CHAPTER TWELVE

DON SANCHO IS DECLARED SUCCESSOR

1. The Burgos and the Segovia Cortes

Ill in Burgos and deprived of the support of the majority of his nobles and allies who had fled to France to seek the king’s protection following the executions of don Fadrique and Simón de los Cameros, Alfonso summoned new Cortes in Burgos in order to request the military and economic support he would need against the feared invasion. The documents show that these Cortes had already begun May 9. None of the dissident nobles alluded to above (such as Lope Díaz de Haro, Núñez de Lara, etc.) were present, nor are the names of Fadrique or Simón mentioned, which confirms that the execution had already taken place. Don Sancho’s name does not appear either, because, Ballesteros argues, “he was fulfilling his mission of justice in la Rioja and in the county of Treviño” (Alfonso X, p. 837).

During the Cortes meetings, the representatives of the nobility, the towns, and the Church sent a plea to pope John XXI relating the deplorable state of the economy as a result of the flight of capital, for the most recent coinages had contained a large amount of silver and the powerful were obviously hoarding them to the detriment of the population, who no longer had currency with which to pay for their basic needs.¹ In other words, the opposite of what happened at the beginning of Alfonso’s reign was now taking place. Then, to increase the circulation of the currency, Alfonso had reduced the silver content, a monetary policy decision that caused inflation and rising prices. The same document reports something not mentioned in the CAX, namely, how Alfonso found out about the second invasion of the North African Moors.² In order to counter the lack of currency, and to collect the funds necessary to defend the southern border, the representatives at the Cortes sent their plea to the pope imploring that they be absolved

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¹ The text of the plea in RABM, 1 época, tomo II, p. 58.
² See above chap. 11, note 54; and Ballesteros, Alfonso X, p. 837.
from their oath to not coin any other currency except the “dineros prietos” (i.e., money with low silver content).

Despite the complaints at the Cortes regarding the economic situation of the country and the poverty of all who did not have enough to afford the high prices, let alone to pay new taxes, Alfonso was still able to have a new annual tribute approved that no future king would be able to collect. The new tribute would help finance the defense of the South from Moorish attacks. At the end of 1277, the assemblies at the Cortes were finished, and Alfonso remained in Burgos at least until March 11, 1278. Surprisingly, these Cortes did not deal with the matter of succession, which had caused so many problems in the kingdom and was still not completely resolved.

During this period, the popes—first the Portuguese Pedro Julião Rabello, who took the name John XXI (1276–1277); and later the Italian Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, who called himself Nicholas III (1277–1280)—began the first initiatives to broker a truce between the kings of Castile and France. But Alfonso, who besides being ill was not very willing to negotiate what he believed belonged to him by legal right, did not attend the meeting, sending instead a delegate, Juan of Galicia, who excused his sovereign saying that the city where the meeting was scheduled, Toulouse, was too far and was not on neutral territory. On the other hand, the pope’s suggestion that if the king of Castile were too ill to attend the meeting, he should send don Sancho, did not sit well with Alfonso; at that moment the issue of the succession was at stake, and although Alfonso had decided to name don Sancho his heir, knowing his son, the king was afraid he would dethrone him. Alfonso deemed it counterproductive to send his son to negotiate what as already non-negotiable. Alfonso may have been ill, but regarding the succession he had very clear ideas, and to safeguard them, he had even broken his promise to the king of France to submit the nomination to a royal Church tribunal of prelates and barons before Christmas 1277. Nicholas III did not appreciate this, sending to Alfonso, according to Ballesteros, “one of the strongest letters found in the Vatican

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