

# Alfonso VIII of Castile

**Alfonso VIII** (11 November 1155<sup>[2]</sup> – 5 October 1214), called **the Noble** (*El Noble*) or **the one of the Navas** (*el de las Navas*), was the King of Castile from 1158 to his death and King of Toledo.<sup>[3][4]</sup> He is most remembered for his part in the Reconquista and the downfall of the Almohad Caliphate. After having suffered a great defeat with his own army at Alarcos against the Almohads in 1195,<sup>[5]</sup> he led the coalition of Christian princes and foreign crusaders who broke the power of the Almohads in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, an event which marked the arrival of a tide of Christian supremacy on the Iberian peninsula.<sup>[6]</sup>

His reign saw the domination of Castile over León and, by his alliance with Aragon, he drew those two spheres of Christian Iberia into close connection.

## Contents

- Regency and civil war**
- Marriage and Foreign Relations**
- Reconquista**
- Cultural legacy**
- Children**
- Ancestry**
- Notes**
- References**

## Regency and civil war

Alfonso was born to Sancho III of Castile and Blanche, in Soria on 11 November 1155.<sup>[7]</sup> He was named after his grandfather Alfonso VII of León and Castile, who divided his kingdoms between his sons. This division set the stage for conflict in the family until the kingdoms were re-united by Alfonso VIII's grandson, Ferdinand III of Castile.<sup>[8]</sup>

His early life resembled that of other medieval kings. His father died in 1158. Though proclaimed king when only two years of age,<sup>[6]</sup> Alfonso was regarded as merely nominal by the unruly nobles to whom a minority was convenient. Immediately, Castile was plunged into conflicts between the various noble houses vying for ascendancy in the inevitable regency. The devotion of a squire of his household, who carried him on the pommel of his saddle to the stronghold of San Esteban de Gormaz, saved him from falling into the hands of the contending factions.<sup>[9]</sup> The noble houses of Lara and Castro both claimed the regency, as did the boy's uncle, Ferdinand II of León. In 1159 the young Alfonso was put briefly in the custody of García Garcés de Aza, who was not wealthy enough to support him. In March 1160 the Castro and Lara met at the Battle of Lobregal and the Castro were victorious, but the guardianship of Alfonso and the regency fell to Manrique Pérez de Lara.

Alfonso was put in the custody of the loyal village Ávila. At barely fifteen, he began restoring his kingdom to order. It was only by surprise that he recovered his capital Toledo from the hands of the Laras.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Marriage and Foreign Relations

Alfonso VIII


 Miniature detail of Alfonso VIII in the *Tumbo menor de Castilla*<sup>[1]</sup>

King of Castile and Toledo	
Reign	31 August 1158 – 5 October 1214
Predecessor	Sancho III
Successor	Henry I
Born	11 November 1155 <div>Soria</div> <span></span>
Died	5 October 1214 (aged 58) <div>Gutierre-Muñoz</div> <span></span>
Burial	Abbey of Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas <span></span>
Spouse	Eleanor of England
Issue	Berengaria, Queen of Castile <div>among others...</div> Urraca, Queen of Portugal <div>Blanche, Queen of France</div> Ferdinand <div>Eleanor, Queen of Aragon</div> Henry I, King of Castile
House	Castilian House of

During the regency, his uncle Sancho VI of Navarre took advantage of the chaos and the king's minority to seize lands along the border, including much of La Rioja. In 1170, Alfonso sent an embassy to Bordeaux to Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine to seek the hand of their daughter Eleanor.<sup>[10]</sup> The marriage treaty helped provide Alfonso with a powerful ally against his uncle. In 1176, Alfonso asked his father-in-law to arbitrate the disputed border territories. While Alfonso received back much which had been taken from him, he did have to pay significant monetary compensation.<sup>[10]</sup>

	Ivrea
<b>Father</b>	Sancho III of Castile
<b>Mother</b>	Blanche of Navarre
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholicism

In 1186, he recuperated part of La Rioja from the Kingdom of Navarre.

In 1187, Alfonso negotiated with Frederick I, Holy Roman Emperor who was seeking to marry his son Conrad to Alfonso's eldest child and heir, Berengaria. In April 1188 they agreed on a treaty in Seligenstadt which made clear that she was the heir of Castile after any sons of Alfonso, and that Conrad would only co-rule as her spouse. This became relevant in her ultimate succession to the throne, even though the marriage to Conrad was never consummated and later annulled. The treaty also documented traditional rights and obligations between the sovereign and the nobles in Castile. In July 1188, Alfonso convened his court in Carrión de los Condes to allow the nobles to review and ratify the treaty. At that court, Alfonso knighted both Conrad and Alfonso IX of León, who would ultimately marry Berengaria. The younger Alfonso had come to seek the support and acknowledgement of his ascent to the throne of León from his older cousin. The elder Alfonso granted this in exchange for acknowledgement that the king of Castile was overlord of the king of León.<sup>[11]</sup>

The relationship between the cousins Alfonso continued to be filled with conflict. In 1194, the papal legate negotiated a treaty between them to temporarily end the conflict. However, after Castile was defeated at the Battle of Alarcos, the younger Alfonso seized the opportunity to again attack his cousin. Castile defended itself with papal support. A more lasting peace was achieved finally by the older Alfonso's daughter Berengaria getting married to the younger Alfonso in 1197.<sup>[12]</sup> The annulment of this marriage by the pope drove the younger Alfonso to again attack his cousin in 1204, but treaties made in 1205, 1207, and 1209 each forced him to concede further territories and rights.<sup>[13][14]</sup> The treaty in 1207 is the first existing public document in the Castilian dialect.<sup>[15]</sup>

Around 1200 when his brother in law John was on the English throne, Alfonso began to claim that Gascony was part of Eleanor's dowry, though there was nothing in the marriage treaty to indicate this. In 1205, he invaded, hoping to make good on his claim. By 1208, he gave up on the venture, though his heirs would come back to this claim generations later.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Reconquista

---

In 1174, he ceded Uclés to the Order of Santiago and afterwards this became the order's principal seat. From Uclés, he began a campaign which culminated in the reconquest of Cuenca in 1177.<sup>[17]</sup> The city surrendered on 21 September, the feast of Saint Matthew, ever afterwards celebrated by the citizens of the town.

Alfonso took the initiative to ally all Christian kingdoms of the peninsula — Navarre, León, Portugal, and Aragon — against the Almohads. By the Treaty of Cazola of 1179, the zones of expansion of each kingdom were defined.

After founding Plasencia (Cáceres) in 1186, he embarked on a major initiative to unite the Castilian nobility around the Reconquista.

In 1195, after the treaty with the Almohads was broken, he came to the defence of Alarcos on the river Guadiana, then the principal Castilian town in the region. At the subsequent Battle of Alarcos, he was roundly defeated by the caliph Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur. The reoccupation of the surrounding territory by the Almohads was quickly commenced with Calatrava falling first. For the next seventeen years, the frontier between Moor and Castilian was fixed in the hill country just outside Toledo.

Finally, in 1212, through the mediation of Pope Innocent III, a crusade was called against the Almohads. Castilians under Alfonso, Aragonese and Catalans under Peter II, Navarrese under Sancho VII, and Franks under the archbishop of Narbonne, Arnaud Amalric, all flocked to the effort. The military orders also lent their support. Calatrava first, then Alarcos, and finally Benavente were captured before a final battle was fought at Las Navas de Tolosa near Santa Elena on 16 July. The caliph Muhammad al-Nasir was routed and Almohad power broken.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Cultural legacy

---

Alfonso was the founder of the first Spanish university, a *studium generale* at Palencia, which, however, did not survive him.<sup>[9]</sup> His court also served as an important instrument for Spanish cultural achievement. Alfonso and his wife Eleanor of England were the first to make the Alcázar of Segovia as their resident when this fortress was still at its early stages.

Alfonso died at Gutierre-Muñoz<sup>[18]</sup> and was succeeded by his surviving son, Henry I.

Alfonso was the subject for Lion Feuchtwanger's novel *Die Jüdin von Toledo* (*The Jewess of Toledo*), in which is narrated an affair with a Jewish subject in medieval Toledo in a time when Spain was known to be the land of tolerance and learning for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The titular Jewish woman of the novel is based on Alfonso's paramour, Rahel la Ferosa.<sup>[19]</sup> Scholars continue to debate the historical truth of this relationship.<sup>[20]</sup> The 1919 film *The Jewess of Toledo* by Franz Höbling is also based on this relationship.<sup>[21]</sup>

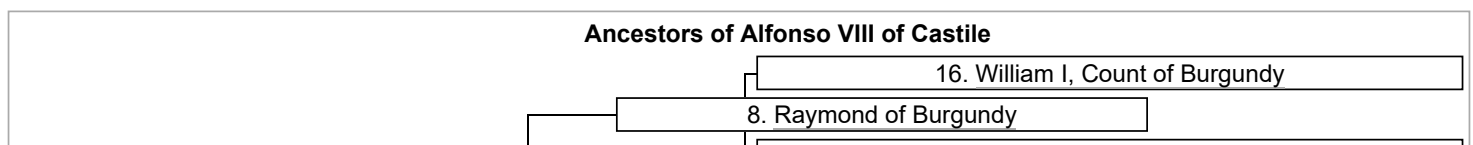
## Children

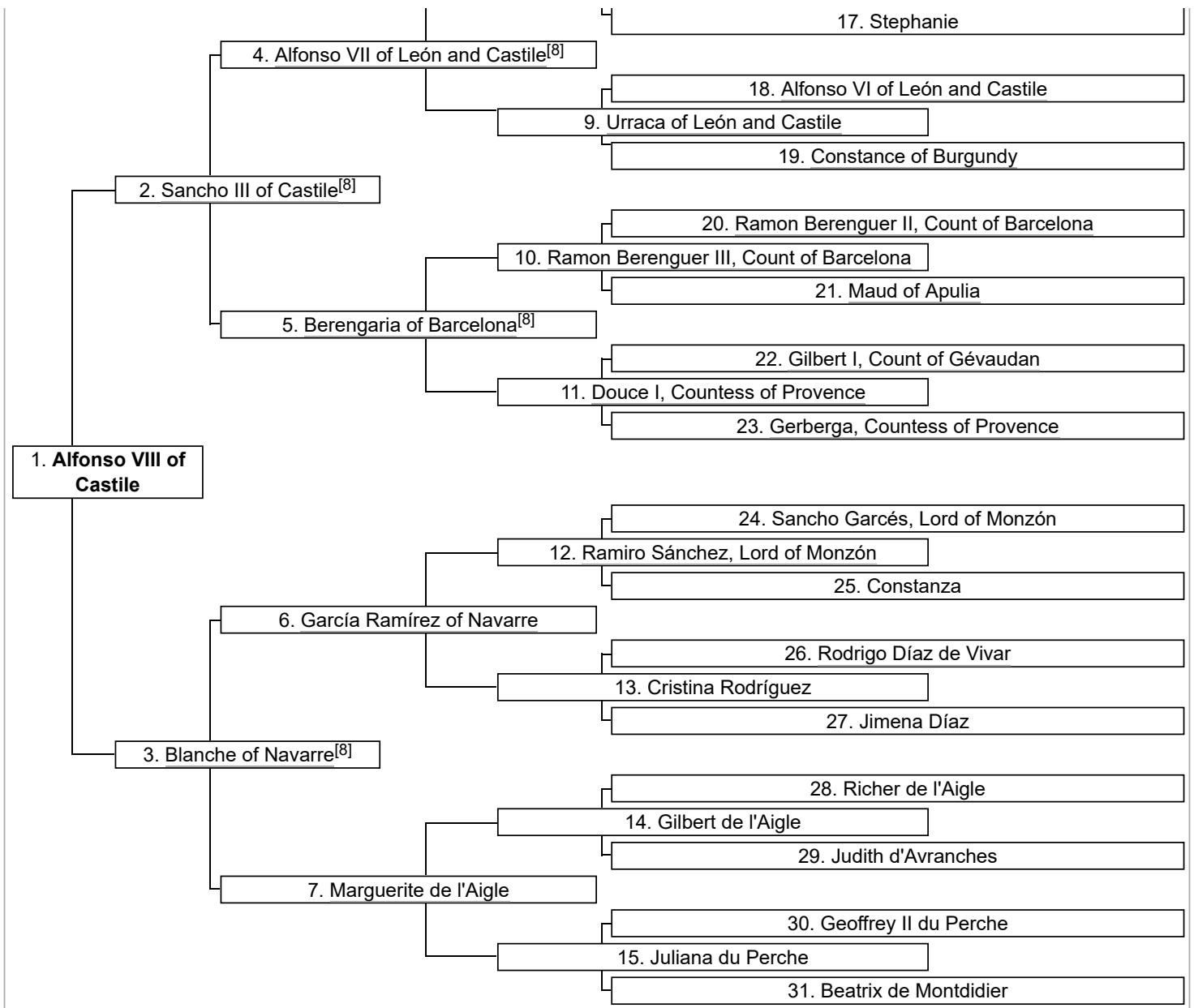
With Eleanor of England,<sup>[22]</sup> Alfonso had 11 children:<sup>[23]</sup>

Name	Birth	Death	Notes
<u>Berengaria</u>	<u>Burgos</u> , 1 January/ June 1180	<u>Las Huelgas</u> near <u>Burgos</u> , 8 November 1246	Married firstly in <u>Seligenstadt</u> on 23 April 1188 with Duke <u>Conrad II of Swabia</u> , but the union (only by contract and never solemnized) was later annulled. Married in <u>Valladolid</u> between 1/16 December 1197 with King <u>Alfonso IX of León</u> as his second wife. <sup>[24]</sup> After their marriage was dissolved on grounds of consanguinity in 1204, she returned to her homeland and became regent of her minor brother King <u>Henry I</u> . Queen of Castile in her own right after the death of <u>Henry I</u> in 1217, quickly abdicated in favor of her son <u>Ferdinand III of Castile</u> who would reunite the kingdoms of Castile and León.
<u>Sancho</u>	<u>Burgos</u> , 5 April 1181	26 July 1181	Heir of the throne since his birth, died aged three months.
<u>Sancha</u>	20/28 March 1182	3 February 1184/ 16 October 1185	Died in infancy.
<u>Henry</u>	1184	1184?	Heir of the throne since his birth, died either shortly after being born or in infancy. His existence is disputed among sources.
<u>Urraca</u>	1186/ 28 May 1187	<u>Coimbra</u> , 3 November 1220	Queen of <u>Afonso II of Portugal</u>
<u>Blanche</u>	<u>Palencia</u> , 4 March 1188	<u>Paris</u> , 27 November 1252	Married to <u>Louis VIII of France</u>
<u>Ferdinand</u>	<u>Cuenca</u> , 29 September 1189	<u>Madrid</u> , 14 October 1211	Heir of the throne since his birth. On whose behalf <u>Diego of Acebo</u> and the future <u>Saint Dominic</u> travelled to <u>Denmark</u> in 1203 to secure a bride. <sup>[25]</sup> Ferdinand was returning through the <u>San Vicente</u> mountains from a campaign against the Muslims when he contracted a fever and died. <sup>[26]</sup>
<u>Mafalda</u>	<u>Plasencia</u> , 1191	<u>Salamanca</u> , 1211	Betrothed in 1204 to Infante <u>Ferdinand of Leon</u> , eldest son of <u>Alfonso IX</u> and stepson of her oldest sister.
<u>Eleanor</u>	1200 <sup>[27]</sup>	<u>Las Huelgas</u> , 1244	Married in <u>Ágreda</u> on 6 February 1221 with <u>James I of Aragon</u> .
<u>Constance</u>	c. 1202 <sup>[27]</sup>	<u>Las Huelgas</u> , 1243	A nun at the Cistercian monastery of <u>Santa María la Real</u> at <u>Las Huelgas</u> in 1217, she became known as the <u>Lady of Las Huelgas</u> , a title shared with later royal family members who joined the community. <sup>[27]</sup>
<u>Henry</u>	<u>Valladolid</u> , 14 April 1204	<u>Palencia</u> , 6 June 1217	Only surviving son, he succeeded his father in 1214 aged ten under the regency firstly of his mother and later his oldest sister. He was killed when he was struck by a tile falling from a roof.

Through his daughters, Berengaria and Blanche, he was the grandfather of two monarchs who became saints of the Roman Church.

## Ancestry





## Notes

1. Pérez Monzón 2002, pp. 23-24; 27.
2. *Anales Toledanos*
3. Roth 1994, p. 128.
4. Titles of the European kings (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090729180928/http://geocities.com/eurprin/castile.html>)
5. Vann 2003, p. 62.
6. Rogers 2010, p. 28.
7. Vann 2003, p. 61.
8. Shadis 2010, p. xix.
9.  One or more of the preceding sentences incorporates text from a publication now in the **public domain**: Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Alphonso s.v.". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 1 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
10. Shadis 2010, p. 25-31.
11. Shadis 2010, p. 52-56.
12. Shadis 2010, p. 61-62.
13. Shadis 2010, p. 78-84.
14. Túy 2003, p. 324, 4.84.
15. Wright 2000.

16. [Shadis 2010](#), p. 31.
17. [Linehan 2011](#), p. 34.
18. [Ricardo del Arco y Garay](#), *Sepulcros de la Casa Real de Castilla*
19. [Marrache 2009](#).
20. [Shadis 2010](#), p. 48-50.
21. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0956166/>
22. *Crónica Latina*
23. [Vann 2003](#), p. 63.
24. *New International Encyclopedia*, Vol.13, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1915), 782.
25. [Vicaire](#), pp. 89–98.
26. [Osma 1997](#), p. 55-56, vol.20.
27. [Shadis 2010](#), p. 4.

## References

- [Linehan, Peter \(2011\)](#). *Spain, 1157-1300: A Partible Inheritance*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- [Marrache, Abraham S. \(2009\)](#). *La Historia de Fermosa, la amante de Alfonso VIII* (<http://www.casadellibro.com/libro-la-historia-de-fermosa-a-la-amante-de-alfonso-viii/9788461289301/1336401>). Madrid: Hebraica Ediciones.
- [Osma, Juan \(1997\)](#). "Chronica latina regum Castellae". In [Brea, Luis Charlo](#). *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XIII*. Turnhout: Brepols.
- [Pérez Monzón, Olga \(2002\)](#). "Iconografía y poder real en Castilla: las imágenes de Alfonso VIII". *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte* (in Spanish). Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. **XIV**: 19–41. ISSN 1130-5517 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/1130-5517>).
- [Rogers, Clifford J. \(2010\)](#). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology: Vol. 1* ([https://books.google.nl/books?id=mzwpq6bLHhMC&dq=Alfonso+X+of+Castile&hl=nl&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.nl/books?id=mzwpq6bLHhMC&dq=Alfonso+X+of+Castile&hl=nl&source=gbs_navlinks_s)). Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0195334036.
- [Roth, Norman \(1994\)](#). *Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and Conflict*. Brill.
- [Shadis, Miriam \(2010\)](#). *Berenguela of Castile (1180–1246) and Political Women in the High Middle Ages*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 978-0-312-23473-7.
- [Túy, Lucas \(2003\)](#). [Rey, Emma Falque](#), ed. *Chronicon mundi*. Turnhout: Brepols.
- [Vann, Theresa M. \(2003\)](#). "Alfonso VIII, King of Castile". In [Gerli, E. Michael](#). *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*. Routledge.
- [Vicaire, M.-H. \(1938\)](#). "Une ambassade dans les Marches". In [Mandonnet, Pierre](#). *Saint Dominique: l'idée, l'homme et l'oeuvre Vol. 1*. Paris: Desclée De Brouwer.
- [Wright, Roger \(2000\)](#). *El tratado de Cabreros (1206): estudio sociofilológico de una reforma ortográfica*. London: Queen Mary and Westfield College.
- [COSTA, Ricardo da](#). "Love and Crime, Chastisement and Redemption in Glory in the Crusade of Reconquest: Alfonso VIII of Castile in the battles of Alarcos (1195) and Las Navas de Tolosa (1212)" ([https://web.archive.org/web/20070927020338/http://www.ricardocosta.com/pub/love\\_crime.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20070927020338/http://www.ricardocosta.com/pub/love_crime.htm)). In: [OLIVEIRA, Marco A. M. de \(org.\)](#). *Guerras e Imigrações*. Campo Grande: Editora da UFMS, 2004, pp. 73–94 ISBN 85-7613-023-8.

<b>Alfonso VIII of Castile</b> <b>Castilian House of Ivrea</b>		
<b>Born:</b> 11 November 1155 <span style="float: right;"><b>Died:</b> 5 October 1214</span>		
<b>Regnal titles</b>		
Preceded by <b><u>Sancho III</u></b>	<b>King of Castile and Toledo</b> 1158–1214	Succeeded by <b><u>Henry I</u></b>

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alfonso\\_VIII\\_of\\_Castile&oldid=864207794](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alfonso_VIII_of_Castile&oldid=864207794)"

**This page was last edited on 15 October 2018, at 19:55 (UTC).**

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.