CHAPTER FIVE

ALFONSO, KING OF THE ROMANS

1. The Election

The support of Pisa and Marseille, of the king of Norway, and in particular the good news coming from Rome made Alfonso optimistic about the possibility of obtaining the imperial crown. But an unexpected obstacle to his aspirations emerged: Richard of Cornwall’s candidacy. Richard was the brother of Henry III of England, who, at least at the time, was the ally of Alfonso X. Richard’s family ties with the Staufens were tenuous and remote (he was Frederick II’s brother-in-law), but he had great personal prestige and was a very wealthy man. Both Richard and Alfonso sent their representatives to Germany in order to obtain votes in exchange for a great deal of money and other promises. Richard’s representative was Johann van Avesnes and Alfonso’s, the aforementioned archdeacon García Pérez, very active and skillful in public relations, whom Alfonso rewarded with much gold.1

The election that was to take place on January 13, 1257 in Frankfurt was truly chaotic. Alfonso’s supporters, the Archbishop of Trier, Arnold of Ysenburg, and Duke Albert of Saxony, did not allow the supporter of Richard, Conrad, Bishop of Cologne, to enter into the city. But Conrad was not intimidated, and he met outside the city with Archbishop Gerhard of Mainz and the count of the Palatinate, Ludwig of Bavaria, to elect Richard of Cornwall as King of the Romans.2 As expected, Alfonso’s main supporter, Arnold of Trier, refused to accept the validity of the election, and meeting with the representatives of Saxony and Brandenburg on April 1, 1257, Palm Sunday, he secured their votes for Alfonso X at the price of 20,000 marks each.3

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1 Cf. A. Ballesteros, “Alfonso X de Castilla y la Corona de Alemania,” RABM, (1919); and Alfonso X, pp. 175–212.
3 That is at least what Thomas Wikes claims. Indignantly, Mondéjar denies that Alfonso would have resorted to the “indecent means of a bribe.” Jofré de Loaysa says
They each thus had three votes, but were still missing the vote of the King Ottokar of Bohemia, nephew of Alfonso’s mother Beatriz of Swabia, and hence Alfonso’s first cousin. It appears that Ottokar at first voted for both candidates. Finally, after hesitating, the Bohemian king favored Alfonso, making his election as King of the Romans official. This double election makes obvious the profound divisions in European Christendom at the time.\(^4\)

Alfonso’s chronicler narrates these events in a concise fashion, only to emphasize that Alfonso’s election garnered him great prestige but at a high cost to his subjects. Another 15 years would have to go by, as well as incalculable expenses that bankrupted Castile, before the problem of the Interregnum was solved.\(^5\)

Alfonso was officially informed of the election on August 15, 1257, when a German delegation headed by Eberhard of Waldburg, Bishop of Konstanz, arrived in Burgos.\(^6\) Following the protocol, Alfonso requested three days to deliberate on the acceptance. On the third day, in a solemn ceremony before the German delegates and the entire court, he formally accepted the result of the election, declaring he did so following the advice of the illustrious monarchs of France, Hungary, Aragón, Portugal, and Navarra. He also claimed he did so, not out of the ambition to govern more lands or obtain greater power or riches, but out of the desire to maintain peace, justice, and freedom in the Empire and to serve the greater glory of God and the people’s benefit.\(^7\) He then proceeded to set up his imperial court, naming as senescal or main caretaker Albert, Lord of Vienne; as chancellor, Enrique, bishop-elect of Spira; and his cousin, Enrique, Duke of Brabant and the son of his

in his Crónica (chap. 219, 6–7, p. 68) that Alfonso was elected by four votes, while Richard obtained only three. Cf. Ballesteros, Alfonso X, p. 177–183 and 454–459; Bayley, "Diplomatic Preliminaries," pp. 473–481.


\(^6\) The CAX mistakenly locates these events in 1268, but their description is quite precise (chap. 18, pp. 68–70).

\(^7\) See the text of the declaration in E. Winkelmann, Acta imperii inedita saeculi XIII et XIV. Urkunden und Briefe zur Geschichte des Kaiserreichs und des Königreichs in Sizilien in den Jahren 1198 bis 1400, 2 vol., Innsbruck: Wagner, 1880, I, p. 463, no. 578.