

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 7  
Hisham

Hello again. Last time we saw the rise to power of Abd al-Rahman, who managed to rule as the Emir of Al-Andalus for over three decades. Abd al-Rahman established his base at Cordoba and, unlike previous Muslim rulers, managed to extend his reach across the Iberian peninsula. Abd al-Rahman's ultimate goal was to establish a hereditary dynasty in Al-Andalus, a bit like his family the Umayyads had done in Damascus. The real test for the founding member of a potential dynasty comes when that person dies, so in this episode we shall take a look at what occurred following Abd al-Rahman's death.

Before we focus on Abd al-Rahman's succession issues though, let's zoom down and take a look at the Iberian peninsula as it was at the time of Abd al-Rahman's death. Abd al-Rahman was 58 years old when he died in the year 788, and he left Al-Andalus in a much more secure position than it had been in prior to his rule. As Brian Catlos points out in his book "Kingdoms of Faith", Muslims were still a minority group at the time of Abd al-Rahman's death. The vast majority of the people living on the peninsula were Christian, and there were also a number of Jewish people. Exactly how many Jewish people were in residence at this time has unfortunately been lost to history, with Brian Catlos stating that the Jewish people on the peninsula at this time were, and I quote "all but invisible to historians" end quote. Most of the Muslim population resided in the south, although there were important clusters of Muslims present in most of the larger towns across the peninsula. Despite the fact that Muslims were in the minority, Muslim rule had extended out across the peninsula so that, by the time of Abd al-Rahman's death, most of the peninsula was under his control, save for some of the more remote mountainous regions in the north and in the Pyrenees, where the Muslims had been expelled and where local strongmen were ruling independently of Cordoba.

As we saw in the last episode, Abd al-Rahman consolidated his rule on the peninsula by means of a carrot-and-stick method, cajoling the various groups inside Al-Andalus and attempting to gain their support, while hitting them hard militarily if they stepped too far out of line. In this way, Abd al-Rahman managed to get most of the diverse groups inside Al-Andalus to accept his rule, although Brian Catlos points out that some of the Berber people who had settled around Toledo were so unhappy with Abd al-Rahman that they moved back to Northern Africa prior to his death. But despite the odd hiccup, Abd al-Rahman managed to establish a web of bureaucratic and administrative networks across the peninsula, which meant that taxes could be collected, infrastructure could be built, and some degree of control could be exercised by the Emir over the peninsula's inhabitants.

Interestingly, Brian Catlos points out that Abd al-Rahman managed to break up some of the larger estates controlled by the Christian Visigothic lords during his rule. Most of the Christian lords were pretty unhappy with this turn of events, but there was little they could do about it, as Abd al-Rahman had decided that he wasn't legally bound by the treaties and agreements enacted by his predecessors.

The taxes collected by his vast network of bureaucrats meant that Abd al-Rahman had the funds to undertake beautification and enhancement projects inside his capital city Cordoba. At the beginning of his rule, Cordoba was very much a Roman town, with its

streets narrow and jumbled, and with the town itself surrounded by ancient walls. Abd al-Rahman set about stamping a Middle Eastern influence onto the city. Builders, craftsmen and artisans from the Middle East worked on building a large central marketplace inside Cordoba, based on the souks from the Middle East, while Abd al-Rahman had a magnificent villa constructed for himself two miles outside the city walls. This villa was named for his childhood home, which had been located on the banks of the Euphrates River in Syria. It was surrounded by elaborate gardens, which included a pomegranate tree grown from seed sent by his sister from Syria.

As we stated in the last episode, Abd al-Rahman also ordered a mosque to be built in Cordoba. Now, like his villa, the new mosque imported an Islamic style of architecture into the Iberian peninsula, but it also borrowed from Roman, European and even Visigothic Christian influences, which resulted in a stunningly unique building, which still exists today. The overall design of the mosque was modelled on the building constructed at the House of the Prophet, at Medina in Arabia, but if we take the magnificent prayer hall as an example, we can see how other, non-Muslim, influences were utilised. The hall itself was divided into eleven aisles, separated by rows of marble columns topped by double arches, which were decorated with alternate red and white bricks. The marble columns were recycled from Roman temples which had been built on the peninsula, and the red and white stripe idea came from a Roman building technique. The extensive use of arches was seen as a nod to Visigothic churches already in existence in the peninsula. The result of this mixture of influences is that the great prayer hall was a totally unique space, which distinguished itself sharply from other buildings on the Iberian peninsula while also tipping its hat to their influence. As Brian Catlos states, the prayer hall looks a little bit like a Roman aqueduct, but its proliferation of marble pillars also made it resemble a thicket of palm trees, trees which Abd al-Rahman himself was known to have missed from his homeland.

The building of this mosque signalled to the residents of Al-Andalus that the Muslims were here to stay. As stated by Brian Catlos, and I quote "it was a political as well as a religious monument, signalling Cordoba as the new Damascus" end quote. As we've mentioned, the prayer hall is still in existence today, and I'll post a photo of it on the website and Facebook page. But the mosque itself is no longer a mosque. Spoiler alert: it was seized during the 13th century as part of the Reconquista, and was converted into a cathedral. It's still a cathedral today, and Muslims in the 21st century have lobbied both the Spanish authorities and the Vatican in an attempt to allow Muslims to pray in the building, but so far those attempts have been unsuccessful.

Oops, I seem to have gone off track a little. Where were we? Ah, yes, the death of Abd al-Rahman. Now, When Abd al-Rahman died in October of the year 788 he left behind three sons. While Abd al-Rahman's goal was to establish a hereditary system of government, it was sort of an open question about which one of his sons would get the nod. Unlike in Christendom, the primogeniture principle, which sees the eldest son automatically take over following his father's death, hadn't applied to the Umayyad family in Damascus, and Abd al-Rahman didn't think it should start applying now, so theoretically all three of his sons were now in contention to replace him as Emir of Al-Andalus. In reality though, one of the three sons was pretty sketchy, and no one really backed him for the position, so that left only two sons in the running. Let's take a look at them both.

The eldest son was called Sulayman. Sulayman was a military man through and through, and enjoyed widespread support from the Syrian fighting men, particularly around the city of Toledo where he was based. He was a seasoned fighter and was admired for his

bravery and his successes on the battlefield. In contrast, the second-eldest son, Hisham, was more of a scholar than a fighter. Having enjoyed the benefits of a good education, he was a devoted Muslim, and was admired for his capable decision making abilities. Just to round out the pool of brothers, the final brother, who didn't seem to be in the running, was called Abd Allah.

Some sources have Abd al-Rahman favouring Hisham, and naming him as his successor on his deathbed, while other sources describe the succession issue as being decided by chance. What does seem certain is that neither Sulayman nor Hisham were at their father's bedside when he died. Sulayman was in Toledo, while Hisham was in Merida. Abd Allah however, was in Cordoba and was at his father's deathbed, and so was able to pass on his father's dying wishes.

As I've said, one source has Abd Allah declaring that his father wished Hisham to succeed him, while another source has Abd Allah declaring that Abd al-Rahman was unable to choose between his two sons, and instead stated that whomever arrived at Cordoba first would take the prize. In that account, both sons raced towards Cordoba, with Hisham reaching it after taking only six days to travel there from Merida. Upon his arrival, Abd Allah handed him the seal of office and greeted him formally as the Emir of Al-Andalus.

Suleiman, though, wasn't prepared to just sit back and watch his bookish younger brother take over as Emir. Gathering his forces, he headed towards Cordoba. Hisham mustered an army of his own and intercepted Sulayman's forces before they reached Cordoba, at a town called Jaen. In a shock move, Hisham defeated his elder brother's army. However, Sulayman still refused to acknowledge his brother as the true leader of Al-Andalus. In fact, not only did he refuse to recognise Hisham's rule, he managed to recruit Abd Allah to his cause, and plotted to overthrow Hisham. In response Hisham led his army to his brother's effective seat of power, Toledo, and after a gruelling two month campaign managed to force Toledo to throw its arms up and acknowledge Hisham as the true Emir of Al-Andalus. At this stage, it was pretty much all over for Sulayman, who was also forced to admit defeat.

Deciding that it would be best for everyone if his two brothers were anywhere but the Iberian peninsula, Hisham paid Sulayman a huge sum of money, so huge in fact that Hugh Kennedy in his book "Muslim Spain and Portugal" states that it was equivalent to half the annual income of the emirate at this time, and told him that he was to take himself and Abd Allah to northern Africa and never return to the peninsula. Which is exactly what happened.

Without his brothers opposing his rule, Hisham successfully ruled Al-Andalus, continuing his father's policies and style of rule, completing the building of the mosque at Cordoba, and making various improvements to infrastructure in Cordoba, as many of the old Roman bridges and buildings were centuries old and in serious need of repairs. Unfortunately, while Hisham's rule was successful, it was also quite short. He died only eight years after taking over as Emir.

The good news was that Hisham had his successor already sorted out, and as a result there was a relatively uneventful transfer of power after his death.

Now there were two points of interest which arose out of Hisham's eight years of rule, both of which concern the Christians of the region, and both of which we will now discuss. The first interesting development concerns the return to the stage of some of the traditional

Visigothic and Hispanic families. By the year 790 or thereabouts, some of the traditional landowners, who had kept their heads down and formed alliances with their new Muslim overlords, had taken a leap forward and had converted to Islam. With their new religion opening the doors to greater political and military influence, the new Visigothic and Hispanic Muslim converts slowly began reasserting themselves onto the political stage.

Their first opportunity to make an impact occurred a few years into Hisham's rule. The city of Zaragoza had risen in rebellion and had declared itself independent from Muslim rule during the years 788 and 789. Two years after the governor of Zaragoza had been defeated, a Berber warlord seized control of the city, and again declared its independence. He too was then defeated. Instrumental in both of these defeats were two powerful local landowners, both of whom were described as "muwallads", or indigenous converts. One of the landowners was known as Musa ibn Fortun ibn Qasi, which roughly translates as "the son of Fortunis, son of Cassius", meaning the man was likely of Hispano-Roman heritage. This signals the start of a small power shift inside the Iberian peninsula, whereby Visigothic and Hispanic converts to Islam were beginning to reassert themselves into the politics of the region.

The other interesting development came about as a result of Hisham's military activities across the Pyrenees. Septimania had been under the control of the Christian Franks since the Muslims had been driven out of their capital Narbonne, in the year 759. However, both Muslim and Frankish military commanders would occasionally raid into each other's territory across the Pyrenees, with the Muslims in particular gaining much booty from their raids. In his book "Kingdoms of Faith", Brian Catlos notes that the goal of these raids appeared to be the gaining of plunder rather than the annexation of territory. In fact, in the year 793, one of Hisham's generals led a raid against the towns of Carcassonne and Narbonne which was so spectacularly successful that Hisham was able to use the proceeds to complete the work commenced by his father on the mosque at Cordoba.

In addition to fighting each other, the Franks and the Muslims also regularly interacted in the diplomatic arena. A very interesting outcome of this interaction was the fact that one of Hisham's wives was actually a Frankish woman. The woman, whose name was Zukhruf, or "golden ornament", had been presented to Hisham as part of a treaty signed between King Charlemagne and Hisham's father, Abd al-Rahman.

By the time of Hisham's death in the year 796 he had clearly identified the person he wished to succeed him as Emir of Al-Andalus, and that person was his 26 year old son, al-Hakam, whose mother was the Frankish Zukhruf.

So, with the Visigothic and Hispanic population dipping its toes into the waters of the politics of Al-Andalus, how will this new half-Frank half-Umayyad ruler fare? You'll have to tune in next time to find out. Until next time, bye for now.

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