

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 50
Some More Succession Issues

Hello again. Last time we saw the Kingdom of Leon and Castile and the Christian territory of Valencia face succession issues. King Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile deftly resolved his succession issues via some masterful political manoeuvring, but over in Valencia things weren't so rosy. El Cid's only son and heir had been killed fighting for King Alfonso, and El Cid died in the year 1099 without having nominated his replacement. El Cid's widow Jimena valiantly attempted to rule Valencia on her own, but a siege of the city of Valencia brought home the fact that she really didn't have the military might, nor the skills as a military commander, to keep Valencia in Christian hands. King Alfonso convinced her to evacuate Valencia, and a huge line of baggage carts, laden with the goods accumulated from five years of Christian rule, travelled all the way north to Castile.

Fifteen years after the death of El Cid, a cleric who had accompanied El Cid through many of his military campaigns compiled a biography of El Cid which later became known as the "Historia Roderici", a work which, incidentally, was the first biography to be written in Christian Spain about a person other than a king. Around thirty years later an epic poem in the chivalric romantic tradition entitled "Cantar de Mio Cid" was composed, and this was instrumental in cementing El Cid in the popular consciousness as a great Christian warrior fighting against the forces of Islam. The growing legend of El Cid reflected a wider shift in public sentiment which was spreading across Europe, and which will have a massive impact on the Iberian peninsula, a subject which we will focus on towards the end of this episode.

I will conclude our examination of El Cid by telling you some fun facts. El Cid's favourite sword, which he named Tizona, was on display at a museum in Toledo until it underwent testing in the year 1999, revealing that it was forged in Cordoba in the 11th century and probably was the sword favoured by El Cid. The autonomous community of Castile and Leon then purchased the sword in the year 2007 for an eye-watering 1.6 million Euros, and it's currently on display at the museum in Burgos, which is appropriate as Burgos is located in Castile and Rodrigo Diaz de Viva was born near Burgos and spent much of his childhood there.

Due to a combination of his exploits, particularly his victory at the Battle of Cuarte and the epic poem and histories composed after his death, El Cid has endured over the centuries as a popular figure. If you asked a random person in Spain today, it's likely they would know of El Cid, but would probably be pretty hazy about the life and exploits of King Alfonso VI, a fact which would have pleased El Cid no end had someone advised him of this nearly 1000 years ago when he was knocking heads with King Alfonso.

And El Cid's fame isn't just limited to Spain. Charlton Heston played the part of El Cid in a movie of the same name in 1961, with El Cid's wife being played by Sophia Loren. In the year 2020, a Spanish series entitled "The Legend of El Cid" premiered on Amazon Prime. The second season of this series was released in 2021, and stay tuned for more seasons to follow. It's received some pretty solid rankings and is being filmed on location around Burgos in Castile, and in Zaragoza. It's aiming to provide a kind of detailed narrative of El Cid's life, ground in historical fact, and by the end of Season Two it had covered the drama

around the rise of King Alfonso VI. There's a long way to go yet to completely cover the life and times of El Cid, so hopefully there's a few more seasons to come.

El Cid isn't just confined to the big and little screens either. He has also made an appearance in a bunch of video games, including the Age of Empires and Medieval Total War. All in all, I think El Cid would be pretty pleased about his impact on popular culture, and the fact that, nearly 1000 years after his death, people are posting questions on message boards trying to work out how to get El Cid to join their faction in the game Medieval Total War II. Anyway, the exploits of El CID have endured over the centuries, and there's no sign of him vanishing from popular culture any time soon.

So, what happened after El Cid's widow withdrew from Valencia in the year 1102? Well, the Almoravids moved in and claimed it. This meant that the Almoravids had control of all of Al-Andalus except for Zaragoza and Toledo. To celebrate the milestone, Yusuf Ibn Tashafin had his son Ali formally and publicly acknowledged as his heir. The King of Zaragoza sent his son and heir to the ceremony and eventually a treaty was signed between Zaragoza and the Almoravids, the two remaining Muslim powers on the Iberian peninsula. The treaty freed the Almoravids to concentrate on the territory they really wanted to conquer, the former Taifa of Toledo, which they were intent on taking from King Alfonso.

Now, although the King of Leon and Castile is going to be the focus of Almoravid military action, I should point out that King Alfonso isn't the only Christian king pushing back against the Muslims at this point in our narrative. The new King of Aragon, Pedro I, seemed to be intent on continuing the aggression displayed by his father towards, not the Almoravids, but neighbouring Zaragoza. Between the year he commenced his reign in 1094 and the year 1101, Pedro scored a number of victories against Zaragoza, including conquering the town of Barbastro.

Anyway, while Aragon and Zaragoza are keeping each other occupied, let's see how the conflict between the Almoravids and King Alfonso played out. In the year 1100, when King Alfonso was in Valencia assessing the viability of maintaining it as a Christian territory, one of Yusuf Ibn Tashafin's grandsons led an attack by the Almoravids against the city of Toledo. The defence of Toledo had been placed in the hands of King Alfonso's new son-in-law, Count Henry, and Henry successfully oversaw the defence of the city until the Almoravids were forced to withdraw. Having the Almoravids now solely focused on defeating the former Taifa of Toledo was clearly a concern for King Alfonso, and he responded by settling Christian refugees from Valencia into towns which were strategically important to the defence of Toledo, places which guarded the routes which would most likely be used by the Almoravids to invade. To that end, a bunch of Christians from Valencia ended up settling in the town of Salamanca, which was just to the north of Toledo, inside the Kingdom of Leon, but was considered important to Toledo's defence. Jerome, the first Bishop of Valencia, was installed as the first Bishop of Salamanca. The repopulated towns also acted as a sort of fail-safe. Should Toledo fall to the Almoravids, the towns would become the first line of defence to prevent the Almoravids from invading the Kingdom of Leon.

In the year 1103 King Alfonso went on the offensive, besieging the town of Medinaceli. Medinaceli was only a small place but it was strategically important. Should a raid into Toledo be launched from the now Almoravid-controlled Valencia or from Almoravid-allied Zaragoza, the Muslim forces would likely need to pass down the valley of the River Jalon, and the town of Medinaceli overlooked this valley. The Almoravids were well aware of the

strategic importance of Medinaceli and the governors of Granada and Valencia were dispatched to Medinaceli with orders to defeat the Christians and lift the siege of the town. However, the armies from Valencia were prevented by the Christian forces from reaching Medinaceli, while the governor of Granada was killed in a skirmish near the town while trying to create a diversion. The siege was able to continue, and the town eventually fell to King Alfonso in summer of the year 1004.

Clearly emboldened by this victory, King Alfonso conducted repeated raids into Almoravid territory over the next three years, with the result that the Almoravids were prevented from attacking Toledo and instead suffered some losses of their own, the most notable occurring in the year 1106, when King Alfonso personally led a raid into Almoravid territory which ended up with the Christian army making it all the way to Malaga, in the former Taifa of Granada on the Mediterranean coast. King Alfonso even managed to grab a bunch of Mozarab Christians and escorted them northwards, to be resettled in Toledo and in the Christian north.

By the year 1106, though, King Alfonso was 69 years old, which was a pretty ancient age for the medieval period, while Yusuf Ibn Tashafin was in an even worse position. He was incapacitated by old age by this time and died in September of 1106.

Before we address the looming succession issues for both the Almoravids and the Christians of the north though, we will conclude this episode by taking a look at the changing “vibes” across the Iberian peninsula and across wider Europe. Now, in the years immediately following the Battle of Cuarte in 1094, some pretty important events were taking place in Europe and beyond. In the year 1095 Pope Urban launched the First Crusade, and over the next few years thousands of Christian fighters from Europe will travel to the Middle East, intent on liberating the Holy Land from the Muslims. This will result in a series of military confrontations between Muslims and Christians which we outlined in the History of the Crusades Podcast. Part of a spin-off from this event was a reduction in cooperation and understanding between Muslims and Christians, and a rise in aggression between the two religions. This had limited effects across much of Europe, as most countries and kingdoms in Europe at this time had infrequent contact with Muslims on a day-to-day basis, and had few permanent Muslim residents. The Iberian peninsula though, was an obvious exception to this rule.

Now, while Muslims and Christians on the Iberian peninsula had been butting heads regularly over the centuries, there had been a reasonable level of understanding and civilised interaction, if I can put it that way, between the two sides. To point to a couple of recent examples of this, when El Cid was expelled from Castile by King Alfonso he found employment in Muslim Zaragoza. King Alfonso himself fathered a son with his Muslim mistress, who may later have become his wife. Following the launching of the crusading movement though, this changed. It didn't change overnight, and to be fair to the crusading movement, the Crusades weren't the only factor which resulted in the Muslims and Christians of the Iberian peninsula seeing themselves as being, not occupants of a territory who just happened to have different customs and different religions, but as enemies in two distinct camps, Team Christian and Team Muslim, with each Team intent on eliminating the other.

The other main factor was the Almoravids. The Almoravids were staunchly Muslim and looked upon the interactions the Taifa kings had with the Christian kings of the peninsula with disdain. To the Almoravids, the Muslim rulers of the Taifas were soft, corrupted

appeasers of Christians, and moving forward the Almoravids will take a much harder line against the Christians.

At this point in our narrative, so as we enter the last remaining years of the rule of King Alfonso VI, we're in a sort of transition period. The old days of regular interactions between Muslim and Christian leaders inside the peninsula, and the era of Muslims, Christians, and Jews living alongside each other in relative harmony, are coming to an end, and a more belligerent vibe, where all Muslims are the enemies of all the Christians and all Christians are the enemies of all of the Muslims, is beginning to emerge.

But we're not at that point yet. In fact, over in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, King Alfonso VI seems intent on grooming his son Sancho, whose mother is a Muslim woman, to be his heir. Is that going to cause some friction between King Alfonso, his daughters, and his sons-in-law? Yes, it absolutely is. Join me next time as King Alfonso once again faces some succession issues. Until next time, bye for now.

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