

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 80
Almohad Consolidation

Hello again. Last time we saw King Fernando II of Leon come to the assistance of the Almohads in a battle over the city of Badajoz. The defences of Badajoz had been penetrated by Geraldo the Fearless, and it seemed as if Badajoz was about to fall to Geraldo and the King of Portugal, Alfonso I. Concerned that Badajoz would fall to Portugal before Muslim troops from northern Africa arrived to relieve its garrison, King Fernando of Leon, who believed that Badajoz was rightly part of Leon not Portugal, decided to take an army to Badajoz to attack the Portuguese forces. He ended up prevailing, with his father-in-law, King Alfonso I, breaking his leg during the fighting and becoming a prisoner of the northern Christian forces. Did the fact that his son-in-law had come to the rescue of the Almohad garrison cause tensions between King Fernando and King Alfonso? Yes, I think it's safe to say that it did.

Had King Alfonso not been injured in the fighting perhaps the difficulties between the pair may have resolved, but the broken leg which King Alfonso suffered never healed properly, and served as a constant reminder of the duplicity of his son-in-law. King Alfonso was aged in his fifties at the time the battle took place in 1169, and there are reports that in an attempt to get his leg to mend he spent months rehabilitating at thermal baths in a spa town in Portugal, but to no avail. His injury meant that he was unable to ride a horse for the remainder of his life. This wouldn't pose too many difficulties in modern times, but back in the day when a king was meant to personally lead his army into battle, and when that was always done from horseback, and when horses were the main form of transport, this was a huge problem. It is also possible that the antagonistic relationship between King Alfonso and King Fernando filtered down to King Alfonso's daughter, Urraca, who was married to King Fernando. The marriage between Urraca and Fernando seems to have hit a rocky patch after the battle, and the marriage will end up being annulled in the year 1171.

So was it worth it? Having sacrificed his relationship with his father-in-law and possibly his marriage to secure Badajoz, how did the territorial grab by Leon pan out? Well, it didn't last very long. King Fernando left Badajoz in the hands of its Muslim garrison, who agreed to hold it for him as vassals until he returned from Leon with his own Christian garrison. However, not long after King Fernando's departure the garrison apparently changed its mind and switched its allegiance back to the Almohads, so King Fernando didn't get to hold on to Badajoz.

Now, you may all be shaking your heads and tut-tutting over King Fernando's apparently traitorous activities, where he pledged his support to the Muslim Almohads fighting against a fellow Christian king. But you shouldn't be too shocked. There was actually quite a bit of Muslim-Christian crossover on the peninsula at this time. We've already seen the Muslim warlord the Wolf King align himself with the Christians and utilise Christian cavalymen to great effect inside his army. Not long after the battle of Badajoz, Geraldo the Fearless will also switch sides and will begin fighting on behalf of the Almohads. However, this will all come to an abrupt end in 1174, when he will be beheaded by the Muslims on suspicion of selling them out to King Alfonso I of Portugal. So although King Fernando's decision to fight against his fellow Christians was unusual, it wasn't completely unheard of for people at this time to fight against people of their own religion.

Now, the brief loss of Badajoz, firstly to Geraldo and then to King Fernando, set alarm bells ringing for the Almohads. They didn't view Geraldo or the Kingdom of Leon as huge threats. No, to their minds the reason why Badajoz fell out of Almohad hands was because the Almohads had diverted much of their attention and many of their resources to problems caused by the activities of the Wolf King. In the minds of the new Caliph Yusuf and his chief adviser and brother Umar, if they could resolve the issue of the Wolf King, then many of their other problems would take care of themselves, so the new priority of the Almohads was to defeat the Wolf King and remove him from the Iberian peninsula.

It turned out that, initially at least, the Almohads didn't need to raise a finger. The first blow against the Wolf King following the battle of Badajoz was actually struck by the Wolf King himself. For reasons which are now unclear, the Wolf King decided to divorce his wife, the same woman who was the daughter of the Wolf King's chief ally, Ibn Hamušk. Now this was an unusual move, and one which was deeply insulting and humiliating for the Wolf King's wife and her family. It was so offensive in fact, that it prompted Ibn Hamušk to defect to the Almohads. This, of course, was very bad news for the Wolf King. His former chief ally and father-in-law knew many of his military secrets and weak points, and all of this information was delivered into the eager hands of the Almohads. For his part, Ibn Hamušk travelled to Marrakesh to meet the Caliph and was granted estates by the Caliph in Morocco near Fez.

Towards the end of the year 1170 Ibn Hamušk was back in Al-Andalus, assisting Umar and Uthman to plan their upcoming campaign against the Wolf King. By now it was common knowledge across the Wolf King's territory that Ibn Hamušk was now part of Team Almohad, and the sympathies of many of the Wolf King's subjects seem to lay less with him and more with Ibn Hamušk. That being the case, when the Almohad forces set out from Cordoba early in the year 1171 intent on conquering the Wolf King's lands, they were pleased to find a lot less resistance than they had expected. For instance, as they approached the small town of Lorca, which is located around 60 kilometres from Murcia, the residents of Lorca actually approached the Almohads and requested their assistance to remove the garrison of their town, which was comprised of a mix of Muslims and Christians installed by the Wolf King. The Almohads of course were only too happy to oblige. The garrison was removed and Lorca pledged its allegiance to the Almohads. The town of Baza near Guadix, the town of Elche to the north-east of the city of Murcia and even the crucial port city of Almeria all ended up switching sides from the Wolf King to the Almohads with little prompting.

This, of course, was terrible news for the Wolf King, who attempted to deal with the issue by importing a bunch of Christian fighters and installing them in key strategic towns, including the city of Valencia. Instead of fixing the issue, this seems to have had the opposite effect, with the residents of the towns realising that the easiest way for them to rid their towns of the Christians would be for them to ditch the Wolf King and join Team Almohad. When the town of Alcira declared for the Almohads in summer of the year 1171 the Wolf King decided to force it back into his camp. He besieged the city, but it refused to surrender. In the end, the humiliated Wolf King lifted the siege and left the town to its new Almohad overlords.

By now the defections were snowballing. Town after town was volunteering to become an Almohad possession. Probably the worst blow came when the city of Valencia, whose governor was the Wolf King's own brother, volunteered to flip over to the Almohads and ejected its Christian garrison. By now, the Wolf King was losing friends and allies as

quickly as he was losing territory. He made his way back to his capital city Murcia, and died there, apparently of natural causes.

The Wolf King's son and heir decided against taking his father's path of resistance, and instead he formally surrendered all of the Wolf King's territory to the Caliph, who sealed the deal by marrying one of the Wolf King's daughters and marrying another daughter to his own son and heir, who was also named Yusuf. So both Yusufs, the Caliph and his son, have scored themselves a Wolf King daughter, and with the Wolf King out of the picture the Almohad Caliph was now the uncontested ruler of Al-Andalus. Now it was time for the Caliph to focus on conquering Christian Spain.

Talking of Christian Spain, it's been a while since we checked in on the young Alfonso's, so let's zoom down and see how all the rulers of the Christian parts of the peninsula are faring at the beginning of the year 1172. We've already dealt with King Alfonso I of Portugal. Currently aged in his fifties and the elder statesman of the Christian rulers, he's struggling with mobility issues due to the broken leg we mentioned earlier in the episode. On a positive note though, Portugal itself is in really good shape thanks to his competent governance, and looks set to endure well into the future.

Next up is the cause of the broken leg, the King of Portugal's son-in-law, King Fernando II of Leon. The King of Leon is currently aged in his early thirties. In the fifteen or so years which have passed since he was crowned as the King of Leon, Fernando has been hard at work forging strategic alliances and attempting to extend the boundaries of his kingdom. He has worked closely with the exiled Castro family, who were expelled from Castile when the Lara family gained the wardship of young Alfonso of Castile. His closest and most trusted ally is Fernando Rodriguez de Castro, a talented and capable military commander who has been more than willing to work with King Fernando to seize territory from his former homeland, Castile. The pinnacle of success for Fernando Rodriguez de Castro and his patron King Fernando came in the year 1162 when King Fernando conquered the city of Toledo, effectively the seat of power for the Kingdom of Castile. King Fernando appointed Fernando Rodriguez de Castro as the new governor of Toledo, and he ruled the city on behalf of the Kingdom of Leon until it was recaptured by the Castilians in 1166.

As you have probably guessed, the Castilians have been kept busy defending their territory from the expansionist activities of the King of Leon. The orphan baby Alfonso, heir to the Kingdom of Castile, is sixteen years old at the beginning of the year 1172. For the last year or so he has begun to assert his authority over his kingdom, and has been doing his best to wriggle out from under the thumb of the Lara family, who have been "helping" him rule his kingdom since he was a baby. He is now known not as "baby Alfonso" but as King Alfonso VIII of Castile. A couple of years ago, the then fourteen year old King Alfonso VIII married nine year old Eleanor of England in Burgos. Young Eleanor was the sixth child and second daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and King Henry II of England. Young Alfonso had arranged for a Castilian embassy to travel to England to lobby for a marriage alliance between himself and England. Having the powerful English King as his father-in-law would no doubt assist Alfonso in his future battles with his uncle, King Fernando of Leon, and on young Eleanor's side of things it was thought that an alliance with Castile would serve to protect the southern border of Eleanor of Aquitaine's territory, the Duchy of Aquitaine, which lay just over the Pyrenees. Aquitaine, in fact, shared its border with Navarre, and during Alfonso's minority his other uncle, King Sancho VI of Navarre, had taken advantage of the internal instability inside Castile to seize territory from Castile. So, young King Alfonso VIII is emerging from childhood into his reign, with his first priority being to wrestle

lost Castilian territory back from his uncles, uncle Fernando the King of Leon, and uncle Sancho the King of Navarre.

This was made even more imperative by the fact that Uncle Fernando had worked to form close ties with the other young Alfonso on the peninsula, King Alfonso II of Aragon and Barcelona. King Alfonso II of Aragon is currently around fifteen years old. Like the other young Alfonso, Alfonso II of Aragon is just starting to flex his royal muscles and take charge of his kingdom. He scored his first military victory in 1171 when he took advantage of the collapse of the Wolf King's reign to annex part of Valencia to the former Taifa of Zaragoza, which is part of the now expanded Kingdom of Aragon. Young King Alfonso II will be kept busy forging alliances on the peninsula, pushing back against attempts at territorial expansion by the King of Navarre, and also consolidating his territory across the Pyrenees in southern France.

So in short, all the Christian Kings are beginning to assert themselves and find their feet, which is a good thing because they are about to face the mother of all challenges when the new young Caliph invades Christian Spain late in the year 1172.

Now, unfortunately, you'll have to wait until next year to find out what happens when Caliph Yusuf arrives in Spain at the head of a massive army. I'm about to take my annual summer break, but I'll be back again in February of 2024, so until then have a safe and happy festive season, and thank you for listening. Until next year, bye for now.

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