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Note: A Medieval City under Threat Turns Its Coat, while Hedging Its Bets – Burgos Faces an Invasion in Spring 1366: Introduction and Translation

L. J. Andrew Villalon

Introduction

Despite the traditional image of the heavily armored knight on horseback, lance couched, charging recklessly into the fray, it has become a well-established truism of medieval military history that typical large-scale military activity in the period involved a siege rather than a set-piece battle. While battles did indeed occur, sieges conducted against castles, towns, and cities far surpassed them in number.

If a target were strong and the defenders resolute, it might well hold out indefinitely, or at least long enough to witness the disintegration of the attacking army. On the other hand, there were not-a-few instances when the place under attack was not well fortified, not adequately supplied, or simply not strongly inclined to resist the forces brought against it. In such a case, its best hope lay in reaching some kind of negotiated accommodation with the attackers that would preserve the lives, liberty, and property of its inhabitants. Upon occasion, however, such a place might feel compelled to take pains to avoid having its surrender being seen as treason by its former lord, in order that it might avoid retribution at some future date in the event that that lord managed to regain possession.

Such was the case with Burgos, the northern capital of the Iberian kingdom of Castile, when, in the spring of 1366, it was caught between two warring half-brothers, one legitimate, the other illegitimate, both of whom were claiming the Castilian throne. Its actions on this occasion exemplify the careful path a city might have to tread in an effort to protect itself against present destruction as well as future retribution.

In March of 1366, Enrique, count of Trastámara and illegitimate son of King Alfonso XI (r. 1311–50) invaded Castile accompanied by his principal captain, Bertrand du Guesclin (d. 1380), the legendary Breton warrior who would later become constable of France and drive the English out of much the territory they had conquered in the opening stages of the Hundred Years War (1339–1453). The pair led an army, paid for by France, Aragon, and the Papacy, composed of

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Castilian exiles, Aragonese volunteers, and thousands of men from the Free Companies, bodies of soldiery thrown out of work by a lull in the conflict raging north of the Pyrenees. The invasion's purpose was to overthrow the reigning monarch of Castile, Pedro I, widely known as "the Cruel" (1350–66/1367–69). Despite Enrique's illegitimacy, upon crossing into Castile he had proclaimed himself king of that land, from which he had been exiled a decade earlier. He was now encamped some eight leagues from Burgos.

In that city, Enrique's legitimate (and hated) half-brother, Pedro, was gathering forces to oppose the invasion. At the last minute, however, and without informing most of his supporters, Pedro decided to evacuate the city without a fight and head south to Seville. At this point, many who had supported him either dispersed or went over to the enemy. For their part, the people of Burgos faced a serious dilemma. Unable to defend themselves in the absence of the king and his army, they had little choice but to go over to Enrique or see their city sacked. However, if Pedro eventually won out and returned to Burgos (as he did, if only briefly, the following year), and the inhabitants had not in his view put up an adequate fight in their own defense, they might be open to accusations of treason.

The Source

The legal gyrations required of Burgos, or, for that matter, almost any city in a similar quandary, are well illustrated by a passage from the *Crónica de Pedro I* by Pedro López de Ayala. Born in 1332 to an old Basque family in northern Spain, Ayala was destined at first to enter the church; as a result, he was sent at a young age to Avignon, where he received a sound, if brief, education under the tutelage of his uncle, Cardinal Barroso. Following the cardinal's death, he left the papal court and returned to Castile, where, early in the troubled reign of Pedro I (1350–66/1367–69), he entered the royal household as a page. For well over a decade, the house of Ayala, presided over by the chronicler's father, Fernán Peréz, stoutly supported the increasingly unpopular monarch. During these years, the younger Ayala came of age, rising through the military hierarchy and eventually playing a significant role in the king's war against neighboring Aragon, later dubbed the War of the Two Pedros (1356–66).

Then, in the pivotal year of 1366, his family joined much of the aristocracy, including the closely allied Basque houses of Mendoza and Orozco, in transferring their allegiance to Pedro's hated half-brother and rival for the throne, Enrique de Trastámara. During three years of civil war that followed (1366–69), Ayala helped his new master to overthrow his old one. He was captured at the battle of Nájera, a crushing defeat for Enrique, but upon securing his release, rejoined that king for the closing months of the struggle – one which ended in 1369 with Pedro's dramatic death under the walls of Montiel, a scene Ayala would later portray at some length in his chronicle.

Thereafter, for more than three decades Ayala continued to serve successive members of the new Trastámaran dynasty established by Enrique II, including the founder's son, Juan I (1379–90), and later his grandson, Enrique III (1390–1407).

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During Juan's reign, Ayala witnessed two more of the century's major military encounters: in one case as an observer, in the other as a participant. While on a diplomatic mission to the Low Countries in 1382, he was present at the battle of Roosebecke in which a French army massacred the forces of the commune of Ghent. Three years later, Ayala, now aged over fifty, resumed his own military career when, along with much of the Castilian nobility, he participated in Juan I's ill-starred invasion of Portugal. As a result, he found himself at the battle of Aljubarrota where the Portuguese routed the Castilian invaders, ending Juan's attempt to absorb the neighboring kingdom and reaffirming Portuguese independence for several centuries to come. Once again, Ayala was taken on the field and spent many months as a prisoner of war.

In 1398, Ayala capped his long political career with a brief stint as lord chancellor of Castile, after which he is thought to have retired into a Geronymite monastery near the Basque country where he had been born. Here, around 1407, Pedro López de Ayala died, having outlived most of his contemporaries, including that other great chronicler of the age, Jean Froissart, whose exit from the scene is believed to have occurred two years earlier.

Despite busy decades of public service, in later life, Ayala found time to write chronicles for each of the four kings he had served, the last of which, the *Crónica de Enrique III*, remained unfinished at his death. The first of these chronicles, devoted to the reign of Pedro I, was his most ambitious and most controversial historical work. His largely unfavorable portrait of Pedro, coupled with his desertion of that monarch at a critical moment, has led not a few historians over the centuries to accuse him of bias and misrepresentation. Those adopting this view condemn the chronicle as either an exercise in self-justification or, worse, a piece of propaganda written to serve the usurper to whom he had transferred his allegiance (views with which the present author strongly disagrees.)

The following translation is part of a joint project with co-editor/co-author Donald J. Kagay to translate one of the major chronicles of the late medieval period. In undertaking this translation, we have worked primarily from the most easily available version of the work, used by most Spanish historians of the past, the edition by Cayetano Rossell.[1]

[1] Pedro López de Ayala, *Crónica del Rey Don Pedro Primero*, in *Crónicas de los reyes de Castilla desde don Alfonso el Sabio, hasta los Católicos don Fernando y doña Isabel* [CRC], Cayetano Rosell (ed.), 3 vols., (Madrid, 1877). Volume 1 of the nineteenth-century edition containing Pedro's chronicle, the version we have used for our translation, has been reprinted in the Biblioteca de autores españoles, vol. 66 (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1953), pp. 393–614. For the above below, see pp. 540–41. For those who wish to consult a more recent edition of Ayala's chronicle, see: Pedro López de Ayala, *Crónica del rey don Pedro*, ed. Constance L. Wilkins and Heanon M. Wilkins (Madison, 1985). Alternatively, there is an even more recent edition dating to the 1990s published in Argentina. See: Pedro López de Ayala, *Crónica del rey don Pedro y del rey don Enrique su hermano, hijos del rey don Alfonso onceno*, ed. Germán Orduna and José Luis Moure, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1994–97).

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Translation

Chapter IV: How the King Don Pedro left Burgos and abandoned the city and the companies that were there with him.

While in Burgos, King Pedro learned that Count Enrique and the captains who had come with him had arrived at Calahorra and taken it and how Count Enrique was calling himself king of Castile and Leon, how he had divided up all the offices of the realm, how he had made and promised many gifts, and how he had seized Navarrete and Briviesca. [Pedro] greatly feared all this; and on Saturday morning, the day before Palm Sunday, without saying anything to the lords and knights who were with him, he rode out as if to leave and abandon the city of Burgos. And when the inhabitants of the city, great and small, learned of this they came to him at his palace and addressing him, required and begged him by his grace (*por merced*) not to leave and abandon them because he had there many good companies and enough [supplies] to maintain them. And if he had need of any more, they would give to him as much as they had in this world. They asked the scribes (*escribanos*) who were present that they provide [the inhabitants] with a signed record of the meeting.

The king was at the gate of the palace where he was staying and already intended to mount up to leave there. He responded to [the people] that he greatly appreciated all the good advice they had given him and he was sure that they would do all they had promised, because he realized very well that the loyalty they felt [for him] was great and a good thing and of the sort they had also always shown to the kings from whom he was descended. But he must leave there immediately because he had certain news that Count Enrique and the companies that were with him intended to take the road to Seville, where he [Pedro] had his children and his treasure, and for this reason he was leaving to make them secure.

And the people of Burgos came again to ask him that he not leave the city, and that they did not believe the news he had received, but instead it was certain the count and all the companies in Briviesca, eight leagues from there, intended to come to Burgos. And concerning this matter, the people of the city strongly importuned the king, but when they saw that he would not hear any more from them, they asked him this: "Lord, as your grace is aware, your enemies are eight leagues from here, but you do not wish to await them here in this, your very noble city of Burgos with the many good companies you have here. What do you command us to do and how should we defend ourselves?"

The king then said to them: "I command that you do the best you are able to do." And they replied to him: "Lord, we would wish to have such good fortune that we should be able to defend this, your city from all your enemies, but when you with so many men and such good companies do not dare to defend it, what do you want us to do? Therefore, Lord, if it be the case (may God not let it be so) that we are unable to defend it, will you excuse us from the oath and homage for this city that we swore to you one, two and three times (*quitades nos el*

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pleyto é omenage que por esta ciudad vos tenemos fecho una é dos é tres veces)."

The king responded: "Yes." And they asked the scribes who were there to give them signed copies of the instrument.

Just before the king left there, a major representative (*recabdador mayor*) of the bishop of Burgos arrived who was named Rui Perez de Mena and who held the castle of Burgos. Since the maravedis collected from the king's rents were guarded within the said castle, the representative asked the king that he instruct what was to be done with the castle inasmuch as he was leaving the city of Burgos and it could not be defended. And the king ordered him to defend it, to which Rui Perez replied: "Lord, I do not have the power to defend it since you are leaving your city of Burgos." And the king did not respond to him.

On the morning of the day the king left Burgos, he ordered the execution of Juan Ferrandez de Tovar, brother of Don Ferrand Sanchez de Tovar, who was imprisoned in the castle of the said city. He did this as a result of anger he felt toward his brother, Don Ferrand Sanchez, who had welcomed Count Enrique in the city of Calahorra. And the king departed Burgos on Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday, which was the twenty-eighth day of March of this said year....

Chapter VI: What the people of Burgos did after King Pedro left

Thus it was in the city of Burgos when [the inhabitants] saw matters reach a point where the king was going to Seville without affording them any protection (*sin les poner cabro alguno*) and they realized they could not protect themselves. For all the companies that had gathered at the command of King Pedro had left there, some going over to Count Enrique, others departing for their lands. And therefore, the people of Burgos took counsel on what they should do since there was no way in the world they could defend themselves and if they dawdled for too long before reaching an agreement [with the invaders], they could be in great danger. For the city of Burgos was not well-fortified (*cercada*), but had a low wall, and all the armed companies of both foreigners and Castilians who came with Count Enrique were already close at hand, only eight leagues from Burgos in the town of Briviesca, which they had taken by force (as we have recounted).

For these reasons, they sent messengers to [the count] in Briviesca addressing him as count,[2] but informing him that as soon as he was in Burgos and swore to them that he would maintain their rights (*fueros*) and liberties they would call him king. And they asked him to show favor (*por merced*) by coming to Burgos for they would welcome him as their lord king and this they could well[3] do without falling into error or incurring shame (*sin caer en yerro é en verguenza*) because they were freed from the oath and homage (*tenia quito el pleito é*

2 An alternate version reads as follows: "They sent him their messengers, calling him king and lord and asking him to show favor (*por merced*) by coming to his very noble city of Burgos."

3 A better translation here might be "lawfully."

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omenage) they had sworn to King Pedro, and which he had rescinded when he left there.

And Count Enrique was greatly pleased by the messengers of Burgos and with the letters that the city sent to him. He immediately departed Briviesca and came to Burgos where he was received very honorably with joy and large processions. And the alcaide who held the city castle (of whom we have spoken) came to him and surrendered it.

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