

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 48  
El Cid

Hello again. Last time we saw Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, also known as El Cid, take the Taifa of Valencia. We also saw the Almoravid army head towards Valencia intent on defeating El Cid, and adding Valencia to their growing list of conquered taifas.

Now, before we get to the action, I'd like to point out to any of you who have just stumbled across the Reconquista podcast, have scrolled through the episodes and clicked on this one, thinking that it's going to give you a neat summary of the life and times of El Cid in one short episode, well that's not how this works. Although this episode is titled "El Cid", it just forms part of the wider narrative, because this is a chronological podcast working its way along the lengthy timeline from the rise of Al-Andalus to the end of the Reconquista, and to get a full picture of the life and times of El CID, you'll have to start listening to Episode 35, which is the first time he appears in the narrative, or even better go back to the first episode and start from there. Anyway, back to the narrative.

Now, just to recap, let's see where we are. El Cid has just conquered Valencia but will now have to defend it against the Almoravids. This will be no easy task. The Almoravid army is enormous, highly effective, and at this stage, undefeated. Yusuf Ibn Tashafin has returned to northern Africa, but he has placed the Almoravid forces under the command of his nephew Muhammad, with a brief to march to the city of Valencia, attack it, conquer both the city of Valencia and the Taifa of Valencia, imprison El Cid, then bring him to Yusuf in chains.

El Cid, in defending Valencia, doesn't have much to work with. He's not a king and he doesn't command a royal army. He has called on the Christians of the peninsula for assistance, but only one person has effectively responded to the call, that person being King Alfonso VI. While King Alfonso has dispatched a small fighting force to Valencia, it won't reach the city in time to be of any use.

El Cid is also having trouble co-opting the men of Valencia into his army. Most of this trouble stems from the fact that El Cid has just staged a hostile takeover of their city. He had effectively starved the city into submission, forcing it to surrender to him. How do the men of fighting age in Valencia feel about El Cid? Well, apart from the fact that he made them all suffer in order to conquer the city, he is a Christian man, and he's not even a king. He's just a freelancing, mercenary, military commander without any impressive bloodlines who is now claiming to rule the city of Valencia and the Taifa of Valencia, regions with a majority Muslim population. So if you were a Muslim man living in Valencia, would you be willing to fight for El Cid and lay down your life for him? Probably not. In fact, you would be more likely to work to undermine El Cid and his fighting force in the hope that he would be defeated and you would be ruled by the staunchly Muslim super fighting force of the Almoravids.

El Cid was well aware of this and attempted to counter it by telling all the Muslim men in the city of Valencia that they would be put to the sword if the Almoravids besieged the city, a threat likely designed to incentivise the residents of Valencia to join with El Cid to prevent the Almoravids from taking the city. El Cid then confiscated not only all the weapons inside Valencia but all the iron tools as well, a move which deprived the Muslim residents of any

weapons and increased the stockpile of weapons available to his own men. El Cid then ordered his military commanders to take groups of Valencian men outside the city walls on military exercises, expeditions which were designed to sort the trustworthy fighters from the untrustworthy ones. Any men deemed by his commanders to be likely to switch sides and back the Almoravids were not allowed back into the city, but were told to make themselves scarce until the Almoravid threat had passed.

And so we come to the place where we left off the last episode. The absolutely massive Almoravid army has now arrived and has set up camp in a field outside the city of Valencia in a place called Cuarte, which incidentally today is the location of Valencia's airport. So how is El Cid going to play this? Well, it ends up going a little something like this.

Every day for the next ten or so days the Almoravids rode up to the walls of the city of Valencia and did their best to harass the residents. They would yell, shriek, and fire arrows over the walls into the city, trying to entice El Cid and his men to leave the safety of the city walls. According to the *Historia Roderici*, El Cid spent these ten days praying and preparing his troops. Finally, on day ten, El Cid made his move. Unfortunately, there's not a huge amount of information available on exactly how the battle played out, but according to a Muslim source, on the tenth day, without any warning, as the Almoravids were riding around outside the city walls making their usual racket, a group of Christian fighters on horseback charged out of the main gate of the city and began to engage the Almoravids, with the leader of the sortie dressed to resemble El Cid. But it wasn't El Cid. The real El Cid led a much larger force out of the city, by a different gate, and attacked the Almoravids from behind, pinning them between the two Christian armies. The Almoravids panicked as they were cut down by El Cid's men.

The *Historia Roderici* describes the end of the battle in this way, and I quote "By God's clemency, Rodrigo defeated all the Almoravids. Thus he had victory and triumph over them, granted to him by God. As soon as they were defeated, they turned their backs in flight. A multitude of them fell to the sword. Others, with their wives and children, were led captive to Rodrigo's headquarters. Rodrigo's men seized all their tents and equipments, amongst which they found innumerable money of gold and silver and precious textiles. They thoroughly plundered all the wealth they found there. Rodrigo and his men were greatly enriched thereby, with so much gold and silver, most precious textiles, chargers, palfreys, and mules, and various sorts of weaponry. They were amply stocked with quantities of provisions and treasures untold." End quote.

News that El Cid and his small army had not just defeated the Almoravids, but had sent them fleeing and had taken all of their stuff, spread like wildfire. It became the main topic of conversation, not only in Al-Andalus, not only across the Iberian peninsula, but across all of Europe. If social media had existed back in the 11th century, El Cid would have been trending like you wouldn't believe. His defeat of the Almoravids became the defining event for that year, so much so that later in the year a scribe from Aragon, instead of writing a date on a charter instead wrote, and I quote "In the year when the Almoravids came to Valencia and Rodrigo Diaz defeated them and took captive all of their troops" end quote. That is a bit longer than writing the year as 1094, but it celebrated the famous event and everyone knew exactly which year the scribe was referring to.

The victory at the Battle of Cuarte didn't just define the year 1094, it was pretty much the defining event of El Cid's life. It was likely the cause of him being awarded the title "El Cid" following his death, "El Cid" meaning, of course, "the master", "the commander", "the boss", "the complete package", "the absolute unit".

Anyway, after the battle of Cuarte, it was clear that, against all odds, El Cid had conquered the Taifa of Valencia, and the wealthy taifa was now under Christian rule. El Cid spent the next few years consolidating his rule over his new territory and manning and strengthening strongholds across the taifa, subduing restless residents, and securing his borders with neighbouring taifas, particularly those under Almoravid control. El Cid's victory at Cuarte showed that the Almoravids could be defeated and, like King Alfonso had previously demonstrated in Toledo, that a Christian could conquer and rule a Muslim territory.

It also left many Muslims on the peninsula wondering how this could have happened, and also wondering how long it would be before Valencia once again became a Muslim-ruled territory. You might remember back in Episode 46, when the ruler of the Taifa of Granada, Abdullah, was captured and imprisoned by the Almoravids, he decided to spend his incarceration writing his memoirs. Well, in winter of the year 1094 to 1095 he finished his account. His final entry reads as follows and I quote, "Were I to leave the writing of this work until the conclusion of the Valencia story, I would approach my task with a Muslim victory already attained. That's why a lacuna has been left in this book, in expectation that a long cherished hope might be realised" end quote. What Abdullah is saying here is that he believes it to be inevitable that the Muslims will re-conquer Valencia, so he's leaving a gap at the end of his book so that the Muslim victory at Valencia can be inserted once it has happened.

And to be honest, it's completely understandable that the Muslims of Al-Andalus were keen to see Valencia return to Muslim rule. As stated by Richard Fletcher in his book "The Quest for El Cid", and I quote "We know little of the administration of Valencia between 1094 and 1099, but that little suggests that Rodrigo's government was harsh" end quote. Some of the harsh forms of rule included the confiscation of corn, meat, oil, and wine from farmers and merchants in the countryside of the taifa for consumption in the city of Valencia. As Richard Fletcher notes, and I quote "there was nothing pretty or romantic about the Cid's rule in Valencia" end quote.

Probably the least pretty and romantic and the most harsh event concerns the fate of the previous ruler of Valencia, Ibn Jahhaf. Now you might remember that Ibn Jahhaf had forced al-Qadir from his throne in the year 1092. Al-Qadir had managed to arrange for some of his treasure to be smuggled out of Valencia prior to his subsequent execution, but much of it had been seized by Ibn Jahhaf, who had promised to hand it over to El Cid. He did hand some of the loot over, but El Cid was convinced that he had hidden the rest of it away, and El Cid was intent on discovering its location. So he imprisoned Ibn Jahhaf and members of his extended family, then ordered Ibn Jahhaf to be tortured until he revealed the whereabouts of the supposed pile of loot. Ibn Jahhaf failed to come up with anything useful, so El Cid ordered him to be executed on the grounds of having killed al-Qadir and also of allegedly failing to hand over all of al-Qadir's treasure.

It wasn't so much the sentence of execution, but the manner in which El Cid decreed that it should be carried out which left people squirming in discomfort and disbelief. A pit was dug in the marketplace in Valencia, and Ibn Jahhaf was buried in the pit up to his armpits. Then a fire was lit around the pit. Unlike execution by burning at the stake, which is horrible enough, this was less of a burning and more of a slow roasting. It's hard to imagine a more horrible way to die. Completely unmoved by the suffering Ibn Jahhaf must have endured, El Cid was all for meting the same punishment out to Ibn Jahhaf's wife and children, and was only restrained from doing so after an intervention by his advisers.

So you would have to say that unfortunately, El Cid's skills as an administrator weren't up to the standard of his skills as a military commander. Anyway, the Muslims of Valencia will need to adjust to their new Christian government, as it will continue for a few years yet. Join me next time as we examine the remainder of El Cid's rule in Valencia, and return to the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, where some succession drama is playing out. Until next time, bye for now.

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