

The Gibraltar Crusade

Castile and the Battle for the Strait

Joseph F. O'Callaghan



The Gibraltar Crusade

THE MIDDLE AGES SERIES

Ruth Mazo Karras, Series Editor
Edward Peters, Founding Editor

A complete list of books in the series is available from the publisher.

The Gibraltar Crusade

Castile and the Battle for the Strait

Joseph F. O'Callaghan

PENN

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

PHILADELPHIA

Copyright © 2011 University of Pennsylvania Press

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations used for purposes of review or scholarly citation, none of this book may be reproduced in any form by any means without written permission from the publisher.

Published by
University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112
www.upenn.edu/pennpress

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
O'Callaghan, Joseph F.

The Gibraltar crusade : Castile and the battle for the Strait / Joseph F. O'Callaghan.

p. cm. — (The Middle Ages series)

978-0-8122-4302-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Crusades—13th–15th centuries. 2. Gibraltar, Strait of—Strategic aspects. 3. Gibraltar, Strait of—History, Military. 4. Castile (Spain)—History, Military. 5. Spain—History—711–1516. 6. Morocco—History, Military. 7. Granada (Kingdom)—History, Military. I. Title.

II. Series

DP302.G39 O58 2011

946'.02—dc22

2010023080

In Honor of My Masters

Cyril E. Smith

James S. Donnelly, Sr.

Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan

Gerhart B. Ladner

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Genealogical Tables	xi
Chapter 1. Spain and the Strait of Gibraltar	i
Chapter 2. Alfonso X's African Crusade	ii
Chapter 3. The Crusade Against the Mudéjars	34
Chapter 4. The Crusade Against the Marinids	60
Chapter 5. Sancho IV and the Conquest of Tarifa	88
Chapter 6. The Crusades of Gibraltar, Almería, and Algeciras	112
Chapter 7. The Early Crusades of Alfonso XI's Reign	137
Chapter 8. The Loss of Gibraltar and the Crusade of Salado	162
Chapter 9. The Crusade of Algeciras and Gibraltar	189
Chapter 10. Waging the Crusade of Gibraltar	218
Chapter 11. The Aftermath: The Strait of Gibraltar to 1492	256
List of Abbreviations	267
Notes	271

Bibliography 337

Index 365

Acknowledgments 375

Illustrations

FIGURES

1. King of Granada besieges Chincoya Castle 42–43
2. Christian knights defeat Marinid emir 64
3. Muslims besiege Christian town 106
4. Christians battle Muslims 230

MAPS

1. Castilian-Granadan frontier, ca. 1252–1350 2
2. Battle of Salado, 1340 181
3. Siege of Algeciras, 1342–44 194

This page intentionally left blank

Genealogical Tables

TABLE 1
KINGS OF CASTILE-LEÓN

Fernando III 1217-52								
Alfonso X Fadrique Enrique Felipe Manuel Leonor m. Edward I of England 1252-84 d.1277 d.1303 d.1274 d.1283								
Fernando de la Cerda d. 1275		Sancho IV 1284-95 m. María de Molina			Pedro d. 1283		Juan Jaime d.1319 d. 1284	
Alfonso	Fernando	Fernando IV 1295-1312			Pedro d.1319	Felipe d.1327	Juan el Tuerto d.1326	
		Alfonso XI 1312-50						

TABLE 2
KINGS OF ARAGÓN

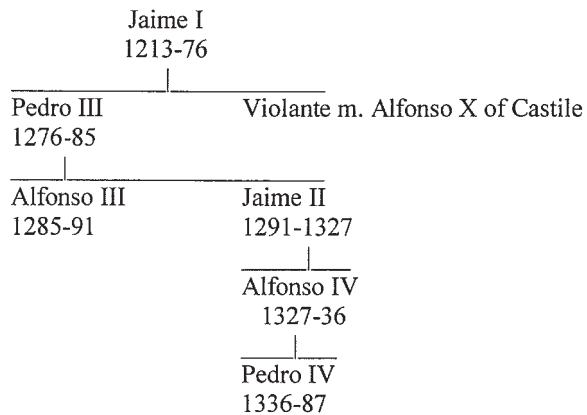


TABLE 3
KINGS OF PORTUGAL

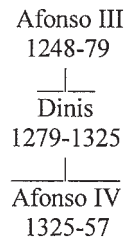


TABLE 4
THE NASRID KINGS OF GRANADA

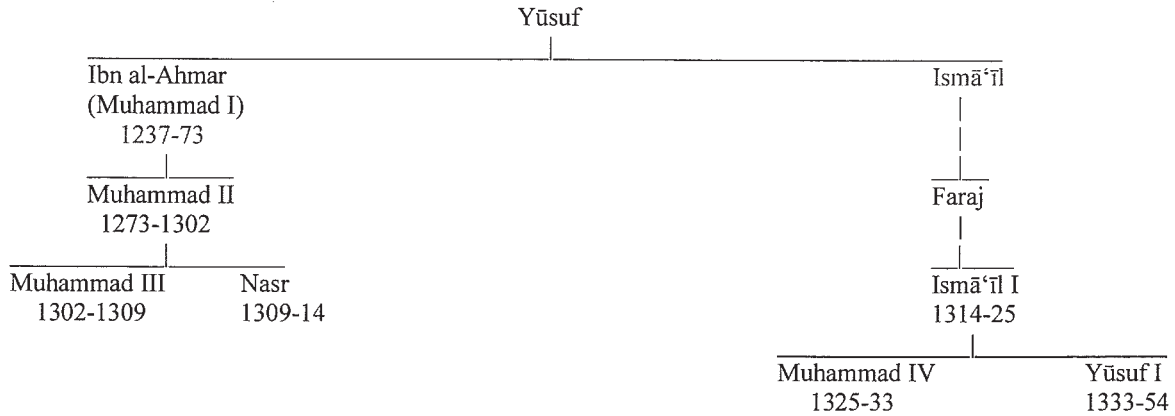


TABLE 5
THE MARINID SULTANS OF MOROCCO

Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb 1259-86		
Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf 1286-1307		Abū Sa‘īd ‘Uthmān 1310-31
Abū Āmir ‘Abd Allāh		Abū l-Hasan ‘Alī 1331-48
Abū l-Rabī‘ Sulaymān 1308-10	Abū Ṭābit 1307-8	Abū ‘Inān Fāris 1348-58

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Spain and the Strait of Gibraltar

The epic battle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar waged by Castile, Morocco, and Granada in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is a major, but often overlooked, chapter in the history of the Christian reconquest of Spain. It must also be seen in the broader context of the confrontation between Christianity and Islam during the crusading era.

The reconquest reached a climax with the fall of Seville in 1248 and the submission of the Moorish kingdom of Granada as a Castilian vassal state. The ensuing Castilian attempt to dominate the Strait is often regarded as a secondary episode in the reconquest. For some, the reconquest becomes important again only in the late fifteenth century when Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada, the last Muslim outpost in Spain. However, Castilian success in the fourteenth century in denying the Moroccans easy access to Spain made possible the ultimate conquest of Granada.

While Castile contested the battle for the Strait at the western end of the Mediterranean, the crusader states in the Holy Land ceased after 1291. Despite that overwhelming loss, the papacy, well into the fourteenth century, persistently attempted to convince western European rulers to liberate the Holy Land. Acknowledging the significance of that task, the Castilian kings contended that the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula constituted a more immediate threat to Western Europe. Indeed, successive popes had recognized the importance of the reconquest by granting crusading privileges to those who participated in it.¹ As a continuation of that enterprise, the struggle to command the Strait also received the character of a crusade. The kings of Castile suggested that, once they had overthrown peninsular Islam and gained a base in Morocco, they could participate in a general European crusade to rescue the Holy Land.

The Strait, the Link Between Africa and Europe

For centuries the Strait of Gibraltar served, not as a barrier severing Europe from Africa, but as a bridge between the two continents. In Roman times the province of Mauritania Tingitana (now Morocco) formed part of a larger administrative unit known as the Diocese of Spain. When the Visigoths established their dominance over all of Spain in the sixth century they also asserted claims to Mauritania, but it is difficult to ascertain the extent of their authority there.²

Intent on spreading God's word, the Muslims raced across North Africa in the seventh century and traversed the Strait into Spain in 711. Within the century they were masters of the greater part of the Peninsula, or al-Andalus. Communication between al-Andalus and Morocco thereafter was continuous as a steady flow of warriors, farmers, herders, craftsmen, and merchants crossed and recrossed the Strait. Volunteers, determined to gain merit by engaging in the *jihād*, or holy war, also entered Spain. Scholars introduced the philosophical, medical, scientific, and religious ideas of the Hellenistic world. The great Muslim cities of Córdoba, Seville, Málaga, Granada, and Almería were now connected with the larger Islamic empire stretching across the Mediterranean. To the Arabs ancient Mauritania now became al-Magrib al-akṣa, the far west. Medieval Christians called it Morocco in reference to the capital city of Marrakech.³

In the tenth century the caliph of Córdoba attempted to create a western Islamic empire straddling the Strait, but the collapse of the caliphate in the next century severed that connection. Nevertheless, Islamic Spain was destined to be part of a Moroccan empire ruled by the Almoravids in the late eleventh century and the Almohads in the twelfth.⁴ The Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn articulated the significance of Spain for the Islamic world:

From the time that Spain was conquered by the Muslims, that land beyond the sea has always been a frontier of their empire, the setting for their holy wars, the field of martyrdom, and the gateway to eternal happiness for their soldiers. Muslim institutions in that country were constantly on a flaming brazier, so to speak, placed as they were between the claws and fangs of the lions of infidelity. Surrounded by a mass of hostile people, the true believers of Spain still find themselves separated from their coreligionists by the sea.⁵

Although the Christian kingdoms that survived the Muslim conquest were kept on the defensive, Alfonso VI (1065–1109), king of León-Castile, reached the southernmost extremity of the Peninsula at Tarifa. Riding out into the surf, he exclaimed in exultation: “This is the end of the land of al-Andalus and I have set foot on it.”⁶ Nevertheless, more than two centuries were to elapse before his successors could replicate that grand gesture.

The Ports of the Strait of Gibraltar

The Strait of Gibraltar, leading from the Mediterranean Sea into the Atlantic Ocean, is about thirty-six miles long and nine miles wide at its narrowest point. The depth of its waters varies between 980 and 3,000 feet. On the Spanish coast at the eastern end of the Strait, the Rock of Gibraltar, a limestone mountain, stands 1,396 feet high. Dominating Ceuta on the Moroccan shore, Mount Acho rises about 787 feet. Only fourteen miles apart, the Rock and Mount Acho, the ancient Pillars of Hercules, marked the farthest limits of the Mediterranean. Gibraltar (*Jabal Tārik*, the Rock of Tārik), about three miles long and a quarter mile wide, is connected to the Spanish mainland by a low-lying sandy isthmus.

The Bay of Algeciras, with a maximum depth of about 1,312 feet, forms a nearly full circle reaching from the Rock at the eastern end to Algeciras (al-Jazīrah al-Khadrā', the Green Island) on the west, a distance of six miles. The Miel and the Palmones Rivers flow into the bay while hills lead from the mountains down to the shore. About ten miles southwest of Algeciras is Tarifa, where hills rise gently from the beach to more than 500 feet. The strong winds from the Atlantic and from the Strait that make Tarifa a mecca for modern windsurfers wreaked havoc on Muslim and Christian fleets, especially in the fall and winter months. From Tarifa the shortest distance to Africa is nine miles. The struggle to rule the Strait focused on possession of these three sites, Gibraltar, Algeciras, and Tarifa.

Two ports served as points of embarkation for Moroccan armies invading Spain: Tangier on the Atlantic coast at the western end of the Strait and Ceuta about thirty miles to the east on the Mediterranean. Tangier, about thirty-six miles southwest of Gibraltar, was once the capital of Roman Mauritania. Ceuta is fourteen miles from Gibraltar. Ibn Khaldūn stated that “Ceuta and Tangier were always thought of as the most important governmental seats in the Almohad Empire, because they were both maritime fortresses, seaports,

arsenals for shipbuilding, and points of embarkation for those wishing to participate in the holy war. On that account governance of those places was always entrusted to princes of the royal family.⁷⁷

Islamic Spain in 1248

After the conquest of Seville in 1248 Islamic Spain was reduced to several kingdoms occupying a comparatively narrow belt of land generally south and east of the Guadalquivir River and reaching the shores of the Mediterranean. The Portuguese had occupied the Algarve, the southernmost section of modern Portugal, situated west of the Guadiana River. The region between the Guadiana and the Guadalquivir was subject to the Muslim king of Niebla. The largest of the Islamic kingdoms was Granada, whose boundaries roughly curved northward from Algeciras and Gibraltar through the mountains east and south of Seville, Córdoba, and Jaén and then southward to the Mediterranean coast below Murcia. Situated north and east of Granada was the kingdom of Murcia, extending along the coast from below Cartagena northward through Alicante almost to Denia.⁸ Lying to the north were the dominions of the Crown of Aragón.

Numerous mountain ranges intersecting the kingdom of Granada served as an obstacle to easy conquest. Castles set on rocky mounts surveying the surrounding plain provided an initial line of defense and protection for the many small villages dotting the valleys and plateaus. Densely populated, the kingdom included many refugees from Christian Spain or their descendants. An abundance of wheat, fruits, olives, grapes, and other fruits and vegetables, as well as an active commerce with the Mediterranean world contributed to the general prosperity.

The Mediterranean clearly defined the southern boundary of the kingdom. Starting at Aguilas adjoining the kingdom of Murcia on the northeast, the coastline extends southward to Cabo de Gata and then west to Almería, a major seaport on the gulf of the same name. West of Almería are Almuñécar, Málaga, Marbella, Estepona, Gibraltar, and Algeciras.⁹

The inland frontier of the kingdom of Granada, a fluid zone rather than a fixed line, is less easily defined, as Christians and Muslims competed for control of certain regions. Frequent skirmishes, sieges, and even major battles occurred along the frontier with the Castilian kingdoms of Seville, Córdoba, and Jaén. The kingdom of Seville stretched southward from the city on the

Guadalquivir to the Gulf of Cádiz and beyond. After flowing about fifty miles the river empties into the Atlantic at Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Jerez de la Frontera is about twelve miles southeast of Sanlúcar. Eight miles south of Jerez is El Puerto de Santa María and about eight miles across the Gulf of Cádiz lies Cádiz itself. The coastline then turns to the southeast, passing by Vejer de la Frontera (about twenty-eight miles from Cádiz) and finally reaching Tarifa (about another twenty-eight miles from Vejer), directly opposite Morocco. Until 1292 the boundary between Christian and Muslim territory lay somewhere between Vejer and Tarifa.

Lying east and south of the Guadalquivir was a broad sector not entirely dominated by either side. Clashes of arms frequently occurred in this no-man's-land. A line of Castilian fortresses running westward from Estepa, through Osuna, La Puebla de Cazalla, and then turning southward to Morón de la Frontera, Arcos de la Frontera, and Vejer de la Frontera guarded the kingdom of Seville. Just east of that line were the Muslim strongholds of Pruna, Olvera, Zahara, Alcalá de los Gazules, and Jimena de la Frontera. Another series of Castilian outposts, namely, Cabra, Aguilar de la Frontera, Baena, Martos, La Guardia, Pegalajar, Jódar, Cazorla, and Castril defended the kingdoms of Córdoba and Jaén. Standing opposite them were the Granadan fortresses of Benamejí, Lucena, Luque, Rute, Zambra, Alcaudete, Bedmar, Quesada, Tíscar, and Huéscar. Beyond Huéscar, the frontier between Granada and Murcia underwent the least alteration during this period, although both sides frequently crossed the border with hostile intent.¹⁰

Fernando III, Granada, Morocco, and the Holy Land

By the middle of the thirteenth century, Castile, alone among the Christian states, had a frontier adjoining that of the kingdom of Granada. Thus, only Castile had a realistic possibility of peninsular expansion at Muslim expense. The Muslim kings of Granada, Niebla, and Murcia had all acknowledged the suzerainty of Fernando III (1217–52), the conqueror of Seville.¹¹ In 1246 Muhammad ibn Yūsuf ibn Nasr, known as Ibn al-Ahmar or Muhammad I (1237–73), king of Granada, pledged homage and fealty to him, promising court service, military service, and an annual tribute (*parias*). A truce of twenty years enabled him to consolidate his power in Granada. The Nasrid dynasty, which he founded, governed Granada until 1492. In like manner, Ibn Mahfūt, king of Niebla, and Ibn Hūd, king of Murcia, also accepted Castilian overlordship.¹²

Although the Moors no longer loomed as a threat to Christian Spain, Fernando III and his successors intended ultimately to expel them from the Peninsula. As early as the ninth century, if not before, the idea emerged that the Christian rulers of Asturias-León-Castile were the heirs of the Visigoths and as such had the obligation of recovering lands once subject to Visigothic rule, including the entire Iberian Peninsula and Mauritania. The Muslims were regarded as intruders who had usurped lands rightfully belonging to the Christians. The expulsion of the Moors and the reestablishment of Gothic rule over the whole of Spain was an ideal repeatedly expressed by Christian authors. The kings of Castile-León also aspired to conquer Morocco, believing that it had once been part of the Visigothic realm.¹³ In more practical terms, the kings recognized the need to shut off the invasion route giving the Moroccans entry into the Peninsula by seizing Tarifa, Algeciras, and Gibraltar. If that could be accomplished, they hoped to isolate the kings of Granada and deprive them of receiving aid from their Moroccan coreligionists.

Secure in his ascendancy over the Moors of Spain, Fernando III proposed to establish a foothold in Morocco and also contemplated the possibility of leading a crusade to the Holy Land. With that in mind, he ordered the construction of galleys and other vessels. Many Moroccan lords, fearing his power, reportedly intended to surrender rather than oppose him. In the *Setenario* Alfonso X indicated that his father, by virtue of “his pacts with the Moors of Spain and with some of those in Africa,” had great wealth, but as “the land beyond the sea was not wholly conquered and the Moors remained there,” he was reluctant to assume the imperial crown of Spain.¹⁴ Juan Gil de Zamora commented that “the Africans also offered him part of Africa.”¹⁵ These texts suggest that some Moroccan lords, like the kings of Granada, Niebla, and Murcia, paid tribute to Fernando III, but, as the greater part of Morocco was not subject to his rule, the Hispanic empire was incomplete.

By preparing a fleet at Seville, Fernando III likely intended to seize certain Moroccan seaports as a preliminary to a crusade to the Holy Land. In 1252 Pope Innocent IV approved a pact between the king and the Almohad caliph of Morocco. Although its provisions are unknown, Fernando III may have secured the caliph’s pledge not to interfere with a possible eastern crusade.¹⁶ The English historian Matthew Paris related that when Louis IX of France (1223–70) was captured in 1250 during his crusade to Egypt, Fernando III “took the cross, believing that to conquer the Holy Land was worthier than any other [deed].” Learning that King Henry III of England (1216–72) was planning a crusade to the Holy Land, he urged him to come first to Castile where he

would provide him with supplies, arms, and a fleet and accompany him on his journey. Matthew Paris lamented that Fernando III's death in that year brought to naught his plans for a crusade. Louis IX, liberated from captivity but determined to recover the Holy Land, also had reason to deplore the death of Fernando III, "who, on account of his eminence, is called king of all Spain," and had gained great conquests over the infidels there. Louis IX's mother, Blanche of Castile, made frequent entreaties to her nephew Fernando III, who promised prompt and effective aid to the king of France. That was not to be.¹⁷ The battle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar began in earnest with his son and successor, Alfonso X (1252–84).

Sources for Study

The principal Christian narratives for this period are the *Chronicles* of Alfonso X, Sancho IV, Fernando IV, and Alfonso XI, written in Castilian.¹⁸ In the prologue to the *Tres Crónicas*, as the first three are known, the author emphasized the importance of recording the efforts of the Castilian kings to increase the Catholic faith by expelling the Moors from Spain. Alfonso XI, on discovering that the written history of the royal house ended with Fernando III,¹⁹ commissioned an official account of the reigns of his three predecessors. As the prologue included Algeciras among his dominions, it was written after March 1344, but the date of initial composition of the full text is uncertain.

Alfonso XI apparently assigned the task of writing the *Tres Crónicas* to Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid (or de Tovar), the chancellor of the privy seal and chief notary of Castile. He is also the likely author of the *Chronicle of Alfonso XI*, a detailed account down to 1344. A few additional paragraphs summarize the king's last six years. The four chronicles follow an annalistic form, but the chronology does not always accord with documentary evidence. As a staunch royalist, the author's tone is laudatory and he is seldom critical of the monarchs he writes about. The original *Chronicle*, reedited between 1376 and 1379, is known today as the *Grand Chronicle of Alfonso XI*. Some chapters were expanded and others added, but the last section on the siege of Algeciras repeats the earlier text. Its picturesque and dramatic style distinguishes it from the more sober presentation of Fernán Sánchez.²⁰ Closely paralleling the prose *Chronicle* is Rodrigo Yáñez's *Poem of Alfonso XI*, a reasonably accurate presentation ending in 1344. The poet is clearly biased in favor of the king.²¹

Jofre de Loaysa, archdeacon of Toledo (d. 1307/10), composed a brief

chronicle of the reigns of Alfonso X, Sancho IV, and Fernando IV down to 1305. As one intimately associated with the royal court, he is generally positive toward the kings. Though he wrote in Castilian, only a Latin version made at his request survives.²² A translation of the Latin history of Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada and a continuation down to 1327 has been attributed to Gonzalo de la Finojosa, bishop of Burgos (1313–27). The initial portion, described by Diego Catalán as the *Historia hasta 1288 dialogada* because of its use of dialogue, served as a source for the *Chronicle of Alfonso X*. The chronology of both works for the early years of Alfonso X is erratic.²³

Also useful is the Catalan *Chronicle of Pedro IV of Aragón*, a purported autobiography that also recounts the reigns of his father and grandfather. As they were preoccupied chiefly with their Mediterranean empire, the *Chronicle's* references to the struggle for the Strait are limited.²⁴ The *Chronicle of the First Seven Kings of Portugal*, attributed to Fernão Lopes (d. 1460), is useful for the reigns of Afonso III, Dinis, and Afonso IV, though it draws on the Castilian chronicles mentioned above. That is also true of the *Chronicle of Afonso IV* by Rui de Pina (d. 1521).²⁵

The *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a collection of miracle stories in praise of the Virgin Mary, includes a number of poems recounting events in the reign of Alfonso X.²⁶

The Muslim narratives include Ibn Abī Zar's *Rawd al-Qirtās*, a confused and often inaccurate history of Morocco and al-Andalus, reaching to 1326. The author tends toward hyperbole and is not always trustworthy. Ibn 'Idhārī's *Al-Bayān al-Mugrib*, a history of the rulers of Morocco, ends in 1306. Though little is known of him, his careful style, abundance of detail, and judicious assessments make his work particularly valuable.²⁷

The two great historians of the fourteenth century, Ibn al-Khatīb (d. 1374) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), both served the kings of Granada and witnessed many of the events they recorded. The former composed *Al-Lamba al-badriyya fī l-dawla al-nasriyya*, a history of the kings of Granada to 1363, and *Al-Ihāta fī akhbār Garnāta*, a description of Granada with biographical sketches of notables. His writings have been translated only in part,²⁸ but Al-Makkarī (d. 1633) incorporated large sections of his work into his history.²⁹ Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-Ibar*, or *Book of Examples*, was a sort of universal history. The section dealing with the Berbers of North Africa, translated into French by the Baron de Slane, is especially helpful. One of the great historians of all time, his work is characterized by extensive detail, balanced presentation, and critical reflection.³⁰

On the other side of the Strait, Ibn Marzūq (d. 1379) composed the *Musnad* in praise of the Marinid emir Abū l-Hasan, whom he served as a counselor and diplomat. He did not write a connected narrative and tended to pass over events that might tarnish his hero's reputation.³¹

The loss of the Castilian royal archives necessitates the reconstruction of their contents from originals in municipal, monastic, noble, and other repositories.³² The Royal Academy of History published numerous documents of Alfonso X and a few of Sancho IV.³³ Mercedes Gaibrois and Antonio Benavides produced extensive diplomatic collections for Sancho IV and Fernando IV.³⁴ Manuel González Jiménez compiled royal documents of Alfonso X relating to Andalucía, and Esther González Crespo published a collection of Alfonso XI's charters.³⁵ The *Colección de documentos para la historia del reino de Murcia* includes a multitude of relevant texts.³⁶ Andrés Giménez Soler, Heinrich Finke, and Ángels Masià i de Ros transcribed many of the hundreds of letters of the kings of Castile, Aragón, Granada, and Morocco preserved in the archives of the Crown of Aragón.³⁷ Maximiliano Alarcón and Ramón García printed many Arabic documents from the same archive.³⁸ Some diplomatic correspondence between the kings of Granada and the emirs of Morocco during the fourteenth century has also been issued.³⁹ Numerous papal bulls of crusade published by the Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome will be cited throughout this work.

Now let us turn our attention to the struggle between Muslims and Christians to hold sway over the Strait of Gibraltar from the accession of Alfonso X of Castile in 1252 to the death of his great-grandson Alfonso XI in 1350.