Beyond the Border
The Aristocratic mobility between the kingdoms of Portugal and León (1157-1230)

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Abstract

During the reigns of Fernando II and Alfonso IX, the kingdom of León became home to several Portuguese aristocrats. Their relations with the Galician and Leonese nobility helped them create many cross-border ties and a powerful network of family-based relationships, which heavily influenced the course of the main political conflicts of this period. In this article, the authors try to situate these migrations in their context, analyzing their cycles, causes and favorable conditions, describing each of these exiles and assessing their influence on both Portuguese and Leonese politics.

Keywords

Migrations, cross-border, exile, León, Portugal, Galicia, kinship

Resumo

Durante os reinados de Fernando II e Afonso IX, o reino de Leão transformou-se num lar para vários aristocratas portugueses. As suas relações com a nobreza galega e leonesa ajudaram a criar vários laços transfronterizos e uma forte rede de relações familiares, que tiveram uma grande influência no curso dos principais conflitos políticos deste período. Neste artigo, os autores tentam colocar estas migrações no seu contexto, analisar os seus ciclos, causas e condições favoráveis, descrever cada um destes exílios e avaliar a sua influência sobre a política portuguesa e leonesa.

Palavras-chave

Migrações, transfronteriço, exílio, Leão, Portugal, Galiza, laços familiares

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1. Introduction

1.1. The “state of the art”

The study of aristocratic mobility between the kingdoms of Portugal, León and Castile started with the now classic article by José Mattoso about Knights-Errant – *Cavaleiros Andantes* (2001) – in which he analyzes the migrations of several nobles during the 12th and 13th centuries. This subject subsequently evolved into an integral part of some of his later works, such as *A Nobreza Medieval Portuguesa: A Família e o Poder* (2001), *A Nobreza Medieval Galaico-Portuguesa: A Identidade e a Diferença* (2002) and *A Nobreza Medieval Portuguesa no Contexto Peninsular* (2000). A few years later, Henrique David produced two articles about the Portuguese noblemen who participated in the reconquest of Andalusia and who received estates both through its *repartimientos* (David, 1986) and in the campaigns of Murcia and Valencia (David, 1989). Together with Sottomayor-Pizarro, David also analyzed the Portuguese who settled in León and Castile before and after the civil war that opposed Sancho II to his brother Afonso III of Portugal, as well as the network of kinships and family-based solidarities that they created in the court of Alfonso X (David and Sottomayor-Pizarro, 1987). Sottomayor-Pizarro recently returned to this subject with the publication of his magnificent synthesis *De e para Portugal* (2010), in which he contextualizes the migratory flows of the Portuguese nobility to León and Castile between the 12th and 15th centuries.

Medieval literary and cultural history has also benefited from several important works that studied the first generations of Galician-Portuguese troubadours, among which we can include those by Miranda (2004), Resende de Oliveira (1994), and Souto Cabo (2012).

Over the last few years, the authors of this article have worked simultaneously, but from different perspectives, on aristocratic mobility between Portugal and Léon during the period from 1157 to 1230. João Ferreira studied the different migration cycles of the Portuguese nobles who settled in León, as well as the causes, constraints and factors that determined their movements (Ferreira, 2009). At the same time, Inés Calderón sought to identify several aristocrats who joined the Leonese court during the crucial moments of this period, in which they were able to achieve important positions and forge bonds with some of the most important Leonese and Galician families, including the royal family (Calderón Medina, 2011). Their work proved to be fruitful, so that the authors of this article decided...
to continue exploring this theme, seeking to gather their conclusions together and present them in this synthesis of aristocratic mobility during the reigns of Fernando II and Alfonso IX of León.

1.2. The political and territorial context of the kingdoms

Alfonso VII died in August 1157, leaving the kingdoms of his empire to his two sons: Sancho received Castile, and Fernando was crowned king of León. Although several nobles had estates on both sides of the border, the division of the two kingdoms, which until then had been united under one single rule, led to some conflicts among the aristocracy.

Part of the Galician nobility, led by Count Fernão Peres de Trava (the former tutor of the Infante Dom Fernando), became the main supporters of the new king, who was now faced with the power of Sancho III of Castile and the impetus of the new-born kingdom of Portugal. In May 1158, the two brothers signed a pact in Sahagún by means of which they partitioned the lands seized in the south, giving Portugal no chance of expansion in this region. Months later, Sancho of Castile died and left the throne to his three-year-old son, Alfonso VIII. Fernando II became the tutor of the king of Castile (1161) and, later on, of the king of Aragón, Alfonso II (1162), turning him into the most powerful Christian king in the Peninsula. Afonso Henriques, who, during this decade, had fought the king of León for control of the border territory of Toroño and Limia, understood that the survival of his kingdom depended on the reconquest of Muslim territories. In 1165, at Lérez, they signed a pact that regulated the ownership of these lands and resulted in the marriage of Fernando II to the Portuguese Infanta Urraca Afonso. After several victories during the 1160s, the Portuguese monarch decided to attack the stronghold of Badajoz in 1169, but he was unsuccessful due to the intervention of Fernando II. The Leonese sovereign had allied himself with the Muslims, in order to stop the Portuguese reconquest and to keep this part of the south for himself. During the battle, Afonso Henriques was badly wounded and was captured by his son-in-law, who kept him prisoner for four months. The campaign of Badajoz had serious consequences for Afonso Henriques and his nobility.

During the 1180s, the power enjoyed by Fernando II of León grew weaker because of the direct intervention of the Haros in his political sphere. They began to replace the traditional Galician and Leonese aristocracy who surrounded the king. In 1185, Afonso
Henriques died and left his throne to his son, Sancho. Fernando II then died in 1188, leaving behind a situation of open conflict between his firstborn, the Infante Alfonso, and the Haros. This Castilian family wanted to place the Infante Sancho Fernández, their nephew, on the throne. The king of León had married Urraca López de Haro in 1183, and the Infantes Sancho and Fernando were born from this union. The almost simultaneous successions in both kingdoms initiated an important cycle of aristocratic mobility and strengthened the power of the king of Castile.

During the 1190s, relations between León and Portugal were very unstable, oscillating between the alliance created by the pact of 1191, subsequently sealed by the marriage of Alfonso IX of León to the Portuguese Infanta Teresa Sanches, and the rupture caused by the annulment of this same union in 1194 or the open war caused by the Portuguese occupation of Tui in 1196. However, the situation became calmer until the death of Sancho I of Portugal in 1211, when a new conflict broke out between the new king, Afonso II, and his sisters, led by Teresa Sanches, the former wife of the Leonese monarch (who also became involved in this war).

This war led to the emigration of an important section of Teresa’s supporters. In León, they became actively involved in the crisis caused by the death of the Infante Fernando (1214), the son of Teresa and Alfonso IX, and in the claim to the throne of his sisters Sancha and Dulce, in detriment to their half-brother, the new king of Castile. This was one of the reasons why a great number of Portuguese aristocrats, who had already supported their mother, stayed in León until the death of Alfonso IX in 1230.

2. Cycles, causes and favorable conditions

2.1. Cycles

During this period, the Portuguese elites established contacts with their neighbors through two main cycles of emigration to the kingdom of León. These cycles were the natural consequence of the wave of Galician-Leonese immigration that occurred between the last years of the 11th century and the first decades of the 13th.

The newly-gained economic and social power of the portucalense families, the existence of a society that was open to cross-border contacts, the interesting nature of the Portuguese political project, and the chance to acquire new estates on the Muslim border, led several foreign families to become members of the Portuguese court. In the upper