

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 78
A New Caliph

Hello again. Last time we saw two of the Christian kingdoms on the Iberian peninsula end up being ruled by children named Alfonso. The Kingdom of Castile is now under the control of the Lara family, who have secured the wardship of two-year-old Alfonso, son and heir of the late King Sancho III of Castile, while over in the Kingdom of Aragon / Barcelona, seven-year-old Alfonso, son of the late Count Ramon Berenguer IV has risen to the throne. Surprisingly, the Almohads have been unable to take advantage of this situation. In fact, the opposite has occurred, with the Wolf King managing to launch some ambitious attacks against Almohad cities including Cordoba and Seville. As we saw in the last episode, the reason why the Almohads have been forced onto the back foot in Al-Andalus is due to the fact that the leader of the Almohads, Abd al-Mu'min has been distracted by events in northern Africa.

However now, towards the end of the year 1160, with a successful campaign in Tunisia behind him, Abd al-Mu'min has cleared his diary for a lengthy and comprehensive operation in Al-Andalus. In an indication of just how lengthy and comprehensive this campaign might end up being, Abd al-Mu'min has ordered a new palace to be built in Gibraltar for him to use as his headquarters while the military operations are taking place. In November of the year 1160 Abd al-Mu'min made the journey across the strait and arrived at Gibraltar.

Now this was a big occasion and the first thing which needed to happen was for Abd al-Mu'min to host a large and elaborate court reception at his new palace, so invitations were sent to his sons, to other Almohad rulers from across the peninsula, and to Almohad allies from Al-Andalus. The most significant personages to make the journey to the Caliph's court in Gibraltar were Abd al-Mu'min's two sons, Abu Yaqub Yusuf, the ruler of Seville, and Uthman, the ruler of Granada. However, Yusuf's journey southwards to meet his father was delayed by an uprising in the town of Carmona, which was located just to the east of Seville.

The man behind the uprising in Carmona was called Ibn Hamušk, an ally of the Wolf King. In fact, he wasn't just an ally of the Wolf King, he was related to him. Ibn Hamušk's daughter was married to the Wolf King, so the Wolf King was his son-in-law. Ibn Hamušk, operated from his headquarters at Jaen and, like the Wolf King, had been a thorn in the side of the Almohads in recent times. Yusuf arranged for one of his military commanders to travel to Carmona to deal with the unrest, and left for Gibraltar, arriving there a little later than everyone else.

By all reports, the reception which took place at Gibraltar was impressive. Hugh Kennedy describes it in his book "Muslim Spain and Portugal" as, and I quote, "a splendid affair" end quote. Sermons were preached, poems were recited and there was much pomp and circumstance, but not an awful lot of substance was achieved. If supporters of the Almohads on the Iberian peninsula had hoped that the meeting in Gibraltar would herald the start of a major military offensive, they were about to be disappointed.

In January of the year 1161 Abd al-Mu'min returned to Marrakesh and his sons returned back north to their respective cities, but all was not lost. From Marrakesh, Abd al-Mu'min

set about planning the new Almohad offensive in Al-Andalus. He dispatched one of his most experienced military commanders to Cordoba with orders to repair and re-fortify the city, then he sent a message to his son Yusuf in Seville, ordering him to travel to Marrakesh to participate in planning the upcoming campaign.

By this time, Carmona had fallen under the control of forces loyal to Ibn Hamušk, so prior to his departure for northern Africa, Yusuf ordered one of his commanders to lead a force to Carmona and retake it from the rebels. It took nearly a year for Carmona to be defeated by the Almohads. It finally fell in December of 1161. Embarrassingly for the Almohads, it didn't surrender due to Almohad military superiority, instead it was due to treachery. The leader of Ibn Hamušk's forces inside Carmona was captured and taken to Seville, where he was crucified. Ibn Hamušk himself remained in Jaen where he continued to be a major concern for the Almohads.

In spring of the year 1162 Ibn Hamušk managed to get a small force of his men inside the city of Granada. Apparently they were secretly admitted through one of the city's gates by a sympathiser. Usefully for Ibn Hamušk, the ruler of Granada, Uthman, was currently in Marrakesh, meeting with his father. The garrison of Granada was completely taken by surprise and retreated to a fortress inside the city. Ibn Hamušk and his men established themselves in another fortified position inside the city, then sent word to his son-in-law, the Wolf King, telling him that he had penetrated the defences of Granada and requesting reinforcements. The Wolf King responded by immediately marching to Granada with an army which included around 1,000 Christian cavalymen. At the same time, the garrison inside Granada dispatched an urgent message to the Caliph in Marrakesh requesting assistance.

In response, Abd al-Mu'min ordered Uthman to return to Granada and oversee the defence of his town, while also ordering troops from Seville to set out for Granada. Uthman and the men he had gathered on his march met up with the troops from Seville, but as they approached Granada they were met by the combined forces of Ibn Hamušk and the Wolf King on a plain outside the city. The result was a complete rout of the Almohads by Ibn Hamušk, the Wolf King, and the Christians. Hugh Kennedy accounts for the Almohads' embarrassing defeat by suggesting that the Almohads were unaware that Ibn Hamušk had managed to obtain reinforcements and were unprepared for the size of the army which confronted them outside Granada, and the presence of so many Christian cavalymen. Uthman managed to escape the carnage and made his way to Malaga, but the defeat was the worst suffered by the Almohads on the Iberian peninsula to date.

When news of the catastrophic defeat reached Abd al-Mu'min he decided that a massive response was warranted, and a massive response was exactly what he ordered. 20,000 Almohad and Arab fighters were immediately dispatched to Al-Andalus. Their orders were to sail for Malaga, where they would be joined by the survivor of the defeat, Uthman. Yusuf the ruler of Seville, and the experienced Almohad military commander whom Abd al-Mu'min had dispatched to Cordoba, whose name incidentally was Suleiman, were ordered to make their way to Malaga as well, where they would assume joint command of the Almohad forces.

When the Almohad army approached Granada, it was informed that Ibn Hamušk, the Wolf King, and their armies had set themselves up in fortified positions inside Granada. Under cover of darkness during the night of the 12th of July in the year 1162 Suleiman led the Almohad forces into Granada, and just before dawn they attacked the forces of Ibn Hamušk as they slept. Impressively, the Almohads had managed to completely surprise

the occupiers, most of whom woke in fright and attempted to flee. Panic soon set in, and spread to the Wolf King's army, which likewise did its best to get itself out of Granada as quickly as possible. Many of the fleeing fighters were cut down by the Almohads when they became trapped in the gorges and steep terrain which surrounded their positions. Both Ibn Hamušk and the Wolf King managed to make it out of Granada alive, although many of their men were not so lucky and most of their equipment fell to the Almohads. Ibn Hamušk was chased all the way back to his headquarters at Jaen. The Almohads then re-fortified Granada and rewarded the Almohad garrison inside the city, which had managed to hold out despite the occupation.

To celebrate the victory, the Caliph ordered that the Almohad centre of operations be transferred from Seville to Cordoba, likely as a reward for Suleiman's key role in commanding the successful attack. Now, this was a lot more challenging than it sounds. Cordoba had suffered badly in recent times and was now just a shell of its former self. In his book "Muslim Spain and Portugal", Hugh Kennedy reports that two separate chroniclers from the period observed that Cordoba, at this point in time, only had a total of 82 male residents, who were struggling to make a living in the largely abandoned city. The 82 male residents must have been shocked when a long line of administrative officials, secretaries, tax officers, and leading Almohad figures arrived in Cordoba and began dusting off the buildings and surrounds, readying Cordoba for its new role as the centre for Almohad power. An architect was commissioned to create new accommodation and palaces for the Almohad hierarchy, while the fortifications of Cordoba were repaired and restored. On the 26th of September, the effective current rulers of the Almohads in Al-Andalus, Uthman, Yusuf, and Suleiman arrived in Cordoba and were greeted by its new inhabitants with much fanfare. Suleiman ended up returning to Marrakesh with the core of the Almohad and Arab troops, while Yusuf also popped over to northern Africa after his father ordered him to meet with him regarding his succession plans, leaving Uthman in charge of Cordoba.

Now it was fortunate that Yusuf had made the effort to travel to meet with his father as Abd al-Mu'min died six months after this meeting, while touring around Morocco gathering troops for a proposed massive invasion of the Iberian peninsula. The Caliph had planned to launch an extremely ambitious four-pronged assault, hitting the towns of Leon, Toledo, Barcelona and Coimbra in Portugal, attacking not Al-Andalus but Christian Spain. The planning for this invasion was quite advanced and thousands of men, perhaps even hundreds of thousands if contemporary sources were correct, had assembled and set up camp near the coast in Morocco, waiting to be transported to Gibraltar. But the Caliph's death put an end to the campaign, and everyone packed up and returned home.

Now, although Abd al-Mu'min had met with Yusuf prior to his death and appears to have nominated him to be his heir, the succession was never going to be quite that simple. As we've mentioned before, Abd al-Mu'min had plenty of sons. Many of them had risen to positions of power inside his administration, and many of them also wanted to rise to become the new caliph. To make matters more complicated, before Yusuf's journey to Marrakesh six months ago, a different son had been publicly nominated as Abd al-Mu'min's heir. This son, Muhammad, had fallen from grace in the past few years and had been accused of indulging in impure behaviour, including the drinking of wine. As a result, Muhammad had been ousted from his lofty position inside the Almohad power structure. As Muhammad's star fell, another son's star was on the rise. This son was named Umar and he was a full brother to Yusuf due to the fact that they shared the same mother. Umar ended up becoming a key adviser to Abd al-Mu'min, and it's likely that Umar lobbied for his brother Yusuf to be nominated as the next caliph.

Luckily for Yusuf, Umar was with the Caliph when he died and managed to keep the Caliph's death secret long enough for Yusuf to race to northern Africa to secure his succession. The two brothers then worked tirelessly to soothe the ruffled feathers of the Caliph's other sons, doling out favours and positions of power to some, exiling others, while at least one son met a sudden and unexplained death. The new Caliph Yusuf was then formally proclaimed in Marrakesh. From this point onwards, Yusuf as Caliph and his full brother Umar as his chief adviser, will keep a tight rein on power, with the most powerful positions in their administration being reserved for themselves and their sons.

So who is Yusuf, the new Caliph? Well, he was only around 25 years old at the time he became Caliph. He was a scholar rather than a fighter, and had assembled an impressive library of books at Seville. He was prone to long periods of illness, which Hugh Kennedy speculates may have been a form of depression.

So, with Abd al-Mu'min out of the picture and a new young scholarly Caliph ruling from Marrakesh, how will this affect the Almohad occupation of Al-Andalus? Well, you'll need to tune in next time to find out. Until next time, bye for now.

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