well provided with bread and wine. Remember, Cuenca, the days of this prince and show a happy face in memory of him. His name be in your praises, and his glory be your memorial! He gave protection to your frontiers and increased the jurisdiction of your cathedral.

(27) The Great Deeds and Pious Works of the Noble Alfonso

He captured Alarcón on its rocky crags and strengthened its defences.¹³ He endowed many peasants there, to ensure an abundant population of the Faith. He established a strong garrison there, so that it should be a deathtrap for the Arabs. He filled Huerta, hitherto deserted, with people, and protected the way there with inhabitants. He installed people at Alcaria of the cliffs, and changed the barrenness of the holm-oak into grapes. He established an order at Uclés and entrusted them with the sword of defence. It dwelt there as the persecutor of Arabs and its people were a shield to the faithful. The voice of those praising

¹² This was in 1177.

¹³ Alarcón near Cuenca, not Alarcos, near Ciudad Real, which is discussed later.

Him was heard there, and acclamation of the Desired One grew louder. The sword grew red with the blood of the Arabs, and their minds burned with faith and love. The cult of demons was cursed, and those believing in God lived honourable lives. The valley of the Tagus was filled with inhabitants and settlers for the defence of the plateau of Ocaña. He gave that land to the Almighty and granted it to the Knighthood of Santiago. He united the cliffs of Oreja to this, and granted them [also] guard over Mora, so that he dedicated the land to the saint and would share in the religious benefit. His father Sancho the Desired gave Calatrava to [the abbey of] Fitero, the noble Alfonso was the man who completed this work for them. He separated warfare from the contemplative life, and took the brothers away from Fitero. King Alfonso fostered them and endowed them with many possessions. He gave them Zorita, Almoguera, Maqueda, Aceca and Cogolludo, relieved [them of] the burden of poverty, and added suitable riches. Their increase in numbers resounded to the royal glory and their way of life (*disciplina*) enhanced the crown of the prince. Those who praised [God] in the Psalms were [also] girt with the sword, and those who sighed while praying served to defend the fatherland. They were sustained by plain food, and were clad in rough wool. Strict discipline prevailed among them and the cult of silence attended them. They cultivated humility and regular prayer, and tried their strength with nocturnal vigils. Devoted prayer taught them, and incessant work kept them busy. One kept watch over the path of another, and brother kept brother true to the way of life.

(28) The Settlement of Plasencia and the army of Archbishop Martin

He turned his hand to a new task and built a new and glorious city. He established a garrison for the defence of the fatherland therein, and he called it by the name of Plasencia. He gathered people in the new city and distinguished it by establishing a bishop's mitre there. He honoured it by the priesthood of the law, and extended its boundaries with his sword. He surrounded the city of Toledo with castles and filled its territory with people. He founded towns in its diocese and established the religion of the Faith within them. He added to the work of his majesty by building a rampart of blood around Alarcos. He took away many and unknown judgements of God from the sons of men. [He sought] the judgment of God on his works and the sentence of Heaven on his host. He took up arms against the king of Africa, and immediately challenged the people of Arabia. He drew up the forces of his people and directed his mighty arms against the Moors. His army crossed the Guadalquivir, led by the archbishop of Toledo. The magnates of the kingdom advised the archbishop, and the whole

army was subject to the command of the archbishop. His name was Martin el Major, and his family came from Pisuerga.¹⁴ The honour of his people was his life, and his cloak was the diadem of the Church. His wisdom was the peace of many, and his tongue fashioned their way of life. His hand was moved to help the poor, and his heart was turned to compassion for the humble. His belt was zeal for the Faith and his arms were directed towards the chastisement of blasphemers. His host was subject to his command, and the blood of the Arabs was in his sight. The kingdom of the Guadalquivir was given over to the flames, and the archbishop's enterprise prospered, for he marched past the castles of the Guadalquivir to lay waste to its lands and towns, before returning safely to his homeland.

(29) The Battle of Alarcos

The blasphemy of Africa mocked him and the anger of the Arabs grew hot. Yusuf Mazemutus was ruling in Africa as the leader of the Almohad tribe.¹⁵ The prince rose up with a great multitude and he filled the plain with various languages. There were Parthians, Arabs, Africans, Ethiopians, Almohads and men from the Atlas Mountains in his army, and Vandals from Andalusia under his command [too]. He sailed across the Straits of Gibraltar and his triremes ploughed through the waves of the sea. The multitude of his army was as numerous as the sands of the sea shore. He landed at Cadiz and marched into the plain of Cordoba. He [then] turned his face towards Alarcos and vented his anger on the kingdom of Toledo. The fields around Tolosa were laid bare and the crops trodden beneath the hooves [of his army]. He crossed the mountains and this great host drank the rivers dry. Rumours flew hither and thither, and the news spread quickly through Spain. Many rejoiced in hearing this news and the arrival of the enemy excited many people. Man knew nothing of the way of the Most High and the sons of Adam forgot the commandments of Heaven. And when the armies fought a battle, the Christian army was defeated. The noble king was forcibly led away by his men from the fight, and he was saved through their efforts, although he would have chosen rather to die than to be rescued. This battle took place at Alarcos, on 18th July in the year 1233 [*sic*], during the time of Pope Celestine III.¹⁶

¹⁴ Martin, Archbishop of Toledo 1192-1208. The valley of Pisuerga was in Old Castile.

¹⁵ Abu-Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur, ruled 1184-99.

¹⁶ 1233 by the Spanish dating system = 1195 A.D.

(30) The Kings of León and Navarre desert the noble King Alfonso

King Alfonso of León and King Sancho of Navarre had pretended to come to help him for the Alarcos campaign, but when they arrived at the borders of the kingdom of Castile and were informed that matters had not gone well in this battle, they abandoned their plan.¹⁷ The king of Navarre went back home, even though he had already reached the kingdom of Castile. The king of León did come to Toledo, where he dwelt for a few days with the noble king, but then he returned to the land of León, and only a very short while later both these rulers launched an invasion of the kingdom of Castile. The king of León made a treaty with the Arabs, and with many of these people accompanying him he entered the kingdom of Castile through the Gothic Plains, destroying, thieving and laying waste. From the other flank the king of Navarre ravaged Soria and Almazán, and spreading fire and slaughter. From yet another side the king of the Almohads, the aforesaid Yusuf, moved against Toledo, and a year later he besieged Toledo, then he went to Madrid, Alcalá, Huete, Cuenca and Uclés. He returned past Alcares, ravaging and destroying everything that lay outside the walls of these places. The noble King Alfonso joined with his faithful friend King Pedro, who was then ruling over Aragon,¹⁸ entered the land of León and gained many castles, namely Bolaños, Valderas, Castroverde, Coyanca (which through a change of name is now called Valencia), Carpio and Paradinas; and inflicting a great deal of plunder and slaughter. He also forced the Arabs whom the king of León had recruited to flee back to their homeland. In the third year the king of the Almohads of whom we were speaking [earlier] came once more and besieged Toledo, Maqueda and Talavera, but he was able to take none of them, although he destroyed Santa Olalla and other places which lacked defences. Going on from there, he took Palencia, Santa Cruz, Montánchez and Trujillo; and then he returned, haughty and proud, to his homeland. At this time the king of Castile and the king of Aragon were staying at Monte Palumbario, near Abula. Once the Agarenes had gone home, the two kings marched together against the king of León, and they took Castrocábon, Ardòn, Castrogonzalo, Castrotierra and Alba de Aliste, and they ravaged everywhere as far as Astorga with fire and slaughter. Then

¹⁷ Alfonso IX, King of León 1188-1230; Sancho VII, King of Navarre 1194-1234. The Leónese account of Lucas, Bishop of Tuy 1239-49, had a different story. 'The king of Castile hastened with his army to encounter King Miromolinus. King Alfonso of León was coming to the help of the king of Castile with a great army, but the king of Castile was burning with a fierce desire to fight and was unwilling to wait for him, even though the king of León and his army were already at Toledo. The king of Castile thus undertook battle with King Miromolinus, when the multitude of the Moors was so numerous that our men seemed very few compared with them. Our men abandoned the battle, and for our sins Miromolinus was left the victor.' *Lucae Tudensis Chronicon Mundi*, ed. E. Falque (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis 74, Turnhout 2003), p. 322.

¹⁸ Pedro II, King of Aragon 1196-1213.

going through the districts of Alba and Salamanca they ruthlessly destroyed everything [there], and took possession of the noble castle of Monreal. Thereafter they returned to their homelands. But the noble King Alfonso thought it proper to abandon his wrath, and so he made a temporary truce with the king of the Arabs, so that he might deal more safely with the neighbouring kings.

(31) How the noble King Alfonso gave his daughter as wife to the King of León

But while he was preparing to attack the king of León with even more deadly effect, some of those who feared the danger of war persuaded the latter through the advice of those close to him that he seek from the king of Castile his daughter Berengaria as his wife. And although the noble king did not like this, because he and the king of León were joined by ties of consanguinity,¹⁹ Queen Eleanor, the wife of the noble Alfonso, who was a most prudent woman, with wise forethought drew to his attention the dangers which could be averted through a union of this sort.²⁰ Thus, he gave his aforesaid daughter to the king of León, who came with his magnates to Valladolid, and on account of the marriage he [also] gave the donations which these great ladies sought. After the marriage had been solemnly celebrated he handed her over to her [new] kingdom. Alfonso, the noble King of Castile, gave to his married daughter all that he had taken from his new son-in-law, who had previously been his enemy. And so peace was restored, as though with a son, and they refrained from raiding.²¹

(32) About the capture of Vittoria, Guipúzcoa and Ibide

After this, wishing to avenge his injuries at the hands of the king of Navarre, the noble King Alfonso mustered an army along with his faithful friend the king of Aragon and entered Navarre; and they took Ruchonia and Aibar, which pertained to the king of Aragon. They also took Inzura and Miranda, which remained with the noble king. After perpetrating all sorts of devastation, each king returned to his homeland. The noble King Alfonso of Castile [came] once more and took Ibida, raided Alava and laid siege to Vittoria for a long time. Meanwhile King Sancho of Navarre, who was of great strength and valiant in war, but

¹⁹ The two kings were first cousins, and hence by medieval standards the marriage was grossly incestuous.

²⁰ Eleanor (1161-1214) was the daughter of Henry II of England; she had married King Alfonso in 1176.

²¹ The marriage took place probably in October 1197; it was eventually dissolved, on the orders of Innocent III, in 1204, by which time the couple had had three children, including a son Fernando (King of Castile from 1217 and of León 1230). Archbishop Rodrigo refrained from discussing the unfortunate outcome of the union.

obstinately set on his own will, abandoned his endangered kingdom and with only a few magnates accompanying him on his journey he travelled to the Arabs. He stayed with them for some time, awaiting [the return of] the messengers whom he had sent to the Almohad leader beyond the sea. The messengers brought back money and other gifts, the king nevertheless remained in the Arabs' country for some time, travelling from town to town recruiting men. Meanwhile, those who were besieged in Vittoria were exhausted from fighting and working, and were suffering from lack of food – they were close to surrender. But when Garcia the venerable Bishop of Pamplona, a man who was renowned for his generosity, realised how close they were to famine, he hastened to King Sancho in the land of the Arabs, accompanied by one of the besieged. He explained the facts of the situation to the king, and obtained his permission for the castle of Vittoria to be surrendered to the king of Castile.

(33) About the desertion of Diego Lopez, the siege of Estella, and the rebuilding of the monastery of Las Huelgas

After these events, Diego Lopez, lord of Vizcaya, who was deemed to be the foremost among all the magnates of Spain, quarrelled with the noble king and abandoned his company. He therefore handed back the fiefs that he held, and joined the king of Navarre. Launching frequent raids and conflicts, he did a great deal of damage to the men of Castile. The noble King Alfonso refused to put up with such injuries, and summoning his son-in-law the king of León he invaded the frontiers of the men of Navarre. While he was laying siege with the utmost determination to Estella, a most noble town of the Navarrese, Diego Lopez of Vizcaya, who was in that town, along with many [other] nobles, fiercely resisted the attacks of the Castilians, and they lay in wait amid the trellising for vines, inflicting casualties and dangerous encounters. And since the strength of the town's defences was sapping the strength of the attackers, and there seemed little hope of success to strengthen their spirits, the kings raised the siege, and after ravaging the region round about, to the great detriment of the town's inhabitants, they returned to their homelands. Thereafter a truce was established for some time between the kings of Castile, Navarre and León; for the noble King Alfonso great-heartedly laid aside [thought of] the battle of Alarcos. But, so as to please the Almighty, and at the plea of his most serene wife Queen Eleanor, he built a nunnery of the Cistercian order near Burgos, constructing most noble buildings [for it], and endowing it with many revenues and all sorts of possessions, that the virgins dedicated to God who most laudably sang psalms

to God there night and day, might not feel want nor need, but with cloister, church and other buildings royally completed they might devote their time to both contemplation and praise [of God].

(34) About the Building of the Hospital, the Establishment of Scholars and the Acquisition of Gascony

He also constructed a hospital next to the nunnery, with [associated] buildings and houses, wonderfully decorated. He endowed it with such riches that no one was refused entry, and the necessities of life were provided for all the pilgrims at every hour of the day, and beds and excellent coverings were always prepared for everyone who wished to stay the night. Everything that was needed for the sick was provided, until either their death, or until they were restored to rude good health through the ministrations of women or men. Hence one could, so to speak, look at the works of piety in this hospital as if in a mirror; and he who during his lifetime deserved universal praise for the excellence of his works, and after his death he will with many praying for him deserve to be crowned by the Lord. But, to avoid the workings of Divine Grace, which were made manifest in him through the Holy Spirit being corrupted through any power, he summoned wise men from France and Italy so that the discipline of wisdom should never be lacking in his realm, and he mustered masters of all the faculties at Palencia, to whom he generously gave substantial salaries, so that knowledge of every sort would flow to anyone desirous of study, like manna to the mouth. Thereafter he made almost the whole of Gascony, apart from Bordeaux, La Réole and Bayonne, subject to his rule, and once the term of his truce with the chief of the Almohads had finished, thereafter he also repopulated Moya. Although he was a careful man, this same noble king, who was willing to die for the faith of Christ, would not calmly tolerate the previous defeat; and since he always sought [to accomplish] great deeds, he was reluctant to extend the truce any further. Thus, animated by zeal for the faith and full of resolution, he undertook a war in the name of the Lord.

(35) The Capture of Salvatierra

So, for the aforementioned reasons, battle began between the noble king and the Agarenes. After our men had done some damage to the lands of Baeza, Andújar and Jaén, the son of the aforesaid king of the Agarenes, who was called Mahommed, raised an army from

among his peoples and established himself in camp around Salvatierra. He besieged it for almost three months, attacking it with all sorts of siege engines, killing many of those who were in the castle, and wounding many more. Many of the besiegers died [also], either from thirst or in battle. But, after the towers and wall had been all but destroyed, the castle finally fell, in September 1249 [*sic*] of the Christian era, to the shame of the faith.²² That castle was a safe refuge, and its loss harmed our reputation. The people wept over it, and freed the bonds from their arms. Zeal roused everyone, and the news roused many to tears; on hearing this, the young men rose up and the old became bitter through zeal for Him. At that time the noble Alfonso mustered his army on the borders of Talavera. At first he wanted to commit himself to the chance of battle, at the urging in particular of his eldest son Fernando, but thinking better of this, he ordered that the risks of battle be postponed to the next year; for it is more sensible to wait for an [appropriate] opportunity rather than rashly undertaking deeds of bravery.

(36) The Course of the War and the Death of the Infante Fernando

Establishing a garrison in Salvatierra, the Agarene returned, puffed with pride, to his homeland. The noble King Alfonso discussed the matter carefully with the archbishop, bishops and magnates, and then personally announced, amid universal acclamation, that it would be better to run the risks of war in accordance with Divine will rather than see the fatherland and the saints suffer evil. He issued a decree through all the regions of his kingdom that the knights and footmen should furnish themselves with suitable arms, but avoiding any extravagant clothing, gold chasing, or ornamentation that served no useful purpose, that those who had formerly displeased the Almighty by their extravagance should now please Him by having what was necessary and useful. Everyone from the greatest to the most humble obeyed the king's wishes. The most gentle Fernando, the eldest son of the noble Alfonso, was obediently devoting his efforts to carrying out this work – he was, however, struck down by fever at this time, and he finished his life before the time for battle had arrived. The country wept at his death, for he was the hope of the people, while his father mourned him inconsolably, since he saw him while he lived as his mirror-image. The Lord had so distinguished him that he was loved by everyone, and He was already imparting His grace to him, although their age does not [usually] allow this for young men. He died in the

²² 1249 by the Spanish era = 1211.

town of Madrid in the diocese of Toledo, in the month of October in the year 1249 [1211], empty of days but full of grace and courage. He was buried in the royal nunnery of St. Maria, near Burgos. His funeral was celebrated in proper style and with lavish expenditure, but amid grief and lamentation, by Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, along with many other fellow bishops, secular lords and men of religion, and his most excellent sister Queen Berenguala, to whom the kingdom of Castile afterwards came by descent; for he was distinguished by the extent of his good qualities, so that the extent of his devotion exceeded normal piety and his generosity in giving alms the usual bountifulness of princes. The court was also praying for comfort with modest restraint, although its grief was inconsolable, so that his reputation grew and his memory became more sweet [still]. Throughout his life he was the helper and assistant of men of religion and of the poor, and of those whose titles were being tarnished by poverty. In addition, his many and grand deeds shone forth wonderfully during the reign of his son. The noble father would admit no consolation for the death of his son, apart from in mighty deeds, and so mustering his army by the bank of the River Júcar he attacked the land of the Saracens. He besieged and captured a castle called Alcala, and [those of] Jorquera, Carcélén and Cubas. Many Agarenes were captured in these places, and great booty was also found there, and after garrisons had been installed and the places effectively refortified, he returned triumphantly to his homeland because of the onset of winter.

Book VIII

(1) The Coming of the Kings to the Royal City

It happened that in the next year, at the time when kings are accustomed to march to battle, that the noble Alfonso summoned his people and mustered his army, gathering supplies and rousing the hearts of all to battle. Everyone mustered at Toledo, the only place that was rich enough not to lack the supplies that were needed. Meanwhile Rodrigo, archbishop of that city, and other envoys who had been despatched to further this work returned from various places. And so the royal city was filled with people, supplies were amassed, and an assortment of people from different nations flocked there, from almost every part of Europe, speaking different languages and of various cultures, but all filled with zeal for battle. Nor was there anyone who suffered from any shortage, since that city was overflowing in its abundance, and the prodigal hand of the noble prince provided everyone with supplies. People started to flock there piecemeal from the month of February onwards,

and their numbers grew little by little throughout the spring time, increasing until there was a vast multitude. And since there were various nations there, who differed in their customs, language and behaviour, then on the prince's instruction the bishop of that city remained there so that their disputes might be stilled through his endeavour. And so it happened through the grace of Almighty God who disposed everything as He wished, that no quarrel or disorder that could have hindered the campaign, arose, although the enemy of humankind often tried to provoke this. And since the number of those who bore the badges of the Lord on their bodies grew from day to day, the noble king wished to provide more convenient lodgings for them to avoid the lack of space in the city hampering them, and so he brought them to the lovely gardens outside the city by the River Tagus, which had been developed to allow his royal majesty relaxation from his duties, so that they might avoid suffering from the summer heat under the shade of the trees. Shelters were erected there from the fruit trees, and they remained there at the king's expense until the day when they marched to battle. On the eighth day after the feast which the Christian religion celebrates at Pentecost, King Peter of Aragon, the faithfully friend of the noble Alfonso, arrived at Toledo on the day agreed [earlier] at their treaty of Cuenca, having hastened there by long stages unusual for kings. He was welcomed by a procession of the bishop and all the clergy, and he set up his tents in the royal gardens, where he awaited the arrival of his troops.

(2) The Arrival of those from beyond the Mountains for the Conflict

Nobles also began to arrive from Gaul and Italy, including the archbishop of Bordeaux, the bishop of Nantes and many barons. Ordinary knights also mustered there, and a great multitude of footmen. The venerable Arnould also arrived, who after being for some considerable time a member of the Cistercian order, was now ruling the church of Narbonne.²³ A little while before, he had been roused by his concern for Catholic observance, to incite the hearts of the faithful against those people who dared wickedly to blaspheme against the name of the Lord and the Church in the province of Narbonne and the neighbouring regions, encouraging them to arm themselves against the cunning of the heretics with the sign of the Cross. And so it happened through the Lord's grace that where preaching was held in contempt and achieved nothing, the catholic faith happily grew stronger from day to day against these disgusting heresies through the scythe of the Cross, and with the destruction of

²³ He was Archbishop of Narbonne from March 1212 until 1229, and previously abbot of Cîteaux from 1201 onwards.

Beziers and Carcassonne, the blood of the heretics was in the year 1246 consumed through the fierce fire and avenging sword.²⁴ This prelate entered the city of Toledo with a host of well-equipped warriors from southern France, distinguished by their banners and arms, and he was welcomed as was proper by the noble king and the archbishop of the city. Many knights from Portugal also mustered at this same city, along with a great host of foot soldiers, who easily sustained the hardships of the expedition, and displayed wonderful speed of movement and great bravery in attack.

(3) The Bishops and Magnates of Spain muster for Battle

Nobles of the king of the Aragonese arrived to join the army, men distinguished for their courage, excellently equipped and well-furnished with horses and arms, among whom were Garcia Romero, Eximino Cornelio, Miguel de Lusía, Aznario Pardo, Guillermo de Cervaria, Count Raimund Fulques of Empurias, Guillermo de Cardona, and many other princes, barons and ordinary knights, as well as a considerable crowd of crossbowmen and infantry. A splendid company of his own magnates were present with the noble king in the royal city, blessed with noble birth, courage and a host of followers. This group was distinguished for the refinement of its character, its courtly behaviour and its outstanding courage, so that they appeared not only frightening to the eyes of the enemy, but also worthy of honour. The councils of the cities and towns arrived, accompanied by bands of well-armed troops, furnished with horses, weapons, carts, rations and all the supplies needed for the conflict, for there was nobody among them lacking anything, indeed they generously shared their possessions with each other. Whoever lived in the towns and cities under one princely rule, from the early days of their people had their own separate method of warfare, military banners and name which derived from ancient times. They and their relatives had waged war frequently and effectively against both Saracens and Christians. There were also bishops there who devoted themselves and their resources, as God had granted these to them, to the interests of the Faith, devoting themselves to the office and to watchful vigils, shrewd in counsel, generous in [providing] supplies, conscientious in their preaching, valiant in time of danger, and long-suffering in labour. [These were] from the kingdom of Castile, Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, Bishops Tellio of Palencia, Rodrigo of Siguenza, Menendo of Osma, and

²⁴ 1209.

Pedro of Avila; ²⁵ from the kingdom of Aragon, Garcia of Zaragossa and Berenguer, Bishop-elect of Barcelona. ²⁶ Then, from the secular nobility of the kingdom of Castile there were Diego Lopez of Faro, Count Fernando of Lara, Count Alvaro and his brother Count Gundisalvo, Lope Diego of Faro, Rodrigo Diego of Cambero, Gonsalvo Rodrigo and his brothers, along with many other great and brave nobles, whose names would take too long to list here. There were also the brothers of Calatrava, under the master of their order, Rodrigo Diego, a brotherhood well-regarded by both God and man; the brothers of the knighthood of the Temple, under their commander Gomez Ramiro, who passed away happily after the battle. These are those who are first in the New Testament; after receiving the sign of the Cross, they spurn warlike pride, but acting courageously, are bound by the bond of charity and religion. There were also the brothers of the Order of the Hospital, who devote themselves to brotherhood and charity, but burning with zeal for the Faith and to bring help to the Holy Land they [too] have assumed the sword of defence. They were under the command of their prior, Guterrio Fernando, while the brothers of Santiago were led by their master, Pedro Arie. The people of Spain worthily performed many knightly deeds; many were moved by zeal and compassion for the Christian religion through various sorts of vows and professions, and these distinguished men flocked together there under the sign of the Holy Cross.

(4) The Outstanding Virtues and Generosity of the Noble Alfonso

A host so various and mixed, and with so many foreigners was not easy to command, even for a man of determination. However, the noble king through his great heartedness kept everything at peace, everything quiet and calm, so that he transformed boredom into something positive, and overcame this boredom through a cheerful face. He converted an impolite remark into respect through a reverent response; with [a wave of] his generous hand he would alter the prolix dreariness of boastfulness into delightful eloquence; preserving the dignity of royal behaviour, he would confront the arrogance of military men. His kindly disposition so worked in him that his pre-eminence seemed like equality; his wisdom spiced with seriousness of purpose so embellished everything that his courtliness became an aspiration, and his steadfastness an example, so that it could be said of him: this man has

²⁵ Tellio, Bishop of Palencia 1212-46; Rodrigo, Bishop of Siguenza 1193-1218; Menendo, Bishop of Osma 1210-25; Pedro, Bishop of Avila 1211-13.

²⁶ Garcia, Bishop of Zaragossa 1195-1218; Berenguer, Bishop of Barcelona 1212-41.

more goodness in him than we all have put together. [Everybody], youths, young men, those who were in the flower of their manhood, old men and the infirm found [in him] something to praise, and something to strive for were their abilities up to this, something to admire and something to cherish. Struck dumb with amazement, they wondered at his energy in getting things done. Perfection was so marked in him, both in giving and in what had been given [to him], that he abounded in the gifts of grace and nature, to such an extent that the whole world acknowledges the noble Alfonso to be totally committed to Spain. He appointed to military command young men and youths who were recommended to him by the nobility of their grandfathers, so that both the hand of the man making such appointments and the great deeds of their forbears would inspire to [equally] great deeds those who had not yet acquired a reputation for courage. He would spur these men with generous gifts of horses, plenty of armour to assure their safety, and with all sorts of precious clothing, so that they should find in him both a lord to love and a generous benefactor to praise. And although the practises of the foreigners were different, and they differed from the natives in their habits, since his good qualities as a ruler allowed him to assess everyone's behaviour, he who was able to preserve the virtues of everyone within himself was able to keep everybody satisfied, as though he was not the native of one single country but knew how to adopt the customs of everyone [else] within himself, so that he seemed not in his own behaviour to be inconsistent with that of anyone else. Who would be so bold as to speak about his generosity, if that which was scarcely to be found in others had been [only] of moderate extent in him? But from his infancy he had so cultivated generosity that he was unable to forget what had been ingrained within him from his mother's womb. Through the privilege of his generosity, he confirmed everything in such a way that, even though silence had been imposed on all his gift-giving, because everyone talked about it, he acquired a widespread reputation for lavish generosity. And although he made magnificent disbursements to the great men, he did not stay his hand from the lesser. For even though those from beyond the Alps numbered more than ten thousand cavalry and a hundred thousand footmen, all the knights were given 20 shillings a day, and the infantrymen five shillings; nor were women, children, the sick and the rest who were unsuited for battle neglected by his grace. These were the things that were given in common and in public, not counting donations to private individuals, which exceeded them in scale, for the magnates did not receive these by daily distribution but sums were sent to them on a less frequent basis by royal messengers. His generosity loaded them with presents: innumerable horses, a delightful variety of textiles, something which the hard-faced and miserly could not look at with a cheerful face. If these gifts (*donaria*) given to the kings, and

wages (*stipendia*) given to their men, were added together, the style and good humour of the donor still earned more than could be bought with all these payments. And in addition to all this, lest the people from abroad might lack anything for the expedition, he gave tents to all of them and generously provided wagons (*vehicula*) for them. He also added grace to grace and filled these wagons with food and other supplies, and providing 60,000 loads and pack animals.

(5) The March to Battle and the Capture of Malagón

Having therefore provided all that was needed for everyone, the army of the Lord set out from the royal city on 20th June: those from beyond the mountains by themselves, with Diego Lopez of Faro having been given to them as their guide, Peter the valiant King of Aragon with his men, and the noble Alfonso with his troops. But although they marched separately, the [different parts of the] army were only a little distance from each other. They camped on the first day next to the riverbed of the Guajaraz, on the second next to the Guadacelet, and on the third next to the Algodor; while those from north of the mountains pitched their camp next to the Guadalfezra.²⁷ They then marched on and laid siege to the fortress of Malagón, and through the help of Divine grace and as a sign of good [fortune], although those who were inside the castle defended themselves quite manfully, the attack of those from beyond the mountains, who behaved with great valour, being willing to die for the name of Christ, sapped the courage of the defenders and rendered their defences useless, and the army took Malagón, killing all those who were within. The next day the army of the kings arrived, and rested there for one day, where there was some shortage of foodstuffs; however, the noble king took energetic action and had plentiful supplies brought there.

(6) The Capture of Calatrava and the Departure of Those from beyond the Mountains

Then indeed everyone marched on together and came to Calatrava. The Agarenes who were resisting there decided to manufacture iron calthrops, and hurl these into all the fords of the River Guadiana. These calthrops [each] had four spikes, and however they fell one of these was always sticking up, to pierce the feet of men and the hooves of horses. But since

²⁷ These *arroyos* were quite probably dry during the summer.

human artifice counts for nothing against the foresight of God, so God decided that very few, indeed almost none of them, suffered injury from these calthrops, and helped by the hand of God's grace, we crossed the River Guadiana, and pitched camp around Calatrava. The Agarenes, however, defended the town by stocking the tops of the towers with arms, banners and war machines, so that it seemed to those wishing to attack it that this would be extremely difficult. Furthermore, although this town lies in the plain, one part of its wall was rendered inaccessible by the course of the river, while on the other sides it was defended with inner and outer walls, ditches, towers and barbicans, and it appeared impregnable without a lengthy bombardment by siege engines. There was also there a certain Agarene named Avenchaliz, who from long experience had a shrewd knowledge of warfare and was most skilled in battle tactics; those who were besieged there had more confidence in his diligence than they did in themselves, although there was an Almohad there in the fortress who was in command of the garrison. After we had been there besieging the place for some days, and the kings and other leaders were doubtful about launching an attack, after long discussions everybody agreed that we should not leave the town without making an attempt, even though storming it looked difficult. There were many, however, who thought it better to take up our march again and proceed to battle rather than continue with attacks on castles, particularly since brave men would be risked in such attacks and the army tired out, while the ability to gain and to retain such places would be dependent on the outcome of the battle. They therefore took up arms, and mustered in the places around the town which had been specifically assigned to troops from different regions and particular leaders, and [then] shouting Christian war cries they attacked the town. And it so happened that by the grace of God, on the Sunday after the feast of St. Paul, the Arabs were driven out and Calatrava was restored to the noble king, who immediately had it garrisoned and restored to the Christian name by the brothers who had formerly resided there. The noble king retained nothing of all that was found there for himself, but granted everything to the people from beyond the mountains and to the king of Aragon. But since the enemy of the human race does not cease from envying the deeds of Christians, he sent Satan into the army of charity and stirred up the hearts of the envious, and those who had pledged themselves to fight for the Faith abandoned their good intentions; for almost all of those from beyond the mountains declared their intention to desert the banners of the Cross, avoid the travails of battle, and return to their homes. The noble king was generous to all, sharing the foodstuffs of his own men where this was necessary, but he could not recall them to the undertaking, rather almost all ingloriously retreated, apart from the venerable Arnold, Archbishop of Narbonne, who, along with all those men whom he could

retain and many nobles from the province of Vienne, always remained constant on the side of good and would not abandon the holy enterprise. There were [with him] around 130 knights, along with a few infantry who remained there. There remained also Theobald de Blazon, from the region of Poitou, a valiant and noble man, who was by birth Spanish, from the people of Castile. The king of Aragon and all his men remained to the end, bound to the noble king by an indissoluble love, and since according to Solomon: ‘If you possess a friend, possess him in temptation’,²⁸ this could be proved, to the extent that each loved the other. However, ‘all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose’,²⁹ thus although perilous consequences might have been feared from this schism, events however turned out to get better from day to day. After those who bore the Lord’s Cross as a burden had departed, only the Spaniards were left, along with those few from beyond the mountains who were named above, to march bravely into battle for the Lord. They came first to Alarcos where they pitched camp, occupying the fortress and the other castles in the vicinity. During that same halt King Sancho of Navarre arrived. Although to begin with he had pretended to be unwilling to come, once he had arrived at this critical moment he did not deny the Lord the glory of his bravery. And so these three kings marched onwards in the name of the holy Trinity, and on the first day they made camp in the territory of Salvatierra. On the following Sunday it was clear to the kings and princes that the whole army should stand to arms and make all the preparations needed to be ready for battle. And by the grace of God the host appeared so well-furnished with arms, banners and horses that in the opinion of the nobles it would appear terrible to our enemies, but pleasing to our own men, and was ready for battle, despite the absence of those who had left, so that the hearts of the brave grew stronger, the tremulous were comforted, the doubtful strengthened, and the departure of those who had retreated, which had thrown fear into many, was banished from the hearts of the fearful. We remained here waiting for a further day, then we marched on to another stopping place which was called Fresnodas, next we came to another camping place of the same name, and on the third day to another campsite at the foot of the Sierra Muradel, which is called Guadalajara.

²⁸ *Liber Ecclesiasticus*, 6: 7

²⁹ *Romans*, 8.28.

(7) The Occupation of the Mountain, from which the Christian Army Marched into Battle

While these events were taking place, King Muhammed of the Agarenes gathered his people together in the mountains near Jaén, there to await the army of the Christians. Not that it was in his heart to fight, since he feared the help brought by the pilgrims, but he intended to ambush them during their retreat, when the Christians might well be tired from their labours, and their ranks thinned by deaths, and hence they would be unable to resist him. So when, perhaps through the plan of the Almighty, it happened that those who had come [from abroad] departed, after their departure certain persons were influenced by the Devil secretly to desert from our army and flee to the Arabs, revealing to them the situation in our army and the shortage of rations, although this was not a problem after the departure from Calatrava. And so through the action of Divine Providence, which never fails in its planning, it happened that the Agarene leader was emboldened and changed his plan. Anticipating a glorious victory, he marched out from the Jaén district and hastened against us. Arriving at Baeza, he sent some men to Las Navas de Tolosa, to prevent the Christians traversing the narrow pass, where the cliff came close to a deep abyss. If the Christians had not [already] captured the mountain top, they were to station themselves around the summit, to prevent the army of the Lord climbing up there, or so those who were captured in the battle later told us. They were guarding the pass so that with foodstuffs running short we would eventually be forced to retreat through weariness and hunger. The Lord, however, had other intentions. Diego Lopez of Faro, who had been entrusted with leading the army, sent his son Lope Diego and his two nephews, Sancho Fernando and Martin Munioz, on ahead as an advance guard to seize the mountain tops. They indeed had gone recklessly forward some little way, trusting in their valour, when they encountered some Arabs on the top of the mountain near a castle called Ferral. The Arabs attacked them and would have done them great harm had this not been prevented by Divine Grace, for seizing their weapons the aforesaid Christian leaders and their men bravely drove the Arabs back. Gaining possession of the mountain top through the grace of God, they immediately pitched their tents and stayed there. We came to the foot of the mountain on the Friday, ³⁰ about the ninth hour, and on that same day many of our men climbed up to the mountain crags, although the greater part remained near the Guadalajara riverbed. On the Saturday morning the three kings, Alfonso of Castile, Peter of Aragon and

³⁰ 13th July.

Sancho of Navarre, called on the name of the Lord and climbed up there, pitching their tents on the mountain slope where they remained. That day our men [also] occupied the castle of Ferral, below which are chasms and clefts in the rock, and rock falls near Losa, and such is the narrowness of the pass that it even makes difficulties for the lightly-equipped. Some formations of the Agarenes watched the Christians' passage through that day and part of the following one, and throughout the day there were frequent skirmishes between our men and theirs, in which there were some people killed on both sides, albeit not a great many. While this was going on, a council of the kings and princes was held, to decide how they might advance without [undue] risk, for the Losa pass was impossible without heavy casualties. Since the Sultan's army was now that much closer to ours, while his red tent appeared to be fixed, various plans were put forward by different people for the army's advance. Some thought that the pass was impossible and counselled retreat, and then to find an easier way to cross into the plains subject to the Agarenes. To this, the noble Alfonso, the King of Castile, replied: 'Even if this advice displayed good sense, it would carry danger with it, for when the common people and others of little experience saw us in retreat, they would think that this was not in order to seek battle but to flee from it. There would be desertions from the army, and it would be impossible to keep people there, and from the enemy's positions and since they are so close, there is no alternative but to press on. So whatever Heaven's wish shall be, so let it be.' After this advice from the noble king had been accepted, Almighty God, who was directing this enterprise with His special grace, sent a certain common man, of lowly dress and person who had once herded flocks in these mountains and hunted rabbits and hares there. He revealed a way that was quite easy, or at least possible, down one side of the mountain slope; nor was it necessary for this route to be out of the enemy's sight, for although they might see [what we were doing] they would be unable to prevent it, and so we would be able to reach a suitable site for a pitched battle.

(8) The March to the Battlefield and the Attack of the Agarenes

But since in such a dangerous situation, one could hardly give credence to such a person, two of our leaders, Diego Lopez of Faro and Garcia Romero, made a reconnaissance to find out if what the shepherd had said was true, and they advanced to a plateau near the summit of one of the mountains. And as the Lord decreed, so it turned out, for this man was found to be telling the truth, and he was indeed a messenger of God, although He chose him from the lowly of this world. The two leaders occupied the plateau, and early on Sunday

morning the three kings, after receiving pontifical blessing and the grace of the sacrament, marched with their men to the aforesaid mountain, abandoning the castle of Ferral, which was now entirely useless. The enemy, however, believing that we were avoiding battle because we could not penetrate the Losa Pass, occupied the castle with great rejoicing. The kings had remained with our rearguard observing; they now joined up with the leaders who had gone ahead, along with all their following. When the Muslims realised that this move was not a feint but a [real] advance, they were extremely upset. Seeing the tents which were being pitched on the aforesaid mountain top, they sent a body of troops to hinder the encampment of the first squadrons. For because of the narrowness of the track, we were forced to march with our force in extended order, but although the enemy fought with our men for some time, with the Lord's help they were manfully driven back and through God's grace our men occupied the plateau and successfully made camp there. The tents had only just been set up when the king of the Agarenes, realising that neither ambush nor deception would profit him in barring the pass, drew up his forces and marched that same day into the plain. He cleverly stationed his élite division, which had been chosen as his bodyguard, on a certain promontory, to which the climb up was difficult, and most wisely drew up his other divisions to right and left; and there they waited, from the sixth hour until Vespers, thinking that we would march to battle that day. But the discussion of the council decided to postpone the conflict until the Monday, because the horses had suffered from the difficult route through the mountains, and the army was tired, and this would also allow us to reconnoitre the enemy's dispositions and progress during the intervening period. When the Muslim leader realised that we would not be advancing to battle, he was deliriously happy, believing that this delay was not the result of caution but of fear; and as a result he sent letters to Baeza and Jaén, saying that he had trapped the three kings and would capture them within three days. However, some of his men, who were of a different opinion, are alleged to have said the following: 'We see that they are stationed prudently and carefully, and they seem rather to be preparing for battle than to be anxious to flee'. On the morrow, early on the Sunday morning, the Muslim leader rode out into the field, as the day before, and after drawing up his forces he remained in the field until midday. To avoid suffering from the heat the red tent was brought out to provide him with shade. This was adorned in all sorts of different ways. He remained in state under this, waiting for the conflict with royal pride. We did as we had the day before, watching their army and keeping their camp under observation while we discussed what we should do on the morrow. The archbishop of Toledo and the other bishops most devotedly preached words of encouragement and proclaimed the indulgence throughout the

encampments of all the princes and of every city militia. On that day [too] the illustrious king of Aragon girded his kinsman Nunio Sanchez with the belt of knighthood, while the Agarenes tried preliminary skirmishes around the edge of the camp, as though this was a tournament. Finally, after a long wait the Agarenes returned to the place where they had been camped between the sixth and the ninth hour.

(9) The Disposition of the forces and the Order of the Warriors

On the following day, around the middle of the night, a voice of exaltation and confession sounded in the tents of the Christians, and it was proclaimed by the voice of the herald that everyone should arm themselves for the Lord's battle. The mysteries of the Lord's Passion were celebrated, and confession was made, and after putting on their armour they marched out to the field of battle. The forces were drawn up as had previously been agreed by the princes. Diego Lopez and his men made up the first detachment of the Castilians; in the middle line were Count Gonsalvo Nunio with the brothers of the Temple and the Hospital, and those of Ucles ³¹ and Calatrava; Rodrigo Diaz of Cambero, his brother Alvaro Diego, Juan Gonsalvo, and other nobles with them, held the flank; while in the last line were the noble King Alfonso, Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo and the other aforesaid bishops. From the barons there were Gonsalvo Rodrigo and his brothers, Rodrigo Pedro of Villa Luporum, Suero Tellio, Fernando Garcia and others. The city militias were divided among these different divisions, as had been agreed. The valiant King Peter of Aragon drew up his army in the same number of lines; Garcia Romero commanded the advance force, in the second line were Eximino Cornelio and Aznario Pardo, in the last line there was the king himself along with some other magnates of his kingdom, while in the flanking squadron he stationed others among his nobles. He also had some of the communal militias of the cities of Castile with him. King Sancho of Navarre was on account of his valour granted the special privilege of marching with his men on the king's right hand, and in his company were the militias of the cities of Segovia, Avila and Medina [del Campo]. Once these dispositions were made, hands were raised to Heaven, eyes were directed to God, hearts were encouraged to martyrdom, the banners of the Faith were unfurled, and the name of the Lord invoked, and all marched together into the dangers of battle. Those who were the first to strike were those in the squadron of Diego Lopez, and especially his valiant and daring son and nephews.

³¹ That is, the knights of Santiago.

The Agarenes set up a barricade on the hill, to act as a screen from the flights of arrows, behind which they stationed infantry in particular; there their king sat, having his sword next to him, wearing the black cap which was that of Abd-al-Mūmin, who was the first leader of the Almohads,³² and having with him the book of the nefarious sect of Mahommed, which is called the Koran. Outside the screen were other units of infantry, and some of these, both inside and outside, were joined to each other by ropes, so that, as if disdainingly flight from the enclosure, they would sustain the shock of battle resolutely. An Almohad armoured cavalry division was stationed outside and in front of the barricade, great in number and fearsome to behold. To the left and right of these were Arabs who were dangerous to the unwary through their speed and skill with the lance, who attacked by [feigning?] flight and having fled counter-attacked more fiercely; in the plain, where lack of space does not hinder mobility, they are acknowledged to be more effective. Like the Parthians, they attack using arrows and they avoid heavy blows by manoeuvre. Darting hither and thither by remarkable sallies, they do not keep strict order in their own ranks, so as to disrupt those of their enemies by their attacks, and having thrown their ranks into disorder [by attacking] from the rear, they retain their own ability to move about. I believe that none of our men were able accurately to estimate the size of the countless multitude of these and other troops, although afterwards we heard from the Agarenes that there were 80,000 cavalry – the crowds of infantry were, however, impossible to count. In addition to this, they said that certain Agarenes from the Atlas regions near Morocco were present, who were not well-regard in the eyes of their king; these people had surrendered their horses to their king, to secure his grace, and so they were serving as infantry. Nobody from all these men is thought to have survived. A division of enormous size was stationed around their king, wonderfully furnished with military banners.

(10) The Victory of the Christians and the Massacre of the Saracens

The Agarenes, however, remained stationary in their posts, although they succeeded in repelling the first of our men who climbed up onto rough ground that was unsuited to a battle, and when these were driven back some of our men, tiring after a tough fight, retreated a little way. Some men from the middle divisions of both Castile and Aragon then came together in one column and moved up to join the first rank. There was considerable confusion

³² Strictly speaking, Abd al-Mūmin (d. 1163) was the second Almohad leader, after Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), the founder of the sect, but he could be considered the first actual ruler.

there, and the situation was looking dangerous; indeed to such an extent that some men, although not from among the nobles, seemed to be on the verge of flight. But once the first and second ranks from Aragon and Castile had merged they pressed on with the fight. Meanwhile the flanking squadrons fought fiercely with those of the Agarenes, and some of them turned tail and were seen to be retreating. Realising this, and seeing some of the common people not behaving as they ought, the noble Alfonso said in the hearing of all to the archbishop of Toledo: ‘archbishop, you and I will die here’. The latter replied to him: ‘Never, rather we shall here prevail over our enemies’. The king remained resolute. ‘Let us make haste’, he said, ‘to assist those who are the most in danger’. Gonsalvo Rodrigo and his brothers charged towards the front rank, while Fernando Garcia, a valiant man well-versed in military matters, restrained the king, advising him that they should proceed to the rescue with caution. Then the king said once more: ‘here, archbishop, we shall die, for dying in such a situation is no disgrace’. But the latter responded: ‘If it be pleasing to God, the crown of victory, not death, beckons. If, however, some other outcome is to be pleasing to God, then we are all ready to die along with you’. I testify in the presence of God that in all this the king’s face did not alter, nor his customary manner of speech or behaviour; he remained stalwart and steadfast, as an imperturbable lion, resolved to conquer or die. Nor did the danger to those in the front rank last very long, for happily, with the Lord’s help, their banners advanced at the double towards the barricade of the Agarenes. The Cross of the Lord, which was customarily carried before the pontiff of Toledo, was borne by Domenico Pascasio, a canon of Toledo. He miraculously passed through the Agarene lines, and it pleased the Lord that he remained there, carrying it unscathed until the very end of the battle. There was also on the banners of the kings the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has always been the patron and guardian of the province of Toledo and of all Spain. On the arrival of these, that wonderful division and the countless crowd, which had up to that point held their station and obstinately resisted our men, threw down their swords, dropped their lances, and ceasing their blows [now] gave ground. Then too, at the instance of his brother, who was called Zeyt Avosecri, the Agarene king mounted a piebald riding horse and took flight, and rode on, accompanied in his peril by [only] four knights, until he came to Baeza. And when the inhabitants of Baeza asked what they should do, he is said to have responded to their inquiries: ‘I can take responsibility neither for you, nor for myself. The Lord be with you’. Then he changed his mount, and rode on in the dark to Jaén. Meanwhile, attacked by the Aragonese on one side, the Castilians on another, and the Navarrese on their side, many thousands of Agarenes were slain. Seeing and hearing this, the archbishop of Toledo

addressed these words to the noble king: ‘Be mindful of the grace of God, which has made up for all that is lacking in you, and has today removed the shame which has been tolerated for so long. Be mindful also of your knights, with whose help you have come to such great glory’. With these and other similar words, the archbishop of Toledo and the other bishops who were there with him, with tears of devotion, raised up their voices and burst out into songs of praise, saying: ‘We praise you, O God! We acknowledge you, O Lord!’³³ Also here present were Bishops Tellio of Palencia, Rodrigo of Siguenza, Menendo of Osma, Domenico of Placencia, and Pedro of Avila, as well as many other clerics singing canticles to the Lord. The field was so covered with the dead bodies of the Agarenes that even on the strongest of horses we could scarcely ride over their corpses without danger. There were indeed some Agarenes who were discovered near the barricade, tall of stature, bulging and fat, but what is wonderful to say is that although their headless bodies lay strewn around on all sides, and had already been plundered by the poor, no sign of blood could be found on the entire field. After these events, our men were by the grace of God unwilling to bring the battle to a close, but they pursued the enemy indefatigably in every direction until nightfall, and it was believed, so we reckoned, that 200,000 were killed, while we lost scarcely twenty-five.

(11) The Great Deeds of the Warriors

I do not believe that anyone could say enough about those things that were done [there], especially by the magnates, since no one was in a position to see everything in detail, such as how the valour and daring of the Aragonese made the slaughter possible, how manfully Eximino Cornelio and his followers advanced to strike the first blows, how magnificently Garcia Romero, Aznario Pardo and the other magnates of Aragon and Catalonia behaved while the battle was in doubt; how [too] with warlike agility the Navarrese threw themselves into the fray and harried the fugitives; how those from beyond the mountains who remained with us valiantly met the attacks of the Agarenes; and how the magnificent nobility of the Castilians with noble magnanimity supplied everything [that was needed] on a generous scale, stemmed danger with a valiant hand, speedily brought about victory with the sword, solving problems with a happy victory, changing the disdain of the Cross into glory, and making the blasphemies of the enemy sweet with canticles of praise. But if I wished to detail the great deeds of individuals, my hand would be unable to write fast

³³ *Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur*, the traditional hymn of thanksgiving, authorship of which the Middle Ages (wrongly) ascribed to St. Ambrose.

enough, for there would be no lack of material for me to discuss. For everyone was so furnished with protective grace that nobody among those who seemed to be anything, sought other than to win or to suffer martyrdom. After all these things had been successfully accomplished, we sat down exhausted in the tents of the Agarenes about sunset. We were, however, refreshed by joy on account of our victory; nor did any of our men return to the camp apart from servants carrying things back to the baggage. So great was the multitude in the camp of the Arabs that we were barely able to occupy half its space. Those who wanted to plunder found plenty to take in the camp, such as gold, silver, precious clothes, silk hangings and many other most valuable ornaments, as well as a great deal of money and precious vessels, nearly all of which was taken by the infantry and some of the Aragonese knights. But the majority, who were distinguished by their zeal for the Faith, reverence for the law and love of valour, ignored all this and manfully continued the pursuit until nightfall; and especially since on the previous day the archbishop of Toledo had prohibited on pain of anathema anyone from going to plunder the camp if Divine Providence should deign to grant us victory. The most keen mind could scarcely reckon how many camels and other animals, as well as foodstuffs, were found there. We remained in that same place, tired out, for [the rest of] that day and the next. The servants brought up the men, wagons, baggage and packs which had been left behind or abandoned because of the approach of battle. And although it seems barely credible, it is nonetheless true that in those two days we burned no other wood for the needs of everyone except the spears and arrows which the Agarenes had brought with them; however in those two days we were able to consume scarcely half, even though we deliberately placed on the fire not just what we needed but as much as we could to use up the multitude of this material.

(12) The Capture of Baeza and Ubeda and other Castles, and the Return of the Army

Then some of our men marched to besiege the very strong castle of Vilches. On the third day after the battle, that is the Wednesday,³⁴ we arrived and captured Vilches, along with three other castles; Ferral, Baños and Tolosa, which are through the grace of God inhabited by the faithful up to the present day; there we made a halt of one day. Then some of our men went on to the city of Baeza, which they found deserted, the Arabs having fled. Now well aware of the danger they were in, they took refuge in Ubeda, apart from some who were

³⁴ Counting inclusively, the battle having been on the Monday.

unable to walk [far?], who took refuge in their chapel, which is called the Mesquita, and perished by fire. On hearing this, the kings and princes by general agreement ordered that Ubeda be besieged. This took place on the Friday after the battle. Then, on the next Tuesday, the eighth day after the battle, they attacked the city, after invoking the name of Christ, and it so pleased the Lord that on the side where the Aragonese were stationed a certain squire (*armiger*), Lupo Ferrenzio de Luna, climbed the wall. After his ascent, the hearts of the defenders grew weak, and they surrendered themselves to the king's grace. There were intense negotiations about this, and the Saracens first of all offered a million gold pieces if the city should remain in their hands and undamaged. Some people were willing to accept this, although the kings were not very happy, but at the request of the magnates they concealed this. Finally, the archbishops of Toledo and Narbonne and the other bishops used their pontifical authority to forbid an agreement of this sort, and it happened that the city was razed to the ground. Nevertheless, to save their lives, the Saracens entered into captivity. But already the grace of God was growing cool because of the wickedness of men, for the Christians were led astray by greed and plundered and inflicted injuries [upon them]. As a result the Lord checked their mouth with his rein and struck them down with illness and problems, so that there was scarcely anyone in their tents who was able to assist their fellow soldiers or lords. We were thus forced by our situation to withdraw to Calatrava, where we found the duke of Austria, who had come from the German lands with a great following.³⁵ He, however, along with the king of Aragon, to whom he was related by blood, then returned to Aragon. We accompanied the noble King Alfonso to the city of Toledo, and when we arrived there we were received in procession with the bishops, clergy and all the people in the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many thanks were given to God, amid the playing of musical instruments, that He had returned their king to them, safe and unharmed, and crowned with victory. The army was then disbanded, and everyone returned to their homes. This was the end of the battle, which took place in the year 1250, on Monday 16th July.³⁶

³⁵ Leopold VI of Babenberg, Duke of Austria 1198-1230. He had taken the Cross in 1208, and had previously been in southern France, taking part in the Albigensian Crusade, but his stay in Spain was brief and he was back in Austria by the end of 1212, Georg Scheibelreiter, *Die Babenberger. Reichsfürsten und Landesherren* (Vienna 2010), pp. 286-7.

³⁶ By the Spanish era, actually 1212.

(13) The Capture of Albacete, Alcantara and of other Castles, and the Treaty with the King of Leon

After this, however, even though the people of the Christians were worn out by their efforts and illness, the noble king was unable to refrain from great deeds. He mustered his army, and in the month of February in that same year he attacked the castle of Dueñas with siege engines, took it and restored it to the brothers of Calatrava, to whom it had once belonged. Then, marching onwards, he captured a castle called Eznavecore, and gave it to the knights of Santiago. Then coming to a celebrated castle called Albacete, he laid siege to this for a long time, and through the Lord's help he captured it on Ascension Day of that same year, and the holy feast was solemnly celebrated by Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo and the clergy who were there who went in procession to the church of St. Ignatius, which had been a mosque. The king also took another castle, called Ríopar, driving the Arabs from it. And so, having returned to his own land, he celebrated the feast of Pentecost in a village of the church of Toledo called Santorcaz, in the presence of his wife Queen Eleanor, his son Henry and daughter Berengaria, Queen of Leon, and his grandsons Fernando and Alfonso, gloriously and with acts of charity.

However, it happened in that year that the judgement of God visited Spain; for in every part of the kingdom there was a shortage of foodstuffs, so that men seeking bread, since there was not enough to go round, lay in the squares and at cross roads dying of hunger, even though the noble king gave alms most generously, and the bishops, magnates, knights and commoners did all they could and shared what they had with the poor. Nor was this dearth confined to the harvest, for in that year birds, herds and flocks were similarly unfruitful and failed to produce offspring, while many horses and riding animals died through lack of grazing and barley. But although this great misfortune affected the country, the noble king could not be deflected from the high designs he had conceived in his heart, and he renewed the truce made with King Alfonso of Leon, once his son-in-law, and the king of Castile restored to him Carpio and Monreal, lest they remain abandoned any more.³⁷ And he sent to his assistance Diego Lopez of Faro, a noble and powerful magnate, and both kings agreed that each should lead their army across the borders of their kingdom against the Moors. The

³⁷ Carpio Bernardo and Monreal were both near Alba de Tormes, SE of Salamanca.

king of Leon began by taking the noble fortress of Alcántara, which he afterwards gave to the brothers of Calatrava.

(14) The Siege of Baeza, the Truce with the Arabs, the Settlement of Milagro and the Famine

Alfonso, the noble King of Castile mustered his army and entered the city of Toledo on 24th November in the year 1251.³⁸ Passing through Consuegra and Calatrava, he pitched camp around Baeza. But hunger grew so much there that they were forced to eat flesh to which humans were unaccustomed. The aforesaid Diego Lopez arrived there with a great force of troops. However, the king of Leon had returned to his own land after the capture of Alcantara. And when the siege of Baeza had dragged on for a long time, and no victuals had been brought there from their homeland, nearly everybody was suffering from hunger; hence on the advice of his men the noble king made a truce with the Arabs and returned to Calatrava. Since both the brothers [of the Order] and the secular people who dwelt there were suffering from famine and hunger, the barons and knights, and the rest of the people, came to their assistance, to the best of everyone's ability, and so this great hardship was overcome. Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo remembered the words of the Apostle John: 'Whoso seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'³⁹ Scripture also says, 'feed him who is dying of hunger, for if you do not do this you have killed him'.⁴⁰ He gave to the brothers all the money that he could find, and to prevent the frontier castles being left without inhabitants, he himself chose to impoverish himself along with the indigent, and to remain there for that time to aid and comfort that land. The king and his army went home, but the aforesaid pontiff remained at Calatrava with all the secular [brothers]⁴¹ from the feast of the Epiphany until the Octave of St. John, and every day he provided food [for them]. But during Lent they had arrived at such dire straits that the archbishop and the brothers of the chapter decided that, if the Lord did not provide anything else, it was better to eat meat rather than to abandon this land. But the Lord out of his abundant goodness mercifully provided for them, so that the aforesaid pontiff did

³⁸ Once again Rodrigo was using the Spanish era, which corresponds to 1213.

³⁹ *I John*, 3: 17.

⁴⁰ In fact, this is not a biblical reference, but from Gratian, *Decretum*, I Dist. Lxxxvi.21 (*Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. E. Friedberg, i.302).

⁴¹ The reference to *seculares* here probably means the members of the lay confraternity of the Order of Calatrava.

not lack food and that he might support the poverty of the brothers until the day when the land of the Lord might render up fruits to rich and poor [alike]. At this time the pontiff also brought people to settle in a castle called Milagro on the road by which the Arabs gravely threatened Toledo. But after he had stayed there for some little time, and the castle building had not advanced, hindered by heavy rain and floods, although he did what he could, he left knights and other warriors there to guard the lands of the new population. With the feast of Palm Sunday approaching, he went to the church of Toledo. There, while the festival procession was being solemnly celebrated, a hubbub arose from the needy, and this same pontiff preached the word of charity. The Almighty so inflamed the hearts of those who were listening that those who heard the word of the Lord followed his example and supported those who were known to be poor until harvest time; and so charity augmented the number of the graces, so that there was scarcely anyone in that great city who did not make his own distribution. But on the same day on which this charitable distribution took place, 700 Arab cavalry and 1400 infantry came to the castle of Milagro and made a fierce and daylong attack on those who were therein, so that barely any of those inside remained alive and unwounded. The Arabs, however, feared the steadfastness of those trapped there, and after many of them had been killed by their arrows, by the sword or by stones, they withdrew, and such was the slaughter among the besiegers that none of them could remain in the field. After the departure of the Arabs a messenger was sent to Archbishop Rodrigo, to whom they were subject. They received strong and unharmed reinforcements, and the wounded were sent to Toledo in wagons; there they could recover in proper comfort, remaining under medical care until they were restored to health. After arranging these matters, Archbishop Rodrigo went to the noble King Alfonso in Burgos, who commended his work for the Lord and gave him twenty estates [*aldeae*] for the church of Toledo to hold in perpetuity.

(15) The Death of the Noble King Alfonso

Having finished his fifty-second year as king, the noble King Alfonso summoned his son-in-law the king of Portugal to a conference.⁴² But while he was in the course of his journey to Plasencia, the furthest town under his lordship, he fell gravely ill at a village called Gutierre-Muñoz, near Avila. There he was consumed by fever, and he finished his life, and the glory of Castile was buried with him. Before he died he made his confession to

⁴² Alfonso II 'the Fat', King of Portugal 1211-25, had married the king of Castile's daughter Urraca.

Archbishop Rodrigo, and received the sacrament of the viaticum, with Bishops Tellio of Palencia and Domingo of Plasencia assisting.⁴³ The following night he rendered up his holy spirit to the Creator who had given it to him, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, not full of days but rather of virtues and honour.⁴⁴ There was universal lamentation, and both the magnates and all the people were left desolate. His body was placed in an appropriate coffin, and that day we arrived at Valledolid. Then from every part of the kingdom bishops and abbots, regular and secular clergy, knights and magnates, humble and great, gathered for the funeral of this great man. For news of his death wounded the hearts of all, almost as if they had suddenly been hit by an arrow or a javelin. For courage, generosity, courtliness, wisdom and modesty so revealed themselves in him from his childhood that after his death all these qualities were believed to have been buried with him. For everyone, not only in his own lands but in other parts of Spain, with the reins restraining self-indulgence released, let their natural propensities run riot and did as they pleased, showing no restraint once they had lost the treasure-houses of respectability. He was buried in the royal monastery near Burgos, by Rodrigo of Toledo, and Bishops Tellio of Plasencia, Rodrigo of Siguenza, Menendo of Osma and Girardo of Segovia,⁴⁵ along with other men of religion. His daughter Queen Berengaria was present at the solemn interment of his corpse, and was so consumed with grief at his funeral that with tears and tearing at herself she came close to expiring. And so just as in his life he filled his kingdom with his good qualities, so at his death he made Spain, or rather the whole world, wet with tears. He was buried in the aforesaid monastery by these bishops, where neither rumour, nor envy nor forgetfulness will be able to silence praise of him.

⁴³ Domingo, Bishop of Plasencia 1214-33. For the other bishops, see above note 23.

⁴⁴ He was actually fifty-nine, having been born in 1155, and become king at the age of three.

⁴⁵ Girardo, Bishop of Segovia 1214-25.