

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 49
Succession Issues

Hello again. Last time we saw El Cid defeat the Almoravids at the Battle of Cuarte and secure his hold over the Taifa of Valencia. We also saw that his methods of governance were frequently harsh and unpleasant, leaving many Muslims in the Iberian peninsula keen to see Valencia return to Muslim rule. Now, before we examine the remainder of El Cid's rule in Valencia, we are first going to pop over to the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, where some succession drama is currently playing out.

Now I shouldn't need to point out to you the fact that the rule of King Alfonso VI has been epically successful, and that whomever rules the Kingdom of Leon and Castile following King Alfonso's death will have very big shoes to fill. As at the year 1094, when El Cid defeated the Almoravids at the Battle of Cuarte, King Alfonso was aged in his mid-fifties and had been King for nearly three decades. The good news was that King Alfonso was in good health and looked like he would be King for some time yet. The bad news was his succession plans were currently in disarray and causing him no end of headaches.

Now you might remember that, back in Episode 44, Count Raymond of Burgundy found himself betrothed to King Alfonso's only legitimate child, his then six-year-old daughter Urraca. Count Raymond was awarded the title of the Count of Galicia, and it was intended that Count Raymond, as the husband of King Alfonso's only legitimate child, would eventually succeed King Alfonso to the throne of Leon and Castile. This promotion of a young Burgundian nobleman into the Royal Court of Leon and Castile was a political move designed to reinforce and strengthen ties between Burgundy and the Christian north. Queen Constance, of course, was from Burgundy, but having a Burgundian man primed to become the King of Leon and Castile meant that the Duchy of Burgundy had a considerable stake in the fortunes of the northern Spanish Christian kingdom, and could therefore be relied upon to provide military and other support when required.

However, this all changed in the year 1093. What happened in the year 1093? Well, two events of note.

Firstly, King Alfonso VI managed to father a son. The baby boy wasn't legitimate, though. His mother was a Muslim woman named Zaida. Now Zaida had been part of the Royal Court in Seville under al-Mutamid. Some sources report that she was al-Mutamid's daughter and others that she was his daughter-in-law. Regardless of her exact relationship to al-Mutamid, she was highly placed within the Royal Court of Seville, and when Seville fell to the Almoravids she fled northwards, eventually coming under the protection of King Alfonso. Now, unfortunately, the history around Zaida is rather hazy. Some reports have her becoming King Alfonso's mistress before converting to Catholicism and taking the name Isabel. Other reports have her subsequently marrying King Alfonso, a fact supported by the finding of a funerary marker bearing the inscription and I quote "Queen Isabel, wife of King Alfonso, daughter of the King of Seville, previously called Zaida" end quote. Other reports have her dying in childbirth in the year 1093 after having produced King Alfonso's son. Anyway, regardless of exactly how things played out, we do know that in the year 1093 Zaida gave birth to King Alfonso's first son, Sancho. Apparently, King Alfonso was thrilled to have finally fathered his son, despite the fact that the baby was born not to Queen Constance but to his Muslim mistress.

The fact that King Alfonso now had a son was not good news for Count Raymond. By the year 1093 Count Raymond was married to the now fourteen year old Urraca, and the birth of King Alfonso's son affected Count Raymond's chances of becoming the next king of Leon and Castile, despite the fact that baby Sancho was illegitimate.

Later in the year 1093 another event took place which made Count Raymond's succession plans even shakier, that event being the death of King Alfonso's Burgundian wife, Queen Constance. This event, of course, weakened the ties between Burgundy and the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, ties which Count Raymond wished to see strengthened to secure his future claim to the throne. In the following year, so 1094, Count Raymond's nervousness increased when King Alfonso took another wife, not a woman from Burgundy or indeed from any of the territories in France, but from northern Italy.

With his confidence now seriously shaken, Count Raymond decided that he needed a Plan B. Plan A, of course, was for Count Raymond to ascend seamlessly and un-controversially to the throne of Leon and Castile following King Alfonso's death. The chances of Plan A playing out now looked less than certain, so Count Raymond formulated Plan B.

Plan B involved Count Raymond taking the Kingdom of Leon and Castile by force as soon as King Alfonso died. For Plan B to succeed, Count Raymond was going to need the support of some powerful backers, and he managed to obtain these in the form of Abbot Hugh from the monastery at Cluny and Raymond's cousin, Count Henry of Burgundy. Plan B involved Henry racing over to the Iberian peninsula with forces from Burgundy as soon as King Alfonso's death was announced, and assisting Raymond to seize the throne. In return for this assistance, Count Henry would be awarded either Toledo or Galicia. King Raymond would then turn the territory of Galicia or Toledo into a kingdom, and Count Henry would become King Henry of Toledo or Galicia, whichever one panned out. The two cousins would then rule the Christian north as kings and live happily ever after.

Now, unfortunately for Raymond, once Plan B was formulated it was difficult to keep it quiet, and word of it found its way to King Alfonso. King Alfonso then effectively scuttled Plan B via a series of deft moves. The first deft move was to make a public show of the personal support that he, King Alfonso, enjoyed across the Christian north, including in Toledo and Galicia. Using the excuse that he wished to showcase his Kingdom to his new Queen, King Alfonso organised public parades and processions across his realm, and people flocked to show their support for their King. Count Raymond, of course, was not involved in the proceedings and was forced to watch from the sidelines as people from across the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, including Galicia, which was ruled by Count Raymond on behalf of King Alfonso, voiced their support for their King.

The second deft move involved leveraging Count Henry and driving a wedge between Count Henry and Count Raymond. King Alfonso did this by arranging the betrothal of Count Henry to King Alfonso's illegitimate daughter, Teresa. This gave Count Henry a stake in ensuring that he stayed on the right side of King Alfonso, a stake which was reinforced two years later in the year 1096 when King Alfonso bestowed upon Count Henry the County of Portugal. Securing Portugal meant that count Henry now had a legitimate claim to an impressive chunk of territory, which made claiming a future kingdom via the risky and treasonous Plan B much less appealing. It also made Count Henry a possible future rival for the throne of Leon and Castile, meaning that Count Raymond could no longer rely on him to support Count Raymond's claim to the throne. All in all, it was a masterstroke of political maneuvering from King Alfonso, who undercut Count

Raymond's position and future plans while shoring up his own allies and his own levels of support.

And it was a good thing that King Alfonso had managed to place a lid over his domestic troubles, because in the year 1097 Yusuf Ibn Tashafin returned to the Iberian peninsula and the Almoravids once again went on the offensive. Their target was King Alfonso's territory in Toledo. King Alfonso appealed to Aragon and Valencia for military assistance, but neither was able to send armies of any size, although one person who did show up to assist was El Cid's son Diego. King Alfonso was forced to try to defend a front of around 80 kilometres, primarily using the armies of Leon and Castile. Unsurprisingly, some sections of the Christian line were absolutely pummeling by the Muslim forces, although, while parts of the lines suffered heavy losses, the overall defences held and the Almoravids eventually withdrew to the south.

One of the casualties of these battles though, was El Cid's only son and heir Diego, who was killed in the fighting. Now this, I guess I don't need to tell you, was absolutely devastating news for El Cid. Slowly but surely, El Cid had been doing his best to turn Valencia into a permanently Christian territory, modelled on King Alfonso's conquest of Toledo. El Cid had converted the main mosque inside the city of Valencia into a cathedral, and a French monk from the monastery at Cluny named Jerome was ordained by Pope Urban II in Rome to be the first Bishop of Valencia. El Cid then did his best to populate Valencia with Christians, although to be honest he didn't really succeed in doing so. Ordinarily, Christians from Aragon, Catalonia or the Christian north might have been enticed to settle in the newly conquered territory via inducements such as grants of land, but with the Almoravid threat ever present, and with the future of Christian rule in Valencia now up in the air following the death of El Cid's son, most people preferred to stay where they were. El Cid probably hoped he had plenty of time to resolve his succession problem, as he was only aged in his fifties when he conquered Valencia in 1094. However, it wasn't to be. In July of the year 1099, only five years after his conquest, El Cid died in his bed in Valencia.

The rule of Valencia was taken up by El Cid's widow Jimena, but she was going to face a raft of challenges. She immediately appealed to Aragon and Barcelona for military assistance, and King Alfonso personally journeyed to Valencia in May of the year 1100. In his book "The Quest for El Cid", Richard Fletcher reports that on the 21st of May in the year 1100, Jimena wrote, in a charter confirming El Cid's grants to the Cathedral of Valencia, of future conquests, and I quote "which, with God's help, we shall make by land or sea" end quote.

However, it wasn't to be. In summer of the year, 1101, a Berber general in command of the Almoravid forces led an army of northern Africans to the city of Valencia and besieged it. By the end of the year 1101 the siege was still in place, and Jimena dispatched the Bishop of Valencia to King Alfonso's court to beg him for assistance. In March of the year 1102 King Alfonso answered the call. He led the armies of Leon and Castile to the siege of Valencia, and at the approach of the northern Christians the Almoravids lifted the siege and withdrew a short distance to the south.

King Alfonso spent some time conferring with the military commanders inside Valencia and assessing the situation. The conclusion he came up with was devastating for the Christians. King Alfonso couldn't spare the troops needed to adequately defend Valencia on an ongoing basis, and there were no military commanders of El Cid's calibre in

Valencia. So King Alfonso informed Jimena that the only option available was to evacuate Valencia and head back to Castile.

For the remainder of the month of April, preparations were made to pack the treasures of Valencia, the household goods from the palace, and items from the cathedral into carts and wagons for the long journey northwards. In May of the year 1102 a long line of horses, mules, camels, and donkeys, many pulling carts and litters, were escorted from Valencia by an equally long line of troops. Included in the baggage train was the body of El Cid. Some of King Alfonso's men remained behind to set fire to the administrative buildings in the city. The refugees from Valencia eventually arrived in the Christian north, and Jimena re-interred her husband's body in a monastery in Castile. After a long and very eventful journey, El Cid had arrived back where it all started.

Join me next time as the Christians of the peninsula encounter a number of challenges. Until next time, bye for now,

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