

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 12  
Christianity during the rule of Abd al-Rahman II  
Part 1 – Inside Al-Andalus

Hello again, and welcome back to another year of podcasting. In our last episode of 2020 we saw the rise to power of Abd al-Rahman II, a colourful and interesting ruler, who successfully fended off a Viking raid, and who managed unrest in Al-Andalus by incorporating promising dissenters into his administration, meaning that he could keep a close eye on them while they exercised their ambitions in the service of his administration, instead of against it. As a result of this practise, the Emir's influence spread into nooks and crannies across Al-Andalus where it hadn't previously reached, and the administration itself was injected with new ideas and new ways of thinking, a factor complemented by the many visiting scholars and men of learning bringing the latest innovations from the Abbasid Caliphate to the Iberian peninsula.

Abd al-Rahman II ensured that the cultural exchange between Al-Andalus and Baghdad was exploited to its fullest. Not only were visiting scholars drawn to Al-Andalus and the patronage of its Emir, but any residents of Al-Andalus who caught Abd al-Rahman's eye and showed an unusual talent for intellectual pursuits or the arts was promptly set on the road to the Middle East and told to further their education in the Abbasid court at Baghdad, then bring the fruits of their learning back to Al-Andalus. In his book "Kingdoms of Faith", Brian Catlos provides multiple examples of individuals who brought Abbasid learning and culture to Al-Andalus under the encouragement of Abd al-Rahman II. I'll relay just two of these examples to you.

The first individual is a man called Abbas Ibn Firnas, who was a Muslim resident of Al-Andalus of Berber descent. He had risen within Abd al-Rahman's inner circle due to his talents as a poet, musician, scholar and philosopher, so Abd al-Rahman dispatched him to Baghdad to see what he could pick up and bring back to the peninsula. Abbas ended up voyaging to Baghdad and Egypt, and returned to Al-Andalus with an array of impressive skills, including the ability to cut rock crystal into lenses. Brian Catlos reports that, upon his return to Al-Andalus, Abbas constructed a mechanical model of the universe, as well as a clock. He then turned his talents to the mysteries of flight. He constructed a pair of wings, modelled on birds' wings, and was convinced that his invention would enable him to fly. In front of a gathered audience, he launched himself from the roof of the Emir's palace, only to discover that his wings didn't actually work that well. Unable to control his flight or, more importantly, his descent, he plummeted to the ground and suffered some serious injuries.

The second colourful character to bring the culture and influence of the Abbasid Caliphate to Al-Andalus was a man called Abul Hassan Ali Ibn Nafi, who earned himself the nickname "Ziryab", or "Blackbird", due to his dark skin tone. Ziryab had enormous talent and promise as a musician. As a young adult, he made his way to Cordoba at the invitation of al-Hakam, but he arrived there in the year 822, shortly after al-Hakam's death. Fortunately though, his journey wasn't wasted. He was befriended by the new Emir, Abd al-Rahman II, and eventually was admitted into Abd al-Rahman's inner circle, where he was celebrated not only for his talents as a musician and singer, but for his wit and charm.

Ziryab ended up having a massive influence on the culture of Al-Andalus. He established an Academy of Music in Cordoba, which not only taught the latest styles of music from the

Middle East, it also incorporated influences from Greece, Persia and even South Asia. Soon, musicians from across Al-Andalus were studying at the Academy in Cordoba, and the new styles of music taught at the Academy were exported across the peninsula and into Northern Africa.

Ziryab's influence didn't stop at musical styles. A trend in the Islamic Middle East was to view the eating of food not just as a means by which to alleviate hunger, but as a sort of pathway to better health. Ziryab introduced a number of innovative recipes to Abd al-Rahman's court, which combined meat and beans with spices such as coriander seed and saffron. He also pioneered the use of ceramic dishes to serve both hot and cold stews, replacing the traditional metal platters. Interestingly, he initiated the practise of eating a range of small courses of different types of food, starting with a soup dish, progressing to more substantial fare, and ending with a nut-filled dessert. According to Brian Catlos, Ziryab was also responsible for introducing asparagus to the Iberian Peninsula, along with a range of other foods and spices he had collected from his travels. Some of the trends started by Ziryab are reflected within modern Spanish cuisine today, which is extremely impressive.

Not content to radically change the food people were eating and the music they were listening to, Ziryab also influenced the manner in which people within Al-Andalus presented themselves to each other and the world. Prior to the reign of Abd al-Rahman II, some of the old Visigothic styles of dress and presentation were still favoured by those in the upper classes, particularly by people of Visigothic or Romano-Hispanic descent. Under Ziryab's influence this changed. People gradually abandoned their old-fashioned Visigothic hairstyles, in which hair was parted in the middle and kept long, and instead people began to cut bangs or fringes at the front while trimming the hair over their ears and letting the hair on the back of their heads grow long - like an '80s mullet. Interestingly, Brian Catlos reports that the new style was an imitation of the hairstyle worn by slaves at the Abbasid court in Baghdad, so everyone in Al-Andalus, from those in the inner circle of Abd al-Rahman's court right down to the common people, began looking suspiciously like Middle Eastern slaves (or Michael Bolton).

And we're not done yet. Ziryab's final influence concerns clothing. Strangely, prior to Ziryab's time, people tended to wear the same clothes year round, however, Ziryab introduced the sensible innovation of seasonal clothing, meaning that people wore white, simple clothes in summer then, as the weather cooled, colourful layers would be added. These colourful clothes included blends of fabrics such as silk and wool, and the use of new types of dyes, combined with metallic thread, opened up a whole range of vibrant ways in which wealthy citizens could express themselves.

Unfortunately though, the silk and silk-blend clothes were difficult to wash, but don't worry, Ziryab had a plan for that. He introduced a Middle Eastern innovation, which was a type of anti-perspirant. The active ingredient in the anti-perspirant was lead monoxide, which meant that it wasn't exactly healthy, but still it meant that the upper classes were fresh and comfortable-looking in their fancy bright clothes.

Seriously though, it's difficult to overstate the impact of people like Ziryab on the culture of Al-Andalus at this time.

By the later years of Abd al-Rahman II's reign, Al-Andalus was no longer an Umayyad backwater, hanging on desperately to its Visigothic roots, but a vibrant, colourful and exciting place of cutting-edge fashion, intellectual pursuits and learning.

The general fabulousness of Al-Andalus at this time, though, did have a drawback, in that it ended up increasing the tensions which existed within the more fervent believers of Islam and Christianity inside Al-Andalus. The problem arose due to the fact that Al-Andalus was developing its own identity and its own culture, and the adoption of this culture by adherents of the three faiths inside Al-Andalus (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) was blurring the lines between the three religions. By this stage, pretty much everyone in the middle and upper classes inside Al-Andalus was speaking Arabic, and Arabic was also the language used in texts inside the administration, so even for Jewish and Christian residents who had not converted to Islam, Arabic was their primary language. In fact, in his book "Kingdoms of Faith", Brian Catlos reports that Arabic was so entrenched as the language in some Christian communities around this time that some members of the clergy were forced to translate Christian texts into Arabic so that their congregation could understand it. I should point out that amongst the rural and peasant communities, the main language spoken was a local type of Latin vernacular, which will eventually develop into the language we now know as Spanish, but amongst the middle and upper classes Arabic was the language of choice.

Alarmingly for many deeply religious Christians inside Al-Andalus, Christians were not only speaking Arabic, but were adopting the new clothing styles, the new cuisine, and the new Abbasid-influenced trends which had become popular within Al-Andalus under the rule of Abd al-Rahman II. Interestingly, many Muslims also adopted some Christian traditions, particularly the holidays. In fact, across Al-Andalus, the proponents of the different religions began sharing each others' holidays, so not only would Christians join in the feasting marking the end of the period of fasting and reflection in the Muslim calendar known as Ramadan, Muslims began celebrating Easter and Christmas. And, according to Brian Catlos, members of all faiths partook in ceremonies and processions to encourage rain in Cordoba in times of drought, traditions with more pagan origins.

While this seems to be a beneficial, inclusive type of arrangement, it sparked a degree of alarm and then a backlash from staunch Christians and zealous Muslims, who were determined to push back against the perceived watering down of their respective religions.

The Muslim backlash came mainly in the form of the prosecution of crimes of apostasy or the renouncement of Islam. This was becoming a problem, mostly within families of mixed religions. Christian wives of Muslim men weren't required by Islamic law to convert to Islam, although many in fact chose to do so. But children of mixed marriages were considered to be Muslim. However, since the Christian mothers carried out most of the child-rearing activities, the children of the marriages would often be raised with a Christian rather than a Muslim outlook, a situation which, Brian Catlos points out, would sometimes cause problems when the children grew to adulthood, resulting in them rejecting Islam as a religion.

Towards the end of Abd al-Rahman's rule, a number of people were executed for apostasy, many of whom were people who had been raised in mixed religious households, and who had gone on to reject Islam as adults. They were given the choice to confirm their commitment to Islam or to be executed, and a handful of them chose execution. These executed apostates were labelled as martyrs by some fervent Christian leaders, one of whom ended up being the last Christian executed in Cordoba, a man named Eulogius.

Eulogius and his followers had become alarmed about the adoption of the Arabic language amongst Christians inside Al-Andalus, and aimed to prevent the further erosion of

Christian culture inside the peninsula. Eulogius founded monasteries in rural regions, which he hoped would become centres of Christian resistance against Islam, and began publicising the deaths of the martyrs, hoping to light the fire of a sort of militant Christianity inside Al-Andalus. But it didn't work. Unfortunately for Eulogius, most Christian residents of Al-Andalus were actually pretty happy with their situation, and they didn't want to stir up trouble against a regime which, for the most part, let them practise their beliefs unhindered. Eulogius stomped around and tried, along with some other reactionary clerics, to get himself arrested for blasphemy, in an attempt to further his cause by his own martyrdom.

Abd al-Rahman II dealt with the issue thoughtfully and diplomatically. Careful not to play into the hands of Eulogius and his compatriots by prosecuting him and enabling him to achieve his goal of martyrdom, he instead convened a Church Council, which ruled that to provoke your death was a form of suicide, which was a Christian mortal sin. Eulogius was then arrested and incarcerated in a sort of preventative detention, to stop him from stirring up trouble. However, when he was later released, stirring up trouble was exactly what Eulogius ended up doing. He assisted a woman called Leocritia, who was legally a Muslim but who had developed Christian beliefs. He was arrested for this crime, then beheaded in the year 857. However, the martyrdom of Eulogius didn't spark the uprising he had hoped for. Instead, the opposite happened. Without Eulogius to rabble-rouse, his movement ground to a halt and was soon largely forgotten by most people. However, Eulogius may have been comforted to know that, three decades after his death, his remains were taken out of Al-Andalus to the Kingdom of Asturias, where he was venerated as both a martyr and a saint.

While we've seen the effect of the colourful and progressive reign of Abd al-Rahman II on the residents of Al-Andalus, how did it impact the Christians in the north of the peninsula? You'll have to join me next time to find out.

Now, before we go, I'd like to draw your attention to a new series we are about to embark on in the Patreon feed. We've just completed lengthy examinations of the Hundred Years' War and the Wars Of The Roses, and we are about to revert back to more Crusader themed episodes. The episode which will drop on the Patreon feed next Wednesday is the first in a new series examining the Jewish experience of the Medieval era, and particularly how the Crusades impacted the Jewish communities living in Europe. If that's something you're interested in, pop over to [patreon.com](https://www.patreon.com) and sign up. It only costs \$1 per month, and you'll be able to access not only the new episodes as they drop, but the extensive back catalogue. And it's a great way to support the podcast. Until next time, bye for now.

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