

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 46
The Almoravid Advance

Hello again. Last time we examined events taking place in the Iberian peninsula in another interlude between Almoravid invasions. Most of our focus was on Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, later known as El Cid, doing typical Rodrigo-type activities such as coming up with audacious plans to enrich himself by going on the offensive with crazy military campaigns, which on the whole were successful.

However, in the summer of the year 1090, everyone's plans were put on hold as another crisis rocked the peninsula. The crisis came in the form of another invasion by the Almoravids. This time though, it wasn't going to be a case of the Muslims versus the Christians, in other words, the Almoravids and the taifas against the Christian kingdoms. No, this time it was the Almoravids against absolutely everyone else. By this time Yusuf Ibn Tashafin had had enough of the rulers of the taifas, with their decadent ways, their alliances with the Christians, and their heavy taxation. This time, Yusuf Ibn Tashafin was determined to take on not only King Alfonso IV but the rulers of the taifas, and crush them with his blue-veiled fearsome fighting force.

The first person to find himself in the cross-hairs of the Almoravid army though, was King Alfonso. After landing on the peninsula, Yusuf Ibn Tashafin marched his army towards Toledo, intent on taking the wealthy, formerly Muslim, taifa from the Christian north.

Now, when Yusuf landed on the peninsula it was summer in the year 1090. Summers in the centre of the Iberian peninsula are quite warm and very dry. Perhaps realising that Yusuf was going to find it very challenging to provide his army with enough water to sustain a lengthy campaign, King Alfonso took his time mustering his forces. He requested Sancho Ramirez I of Aragon, to join him, and once the King of Aragon had travelled to Toledo the two Christian armies slowly advanced towards the Almoravid position.

If King Alfonso's strategy had been to wait out the Almoravid forces while the heat and dryness of summer did all the hard work, well the ploy was successful. Without having moved on Toledo, Yusuf withdrew back to the south and turned his attentions instead to the Taifa of Granada. Three months later, Granada fell to the Almoravids. A short time after that, the smaller neighbouring Taifa of Malaga also came under Almoravid control. The King of the Taifa of Malaga was the brother of Abdallah the King of the Taifa of Granada, and both brothers were sent to Morocco where they spent the remainder of their lives as prisoners. Abdallah, happily for historians, spent his days writing his autobiography, which became an important source for the events of this period.

Yusuf Ibn Tashafin then basically picked off all the taifas one by one. Approaching the leader of each taifa in turn, Yusuf demanded that they surrender and abdicate their positions. As reported by Brian Catlos in his book "Kingdoms of Faith", some of the taifa kings did surrender and were pardoned, some were handed over to the Almoravids by their own people, some were executed and others were dispatched to northern Africa as prisoners. Some of the kings of the taifas made valiant stands against the Almoravids, most notably al-Mutamid of Seville.

By March of the year 1091 Yusuf Ibn Tashafin had defeated Cordoba and was preparing to besiege the city of Seville. A desperate al-Mutamid appealed to his old enemy King Alfonso for assistance. King Alfonso, perhaps surprisingly, responded to the call. The Christian army headed out from Toledo and marched south to Granada, then headed west towards Seville. The Christian and Almoravid forces clashed at Seville, with the Almoravids emerging victorious. Then the city of Seville, and in fact the entire Taifa of Seville, fell to Yusuf Ibn Tashafin in November of the year 1091. Al-Mutamid was hauled off to northern Africa, where he will spend the remainder of his days as a prisoner in Morocco.

By the end of the year 1091 the Almoravids had taken Granada, Cordoba, Seville, Malaga and Murcia, so basically the entire southern portion of the Iberian peninsula. The only significant taifas left standing were Badajoz, Valencia and Zaragoza. Badajoz fell to the Almoravids in the year 1094. Al-Mutawakil had attempted to secure Christian support to defend his taifa, by granting a bunch of territory inside Badajoz to King Alfonso. The plan though, was ultimately unsuccessful. After Badajoz was defeated, al-Mutawakil was executed and the Almoravids eventually re-took the territory recently granted by Mutawakil to the Christians.

With the fall of Badajoz the Almoravids now controlled the western part of the Iberian peninsula, from the borders of Galicia all the way to the southern coast, along with the entire southern portion of the peninsula. The only parts of Al-Andalus not under northern African control were Toledo, Valencia and Zaragoza. The next taifa on Yusuf Ibn Tashafin's hit list was Valencia, a taifa which in the year 1094 was under the control of drum roll please ... Rodrigo.

How did El Cid manage to bag himself the wealthy Taifa of Valencia? Well, to answer that question we need to back-track a little, around four years to be exact. Around Christmas time in the year 1090 Rodrigo was busy showering his men with gifts and a generous wage increase. In fact that's where we left him in the last episode. He then moved inland, inside the Taifa of Valencia, and laid siege to a place called Liria. It was while he was besieging Liria in winter of the year 1090 to 1091 that Rodrigo received letters from Queen Constance and some of his contacts back in Castile, urging him to join forces with King Alfonso for an attack on the Almoravids. Deciding this sounded like a good idea, Rodrigo lifted the siege of Liria and headed towards Granada, where he met up with King Alfonso's forces. Unfortunately though, relations between the King and Rodrigo were still rather frosty, and a disagreement broke out between the two men about their standing in relation to each other. According to Richard Fletcher in his book "The Quest for El Cid", when the two forces set up camp King Alfonso's royal tents were pitched in a certain location. Then an argument arose in relation to the place in which Rodrigo had chosen to pitch his tents, the implication being that Rodrigo wasn't showing the correct amount of deference to his monarch.

Anyway, the attack on Granada ended up being abandoned and the royal forces headed towards Seville to go to the assistance of al-Mutamid. According to the *Historia Roderici*, it was during this journey that King Alfonso launched a verbal attack on Rodrigo, accusing him of, and I quote "many and various things, but untrue ones" end quote. According to the *Historia Roderici*, King Alfonso then decided to place Rodrigo under arrest. However, Rodrigo found out about this plan and fled. By Christmas of the year 1091 King Alfonso was back in Toledo and Rodrigo was back in the mountains inside the Taifa of Valencia.

The dispute between Rodrigo and his monarch must have been serious because Rodrigo spent most of the early part of the year 1092 shoring up his alliances, apparently not

against a possible attack by the Almoravids but against a possible attack by King Alfonso. First Rodrigo travelled to Zaragoza and renewed his alliance with the King of the Taifa of Zaragoza, Yusuf al-Mutamin. Then he journeyed to Aragon, where he formed a pact with King Sancho Ramirez and his son and heir Pedro. Then, as a cherry on top of the diplomatic pie, Rodrigo managed to negotiate a peace treaty between his two new allies, Zaragoza and Aragon, a feat which was pretty impressive as Aragon and Zaragoza had been at each other's throats for most of Yusuf al-Mutamin's reign.

It turns out that Rodrigo wasn't overreacting by rushing to make these alliances. Apparently, King Alfonso was now completely done with the whole letting-Rodrigo-back-into-the-royal-circle idea. And you would have to say that of late Rodrigo's transgressions had mounted up. He had muscled in on Valencia and had become al-Qadir's protector, meaning the tribute from Valencia which had previously gone into the coffers of the Kingdom of Leon and Castile was now lining Rodrigo's pockets. The extensive gifts and the conquer-and-keep charter, which King Alfonso had bestowed upon Rodrigo to ensure his loyalty, hadn't really paid off. When King Alfonso had summoned Rodrigo's forces, conflict and miscommunication had meant that Rodrigo hadn't been of much use at all to his King militarily speaking, or anything else speaking for that matter.

So according to Richard Fletcher, while Yusuf Ibn Tashafin was busy picking off the taifas one by one, King Alfonso was busy securing military assistance, not for an attack on the Almoravids but for an attack on Valencia. He sent messages all the way to Italy, to the maritime powerhouse city-states of Genoa and Pisa, proposing that they join him in a combined land and sea attack on Valencia. Pisa and Genoa both agreed, likely gaining a promise for exclusive trading privileges in the city of Valencia should the mission succeed. King Alfonso then travelled with his royal army to the city of Valencia and besieged it, as the first step in his plan to conquer the taifa.

However, it was while he was killing time at the siege of Valencia that King Alfonso received some disturbing news. Rodrigo wasn't in fact inside the city of Valencia. In fact, Rodrigo wasn't even inside the Taifa of Valencia or, for that matter, inside Al-Andalus. Where was Rodrigo? Well, he was attacking King Alfonso's territory in the Kingdom of Castile. It wasn't a randomly chosen piece of land which Rodrigo had decided to lay waste to either. No, it was the county under the control of Rodrigo's old enemy, Garcia Ordonez, whom Rodrigo had defeated, imprisoned, and ransomed back in Episode 39. According to Richard Fletcher, Count Garcia Ordonez had risen to become one of the wealthiest and most influential noblemen in Castile, and had the ear of King Alfonso. Rodrigo appears to have blamed much of the current ill feeling between himself and King Alfonso on Count Ordonez, accusing him of spreading negative and untrue rumours about Rodrigo to the King. Consequently, in order to regain his honour, shame his rival, and scare King Alfonso away from his proposed attack on Valencia, Rodrigo hit the Count's holdings in the Kingdom of Castile like a hurricane, moving like an unstoppable force of nature, destroying, looting, and ravaging his enemy's lands. Count Ordonez seems to have been powerless to stop Rodrigo. He did manage to muster an army after calling in favours from his kinsmen, but there is no record of the Count's forces actually confronting Rodrigo's men. They just sort of stood back and gasped in dismay as Rodrigo put on a masterful display of military showmanship.

After a time Rodrigo moved on. He travelled to Zaragoza, having achieved everything he had hoped for. Count Ordonez was left humiliated and a figure of ridicule. Rodrigo had scored a bunch of loot and booty at his enemy's expense, and a shocked King Alfonso had been forced to lift the siege of Valencia. The ships from Genoa and Pisa changed course

and made their way to Barcelona, to help the Count of Barcelona in what will be a futile effort to seize the city of Tortosa. To top off what was a very bad day at the office for King Alfonso, shortly after he lifted the siege of Valencia the Almoravids overran the fortress at Aledo, King Alfonso's outpost in eastern Al-Andalus, which we mentioned in Episode 44.

While the Almoravids were taking Aledo and Rodrigo was in Zaragoza, events of note were taking place in Valencia. Basically, everyone in Valencia had had enough of their incompetent, unpopular king, al-Qadir, and in the summer of the year 1092 someone decided to do something about it. That someone was a man called Ibn Jahhaf, a respected nobleman whose family had featured prominently in the politics and administration of Valencia for over a century. With the support of other prominent citizens, he worked to remove al-Qadir from power. Al-Qadir managed to send some of his treasure away from Valencia, then locked himself inside his palace. However, resistance was futile. He was captured while trying to leave the city in disguise and was executed. The following day, Ibn Jahhaf was declared to be the new ruler of Valencia.

When Rodrigo received the news that his compliant, easily manipulated, endless source of tribute and cash, al-Qadir, had been killed, he decided to make the biggest play of his career so far. In the same way as King Alfonso had taken the Taifa of Toledo, Rodrigo was going to try to secure for himself the wealthy Taifa of Valencia. Join me next time, as Rodrigo does exactly that. Until next time, bye for now.

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