

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 13
Christianity during the rule of Abd al-Rahman II
Outside Al-Andalus

Hello again. Last time we saw a degree of Christian backlash inside Al-Andalus to the widespread use of the language of Arabic amongst the Christian upper classes, and to the adoption of the new Abbasid-influenced culture inside Al-Andalus, by members of all three religions. However, despite the best efforts of its proponents, the Christian backlash didn't really progress very far, and pretty much died out following the execution of its chief instigator, a fervent Christian called Eulogius. However, the impact of the cultural resurgence of Al-Andalus during the rule of Abd al-Rahman II wasn't just felt inside Al-Andalus. It in fact extended beyond Al-Andalus, into the independent Christian entities in the north of the Iberian Peninsula.

Now, clearly, if you were a Christian resident of Al-Andalus during the reign of Abd al-Rahman II and you were fervently opposed to the cultural and linguistic transformation occurring inside the peninsula, you had three main options: you could stand up and oppose the changes like Eulogius had done; you could throw your hands in the air and decide to bide your time inside Al-Andalus while holding close to your Christian beliefs and identity; or you could decide to move to a place which was ruled by Christians. The closest places currently ruled by Christians were in the Kingdom of Asturias and its neighbour Galicia to the north.

As such, there are indications that during the rule of Abd al-Rahman II some Christians chose to leave Andalus and head northwards. Some of these immigrants even went on to establish monasteries in Galicia and Asturias. Intentionally or not, they also imported into the northern kingdoms some of the customs and cultural practises of Al-Andalus. In fact, the Christians who had been living in Al-Andalus were considered to be so different from the Christians of the north that they became known as "Mozarabic" or "Mozarab" Christians, meaning Christians who had been "Arabized", so to speak, or had been influenced by the culture of Al-Andalus. Actually, the Arabized Christians of Al-Andalus weren't only known as Mozarabs by the Christians to the north; the term was also used inside Al-Andalus to denote Christians who had been assimilated into the culture of Al-Andalus.

Now, unfortunately, not much is known about how the Mozarab Christians of Al-Andalus were received in the north, or whether they were looked down upon for their Arabic tendencies. What we do know is that, in some cases at least, Arabic influences were accepted in the north, so perhaps the unique attributes of the Christians from Al-Andalus were celebrated rather than being disdained.

In his book "Moorish Spain", Richard Fletcher points to two surviving examples of Mozarab influence being imported into the Christian north. The first example came from a church built at the monastery of San Miguel de Escalada, which is located ten kilometres from one of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. The architecture of the church features distinctive mouldings around the tops of the arches, which gives it an Arabic feel.

The second example is courtesy of a Christian artist named Magius, who moved to the Christian north from Cordoba. He became well known for his detailed illustrations, and one

of his works survives to this day. It's a copy of a manuscript by the monk, Beatus of Liebana called "Commentary on the Apocalypse". Thirty-five copies of this manuscript have survived the ravages of time and still exist today, but the one which interests us is the one illustrated by Magius and is currently housed in the Piermont Morgan Library in New York. If you would like to check out the illustrations by Magius yourself, you can do so online, courtesy of the University of Cologne in Germany. All you have to do is go to the "Commentary On The Apocalypse" page in Wikipedia and scroll down to where they list all the manuscripts. The one you want is Manuscript 644. Clicking on the link to the image archive for Manuscript 644 will take you to the correct page in the University of Cologne archive site. If you scroll down that page, you will see an image, which is a photo of a page of the manuscript. If you click that image, you will be taken to another page where you can scroll through the rest of the illustrations in the manuscript. The illustrations are really well preserved and, as stated by Richard Fletcher and I quote "its highly stylised forms and its vivid colours are characteristic of Mozarabic illumination" end quote.

Now, you might have noticed that when I have been examining the influence of the Christians of Al-Andalus on the Christians of the north, I have only mentioned the Kingdom of Asturias and its neighbour to the west, Galicia. So you might ask, "What about the region on the other side of the Kingdom of Asturias, the home of the Basque people on the north coast near the Pyrenees?". Well, I think that it's about time that we took a closer look at what's been happening there.

Now there are two things that you should know about the Basque region before we start our deep-dive into the area. Firstly, it's useful to note that the Basque people have, throughout the ages, from the Roman era onwards, been keen supporters of self rule. The Basque people were none too happy when the Romans moved in, and they were similarly unimpressed by the Visigoths. You might remember that, just prior to the Battle of 711, when King Roderick was advised of the Muslim invasion, he was in the Basque region attempting to put down a revolt. So are the Basque people going to lie down and submit to Muslim rule? No, they are not. Similarly, when the neighbouring Kingdom of Asturias made noises about extending its reach into the Basque region, it was met with a firm "No thank you".

Unfortunately for the Basque people though, their little part of the world, a region which will later become known as the Kingdom of Navarre, is of high strategic importance to just about everyone. For Asturias and Galicia, it's a handy independent Christian region which, if it aligned itself with those Christian kingdoms, would create a handy Christian block stretching all the way across the northern coast of the peninsula to the Pyrenees. To the Muslims, it's one of the regions where it would be extremely handy to gain a foothold, as it would provide access to the neighbouring Kingdom of Asturias, and serve as a launching point for incursions against the Franks. For the Franks, this region was tempting beyond belief. It contained the useful pass over the Pyrenees at Roncesvalle, which you might recall had already been utilised by Charlemagne and his invading army.

The town of Pamplona, which was the capital of the Basque region at this time, was on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, but was situated on the French side of the Ebro River, the river which, you might remember, ran parallel to the Pyrenees along the Iberian Peninsula. You might recall that it was the ultimate goal of the Franks to annex all the land to the east of the River Ebro, land which included Pamplona.

But it won't surprise you to know that the Basque people wanted none of this. Faced with hungry looks from Asturias, Cordoba, and the Franks, they just shook their collective heads and uttered collective "nope"s to all the approaches.

It probably also won't surprise you to hear that the Basque people are still fiercely independent today. They have managed to preserve their own distinct language and culture, and like some residents of Catalonia to the south, there are many Basque residents today who dream of a time when the day will dawn on an independent Basque homeland.

Now the second thing you need to know concerns the town of Pamplona. You may note that I have just called it a town, but at this stage of its history it's not really a town, it's basically a fortress. Why is it a fortress? Well, because whomever controls Pamplona pretty much controls the entire Basque region. As such, Pamplona is heavily fortified, so fortified in fact, that it's more a fortress than a town. Today, Pamplona is a thriving metropolis which is home to around a quarter of a million people and is most famous for the annual Running of the Bulls Festival. It's situated in a very handy location, in a sort of a valley which links the Pyrenees Mountains to the Ebro River flats. Despite being located in a valley, it's in an elevated position, coming in at just under 1500 ft (or 500 metres) above sea level.

The handiness of its location is emphasised by the fact that, apparently, it came into existence during the winter of 75 to 74 BCE, as a campsite for the Roman general Pompey and his army. The campsite became known as "Pompaelo" or "Pompeiopolis", which eventually over the centuries morphed into its current name, Pamplona. It's handy location as a pit-stop for people crossing over the Pyrenees into the northern regions of the Iberian Peninsula made it, as I've already stated, a place high on the wish-list for ambitious conquerors.

Since the Battle of 711, Pamplona has been at the centre of a four-way tug-of-war between the leaders of the local Basque people, the Franks, the Muslims, and the Christians from neighbouring Asturias. In a nutshell, the local Basque people have been kept fully occupied defending Pamplona from outside forces. It was taken over and occupied by the Franks during the years spanning 778 to 824. When the Basque people eventually drove the Franks out, a local Basque chief became the ruler of the region, with his seat of power being located in Pamplona. He styled himself in the manner of a king, and basically aimed to keep the Franks, the Muslims, and the Asturian Christians from his lands.

Of course, what the early kings of Pamplona really needed was some sort of military alliance with a powerful local group of warriors, who could assist Pamplona to keep all these marauders from its gates, and luckily for the kings of Pamplona, they found such an ally in the form of the Banu Qasi.

Now the Banu Qasi, or clan Qasi, were a sort of ambitious, militaristic family dynasty. They traced their origins to a Visigothic count named Cassius who had apparently, shortly after the Battle of 711, come to terms with the Muslim conquerors and had converted to Islam in order to preserve his family's lands and status.

We've already met one of the more prominent members of the Banu Qasi, back in Episode 7. We saw Musa ibn Fortun ibn Qasi defeat the governor of Zaragoza, who had declared the city to be independent of Muslim rule. Musa even ended up ruling Zaragoza for a short

time. Musa's son, who was also named Musa, also made his mark, conquering then ruling the city of Tudela. Shortly afterwards, he joined forces with some fighters from Cordoba and travelled to the Kingdom of Asturias to take up arms against the independent Christians of the north. However, he had a falling out with the military commander from Cordoba, and subsequently declared both himself and Tudela to be independent from the Emir's rule. However, Abd al-Rahman was able to smooth things over, and Musa agreed to continue to rule Tudela as the Emir's vassal. Three years later though, he rebelled once again, and this time it was for good. Declaring that himself and the extended members of the Banu Qasi were no longer under the thumb of Cordoba, he went on a conquering rampage, eventually controlling the three cities of Zaragoza, Tudela, and Huesca, and ruling them independently.

It was around this time that he caught the eye of the King of Pamplona. Since Musa was an individual who was happy to take on Cordoba, the Kingdom of Asturias, and the Franks, all at once if needs be, he was the King of Pamplona's type of guy. He ended up marrying into the royal family of Pamplona, and was able to assist the King of Pamplona to keep Pamplona in Basque hands. Musa will eventually go on to add Barcelona to his lists of conquests. He managed to take the city from the Franks in the year 856.

Now, as we've already mentioned, Musa and the entire extended Banu Qasi family were all Muwallads, or residents of Visigothic Spain who had converted to Islam following the arrival of the Muslim conquerors. However, having a Muslim warrior for a son-in-law didn't seem to concern the King of Pamplona in the slightest, which is another indicator, I guess, of how the religious and political landscape of the peninsula was changing.

Okay, so now we have pretty much covered the impacts of the golden age of Al-Andalus under the rule of Abd al-Rahman II, both inside Al-Andalus and in the neighbouring territories inside the peninsula. As we all know, though, every golden age eventually comes to an end, as we shall see in our next episode, with the rise of Abd al-Rahman's son and successor, Mohamed I. Until next time, bye for now.

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