

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 47
Valencia

Hello again. Last time we saw the Almoravids pick off the taifas one by one, until only a handful remained unconquered. We also saw Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, otherwise known as El Cid, decide to make a move on Valencia at the end of the year 1092. By the end of the year 1092 a coup had taken place in Valencia. The pliable, incompetent King of Valencia, al-Qadir, had been captured and executed, with the Taifa now being ruled by a man called Ibn Jahhaf. The Almoravids had recently taken Aledo and were busy conquering their way up the southern coastline of the Iberian peninsula, heading towards Valencia. El Cid at this time was in Zaragoza, taking a breather following a successful military campaign in Castile.

Now I'm going to start calling Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar "El Cid" at this point in our narrative. I should probably point out that it's likely he was never called "El Cid" during his lifetime, but he earned the nickname posthumously. "El Cid" kind of means "the commander", "the master", or more informally "the boss", "the dude", "the main man". It's a title which definitely suits him, and he's about to earn it, so, with a coup having recently taken place in Valencia and with the Almoravids advancing up the coast, what are El Cid's plans?

Well, his first move was to establish two bases, one to the north of the city of Valencia and one to the south. The base to the south was easy to establish. El Cid had conquered a stronghold in the mountains to the south of Valencia after the Granada campaign of 1091, so he simply fortified and strengthened it. For his northern base, he laid siege to a stronghold nine miles to the north of the city of Valencia. He successfully captured it, then re-fortified it, and set it up as a base for his forces.

Now, conquering Valencia was going to be no easy task. When King Alfonso had taken the Taifa of Toledo, he had had the benefit of the armies of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile to back him up. El Cid though had no such backing. He was just a sort of freelancing military commander with only a small army of loyal men to call upon, so this was going to be a challenge, to say the least. He had nowhere near enough men to besiege the large and wealthy city of Valencia, so he was just going to have to make do. Instead of surrounding the city, he decided to cut supply lines to and from the city by ravaging the surrounding countryside and conducting continuous raids from his bases to the north and south of the city. This he commenced to do in the summer of the year 1093. As the people of Valencia started to feel the pinch caused by the disrupted supply lines, the current ruler of the city, Ibn Jahhaf, sent a message to Yusuf Ibn Tashafin requesting military assistance from the Almoravids.

Now, at this stage, as we have already stated, the Almoravids were conquering their way across the southern coast of the peninsula, and you would think that the obvious move would be for Yusuf Ibn Tashafin to direct his army to attack El Cid's forces and go to the relief of Valencia, which would then likely fall to the Almoravids. But that wasn't how things played out. In his book "The Quest for El Cid", Richard Fletcher states that Yusuf Ibn Tashafin sent a small relief force towards Valencia in September of 1093, but that his men never actually engaged in battle with El Cid's army. Instead, the focus of the Almoravids at this time was on the conquest of Badajoz. Yusuf. Ibn Tashafin concentrated his forces and his attentions on the Taifa of Badajoz, far away on the western side of the Iberian

peninsula. The Taifa of Badajoz will in fact fall to the Almoravids in early 1094, but this is generally seen by military historians, with the benefit of hindsight, to have been an error of judgement. What Yusuf Ibn Tashafin should have done was to take Valencia first and then turned his attentions to Badajoz. But luckily for El Cid, Yusuf didn't do this. The absence of the bulk of the Almoravid forces from Valencia meant that El Cid was free to continue his blockade of the city unimpeded.

The winter of 1093 to 1094 was a difficult one for the citizens of Valencia. Food and fuel shortages caused hardship and misery, and by the spring of the year 1094 everyone had had enough. The ruler of Valencia, Ibn Jahhaf, opened negotiations with El Cid, and terms of surrender were agreed. By the end of May in the year 1094, El Cid found himself the new ruler of the Taifa of Valencia. He installed himself in the palace, which had recently been occupied by al-Qadir and then perhaps embarked on a tour of his new city.

Now, as stated by Richard Fletcher in his book "The Quest for El Cid", and I quote "nothing structural survives of the city of which the Cid became the Lord in 1094" end quote. The Royal Palace is long gone, as are the royal gardens, the administrative buildings and the city walls. Valencia today is a sprawling city of around 1.5 million people, if you count the residents of its wider urban municipalities. It's probably safe to say that the modern city of Valencia, with its extensive infrastructure, its busy port facilities and the usual features you would find in a large and busy modern city, would be completely unrecognisable to the men in El Cid's army who rocked up to claim Valencia in the year 1094.

For the fighters who had been with El Cid since his Castilian days, the landscape around Valencia was about as different from the landscape of Castile as you could imagine. Whereas Castile was rather arid and not really home to any impressive cities, Valencia was lush, green, and picturesque. As described by Richard Fletcher, and I quote "How the conquerors from bleak Castile must have gasped as they looked upon the ordered yield of that astonishingly abundant landscape: the paddy fields of rice, the lustrous greens of the citrus groves, the checkerboard of fruit and vegetable plots; further to the west on the rising ground, the vineyards, olive groves, and cornfields, and beyond them the pine forests on the slopes of the mountains." End quote.

Unfortunately for El Cid, though, there was no time to kick back and enjoy the luxurious gardens and spectacular scenery, because the Almoravids were still in the middle of their conquering rampage, and Valencia was most definitely in their sights. In fact, fresh from his conquest of Badajoz, Yusuf Ibn Tashafin had appointed his nephew Muhammad to the position of military commander of the Almoravid forces from northern Africa and Al-Andalus, and his brief from his uncle Yusuf was that Muhammad should attack Valencia, defeat both the city and the Taifa, capture El Cid, and bring him to Yusuf in chains.

Now the defence of Valencia, from El Cid's point of view, was going to be rather challenging. The Taifa of Valencia was located on the Mediterranean coast. On its northern borders lay the Taifa of Zaragoza. It bordered Toledo to the west and the remaining border it shared was with Denia, the former taifa which was now part of the territory conquered by the Almoravids. In order to keep his vast, wealthy new conquest, El Cid was going to need military support and back-up, and he was going to need it rather quickly. The most obvious source of manpower and support lay to the north of Zaragoza, in Aragon. El Cid enjoyed a close relationship with King Sancho Ramirez of Aragon, so he sent a message to him requesting the presence of the armies of Aragon in Valencia as quickly as possible. King Sancho Ramirez complied, but in a disastrous turn of events, King Sancho Ramirez of

Aragon died while leading his armies to Valencia. Yes, that's right. Only a few days journey away from the city of Valencia, the King of Aragon unexpectedly passed away. El Cid had also formed a bond with the son and heir of Sancho Ramirez, Pedro, but it was clear that Pedro was in no position to stay in Valencia to help with the defence of the Taifa. Instead, Pedro needed to head back to Aragon to secure his claim to the throne, so a no doubt deeply disappointed and disheartened El Cid was forced to wave goodbye to the fighters of Aragon as the army retraced its steps northwards back home.

So with Aragon out of the picture, who was available from the Christians of the peninsula to assist with the defence of Valencia? Well, Catalonia would have been almost immediately crossed off the list. El Cid had a troubled and volatile history with Count Berenguer of Barcelona, so there was no point sending for help from that direction. That left King Alfonso IV of Leon and Castile. As observed by Richard Fletcher, the fact that El Cid was prepared to ask for assistance from King Alfonso showed just how desperate he was. King Alfonso, in a generous gesture, did offer to provide El Cid with some men, but not very many. King Alfonso currently had his own troubles with the Almoravids. The Taifa of Toledo had extensive borders which needed defending, and King Alfonso had just lost a chunk of territory in what today is the country of Portugal to the Almoravids, so he really had few men to spare. He did, however, send a small contingent of royal troops to assist El Cid. However, the gesture ended up being futile, as the men didn't make it to Valencia in time.

El Cid was soon forced to come to the realisation that he was on his own. He was going to need to defend the large and newly-conquered Taifa of Valencia by himself with his small army, against the might of the large, powerful, and so far undefeated Almoravid forces.

The good news for El Cid was that his men were all highly skilled, loyal, and experienced fighters. But that was the only good news. All the other news was bad. El Cid had only just installed himself as the ruler of Valencia. The people of Valencia didn't know him and he didn't know them. El Cid was a Christian man from the north, and for all he knew the people of Valencia, most of whom were Muslim, would much rather be ruled by the Muslim Almoravids than a recently arrived Christian man. So he had no reason to believe that the fighting men of Valencia would fight for him. They may well switch sides and fight for the Almoravids. That was his first problem.

His second problem was the fact that he was going to be massively outnumbered. Reports coming in about the size of the Almoravid army slowly advancing up the coast towards Valencia were truly alarming. The *Historia Roderici* reports that the Almoravid army contained 150,000 mounted men. This is likely a huge exaggeration though. Modern historians believe that the army couldn't have contained more than 20,000 horsemen. Still, the point was the Almoravid army was enormous and El Cid only had a handful of men in comparison.

Still, he seemed determined to make the most of it. While the Almoravid army was laboriously making its way towards the city of Valencia, El Cid got to work. Firstly, he let it be known that if the Almoravid army besieged the city of Valencia, the Muslim population of the city would be put to the sword. This was likely designed to incentivise the Muslim men of Valencia to actively defend the city against the invaders. El Cid, then ordered all tools made of iron to be surrendered and handed over to his men. The point of this was two-fold: to make sure any hostile Muslims inside Valencia didn't have access to any weapons; and to increase the number of weapons available for use by El Cid's men.

El Cid's commanders then took groups of potential Muslim fighting men from inside Valencia out on impromptu military exercises near the coast. The commanders used this time and the exercises to determine which citizens of Valencia were decent fighters, which of them could be trusted, and which were worth arming and incorporating into El Cid's army. Any men deemed untrustworthy or trouble-makers were told to make themselves scarce, and would not be allowed to re-enter the city of Valencia until the Almoravid threat had passed.

Then El Cid busied himself trying to come up with a battle plan, a plan which would pit his tiny army against the might of the Almoravids in such a fashion that he, El Cid, would win the day. It seemed to be an impossible task, but El Cid gave it his best shot.

At the end of October in the year 1094 the Almoravids arrived. They set up camp on a level field outside the city of Valencia, known as Cuarte, a place which today is the site of Valencia's airport. Join me next time as El Cid faces the Almoravids in the Battle of Cuarte, an engagement which cemented El Cid's name in the history books, and showed the world that he really was "the man". Until next time, bye for now.

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