

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 41
The struggle for Toledo

Hello again. Last time we reached the first major milestone in the Reconquista with the fall of the Taifa of Toledo, which was claimed by King Alfonso VI of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. Now this, of course, was a big deal, a massive deal. In fact, it's difficult to overstate just how monumental this was, not only to the politics and history of the Iberian peninsula, but to wider Europe, and to the emerging idea of crusading which was currently being work-shopped by the Papacy. Now we will, of course, discuss how the Muslims of Al-Andalus were affected by the fall of Toledo, but first we will take a look at the Christian side of things.

Now, there were two competing interests in the Christian camp. The first were the "mainstream Catholics". Spearheaded by the current Pope, the prevailing view in this camp was that the Iberian peninsula was a Christian land, and after its reconquest it should be seen as a Christian territory. In fact, as we saw stated by Pope Gregory VII back in Episode 37, the Papacy viewed the entire Iberian peninsula as its territory. In its opinion, any land conquered from the Muslims in the peninsula should revert to Rome and be ruled on behalf of the Papacy. Now, unfortunately for Pope Gregory VII, he will die a few weeks after the fall of Toledo, but his replacement, Pope Victor III likely feels the same way. Unfortunately for Pope Victor, he was elderly and in poor health when he was elected Pope, and he will have a hectic few years on the papal throne, all while battling some serious health issues. Anyway, regardless of the Pope situation, also in the "mainstream Catholic" camp is the Church hierarchy and power-brokers of continental Europe, including most notably the French clergy, the monastery at Cluny, and King Alfonso's current wife.

Now we last mentioned King Alfonso's marital situation back in Episode 38 when he married Ines, the daughter of the Duke of Aquitaine. Well, there's been some marital drama since then, so it's time for an update. King Alfonso's marriage to Ines appears to have been rather brief. After only four or so years, she simply disappears from the scene. Some historians maintain that Ines died, while others believe that, due to the fact that the union was childless, King Alfonso may have had the marriage annulled, leaving him free to marry a more fertile woman, and leaving Ines free to remarry as well. In fact, one chronicle has Ines popping up in the year 1109, married to a French count. Anyway, to cut a long story short, by the year 1077 Ines seems to have left the Royal Court. King Alfonso then has a fling with a local noblewoman, a union which produces two children, before marrying again late in the year 1079 or early in the year 1080.

His chosen bride was a young, childless widow from France with very impressive bloodlines. Known as Constance of Burgundy, the new queen of Leon and Castile was the daughter of the Duke of Burgundy, the great-granddaughter of King Hugh Capet of France, and the niece of the highly influential Abbot Hugh, the Abbot of the monastery at Cluny. Happily, within a year of their marriage Queen Constance produced a child, a girl named Urraca, who was born late in the year 1080. At the time of the fall of Toledo Urraca was around five years old.

So, just to summarise, in the "mainstream Catholic" camp we have the Papacy, the French clergy, including the monastery at Cluny, and Queen Constance. There is a

counterbalance to the “mainstream Catholic” camp though, in the form of the Mozarab Christians who live in the Taifa of Toledo and across the Iberian peninsula.

Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula has walked its own road for a number of centuries. Having been separated from the rest of continental Europe by distance and an impressive mountain range, the Christians of the Iberian peninsula developed their own way of doing things. Even in the Christian north, Christianity had its own “Spanish” sort of flavour. The Christians of Al-Andalus were even more distinct. Many of them spoke fluent Arabic, and their dress, culture, and practices reflected the fact that they were part of the social structure of Al-Andalus. These Christians didn't particularly want mainstream Catholics coming in and telling them what to do, and King Alfonso was firmly on their side. Of course, King Alfonso's preference for the Mozarab position reflected the fact that he viewed his own conquering of Toledo as not a conquest in the name of the Church scoring territory for Rome, but as a king conquering neighbouring territory. In effect, King Alfonso viewed his conquest of Toledo as an expansion of the territory of Leon and Castile, and not as new territory which could be claimed by Rome.

So does this make the situation in the newly conquered Taifa of Toledo interesting? Yes, it absolutely does. King Alfonso began his rule of Toledo by sending his Mozarab envoy, Sisnando Davides, to govern the city of Toledo on behalf of not the Catholic Church, but the Kingdom of Leon and Castile. King Alfonso then distributed large wads of cash to the local peasants, telling them to use the money to buy seed to plant crops for the new season, a move which likely reduced the disquiet about his new role as the ruler of the Taifa. As he had promised, King Alfonso ensured that the Great Mosque of the city of Toledo remained in Muslim hands, and each of the communities living within the Taifa, the Muslims, the Jews, the Mozarab Christians, and even the northern Christians who were pouring into Toledo as new settlers, were provided with charters guaranteeing that they would each be subject to their own legal codes administered by their own chosen community leaders. Basically, everything was done which could be done to convince the residents of Toledo that things would just continue on as usual under King Alfonso's rule.

However, many of Toledo's Muslim residents were not convinced. In his book “Kingdoms of Faith”, Brian Catlos notes that despite King Alfonso's assurances there was a considerable migration of Muslims from the city of Toledo at the commencement of Christian rule. Many conservative Muslims simply could not abide staying in a place which was now under Christian administration. Some Muslim intellectuals and scholars made their way to other taifas, where they sought patronage and hospitality. Many Muslims lower down the social ladder, either fled southwards as refugees or decided that their best way forward would be to go with the flow and convert to Christianity. Brian Catlos states that even some Muslim members of the upper classes decided to remain in Toledo and convert, noting the fact that, because many of the Mozarab Christians of Toledo had identified as Andalusí, spoke Arabic and even had Arab names, this meant that for some Muslims it didn't seem such a big step to convert.

Despite the fact that a large segment of the Muslim population of Toledo had decided to pack their bags and move out of the conquered taifa, initially at least things seemed to be going to plan. In recognition of the fact that he was now ruler of a vast new territory, King Alfonso took for himself the title of Emperor of Toledo. He slapped Sisnando Davides on the back, told him he was doing a great job, then the victorious King/Emperor rode off to the east to see whether he could extend his territory even further.

In one quarter though, discontent was simmering. The quarter which was getting crosser and crosser by the minute about the current situation was team “mainstream Catholic Church”. In contrast to most people who actually resided on the Iberian peninsula, most non Spanish Catholics, particularly the French, were absolutely scandalised by what had taken place in Toledo. To them, the situation of what they viewed as Muslim appeasement under Mozarab rule was outrageous, unjustifiable, and completely intolerable. The two people who seemed to be particularly put out by the situation were Queen Constance and a man called Bernard de Sauvetot.

Bernard de Sauvetot was an ambitious monk from an aristocratic French family. Bernard had received his religious orders at the abbey at Cluny and had been dispatched to the Iberian peninsula by Pope Gregory, as part of his plan to extend the influence of the monastery at Cluny into King Alfonso's domains. In the year 1080 Bernard was appointed as the abbot of a monastery on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, and he seems to have been a confidant of the region's French queen, Queen Constance. It's likely that Bernard urged Queen Constance to convince King Alfonso to abandon his conciliatory approach to Toledo. However, Alfonso's appointment of Sisnando Davides as governor of Toledo seems to suggest that King Alfonso ignored Queen Constance's lobbying.

Queen Constance, though, was not deterred. With King Alfonso fully occupied far away from Toledo, in a venture which we will discuss in the next episode, Queen Constance and her French court, along with Bernard de Sauvetot, decided to travel to Toledo to see for themselves how things were going. Bernard, I should point out, had been appointed as the new Archbishop of Toledo, a decision which was likely primarily Queen Constance's idea rather than King Alfonso's. Now, unfortunately, there's not a lot of information available about how Sisnando Davides felt about the arrival of Queen Constance and her entourage, but I think we can safely say that they clashed heavily. While there isn't a blow-by-blow account of exactly how the conflict played out, the main event appears to have occurred when Sisnando Davides was called away from Toledo on other business. Taking full advantage of his absence, Bernard seized the Great Mosque of Toledo, with the approval of Queen Constance, and declared that it would make a great place to convert to a cathedral, the simple and smaller church buildings already in Toledo having been deemed by the new Archbishop of Toledo as not being grand enough.

This act caused outrage, not only amongst the taifa's Muslim residents but to King Alfonso. King Alfonso had specifically pledged the Grand Mosque to the Muslims of Toledo when he seized power, and he was furious that his Queen and the new Archbishop of Toledo had caused his pledge to be broken and his reputation to be tarnished. According to some sources, he was so angry that he threatened to have both Queen Constance and Archbishop Bernard executed, and was only talked down from this position by the Muslims of Toledo, who were concerned that the executions would cause a violent backlash against the Muslim population.

The fact that the mosque was actually turned into a cathedral and that Archbishop Bernard was allowed to remain in Toledo as Archbishop effectively meant that camp “mainstream Catholic Church” had won its battle with “camp Mozarab Christian”. Probably in recognition of this fact, Sisnando Davides was relieved of his position as governor of Toledo and was dispatched by King Alfonso to the southern taifas to collect tribute.

Meanwhile, over in Valencia, al-Qadir was in the process of being installed as the King of Valencia. Unfortunately for al-Qadir, his reputation had preceded him, and the people of Valencia weren't exactly thrilled to hear that the failed King of Toledo was about to become

their new monarch. In fact, they were so totally not-thrilled that the city of Valencia shut its gates to al-Qadir and refused to let him in. King Alfonso sent one of his military commanders, who just happened to be the nephew of our exiled friend, everyone's favourite loose cannon, Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, later known as El Cid. Perhaps a talent for military command ran in the family, as after a short siege of the city of Valencia the defenders backed down, and al-Qadir was successfully installed as king.

Now, you might be wondering where King Alfonso is during all of this. He wasn't in Toledo as the Taifa adjusted to its status as a Christian territory, and he wasn't in Valencia to hoist al-Qadir onto the throne, so where is he? Well, he's over to the east, in Zaragoza. Now, you might remember from the last episode that, following the death of the powerful King of Zaragoza al-Muqtadir in the year 1082, the Taifa of Zaragoza had been in a state of unrest and disarray, as different factions attempted to seize power. Well, following his victory at Toledo, King Alfonso has decided that a very nice follow-up to his annexation of Toledo would be for him to annex Zaragoza, so he's been in the east, preparing his armies and his strategies. At the current point in time, the armies of the Christian north are all in place outside the walls of the city of Zaragoza, and King Alfonso has taken command and is preparing to attack. You'll never guess who's inside Zaragoza in effective command of the defence of the city. It's our old friend Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, El Cid himself.

How did Rodrigo end up being in charge of the defence of Zaragoza? And how is he going to measure up against the famed military skills of King Alfonso? Well, you'll have to tune in next time to find out. Until next time, bye for now.

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