

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 106
The Kingdom of Granada

Hello again. Last time we saw King Fernando III of Leon and Castile achieve two momentous military victories when he conquered both the city of Jaen and the city of Seville.

Now I guess I don't need to tell you just how huge an event the fall of these cities was to the Reconquista. The defeat of Seville in particular sent shock waves across the region. As we mentioned at the end of the last episode, all the residents of Seville were required to leave the city and were given a month to do so. Many of the Muslim residents in the region around Seville also made the decision to move, with those who remained, many of whom were peasants who had no wish to leave their land, being required to pledge fealty to their new Christian ruler. So in the month following the fall of Seville a vast number of Muslim residents packed up their belongings and left to find somewhere else to live. In his book "The Reconquest of Spain", D. W. Lomax states that the numbers of shifting residents could have been in the hundreds of thousands. Where did they all go? Well, most of them resettled in the only part of the Iberian peninsula still under Muslim rule: the realm of Team Red, the Kingdom of Granada.

There was no certainty though that Granada itself would survive. In fact, there were many reasons, which we shall get to shortly, why it looked like Granada would probably be next on the list of Christian conquests, which is why those who had the resources to do so and the appropriate connections, mainly professional men, shifted themselves and their families further afield to northern Africa, with many finding new homes and employment in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. As D. W. Lomax states, and I quote "North Africa benefited greatly from the immigration, and many of its greatest scholars would trace their descent from Spanish exiles" end quote.

While the fall of Seville may have elevated the fortunes of communities in northern Africa, the blow it dealt to the psyche of the Muslims of Al-Andalus is hard to overstate. Seville was a gorgeous city and had been the last jewel in the crown of Al-Andalus. Its fall to the Christians was devastating and led to an outpouring of grief, some of which emerged in the form of poems of lament. Just one example of this was from a civilian man called Salih Ibn Sharif al-Rundi, who had moved across the Strait of Gibraltar to Ceuta following the fall of Seville. He wrote, and I quote "Who can help avert the mortal shaming of a once mighty folk, whom tyranny and outrage now in humility cloak. For yesterday as monarchs they reviewed their rich domains. Today they are but slaves and bound in unbelievers' chains" end quote.

While for Muslims the fall of Seville was a cause for lament and distress, for Christians it was a triumph. The newly vacated city of Seville was gradually repopulated with new residents from the Christian north. Most of the new residents were Castilian, although some relocated from Leon, Galicia, and even from as far away as Catalonia. While the vast majority of the new residents were Christian, there were some Jewish and even some Muslim settlers. The Muslim settlers weren't old residents of Seville though. They too had moved into the city as newcomers following its evacuation. In addition, the newcomers included groups of small trading colonies comprising French and Genoese residents. D. W. Lomax reports that in the region around Seville a total of 43 different noblemen,

bishops, and military orders were granted significant land holdings, while 200 knights were given smaller estates, and foot soldiers who had participated in the campaign to capture Seville were provided with the smallest properties.

Inside Seville itself, buildings were set aside for the new city council, the newly established archdiocese, and for the royal court. D. W. Lomax notes that, while most of the buildings inside Seville were preserved and while the Muslim system of agriculture was largely maintained, just about everything else changed. Seville became a royal Christian city. Royal taxes were imposed, and a Church hierarchy was quickly established. Following the dedication of the chief mosque of Seville as a cathedral, chapels were erected inside the vast prayer hall of the former mosque, and this was the focus of Christian worship in Seville until the year 1401, when a decision was made to demolish the former mosque and erect a new church building in its place. The palace complex inside Seville, which had served as the residence of its rulers, became the new palace of the Christian king. Apparently King Fernando favoured his residence in Seville so much that upon his death he was interred in the former mosque inside Seville, a resting place which he had specifically requested.

While the city of Seville and its surrounds slowly began to repopulate, one place which was having no trouble at all attracting new residents was the Kingdom of Granada. In fact, it has pretty much been swamped with people wanting to live within its territories. This ended up not being a bad thing. In fact, Hugh Kennedy states in his book "Muslim Spain and Portugal" the presence of large numbers of refugees following the fall of Seville was one of the reasons why the Kingdom of Granada was able to survive for so long. So let's take a closer look at the last major surviving Muslim realm on the Iberian peninsula.

The boundaries of the Kingdom of Granada following the fall of Seville will pretty much remain as they are for the next couple of centuries. They comprise a wedge of land on the Mediterranean coastline stretching from Gibraltar northwards up the coastline encompassing the coastal ports of Malaga and Almeria before ending to the south of Murcia. This chunk of territory doesn't stretch terribly far inland, only around 60 miles or so. Right in the centre of the territory is its seat of power, the city of Granada.

Unfortunately, most of the inland territory of Granada consisted of rugged terrain with not terribly fertile soil. As a consequence, it was forced to import most of its food supply. Cereals and olive oil were shipped in from northern Africa, while it was able to export sugar, raisins, figs, and almonds. It also held a well deserved reputation for manufacturing silk. Granada silk was in high demand as a luxury item in Italy and northern Europe. Exporting and importing required shipping, most of which was conducted by Genoese traders. The area inside the Kingdom of Granada was densely populated and prosperous compared to the Christian areas of Al-Andalus. As a result, productivity was high and taxes could be levied to ensure the kingdom's survival.

Internally though, the politics of the Kingdom of Granada tended to be a hot mess. As stated by Richard Fletcher in his book "Moorish Spain", and I quote "the political history of 15th century Granada is bewilderingly complicated and quite unrewarding" end quote.

As we've just stated, Granada was blessed with plenty of citizens, many of whom chose to live outside the main cities of Granada, Malaga, and Almeria. The rural citizens of the kingdom were like rural citizens everywhere. They were poor, conservative, and tended to be predominantly interested in what was going on in their own small region. Each small region of the Kingdom of Granada had its own tribal or family elite who acted as local

rulers. This vast network of local rulers wasn't at all united. They were basically a loose confederation of people who, while acknowledging the overlordship of their Emir in Granada, would often fight each other, and sometimes would rail against demands from Granada.

And the demands from Granada were often about taxes. The good news was that the healthy population of the Kingdom of Granada meant that quite a lot of taxes could be levied. The bad news was that quite a lot of taxes were needed. Embarrassingly for everyone, a big chunk of the taxes were needed to pay the annual tribute into the coffers of the Kingdom of Castile, which pretty much no one was happy about.

Another considerable chunk was required to defend the kingdom, a subject which we will come to in a minute. A factor adding to the complexity of life in the Kingdom of Granada was its small size and its isolation. This little slice of the Iberian peninsula was now the only pocket left of the once mighty Muslim Al-Andalus, and it lived in constant fear of being swallowed up by the Christians. It was also isolated from mainstream Islamic culture. As Richard Fletcher states, and I quote "all these factors helped breed what has been described as a siege mentality. Late medieval Granada was a tense, volatile, un-harmonious society" end quote.

Fortunately for the nervous residents of Granada their kingdom enjoyed a combination of natural barriers on its borders and a chain of well fortified strongholds along its northern and western frontiers. The natural barriers were in the form of steep mountainous territory, complete with ravines, cliffs, and rocky, virtually impassable terrain along its northwestern borders, and a semi-desert region in the northeast. As we've just stated, between these two barriers lay a network of fortifications, many only five or six miles apart, strung out in a row to prevent an invasion. In addition to these effective and well maintained fortresses, more modest simple watchtower buildings had been constructed throughout the kingdom, not just on its borders, to serve both as an early warning system in the event of an attack and for places of safety to which locals could flee if there was an invasion. Now, when I say watchtowers had been built, there wasn't just a handful of them, they were everywhere. The Muslim chronicler Ibn al-Khatib catalogued around 14,000 of these watchtowers across the Kingdom of Granada. Granada was also able to deploy highly skilled cavalry forces, many of whom had trained in Morocco. Unlike the Christian cavalry, these horsemen were lightly armoured and lightly equipped. As a result, they were nimble, highly maneuverable, and were able to travel rapidly across vast distances.

There were a couple of weak points though. The first was in the region around the Strait of Gibraltar, along the kingdom's southernmost border. Contained inside the Kingdom of Granada were the towns of Gibraltar, Tarifa, and Algeciras, all of which were tempting prizes to the Christian Castilians just over the border. The second weak point was in the centre of the kingdom on its northern border. Following the fall of Jaen, which was now a Christian city close to the border of Granada, there was a constant possibility that the Castilians would use Jaen as a base from which to breach the border and strike at the city of Granada itself, which was only 90 or so kilometres to the south of Jaen - around one hour's drive away today. As a result, strongholds on both sides of the border became vital, well defended, and well resourced centres of operation, with the Castilians setting up bases along their side of the border and the Muslims also establishing strongholds along possible invasion routes and on roads leading from the Christian bases. Much of the conflict between the Muslims and the Christians on the peninsula moving forward will centre around these strongholds.

The final thing you need to know about the defence and the long term viability of the Kingdom of Granada was its ability to call on military support from northern Africa. I've already mentioned that many Muslim cavalymen completed their training in Morocco. Well, the ties between Granada and the new rulers in Morocco went further than that. While the Almohads were disappearing into the rear-view mirror of history, a new dynasty was rising to power, the Merinids, and Richard Fletcher points out in his book "Moorish Spain" that, once the Merinids have consolidated their hold on power, they will be in a position to provide military assistance to the Kingdom of Granada if called upon, and in fact, on occasion they will take it upon themselves to intervene in Spanish affairs despite not being requested to do so by the Emir of Granada.

It was possibly this last point, and the fact that the Merinids have not yet fully established themselves as the new rulers of Morocco, that prompted King Fernando to begin planning his ambitious next military campaign: an invasion of northern Africa with the aim of preempting any attempt by the new kids on the block, the Merinids, to invade the Iberian peninsula and liberate Al-Andalus from Christian rule.

Unfortunately though, King Fernando III of Leon and Castile won't get an opportunity to campaign in northern Africa, because he died on the 30th of May in the year 1252, during the planning stages of this military campaign. Now, although he was only aged in his early fifties when he died, it's likely that, looking back on his reign, King Fernando would have been pretty satisfied with his achievements. In his book "The Reconquest of Spain", D. W. Lomax points out that King Fernando conquered more Muslim land than any other Christian king. At the time of his death, the Muslim presence on the peninsula had been reduced to the small Kingdom of Granada, which itself was a vassal state of Castile. In recognition of this fact, Fernando was canonised by Pope Clement X in the year 1671, so he is actually Saint Fernando. His achievements were pretty impressive. In addition to being a talented military commander, he was an astute administrator and made sure, with the assistance of his mother Berenguela, that the books of his kingdom were balanced, so that his near constant military campaigns could be adequately funded.

Interestingly, D. W. Lomax attributes some of King Fernando's success to the input of Archbishop Rodrigo, the influential Archbishop of Toledo. Apparently Archbishop Rodrigo was a scholar of Arabic literature, may have spoken Arabic himself, and encouraged the translation of Almohad works of literature into Latin. This, in the view of D. W. Lomax, gave King Fernando insight into the mind and culture of the Muslim leaders he was waging war against.

King Fernando's final achievement was providing an able successor in the form of his son Alfonso, who had been actively involved in his father's military campaigns since the age of sixteen. Join me next time as King Alfonso X takes the throne of Leon and Castile. Until next time, bye for now.

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