Pedro I of Castile (1350-69):
A Mediterranean Prince Captured
in a Chivalric Paradigm

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Pedro I of Castile ascended to the Castilian throne in 1350 at the age of fifteen following Alfonso XI’s sudden and unexpected death. Pedro attempted to follow his father’s political policy of moving the monarchy in the direction of political absolutism but his political objectives and violent behavior meet frequent opposition from the Castilian nobility. Pedro’s enemies found a leader in Enrique of Trastamara, one of the many illegitimate children of Alfonso XI. Early in his reign following the advice of his advisors, Pedro entered into a political alliance with France in 1352, which included Pedro marrying Blanche of Bourbon, a niece of the French king. However, by the time Blanche arrived in Castile Pedro had entered into a relationship with Maria de Padilla which resulted in the Castilian king abandoning his French bride only days after their marriage. Blanche became a virtual prisoner until her death in 1361. Pedro’s treatment of Blanche and other actions on his part destroyed the French alliance and in 1362 Pedro became an ally of England, France’s great rival in the Hundred Years War. France in return supported Enrique of Trastamara in his efforts to usurp the Castilian throne. It became the goal of Charles V of France to use Enrique as his instrument in removing Pedro from the throne, establish a pro-French dynasty, and destroy the Anglo-Castilian Alliance. In 1366 with French support Enrique led a large army of mercenaries to Castile driving Pedro from his kingdom and Enrique being crowned king of Castile. Pedro made his

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way to Bordeaux where he meet with Edward, know as the Black Prince and the eldest son of Edward III. In Bordeaux an agreement to restore Pedro to the Castilian throne was worked out bases on the Anglo-Castilian Treaty of 1362. The Prince would lead an invasion of Castile to restore Pedro to the throne but the unrealistic fiscal burden imposed upon Pedro and the incompatibility of the Prince and Pedro led to the ultimate failure of the alliance. Though the Prince defeated Enrique’s forces in 1367 and restored Pedro to the throne, it proved to be an ephemeral victory. The Prince and Pedro could not work together and the Prince returned to Bordeaux refusing further aid to Pedro. Enrique with French aid soon returned to Castile and in 1369 defeated and murdered Pedro becoming king of Castile and ally of France. Castile would render considerable aid to France when the Hundred Year War was resumed and England had lost an important ally. To a large degree this was because of the inability of the Prince and Pedro to cooperate. The Prince was a northern ruler, imbued with the spirit of chivalry; Pedro was a Mediterranean Prince possessing a set of values totally incompatible with those of the Black Prince. Pedro was a Mediterranean Prince captured in a chivalric paradigm.

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