

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 100
The Conquest of Cordoba, Part Two

Hello again. Last time, we saw the political situation inside Al-Andalus shift as Ibn Hud lost support. There are now two leaders inside Al-Andalus fighting for supremacy: Ibn Hud, who dresses in black, and Ibn al-Ahmar, who dresses in red. As Team Black and Team Red are busy trying to secure territory for themselves, another leader has risen to power in Valencia, a descendant of Ibn Mardanish called Zayyan. While all these power struggles have been taking place, an opportunity for the Christians arose in Cordoba. Some roving Christian fighters were approached by one of the factions inside the city to assist them to take a suburb from their rivals. The Christian fighters successfully carried out their mission and managed to send a message to the Christian north that they were inside Cordoba if anyone wanted to come down and help them take the city. By the time we left the last episode enough Christians had arrived to commence a siege of Cordoba. King Fernando had taken 200 knights and had set up camp on the road leading to Ecija, intending to prevent supplies and men from Ecija reaching Cordoba. This ended up being a savvy move, as word soon came in that Ibn Hud, from Team Black, was massing a sizeable army at Ecija, intending to come to the city's aid.

Now the forces Ibn Hud had managed to gather at Ecija were pretty impressive. In his book "Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain", Joseph O'Callaghan estimates that Ibn Hud had gathered up to 5,000 knights, 30,000 foot soldiers, and 200 Christian mercenary knights. This, as I just said, was an impressive force, of a size more than capable of taking on the Christian besiegers. Everyone waited for Ibn Hud to lead his army out of Ecija towards Cordoba. They waited, they waited, and they waited. To the absolute astonishment of just about everyone Ibn Hud will never give the order to mobilise, and will eventually fall back and withdraw to Seville, a move which Joseph O'Callaghan describes as inexplicable. No one, to this day, knows why Ibn Hud failed to come to the aid of Cordoba.

As his large army dispersed, as word spread around the Muslims of Cordoba that Ibn Hud had withdrawn and would no longer be coming to rescue them, the mood inside the city must have darkened. And things were about to get even darker. As the weeks passed, and as people inside Cordoba began to get hungry, more and more Christians began arriving outside the city to assist with the siege. Dislodging the Christian forces from outside Cordoba and breaking the siege was now going to be a mammoth task.

Clearly Ibn Hud wasn't up to taking on the now considerable Christian forces, so the only real hope available to the Muslims of Cordoba was that Ibn al-Ahmar from Team Red would come to save them. This, though, was highly unlikely. The people of Cordoba had rejected Ibn al-Ahmar's rule back in the year 1234, after he had back-stabbed the ruler of Seville and had effectively made an enemy of him. The likelihood that he would set this slight aside and risk himself and his army to come to the city's rescue was pretty much nil.

Facing imminent starvation, the residents of Cordoba sent a message to King Fernando that they were ready to talk terms. Terms of surrender were negotiated, but before the agreement was enacted the residents of Cordoba discovered that the fighters from Leon had only agreed to remain at the siege for three months, a period of time which was about to expire. Deciding that perhaps they had a chance of prevailing after all the citizens of

Cordoba reneged on the agreement. A furious King Fernando then announced to the citizens of Cordoba that he was intending to form an alliance between himself and Ibn al-Ahmar. The alliance between King Fernando and Team Red ended any hope the people of Cordoba had that Ibn al-Ahmar would come to their aid after the departure of the fighters from Leon.

With their last hope of salvation having disappeared, the city once again negotiated terms of settlement. Joseph O'Callaghan reports that some of King Fernando's advisers urged him to ignore the peace terms and instead take the city by force, but King Fernando decided to end the siege peacefully. He agreed that the defenders of Cordoba would be granted safe passage out of the city with any personal possessions they could carry. The terms were accepted, and the city of Cordoba formally surrendered to the Christian King on the 29th of June in the year 1236.

King Fernando had already formed an alliance with Team Red. Now he reached out to Team Black. He negotiated a truce with Ibn Hud whereby Ibn Hud would pay an annual tribute to Leon and Castile in return for King Fernando agreeing not to attack Team Black for a period of six years.

With peace descending over the region, the governor of Cordoba delivered the keys of the city to King Fernando. Shortly after being handed the keys, King Fernando ordered a cross be carried into the city and raised to the top of the highest tower of the famous Great Mosque, along with his royal banner. That evening, the deputy to Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, a man called Bishop Juan, cleansed the mosque, then consecrated it as Cordoba's cathedral. The following day King Fernando formally entered the conquered city at the head of his army. He heard Mass at the new cathedral, then made his way to the royal palace of Cordoba. He placed himself on the throne in the palace, which for centuries had been occupied by Muslim rulers, and held court there surrounded by his lords, barons and bishops. Cordoba, which had been the jewel in the crown of Muslim Al-Andalus since its establishment in the eighth century was now a Christian city.

Now, as Brian Catlos points out in his book "Kingdoms of Faith", King Fernando could have ordered the Great Mosque to be destroyed. It had been founded by Abd al-Rahman I over four centuries ago, and was kind of a symbol of Islamic power on the peninsula. He didn't destroy it, but he did order it to be re-consecrated as a cathedral, and he ordered some alterations to be made. The bells of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which had been taken as trophies from the Christian north by al-Mansur in the year 997 and which had been displayed in the mosque since that time, were removed and carried back to Santiago on the backs of Muslim prisoners. The minaret of the mosque was repurposed as a bell tower, and a number of repairs and alterations were undertaken, with much of the work being carried out by Muslim craftsmen and carpenters from the city. A major change to the structure took place in the 16th century, when a new nave and transept were constructed inside the building. In the words of Brian Catlos and I quote "a hulking cathedral was raised up within it, like a stake stabbing upward through what had been for half a millennium the heart of Islam in Spain" end quote.

Now, clearly the bad news for the Muslims of Al-Andalus in general and the citizens of Cordoba in particular was the fact that their prized city and mosque had been absorbed by the Reconquista and were now Christian. The good news was that little destruction had occurred. Due to the fact that the city hadn't been taken by force none of its structures had been damaged. Muslim residents of Cordoba who wished to leave what was now a Christian city were allowed to do so. Food was still scarce inside the city following the

siege, and many residents did make the decision to leave. A Muslim historian likely accurately caught the mood of the Muslims of Al-Andalus when he described the fall of Cordoba to King Fernando in the following way, stating that Cordoba had, and I quote "passed into the hands of the accursed Christians, may God destroy them all" end quote.

Along with the departure of many of its Muslim residents, most of the members of the besieging army packed up and headed back to the Christian north. Prior to their departure King Fernando ordered each nobleman and each of the military orders from his army to provide him with a volunteer knight who would form a core of defenders to hold the newly conquered city. In his book "The Reconquest of Spain" D. W. Lomax reports that a few months later settlers from the Christian north began making their way to Cordoba to become new Christian residents of the city. Food shortages were still a problem though, and King Fernando will need to send emergency consignments of food to the city for the next few years.

While King Fernando was, of course, incredibly pleased to have taken Cordoba, it will for the next decade or so act as a major drain on the treasury of the Kingdoms of Leon and Castile. The tribute paid by Ibn Hud helped to offset the costs though, and the fact that a peace treaty was currently in place between King Fernando and Team Red and Team Black meant that there were no expensive military campaigns to undertake. Still, securing Cordoba and the region around it was going to take both time and resources. King Fernando himself was required back in the Christian north, so he ended up delegating the important task of holding Cordoba and subduing the territory around the city to his sixteen year old son and heir, who was named - anyone want to take a guess? That's right, Alfonso. Young Prince Alfonso was to be assisted in his first shot at command by Alvar Perez de Castro and the military orders.

The newly conquered city of Cordoba was pretty much a military outpost for the next few years, while Prince Alfonso and Alvar Perez de Castro will work to conquer towns and strongholds around the city. In his book "The Reconquest of Spain" D. W. Lomax reports that soon after Cordoba was taken by the Christians, many residents of towns and villages around the city, including Ecija, fled southwards, deserting their homes. However they gradually returned back, with Prince Alfonso managing to convince most Muslim residents to live in their towns as vassals to his father, King Fernando, paying the appropriate taxes, and allowing Christian troops to garrison their towns. D. W. Lomax also reports that when Alvar Perez de Castro made a trip back to Toledo for supplies, he left the defence of the town he was occupying, the town of Martos, which lies to the east of Cordoba, in the hands of his wife. Apparently, Alvar's wife was up to the task, and she successfully defended Martos against an attack by Ibn al-Ahmar during her husband's absence.

A year later though, in the year 1239, Alvar Perez de Castro died. Without a senior commander overseeing his young son's administration of the region, King Fernando decided it was time for him to travel to Cordoba himself. He ended up staying in the city for a year, establishing new administrative structures within the town, and setting it on course to be a royal semi-autonomous city, like Toledo, with its own council and its own diocese ruled by the new Bishop of Cordoba.

With Cordoba settling into its new role as a Christian city, you might be wondering what was happening to the two Muslim military forces in the region, Team Red and Team Black. Well, Ibn Hud and Team Black never really recovered from Ibn Hud's failure to take on the Christian army outside Cordoba. With his reputation in tatters, and saddled with a humiliating obligation to pay the Christian King whom he failed to take on in battle a hefty

sum of money each year, many of the towns and cities controlled by Ibn Hud rose up against him. The end came for Ibn Hud in January of the year 1238, less than two years after the fall of Cordoba, when he was murdered outside the fortified city of Almeria by the governor of Almeria, a man whom Ibn Hud had personally appointed to the role.

The power vacuum caused by the collapse of Team Black was quickly filled by Team Red. Ibn al-Ahmar was proclaimed King of Almeria and Malaga, then worked steadily to establish his rule across much of the southern part of the peninsula. When deciding where, exactly, to establish a base for himself, Ibn al-Ahmar ended up choosing the city of Granada. Once there, he began constructing a fortified palace to house himself and his family, a building which will eventually become the absolutely stunning Palace of Alhambra. Ibn al-Ahmar's descendants will rule the Kingdom of Granada from the Alhambra for the next couple of centuries.

Join me next time as we pop over to the north-east of Al-Andalus to see what has been taking place in Valencia. Until next time, bye for now.

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