

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 89  
Peace with the Almohads

Hello again. Last time we saw King Alfonso VIII of Castile dodge a rather large bullet. At the beginning of the last episode, Castile found itself being attacked by three of its neighbours - Leon, Navarre, and the Almohads - all at the instigation of Caliph Yaqub. By the end of the last episode though, Castile remained largely intact. Papal pressure had forced Navarre and Leon to back down and the Caliph himself died after his return to northern Africa in the year 1199.

Luckily for the Almohads there won't be any instability or uncertainty following the Caliph's death as one of his sons had been groomed to become the next caliph since he was a young boy. Everyone knew that this boy would become caliph as soon as Caliph Yaqub died, and everyone accepted this fact, so when Caliph Yaqub did in fact die his chosen and carefully groomed successor, Muhammad al-Nasir, stepped neatly into the role. Al-Nasir was 17 years old when he became the new Caliph, and in case you are wondering what he was like here's a description of him by a chronicler, and I quote. "He had a clear complexion, a red beard, dark blue eyes, plump cheeks, average height. He often kept his eyes downcast and was very silent, mostly due to a speech defect from which he suffered. He was inscrutable, but at the same time mild, courageous, reluctant to shed blood and not really disposed to undertake anything unless he had carefully studied it. He was accused of avarice." End quote.

Now, while the new young caliph doesn't need to consolidate his hold on power he does need to turn his mind to unrest in Tunisia, unrest which is being fanned by the King of Majorca. Since his father, Caliph Yaqub, had arranged truces with the Christian kings of Spain before returning to northern Africa, Caliph al-Nasir decided to reaffirm and extend those truces. As a result, there will be peace between the Christians and the Muslims on the Iberian peninsula for the next ten years.

Now, unfortunately we have absolutely no idea what events will transpire in Al-Andalus during those ten years. Clearly, a lot must have been going on, but if anyone took the trouble to record the events those records have now been lost to history. As stated by Hugh Kennedy in his book "Muslim Spain and Portugal", and I quote "The first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century is probably the most obscure in the whole of the political history of Al-Andalus. Even the identities of the most important figures are completely unknown to us." End quote. So Al-Andalus has gone dark, and we will leave it in a holding pattern for the next decade.

Fortunately, though, we do know what was going on in the Christian parts of the peninsula. As we've mentioned, the Christian kings have all signed truces with the new Caliph, so there won't be any action taking place between the Christians and the Muslims, a fact which is making quite a lot of people quite unhappy, one of those people being the new pope, who we will turn to shortly.

Disappointment about the decade long period of peace between the Christians and the Muslims wasn't just confined to Rome. It seems that quite a few citizens of Christian Spain were unhappy about the situation. In the absence of social media, or in fact just about any sort of media, the mood on the ground was often reflected in songs by troubadours. In his

book "Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain" Joseph O'Callaghan relates a song by the troubadour Peire Vidal which was doing the rounds at this time. You will be relieved to hear that I'm not going to attempt to sing the verse in question, although the author Peire Vidal will probably want me to point out that in its original form it would have rhymed and perhaps would have been enhanced by musical accompaniments, with minstrels playing along on their lutes, fiddles or harps. Anyway, here it is spoken, unaccompanied and un-rhyming. And just to let you know, the troubadour refers to the Muslims of Al Andalus as "Moors" in his poem, and I quote "I am irked by the kings of Spain because they so prefer to fight amongst themselves that they give war horses and bays in tribute to the Moors, whose pride is doubled thereby, so they the Christians are defeated and conquered. It would be better if it pleased them to maintain peace, loyalty and faith amongst themselves" end quote. So Peire Vidal is reflecting the views of the Papacy and probably a lot of ordinary people across the Christian parts of the peninsula, expressing frustration that the Christian kings are fighting amongst themselves while keeping peace with the Muslims.

Talking of the Papacy, there's been a change in popes recently, and the new one is an absolute doozy. We all know that Pope Celestine III was an old man when he accepted the role of Pope. By Christmas of the year 1197, after more than six years serving as the head of the Church, Pope Celestine was an astonishing 92 years of age, and he had had enough. His nemesis, Emperor Henry VI, had died a few months earlier, and Pope Celestine was in poor health, was tired, was absolutely ancient, and was ready to hand the reins over to someone else. He had chosen his successor, a cardinal who had served as his right hand man, and he told the Curia that he would be willing to abdicate if they agreed to elect his chosen successor to replace him. However, this proposal was rejected, and Pope Celestine died a few weeks later.

His replacement was elected quickly and unanimously. The new pope wasn't the late Celestine's chosen cardinal, but a completely different man, a man Pope Celestine detested, called Lotario dei Conti di Segni. Lotario was from a patrician Italian family and had studied theology at both the universities of Paris and Bologna. His well connected family had ties to the papacy. His uncle was Pope Clement III, and his uncle had elevated him to the position of cardinal-priest in the year 1191. Lotario was 30 years old back when Pope Celestine III became pope. This was bad news for Lotario because Pope Celestine was from a rival family to Lotario's family, so instead of rising to the rank of cardinal, Lotario found himself shunted to the sidelines. Lotario, though, didn't waste this time. He spent it politicking and lobbying, saying all the right things in all the right ears of all the right people, picking out the power players and those he needed to impress, and laying a solid foundation for his future elevation. He was so successful in this endeavour that when Pope Celestine died, Lotario found himself, at the rather young age of 37, elevated not to the position of cardinal but to the position of Pope, calling himself Pope Innocent III.

Pope Innocent III will go on to be one of the most powerful and influential popes in history. It's safe to say that Pope Innocent didn't see himself as a servant of the people working modestly to advance the interests of the Church. No, according to Pope Innocent, there was only one person more important than the Pope and that was God. Since God wasn't actually a person that made Pope Innocent the most powerful person on the planet. To Pope Innocent's way of thinking he was above the kings and other lowly mortals. He was, in fact, put in place by God to rule not just the Church but, well, everything. Pope Innocent declared himself to be the Vicar of Christ and described his role as, and I quote "set midway between God and man, below God but above man, given not only the universal Church but the whole world to govern" end quote.

If you haven't guessed already, Pope Innocent is going to have a massive impact on the politics of, not just the Church, but of Western Christendom in general. Those of you who have listened to the History of the Crusades podcast will remember that he supercharged the crusading movement and meddled in the politics of just about every country in Europe, while launching the disastrous and destructive Fourth Crusade as well as the Crusade against the Cathars.

So, is Pope Innocent keen to get involved in the politics of the Iberian peninsula? You bet he is. During the first year of his Papacy he dispatched a legate to the Iberian peninsula with a brief to, you guessed it, force the Christian kings of the peninsula to stop fighting each other and start fighting the Almohads.

Almost immediately Pope Innocent likely discovered that just because you declare yourself to be God's voice on earth and just because you tell everyone that they have to do as you say, that doesn't mean that people will actually do as you tell them to. Like Pope Celestine III before him, Pope Innocent seems to have taken an instant dislike to King Alfonso IX of Leon. You might remember that in an attempt to reconcile the Kings of Leon and Castile, King Alfonso of Leon had married the daughter of King Alfonso VIII of Castile. Now, Pope Innocent fairly quickly realised that since Alfonso of Leon and Alfonso of Castile were first cousins, Alfonso of Leon and his new wife Berenguela, were too closely related to be validly married in the eyes of the Church, so invoking the Doctrine of Consanguinity Pope Innocent declared their marriage to be annulled. What was Alfonso of Leon's reaction? Well, in a move which must have completely floored the new pope, Alfonso just ignored him. The King of Leon and his queen Berenguela just carried on as they were, continuing to reign as the married King and Queen of Leon, in open defiance of the Papacy. Of course, the shocked Pope Innocent couldn't let this stand. He promptly excommunicated both Alfonso and Berenguela and placed an interdict over the Kingdom of Leon, which was only to be lifted when the couple separated. Did they separate? Well, yes, but they took their time about it. Only in the spring of the year 1204, a full six years after the imposition of the papal interdict, and after having four children together, did the couple agree to separate.

Ironically, the separation, while operating to lift the papal interdict over the Kingdom of Leon, did nothing to improve relations between the Christian Kings of Spain. In fact, it did the opposite. Hostilities between Leon and Castile resumed almost immediately and only settled down a few years later when the son of Alfonso and Berenguela, the future Fernando III, was endowed with the castles and strongholds which Berenguela had brought to Leon as part of her dowry.

Hostilities also sparked off between Castile, Aragon, and Navarre. Deciding to make good on their long desired plan to split Navarre between them, Alfonso of Castile and Pedro of Aragon invaded Navarre in the year 1198, forcing King Sancho VII of Navarre to seek assistance from the Almohads. Despite repeated attempts by Castile to annex a couple of Basque provinces, in the end King Alfonso was unsuccessful, signing a truce with Navarre in the year 1207. Peace treaties between the Christian kings began trending after this point. Aragon made peace with Navarre in 1208, and Leon and Castile shook hands and hugged in 1209, so at long last, all the Christian kings were finally at peace with each other.

Were they ready to fight the Almohads though? Not really. Out of all of the Christian kings around this time, only one seemed super keen to impress the new pope and to take up

arms against the Muslims. That king was young Pedro II of Aragon. Back in the year 1203, when all the other Spanish kings seemed to be focused on fighting each other, Pedro informed Pope Innocent that he was ready to go on a crusade against the Muslims, and he requested that a papal legate be dispatched to Spain to lobby his fellow kings to join him. However, it seems that Pope Innocent was a quick learner. The Pope actually advised King Pedro that now might not be the best time to launch a crusade as it would be unlikely to succeed due to the fact that the other kings would be reluctant to take part. King Pedro, though, was not deterred. Deciding that the Muslim Kingdom of Majorca would be the target of his crusade, he set off for Rome, popping in to Pisa and Genoa on the way in the hope of recruiting them to his crusading cause. Once he arrived in Rome, Pope Innocent once again counselled him to be realistic and mindful that his campaign needed the support of other powerful Christian kingdoms to succeed. It seems that Pope Innocent may have tried to divert King Pedro's attentions to France, where he urged him to join the crusade against the Cathars.

It seems that King Pedro wasn't at all put out by this. On the contrary, he actually took the momentous step while he was in Rome of pledging his kingdom to the Papacy. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November in the year 1204 he formally surrendered all of his lands and territory to Pope Innocent, who then ordered him to rule it as vassal to Rome and to pay an annual tribute to the Church. Pope Innocent then crowned King Pedro, who sailed back home as a servant of the new Pope in Rome.

Despite the urging of his new overlord for him to abandon his plans for a crusade against the Muslims and to instead join the crusade against the heretics in southern France, King Pedro has his own ideas. Join me next time as King Pedro launches his crusade against Majorca. Until next time, bye for now.

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