

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 39  
Toledo, Part Two

Hello again. Last time we saw unrest erupt within the Taifa of Toledo, which ultimately resulted in the assassination of its King, al-Mamun. Al-Mamun's grandson, the young and completely ineffective al-Qadir, is now occupying the throne in Toledo. We also saw some major changes take place in the Christian north, with the Kingdom of Navarre being effectively divided between Aragon and Leon and Castile following the assassination of its King. Now we shall turn our attentions back to Toledo.

It probably won't surprise anyone to learn that Toledo's new ruler, al-Qadir, is encountering all sorts of trouble trying to rule his Taifa. The civil unrest and conflict which broke out during al-Mamun's reign is continuing unabated, but in addition to domestic crises, young al-Qadir is also struggling to deal with encroachments by other taifas onto his territory. We mentioned in the last episode that the King of Seville had managed to snatch Cordoba from Toledo and is now eyeing off Valencia, a wealthy taifa which al-Mamun had managed to dominate.

This sent al-Qadir into a sort of doom spiral. The more he was occupied trying to quell domestic opposition to his reign inside Toledo, the less time he had available to defend Toledo against encroachments by other taifas. However, the less time he spent protecting Toledo's foreign interests, the more likely it was that Toledo would lose territory and influence, which would of course increase the amount of civil unrest back home. The doom spiral reached its almost inevitable conclusion in the year 1078, when the King of Seville seized the Taifa of Valencia from Toledo. This meant that Seville was now in control of a vast amount of territory, an extension which threatened the very existence of the Taifa of Toledo.

This was the last straw for al-Qadir's opponents, who staged a coup to overthrow him. Al-Qadir was forced to flee from the city of Toledo. He sought shelter on his family's ancestral estates near the borderlands of his territory, and from there sent an urgent message to King Alfonso requesting military assistance.

Meanwhile, back in Toledo, mindful of the threat posed by the expanding Taifa of Seville, the power-brokers who had ousted al-Qadir decided to ask the Taifa of Badajoz for assistance. Badajoz was currently being ruled by a man called al-Mutawakkil, who was the head of a Berber clan. The Berbers had seized power in Badajoz back in the year 1022 and had ruled it successfully, defending it against aggression from Seville, Toledo, and the Christian north. Al-Mutawakkil agreed to provide Toledo with all the assistance it needed on the condition that he, al-Mutawakkil, ruled Toledo as its King. The power-brokers inside Toledo agreed, but soon came to regret their decision. Al-Mutawakkil and his entourage travelled to the city of Toledo and spent the next ten months not working to secure the borders of the Taifa of Toledo, but working to empty its treasury and loot its palace.

As the residents of the city of Toledo watched in dismay as its treasures were transported back to Badajoz, King Alfonso sprang into action. He advised the young king-in-exile al-Qadir that he would come to his assistance, but only if al-Qadir paid him a gob-smacking amount of tribute. While al-Qadir was left pondering how on earth he was going to come up with the sum which King Alfonso had demanded, King Alfonso decided

to test the resolve of the new Berber King of Toledo, by sending raiding parties to attack not only the borderlands of the Taifa of Toledo but also territory belonging to Badajoz. This was all too much for al-Mutawakkil who, having cleared the treasury of Toledo of the cream of its wealth, decided to abandon the Taifa and head back to Badajoz. This left the Taifa of Toledo in a precarious situation. It now had no protectors, nothing left in its treasury, and its people were growing increasingly anxious, angry, and restless.

Now, at this point in time, which incidentally is April in the year 1081, young al-Qadir was able, with King Alfonso's assistance, to return to the city of Toledo and resume his place on the throne, for a price of course. The price which the young king paid to secure King Alfonso's assistance was rather high. Since everyone knew that al-Qadir simply wasn't in a position to immediately hand over large wads of cash due to the fact that the treasury of Toledo had now effectively been relocated to Badajoz, he agreed to pay by way of future tribute, which he would raise via taxes, and he agreed to let King Alfonso seize and garrison the two most strategic strongholds in the Taifa, with the maintenance and upkeep of the garrisons being paid out of Toledo's pocket. The two strongholds in question were Zorita, which was located 110 kilometres northeast of Toledo and was designed to block access to the city of Toledo from Valencia and Zaragoza, and Cantuarias, which was 70 kilometres west of the city of Toledo and was on the road leading from Badajoz. By manning these strongholds, armies from the Christian north would be able to protect Toledo from attack by Valencia, Zaragoza and Badajoz, meaning that al-Qadir would be free to concentrate on securing his realm domestically, while King Alfonso took care of any external threats. As many of al-Qadir's critics within the court of Toledo pointed out though, it also meant that Toledo had just passed control of its two most strategic strongholds to the Christian north.

Anyway, all criticisms aside, al-Qadir then busied himself trying to stamp out spot-fires of rebellion inside his taifa, while King Alfonso turned his attentions towards his favourite pastime: extracting tribute from the various taifas.

And here is where we welcome El Cid back to the stage. Now, El Cid at this point in time isn't yet known as El Cid, but is ordinary Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar. Since that's a bit of a mouthful, we will call him Rodrigo. I'm sure he won't mind. Now, Rodrigo had done pretty well for himself in King Alfonso's court. Since he had once been the chief military commander of King Alfonso's brother, King Sancho, who had beaten Alfonso on the battlefield prior to his assassination, King Alfonso would have been justified exiling Rodrigo from his Kingdom, but he didn't do this. King Alfonso seemed to be the sort of man who was happy to let bygones be bygones, and was also happy to reward and promote men of talent. As such, not only Rodrigo but a number of other high-rollers from the Castilian Royal Court of his brother Sancho were now gainfully employed within King Alfonso's court, where they had all been slowly working their ways up various ladders. By the late 1070s, Rodrigo had scored himself an advantageous marriage, was well connected, wealthy, successful, and was definitely a man on the rise.

In the year 1079 Rodrigo was tasked by King Alfonso with the job of travelling to the Taifa of Seville as a representative of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile to collect tribute from Seville. At the same time, a similar group of envoys from the Christian north had been dispatched to Granada. When Rodrigo arrived in Seville he discovered that something truly shocking had occurred. The King of Granada had decided to use the Christian envoys which had travelled to the Taifa of Granada, which were a group of nobleman from the court of King Alfonso, along with their knights and retinue, to deal a blow against Seville by invading Seville. Rodrigo became aware of this plan and sent an urgent letter from Seville

to the King of Granada, urging him and his Christian allies, and I quote “for the love of their Lord King Alfonso” end quote, to desist. However, the plea from Rodrigo was ignored, the forces invaded, and Rodrigo rode out to confront them. After a hard-fought battle, Rodrigo defeated the Christians from Granada and took them captive.

Well, at least that was Rodrigo's side of the story. It all sounds very reasonable and plausible, except unfortunately it doesn't hold up to scrutiny. As pointed out by Richard Fletcher in his book “El Cid”, it was extremely unlikely that the King of Granada would have sent envoys from the Christian north off on a mission to invade a neighbouring taifa without any military backup from Granada, yet it's pretty clear that the attacking force from Granada didn't contain any Muslim fighters. The only people doing the attacking were Christians. Secondly, envoys were generally dispatched to taifas by King Alfonso in groups. The entire group of envoys dispatched to Granada had in fact been captured by Rodrigo, yet Rodrigo was the only envoy from Seville to be involved in the attack. It was effectively a one-man-Rodrigo show. If that doesn't raise enough eyebrows, current historians are of the view that it's likely that the battle itself took place in the Taifa of Granada, not the Taifa of Seville, meaning that it was Rodrigo doing the invading and not the envoys from Granada. If that doesn't seal the deal, it might be a good time to mention that one of the men captured by Rodrigo in the battle was his longtime rival, a man named Count Garcia Ordonez.

Now, Rodrigo and Count Ordonez had both served together in the Castilian court under King Sancho, and both had switched allegiances to King Alfonso following King Sancho's assassination. However, once at King Alfonso's court, the two men had gradually turned from being comrades into rivals. While Rodrigo had married well and had risen to a position of wealth and prestige inside King Alfonso's court, Count Ordonez had scored an even more prestigious marriage. He had in fact married one of the sisters of the assassinated King Sancho IV of Navarre, which we mentioned in the last episode, and had been promoted to an office more prestigious and more lucrative to that held by Rodrigo.

After capturing Count Ordonez, Rodrigo held him and the other envoys captive for three days, confiscated all the weapons and wealth they had with them, then demanded the payment of a ransom for the release of the Count and the other envoys. After the ransom had been paid and Count Ordonez had been thoroughly humiliated, Rodrigo collected the tribute from Seville and headed back to King Alfonso's court. Rodrigo likely swaggered into Leon, expecting to find his rival's star on the wane and his own star shining brightly for all to see. However, the opposite was true. Instead of striking a blow against Count Ordonez and his loyalists, Rodrigo found them being supported and sympathised with, while Rodrigo was being shunned and talked about in unflattering terms behind closed doors. Word of Rodrigo's exploits made their way to King Alfonso, who was very much unimpressed by them. As the author of the “Historia Roderici”, an early manuscript detailing the life of El Cid states, when Rodrigo arrived at Leon, and I quote “many men became jealous and accused him before the King of many false and untrue things” end quote.

Rodrigo's growing reputation as a bit of a hothead and loose cannon hit new heights in the summer of 1081. At this stage, al-Qadir had just been installed back in Toledo and was trying to kick-start his rule of his Taifa with King Alfonso's assistance. At this time a raiding party of bandits entered Castilian territory, in the Christian north, attacked the castle of Gormaz on the river Duero, and carried off plunder. It appeared that the bandits were Muslim and had crossed over the border into Castile from the Taifa of Toledo. This was a relatively common occurrence, but what happened next wasn't common at all. What

happened next was Rodrigo decided to take the initiative and strike a blow against the attackers. In the words of the *Historia Roderici*, and I quote, “he gathered together his army and all his well-armed knights, and pillaged and laid waste to the land of the Saracens within the Kingdom of Toledo” end quote. Just like his last ill-considered venture, this ill-considered venture was resoundingly successful. Rodrigo and his knights captured a large number of Muslims and scored a bunch of loot, which he took back to Castile.

But if King Alfonso was unimpressed by Rodrigo's actions in Seville, well he was super super unimpressed by his unauthorised raid into Toledo, a raid which threatened the fragile reign of al-Qadir which King Alfonso was attempting to prop up, which showed that the northern Christians who had newly acquired a couple of strategic fortresses inside Toledo could not be fully trusted, and which gave the green light to other hotheads inside Alfonso's royal court. So King Alfonso did really the only thing he could have done in the circumstances: he exiled Rodrigo. Forced out of his home in Castile, and in fact out of the entire vast realm ruled by King Alfonso, Rodrigo made his way to Catalonia, hoping to find employment as a soldier.

The exit of Rodrigo meant that King Alfonso was free to concentrate on more important matters, which was fortunate, as things are about to get rather hectic for King Alfonso. Join me next time for the fall of Toledo. Until next time, bye for now.

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