

Lesson Eight: Andalusia and Prominent Muslim Figures

Andalusia

What is al-Andalus?

Al-Andalus refers to the Iberian Peninsula territories under Muslim rule between 711 and 1492. Its size fluctuated over time, initially encompassing a large portion of the peninsula and even extending beyond the Pyrenees. However, it gradually diminished until the fall of the Nasrid emirate of Granada in 1492.

The Umayyad Emirate and Caliphate (711-1031)

- **Arrival and Early Settlement (8th Century):** Arab groups and families from the East, along with Berber groups from the Maghreb, progressively settled in al-Andalus.
- **Establishment of the Emirate (756):** After the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in Damascus, an Umayyad prince, Abderrahman, escaped and established an independent emirate in Cordoba. This marked the beginning of a culturally vibrant era, albeit with periods of instability.
- **Rise of the Caliphate (929):** Abderrahman III declared himself Caliph, assuming both political and religious authority and solidifying al-Andalus's independence from the East.
- **Golden Age:** The reigns of Abderrahman III and his successor al-Hakam II witnessed a flourishing of arts, sciences, and architecture. Significant projects like the Madinat al-Zahra palace city and the expansion of the Cordoba mosque took place. They fostered relationships with various courts, including Islamic, Byzantine, and other European powers.

Taifa Kingdoms (1031-1085)

- **Fragmentation:** The collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate led to the emergence of independent Taifa kingdoms, ruled by local families vying for power. Some prominent examples include Toledo, Zaragoza, Granada, Almeria, and Seville, where the poet-king al-Mu'tamid reigned.
- **Christian Advance:** This period also saw significant Christian victories, notably Alphonso VI's capture of Toledo in 1085.

Almoravids and Almohads (1085-1212)

- **Almoravid Intervention:** Faced with the Christian advance, Taifa kingdoms sought help from the Almoravids, a Berber dynasty based in Marrakech. They successfully repelled Alphonso VI at the Battle of Sagrajas and eventually took control of al-Andalus.
- **Almohad Ascendancy:** The Almoravids faced challenges from the Almohads, another Berber movement originating in the Atlas Mountains. Led by Ibn Tumart, the Almohads seized control of both al-Andalus and Marrakech, bringing stability and prosperity. They established their capital in Seville and were known for their architectural achievements and patronage of intellectuals.
- **Decline:** The Almohads suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 against the combined forces of Aragon and Castile, marking the beginning of their decline.

The Nasrid Dynasty and the Fall of Granada (1238-1492)

- **Last Bastion:** The Nasrid dynasty, ruling the kingdom of Granada, became the last Muslim territory in the Iberian Peninsula. Despite its fluctuating borders and political fragility, it endured for 250 years.
- **Legacy of the Alhambra:** The Nasrid period left behind the magnificent Alhambra palace and Generalife gardens as its most prominent architectural legacy.
- **The End of al-Andalus:** In 1492, the last Nasrid king, Boabdil, surrendered Granada to the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, marking the end of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula.

Ibn Sina & Ibn Rushd

Choose one of these two historical figures and write a short paragraph about their most important achievements.

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