

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 95  
More Crusading

Hello again. Last time we saw fighters from the Kingdom of Portugal join with forces heading off to join the Fifth Crusade in the Crusade of Alcasar do Sal, which took place in the year 1217 and ended up being the sole military success story of the Fifth Crusade. Incidentally, the Fifth Crusade will limp along as a military campaign for nearly four years, ending in the year 1221, so it's good to keep in mind the fact that, as at the beginning of the 1220's, no one realised just how much of a failure the Fifth Crusade will end up being. Which is why, late in the year 1217 and into the 1220's, crusading fever was sweeping Europe and the Iberian peninsula.

The idea of using this momentum to score some hits against the Almohads prompted Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo to travel to Rome towards the end of the year 1217, intending to pitch to Pope Honorius III the idea of uniting the kings of Spain and Portugal in a joint crusade against the Almohads. Archbishop Rodrigo's pitch was successful. In fact, according to D.W. Lomax in his book "The Reconquest of Spain", Pope Honorius was so impressed by the Archbishop of Toledo that he not only granted him permission to launch a new Crusade on the Iberian peninsula, he awarded him the powers of a Papal Legate to assist him in his mission. Having been anointed as the Pope's representative in the Iberian peninsula, the Archbishop journeyed back home with the first task on his to-do list being to secure peace between the Kingdoms of Leon and Castile. As we mentioned in the last episode, peace did break out between the father and son rulers of Leon and Castile, and both King Alfonso IX of Leon and his son King Fernando III of Castile pledged to take up arms against the Almohads.

This was a positive start to the Archbishop's ambition to launch a Crusade, but what the campaign really needed in order to have any chance of success was an injection of funds. The focus of fundraising across Europe was currently on financing the Fifth Crusade, with the Fourth Lateran Council having decreed that a 5% tax on the income of all clerics across western Christendom should be collected to support the Crusade. This didn't leave much behind in the way of finances for a Crusade against the Almohads. Archbishop Rodrigo had managed to extract a concession from Pope Honorius that half the taxes collected in the Diocese of Toledo and Segovia ought to go towards the Spanish Crusade, and Archbishop Rodrigo managed to bribe a number of additional tax collectors to ensure that some of the money they extracted was diverted to the Archbishop instead of to Rome. But still, the Crusade was having trouble accumulating enough funds to finance a major campaign.

Undaunted though, in the year 1218 Archbishop Rodrigo proclaimed a Crusade, which was supported mainly by the military orders along with a bunch of ordinary soldiers from across the peninsula and even some fighters from Gascon across the Pyrenees. Their target was the town of Caseres, which lay just to the south of the border between the Kingdom of Castile and Al-Andalus. Now this was an ambitious target. Caseres had been a thriving city since Roman times and was surrounded by an impressive set of walls and fortifications. The Crusaders besieged the city but were defeated by a combination of the formidable defences and the weather. The siege occurred in November and December of 1218 and it rained so extensively that the whole region was beset by flooding. The

Archbishop decided to lift the siege in December and the defeated Crusaders returned to Castile.

Archbishop Rodrigo then decided to switch focus to Valencia. In the year 1219 he led a Crusade into Valencia and managed to capture three strongholds. The Crusaders then attempted to capture the fortified town of Requena, which is located around 70 kilometres to the west of the city of Valencia. Apparently the name Requena is derived from an Arab term meaning "secure", and secure it certainly was. The town was heavily fortified, dominated by an impressive fortress, part of which is still standing today if you are lucky enough to be in Requena and want to pop in to take a look. The Muslim citadel now houses a museum, and there are also an impressive network of 300 underground caves which were used to store produce away from the heat. Today, the town of Requena is famous for its wine and its well-preserved historic buildings, some of which date from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It looks well worth dropping into Requena to sample the wine of the region and take a tour of the caves and the ancient parts of the old town. Anyway, back to the narrative. Taking a town named "Secure" was always going to pose a challenge, and it seems the Crusaders weren't up to the task. D. W. Lomax reports that 2000 Christian lives were lost in the attempt to take the town in 1219. Apparently, Archbishop Rodrigo returned to Requena the following year for another crack at defeating it, but yet again it remained impervious to his attempts to annex it. So, by the time we reached the year 1220 Archbishop Rodrigo had led a number of Crusades against the Almohads, none of which had netted him a major win.

During the year 1220 a number of other Christians from across the peninsula were also going on the offensive, although they weren't exactly doing so in the way envisaged by Pope Honorius and the Archbishop of Toledo. D. W. Lomax reports that a half-brother to King Alfonso IX of Leon, a man called Sancho Fernandez, decided to turn himself into a sort of mercenary or bandit, telling everyone he was going to travel to Seville and offer his services to the Caliph, he gathered a bunch of like-minded men from Toledo, all of them either Christian or Jewish, and they headed southwards towards Almohad territory.

D. W. Lomax points out that Sancho Fernandez was not the only Christian fighter from the northern part of the peninsula to decide to switch sides and fight for the Caliph. We already know about Pedro Fernandez de Castro, who served under Caliph Yaqub back in Episode 87. Incidentally, Pedro Fernandez de Castro died in Morocco back in the year 1214. His body was subsequently taken back to the Kingdom of Castile, where it was interred at the monastery of Santa Maria di Valbuena. Now, from what I can gather from TripAdvisor, the Abbey of Valbuena has recently been converted into a five star hotel, so if you are looking for somewhere to stay near San Bernardo in Spain, you can stay in a building which once functioned as 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian monastery, and which once held the remains of Pedro Fernandez de Castro.

Anyway, along with Pedro Fernandez de Castro, some other members of the Royal Court in Castile had also flipped sides and had pledged their services to the Caliph. One of the heroes of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, Fernando de Lara and his brother Gonzalo had found themselves on the wrong side of a dispute with the new King of Castile, Fernando III, who had ended up exiling them from his kingdom. Instead of heading to neighbouring Leon or one of the other Christian kingdoms the brothers headed southwards and pledged themselves to the Caliph whose forces they had defeated at Las Navas. So switching sides from Christian to Muslim wasn't unheard of.

Sancho Fernandez led his group of renegades southwards, but they didn't make it all the way to Seville. In the borderlands between Castile and Al-Andalus, they occupied a deserted castle and used it as a base for attacking anyone who took their fancy, Christians and Muslims alike. Apparently, this venture was fairly successful until Sancho Fernandez was killed by a bear. With the leader of the bandits having met an unpleasant end, the governor of Badajoz attacked the castle and dispatched the rest of the crew, beheading every single one of them.

The next person to put his hand up to join the Crusading movement was King Alfonso IX of Leon. This was a bit of a surprise to everyone, as King Alfonso had a reputation for aligning himself with the Almohads rather than the other Christian Kings, and had always staunchly resisted urging by various Popes to take Crusading vows. In fact, back in the year 1197 Pope Celestine had proclaimed a Crusade against King Alfonso IX, so Joseph O'Callaghan points out that King Alfonso of Leon may be the only person from this era to have been both the subject of a Crusade and the leader of a Crusade. On the 13th of February in the year 1221 Pope Honorius granted the absolution of sins to any Christian who joined King Alfonso of Leon in his battles against the Almohads.

The focus of Alfonso of Leon's crusading mission seems to have involved supporting the Calatravans to defend the southern border of Leon from their various fortresses, including the recently acquired fortress of Alcantara, and attempting to take the town of Caseres, which had successfully held off a Crusade by the Archbishop of Toledo in the rain, at the beginning of this episode, in the year 1218. In November of 1221, at a meeting of his court in Zamora, Alfonso of Leon told everyone to get ready to join him in a Crusade against Caseres in the summer of the following year.

In the middle of the year 1222 the King of Leon besieged Caseres and, unlike the Archbishop of Toledo, Alfonso appeared to be on the verge of taking the town. His crusaders had managed to knock down a couple of the town's formidable towers when word came in from the Caliph in Morocco that he would pay a substantial sum of money to the King if he withdrew from Caseres. This seemed like a good deal to Alfonso, who ordered his men to withdraw, then sat back and awaited the arrival of the enormous sum of money, which never came. The following year, King Alfonso returned to Caseres, but it successfully withstood his attempt to defeat it.

Now, while all these crusading campaigns against the Almohads are taking place, you might be wondering what was the Caliph's response to these attacks? Well, you might recall that the Caliph at this point in time, Caliph Yusuf II is only a boy and he isn't really taking an active role in ruling the Almohad territories in Northern Africa and Al-Andalus. No, all the actual ruling is being done by a combination of his relatives and powerful courtiers. All this came to an abrupt end in the year 1224 when the young Caliph died unexpectedly, reportedly after being gored by his pet cow, which is rather an unpleasant way in which to depart the narrative. The Almohads were plunged into a period of internal chaos, with a total of three men emerging as the victors, all of them naming themselves as the next Caliph.

The courtiers in Marrakesh chose a pliant great-uncle of the late young ruler to be the new Caliph, a man called Abu Mohammed Abd al-Wahid. However, not everyone was keen to recognise the new Caliph. One person definitely not keen to do so was a man who had once been the late young Caliph's finance minister but had found himself at odds with the other courtiers and had ended up being imprisoned. He escaped from prison following the young Caliph's death and fled to Murcia, where he convinced the governor of Murcia, a

man called al-Adil to declare himself the new Caliph. Al-Adil actually had a pretty solid claim to the title as he was a brother of the recently deceased young Caliph Yusuf II. Just about all the Almohad governors in Al-Andalus, then recognised al-Adil as Caliph. The only governor to put his foot down and stick with recognising the elderly al-Wahid in Marrakesh as the rightful Caliph was the governor of Valencia.

So now we have two Caliphs, one in Marrakesh and one in Murcia. But wait, there's more. As al-Adil worked to consolidate his power base in Al-Andalus, he found himself getting a lot of pushback from regions in the west, around Seville and Badajoz. The governor of Seville, a man called al-Bayassi, who had previously supported al-Adil's claim to be Caliph, now decided he had enough support to strike out on his own, declaring himself Caliph. So now we have three caliphs: al-Wahid in Marrakesh, al-Adil in Murcia and al-Bayassi in Seville.

Clearly, three Caliphs is two too many, so they need to be culled back down to a single person. The first Caliph to exit was the first one to be proclaimed, the elderly al-Wahid in Marrakesh. The courtiers in Marrakesh decided to switch allegiance to the Governor of Murcia's claim, so they strangled the unfortunate al-Wahid and threw their support behind al-Adil. So now it is June in the year 1224 and we have two people claiming the title of Caliph, both powerful men, and both in Al-Andalus: the ruler of Murcia and the ruler of Seville.

With the Almohads looking like they are about to erupt into civil war, will the Christians of the peninsula take advantage of this turn of events? Yes, they absolutely will. One person in particular is itching to prove himself on the battlefield, and that person is the new young King of Castile. In June of the year 1224 after having consulted his mother, Berenguela, and the noble families inside his court, King Fernando announced that he was launching his own Crusade against the Almohads. Join me next time as King Fernando invades Al-Andalus amidst the chaos of the internal politics of the Almohads. Until next time, bye for now.

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