

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 44
Interlude

Hello again. Last time, we saw King Alfonso VI suffer a rare defeat on the battlefield, at the hands of the Almoravids and the combined armies of Seville, Granada, and Badajoz. The wounded King Alfonso limped back to Toledo while the bulk of the Almoravid army made its way back to northern Africa, much to the relief of everyone on the Iberian peninsula. With the Almoravids having departed, and with King Alfonso back in Toledo sending out demands for tribute to the taifas, everything sort of went back to normal for a short while, although a few events of note did take place.

The first event of note was the arrival of the French. You might recall from the last episode that when King Alfonso was advised that the Almoravids had arrived on the peninsula he sent requests for assistance far and wide. One of the furthest and widest requests made its way to France, more specifically to Queen Constance's relatives in Burgundy. The Burgundians responded to the request and the Burgundian armies mobilised under the leadership of Queen Constance's cousin Duke Odo of Burgundy. Unfortunately though, Burgundy is quite a distance from Al-Andalus, and by the time the French forces had arrived on the Iberian peninsula the Battle of Sagrajas had already been fought and lost. Not wanting to waste their journey, the Burgundian army decided to besiege the town of Tudela in the Taifa of Zaragoza, before eventually lifting the siege and heading back to Burgundy.

The visit by the Burgundian forces wasn't notable for the fact that they missed the main battle and failed to conquer a town in Zaragoza. The visit actually had a massive and long-lasting impact, due to the diplomatic negotiations which accompanied it. Now clearly, at this point in time King Alfonso knows that he really needs all the manpower he can lay his hands on in order to prevent another disaster like the Battle of Sagrajas, should the Almoravids ever return. In order to tie the Burgundians to the Christian north he was going to need more than just the fact that he was married to a Burgundian woman. In effect, to guarantee the future involvement of French forces, they were going to need to have a stake in the future success of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, and the best way to secure this was via marriage alliances.

At the current point in time, King Alfonso had no male heirs. His only legitimate offspring was his daughter Urraca, who was currently around six years old. He had also fathered a further two illegitimate daughters with his mistress Jimena, who was a noblewoman from the Kingdom of Leon. His two daughters with Jimena were Elvira, who was currently around four years old, and her older sister Teresa, who was nearly six.

One of the Burgundian noblemen accompanying Duke Odo's forces was Count Raymond of Burgundy, who was around seventeen years old and in need of a wife. After most of the French forces headed home following the failed siege of Tudela, Count Raymond and some other noblemen accompanied Duke Odo to the royal court at Leon, where they met with King Alfonso and Queen Constance to discuss strengthening the alliance between the Kingdom of Leon and Castile and the Duchy of Burgundy. The upshot of all of this was that the seventeen year old Count Raymond found himself betrothed to King Alfonso's six year old daughter and heir to the throne, Urraca. As part of the negotiations, Count Raymond was made the Count of Galicia. After all the other members of the Burgundian delegation

returned home, Count Raymond, the new Count of Galicia and possible future ruler of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, remained behind to familiarise himself with his new homeland.

Now, as an aside, King Alfonso's illegitimate daughters will also score themselves favourable marriage alliances. Young Elvira will find herself married to Count Raymond IV of Toulouse in the year 1094. Elvira will be around twelve years old when she will become the new Countess of Toulouse, while her new husband, the Count of Toulouse, was aged in his fifties.

If those of you who have listened to the History of the Crusades Podcast are now scratching your heads with a questioning look on your faces the answer is: Yes, this Count Raymond IV of Toulouse is the same Count Raymond IV of Toulouse of First Crusade fame. In fact, fourteen year old Countess Elvira will accompany her husband on the First Crusade, and will actually give birth to her first child, a son, at the siege of Tripoli. So there you go, it's a small world.

Not to be outdone, Elvira's sister Teresa will be betrothed to Henry of Burgundy, who was Duke Odo's younger brother, and who also may have been at the siege of Tudela. I won't go into much detail to avoid spoilers, but Teresa will end up becoming the Countess of Portugal. So, despite the fact that the arrival of the Burgundians was militarily useless, it did spurn some epically important marriage alliances.

Anyway, while King Alfonso was busy using the betrothal of his legitimate and illegitimate daughters to shore up his military alliances, he was also working hard to get another talented military commander back into the fold. Can you guess who that might be? Yes, it's Rodrigo, our old friend El Cid, who we last saw awkwardly waving at King Alfonso from behind the defensive walls of the city of Zaragoza. Unfortunately, there's not much information available about exactly how Rodrigo was enticed back into the employ of the King of Leon and Castile, but what we do know is that Rodrigo was given highly favourable inducements to return to the royal court. Not only was he given a handful of castles along the Duero River valley and some territory in northern Castile, he was provided with an extraordinarily unusual opportunity to expand on those holdings. This is how this extra sweetener was described in the *Historia Roderici*, and I quote: "Furthermore, King Alfonso gave him this concession and privilege in his Kingdom, written and confirmed under seal, by which all the land or castles which he himself might acquire from the Saracens in the land of the Saracens should be absolutely his in full ownership, not only his, but also his sons and daughters and all his descendants." End quote.

Basically, what this states is that King Alfonso granted Rodrigo a royal charter, whereby any land conquered by Rodrigo in Al-Andalus would belong to Rodrigo in perpetuity and could be handed down to his descendants. This gift was so generous and so unusual that some historians have declared it to be wrong or misconstrued. However, if you were a king in desperate need of talented military men, and you wished to incentivise a slightly uncontrollable, talented, hotheaded commander to conquer as much territory in Al-Andalus as he possibly could, well this would be the perfect way to go about it.

Now, if King Alfonso was scrambling to consolidate his military power due to fears that the Almoravids could return at any moment, well there's some good news on that front. The good news is that for the remainder of the year 1086 and for all of the year 1087 the Almoravids will stay safely across the Strait of Gibraltar in northern Africa.

In fact, this was very good news indeed for King Alfonso because he was forced to deal with a revolt in the Christian north during the year 1087. The revolt occurred in Galicia and was reasonably serious. At the height of the unrest, the town of Santiago de Compostela and the nearby town of Lugo were both in rebel hands. What was the rebellion about? Well, it was spearheaded by the Bishop of Santiago de Compostela and a local count, whose apparent ultimate goal was to free King Alfonso's brother Garcia, who had been imprisoned in a castle in northwestern Leon since the year 1073. In his book "The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain", Bernard Riley speculates that, since Garcia had once been betrothed to a daughter of William the Conqueror, there may have been a vague plan for England to invade Spain, with a view to ousting King Alfonso and placing Garcia on the throne. In any case, their end goal was never really discovered nor realised. King Alfonso was able to quash the rebellion before it got out of hand. He then arranged for the bishop to be deposed, while the count was sent into exile. Handily for everyone, young Count Raymond, who had recently been betrothed to King Alfonso's daughter and had been bestowed with the title of the Count of Galicia, was now able to fulfil his role. King Alfonso installed Raymond in Galicia as his Viceroy and drafted a cleric from a monastery in Castile to be the new Bishop of Santiago de Compostela.

Now, it was a good thing for King Alfonso that he had managed to get his domestic affairs in order in the Kingdom of Leon and Castile, because things were about to become hectic again in Al-Andalus. Why were things about to become hectic? Well, because the Christians will be viewed as staging a bit of a comeback in Al-Andalus during the following year, to such an extent that, during the winter of the year 1088 to 1089, the King of the Taifa of Seville, al-Mutamid, will personally travel to Northern Africa to ask Yusuf Ibn Tashafin whether he wouldn't mind bringing his armies back over to Al-Andalus to give the King Alfonso serpent another whack, a request which Yusuf will agree to.

So, what sparked this sudden concern about the activities of the Christians? Well, the first issue was the presence of the Christians at the fortress of Aledo. Now, one of the moves King Alfonso made after securing the Taifa of Toledo was to conquer the hilltop castle of Aledo and garrison it with his men. This was a very unusual move, as Aledo was nowhere near the Taifa of Toledo. It was located far to the east near the coast, kind of between the towns of Murcia and Lorca. Why did King Alfonso plonk a garrison of Christians in a fortress in the heart of eastern Al-Andalus? Well, because it was a super handy location for a Christian base. The fortress looked down over a valley and could effectively be used to block the route from the Taifas of Granada and Seville to eastern Al-Andalus, as well as acting as a base for raids into Murcia and Denia.

As an aside, it's worth taking a minute to check out Aledo on Google Earth. The modern town of Aledo appears to cover the same footprint as medieval Aledo, and you can see what a handy place it would have been to place a garrison. Part of the old fortress which would have housed King Alfonso's men is still standing, so it's worth checking out. Aledo is spelled A L E D O, for those of you who, like me, struggle with Spanish.

Anyway, the existence of the Christian garrison at Aledo is about to become super important due to the activities of Rodrigo. Now, as soon as Rodrigo was gifted his castles in the Duero River valley and his conquer-and-keep charter, he sprung into action. He travelled down the Duero valley, checked out his new holdings, then decided to head to Valencia. Why Valencia? Well, because things in Valencia looked all set to veer wildly out of control, and Rodrigo sensed an opportunity to secure some territory in this wealthy part of Al-Andalus.

The current trouble revolved around al-Qadir. Unfortunately for King Alfonso, the unpopular and incompetent ex-King of Toledo was proving just as unpopular and incompetent in his new role as the King of Valencia, and a local governor had decided to oppose him. The governor had a powerful ally in the form of Mundir al-Hayib, the brother of the King of Zaragoza who we met back in Episode 42. Mundir al-Hayib is currently the ruler of Lerida and Denia, territories located just to the south of Valencia. Deciding that annexing the wealthy Taifa of Valencia to his modest territory would be a very good idea, Mundir requested assistance from his ally Count Berenguer of Barcelona, then went on the attack. Deciding that it would be a brilliant move to switch Valencia from a Taifa under the thumb of King Alfonso to a Taifa under the thumb of Catalonia, Count Berenguer agreed, and the two forces sprang into action, securing some strongholds around the capital and besieging the city of Valencia itself. Al-Qadir sent an urgent request for assistance to King Alfonso, a request which was answered by Rodrigo, who made his way to Valencia. The forces of the Count of Barcelona scattered before the approach of Rodrigo's army and retreated back to Catalonia. Rodrigo then entered Valencia without too much trouble and met with al-Qadir, who promised to send the required amounts of tribute to King Alfonso in return for Rodrigo staying in Valencia and protecting it from Mundir and the Count of Barcelona.

The effective use of the fortress at Aledo to block any assistance from Granada and Seville to Valencia, and the ease with which Rodrigo had defended Valencia, prompted al-Mutamid of Seville to cross the Strait of Gibraltar to request the Almoravids to revisit the peninsula, with the aim of seizing the fortress of Aledo and removing its Christian garrison. Yusuf happily accepted this brief, and preparations began, with the Almoravids aiming to arrive on the Iberian peninsula in March of the year 1089, meet up with the combined armies of Seville, Granada, and Almeria, then march to Aledo.

Join me next time as the Christians and the Almoravids face off once again. Until next time, bye for now.

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