Geraldo the Fearless: The Unsung Hero of Portugal

Jacob Badal
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thetean

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, History Commons, Medieval Studies Commons, and the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thetean/vol51/iss1/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Thetean: A Student Journal for Scholarly Historical Writing by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT WESTERN EUROPE HAS ENJOYED A LONGSTANDING fascination among scholars and students. So much so that calls to move beyond the region towards a global focus in academia are increasing daily. Yet, much of Western Europe’s history beyond England, France, and Germany remains unexplored. Spain, as of late, has enjoyed a resurgence of interest, but Portugal has largely been ignored. Indeed, many do not even consider the two Iberian nations and their entangled histories with Islam and North Africa as part of Europe proper, despite the many advancements contributed by both nations to science, cartography, navigation, exploration, and countless other domains. Even more isolating is the fact that much of the recent effort at recovering the Portuguese past remains confined to studies in Portuguese. This piece, therefore, aims at tackling both lacunae by examining the deeds and achievements of an important, but forgotten hero of a forgotten nation, Geraldo the Fearless.

The historical record of Geraldo the Fearless and his deeds has enjoyed various states of interest. The earliest records are either contemporary or near contemporary and are almost entirely composed in Arabic. Only a few Spanish sources exist, while Portuguese records are surprisingly silent. The most extensive primary sources come from Ibn Sahib al-Sala and Ibn Idari.1 Ibn Sahib

The Thetean: A Student Journal for Scholarly Historical Writing, Vol. 51 [2022], Iss. 1, Art. 13

al-Sala provides the most detail concerning Geraldo’s exploits in his history of the Almohads.² Geraldo also appears in the Chronica latina regum castellae and Chronicon Lamecense, of Castile and León, though usually only comprising a single sentence and almost always as an afterthought.³ The only exception is the Chronica Gothorum, which is an early history of Portugal written in the twelfth century; yet, even this history only gives a single sentence that brusquely states that Geraldo captured the city of Évora before moving on.⁴

Instead of praising Geraldo for his accomplishments, the contemporary Portuguese documents often attribute his deeds solely to Dom Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal.⁵ These false attributions have the effect of obfuscating Geraldo’s story and are the main reason that only a few studies on this amazing figure exist.

The first substantive work on Geraldo appeared in the seventeenth century in the Crónica de D. Afonso Henriques by Frei António Brandão. Yet, Brandão follows the tendency of earlier writers and focuses almost entirely on Geraldo’s famous capture of Évora.⁶

Interest faded for two more centuries until the works of Alexandre Herculano and Fortunato de Almeida, both renowned Portuguese historians to this day, appeared. Both continue the focus on the conquest of the city of Évora from the earliest records.⁷ Fortunato de Almeida’s book titled História de Portugal in 1922 was the first historical work highlighting Geraldo’s feats beyond the conquest of Évora and was the first Portuguese historian to record the details of Geraldo’s involvement in Badajoz. The lack of any mention beyond these two

---

³. Lópes, David, 93.
⁴. Lópes, David, 105.
⁵. Lópes, David, 94; This is despite the fact that many of Geraldo’s operations and raids would have been considered too rash and dangerous for a King to undertake, especially in a world where if a King dies, often so too does his kingdom.
⁶. Camões, Luís de., Obras do grande Luís de Camões, ed. by Manoel Corrêa (Lisbon, Imprensa da Serenissima Rainha Nossa Senhora, 1720), 92–93. However, this account of the capture of Évora appears to have become the dominant version for a long period of time, as is evident by the various annotated versions of Os Lusiadas as across versions the footnote on Canto III, Verse 63 follows Brandão’s narrative. There are some versions that deviate in some details, but these are almost always spectacular claims that are hard to substantiate.
⁷. Alexandre Herculano falls into the same pattern as other historians before him in that he mentions Évora but then fails to mention Geraldo anywhere else, including his participation in the significant siege of Badajoz.
conquests even among more modern scholarship is most likely the result of a lack of access to the much more expansive Arabic records. These Arabic records finally became accessible with the publication of David Lopes’s article *O Cid português: Geraldo Sem pavor: novas Fontes árabes sobre os seus feitos e morte*, which presented and translated many of the original Arabic sources. With this new information, Lopes was able to correctly demonstrate the gaps in the history and the portrayal of Geraldo the Fearless in other previous accounts. In 1993 and 2007, respectively, José Mattoso recounted a much more complete history of Geraldo in his second volume of *História de Portugal* and then his biography *D. Afonso Henriques*. Yet, these still recount the story of Geraldo as it relates to Dom Afonso Henriques. Thus, the details of the knight’s life are often scattered across each book. In 2008 Armando de Sousa Pereira published *Geraldo Sem Pavor: Um gerreiro de fronteira entre cristãos e muçulmanos c. 1162–1176*, which was the first book to primarily focus on Geraldo and gather all the scattered pieces but presents it in a novelesque manner. In 2013 Miguel Gomes Martins published *Guerreiros medievais portugueses: De Geraldo, O Sem-Pavor, ao Conde de Avranches; Treze biografias de grandes senhores da guerra (séculos XII–XV)* with an entire section devoted to Geraldo. Both Pereira and Martins go beyond simply collecting the dispersed pieces of information of the knight’s life but also start to look at circumstantial evidence in an attempt to fill in the unknown parts of his story. As such, they suggest the theory of him being a Muslim slave as a boy, among other similar ideas.

Considering all this, until now, the majority of the details of Geraldo and his life have remained hidden within the Portuguese language. This article then is the first comprehensive history of Geraldo the Fearless.

**The Career of Geraldo Sem-Pavor**

The exploits of Geraldo occurred during the turbulent period of Portugal’s formation as an independent kingdom through a southern reconquest into Moorish lands. The chaotic nature of the period resulted in an almost complete dearth of primary source material concerning Geraldo, however, a few vital sources survived. When conjoined with the broader context of the time, it becomes possible to cobble together a relatively solid trajectory for both man and nation.

There are no sources documenting the birth and origins of Geraldo Geraldes before he abruptly and impetuously appears in the historical record with the conquest of the city of Évora in 1166. However, estimates place his birth
sometime between 1130 and 1140. Most scholars agree that Geraldo came from the northern regions of Portugal, from either the regions of Porto or Minho. This assumption is primarily due to the fact that in many of the contemporary Arabic chronicles his name is recorded with the appellation of Galego. Nevertheless, the exact area is impossible to determine considering that the term Galego in Arabic records refers to any lands north of the Douro River. Additionally, a recent theory has posited that Geraldo could have been captured and enslaved at a young age by the Moors during the 1144 raids that reached as far north as Coimbra. The theory is further supported by the fact that Geraldo is often referred to as a ‘traitor’ in Arabic sources of the time. Furthermore, it is evident that Geraldo was familiar with the Arabic language and exhibited a considerable understanding of the Moorish lands and their defensive systems. Therefore, it is well within the realm of possibilities that Geraldo spent considerable time in the Muslim territories of Iberia prior to his participation in the reconquest of Portugal.

Portuguese national identity was forged during the reconquest. The first Portuguese king, Dom Afonso Henriques, rose in power and prestige through the siege of Lisbon in 1147. In March of the same year, Dom Afonso Henriques took another important city on the Tagus River, that of Santarém, which became a major stop for Portuguese forces before fording the river to raid Muslim lands further south. Thus, Lisbon and Santarém became essential gateways to the Alentejo region (beyond the Tagus) and a natural border between Christian and Muslim domains. In the aftermath of these two monumental conquests, there came about a profitable business of ransoming captured prisoners from raids conducted by both

11. Carr, Raymond, Spain: A History (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 76: This is not an unreasonable possibility as there were frequent raids deep into Christian territories, with the famous raid of Almanzor in 997 on the cathedral of Compostela; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 32; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 43–44.
12. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 32.
Christians and Muslims.\textsuperscript{15} Generally, these raids were conducted by \textit{cavaleiros-vilãos}, or soldiers from various social classes that could maintain a horse and were given a loose license to operate under the name of the King in much the same way as the privateers did during the early modern naval battles of the Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{16} The constant raids over the next twenty years were never a serious concern for the Almohad rulers of the Alentejo and Extremadura regions (figure 1) considering Portugal was the weakest of the new Christian kingdoms. Fortifications and defensive structures were neglected as a result.\textsuperscript{17}

Fernão Gonçalves broke the status quo on 1 December of 1162 with a significant attack on the major Alentejo city of Beja.\textsuperscript{18} With a contingency of \textit{cavaleiros-vilãos}, Fernão sallied from Santarém under cover of night, caught the local garrison entirely off guard, and captured the city in a matter of hours. Subsequently, the Portuguese knights used the city as a base of operations to raid the surrounding areas during that spring and summer. Nevertheless, logistically speaking, Beja was simply too far from Portuguese lands to maintain and was eventually abandoned.\textsuperscript{19} The capture of the city did, however, mark an important change in the nature of raiding across the Tagus, and the accounts of the event detail unmistakable parallels to the tactics and \textit{modus operandi} for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Martins, Gomes Miguel, 33; Mitre Fernández, Emilio, \textit{La La España medieval: Sociedades, estados, culturas,} (Madrid, Ediciones ISTMO, 1979), 208, 221.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ramos, Julián Clemente, 648–49, 650.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Mattoso, José, \textit{D. Afonso Henriques} (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 2007), 297–98; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 77.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Martins, Gomes Miguel, 33–34.
\end{itemize}
which Geraldo would later become famous. Thus, some argue that Geraldo participated in the taking of Beja and was working as a *cavaleiro-vilão* at the time. Nevertheless, this is far from definitive proof. However, one account from Abd al-Malik ben Sahib Asala, who is thought to have been a native of Beja and who had family in the city at the time, claimed that the attack was the result of Geraldo's urgings. Altogether, there is simply not enough documentation to ascertain with certainty if Geraldo was present at the siege.

Geraldo bursts onto the historical record in the year 1166. First taking the city of Trujillo on the 15th of April, which at the time was a major stronghold of the area. Then soon followed by the taking of Évora in either September or October. Évora was an important and influential city, being the most significant urban center of the Muslim territory of the Al-Gharb (comprising of modern Alentejo and Extremadura), seconded only by Badajoz. The most complete account of the taking of the city was recorded by Frei António Brandão in his *Crónica de D. Afonso Henriques*, written some time at the end of the sixteenth century. In it, Brandão recounts that Geraldo left from the staging point at Santarém with a small contingency of men at nightfall. A watchtower was guarding the road to Évora, so Geraldo, leaving behind his forces, covered himself with greenery for camouflage and approached the tower in the dark. Brandão recounts that a portcullis secured the entrance to the tower; therefore, Geraldo used wooden wedges inserted in between the rough stonework and climbed the tower with his lance in hand. The account goes on to relate that the guard posted on duty brought his daughter along with him that night and left her to hold vigil while he slept; however, the girl fell asleep at the window. After Geraldo climbed the tower, he found the girl asleep and cast her out the window, where she died on impact. Then entering the tower, he found the guard and decapitated him. Geraldo returned to his men hiding out of sight with the heads of the guard and his daughter in hand.

---

20. Herculano, Alexandre, *História de Portugal: Desde o começo da monarquia até o fim do reinado de Afonso III Vol. III* (Lisboa, Livraria Bertrand, 19--), 57–59; Martins, Miguel Gomes, 34–35. This type surprise tactic is not unique as it was used in various other sieges in that time period, such as the siege of Santarém in 1147 as is dramatically portrayed in Roque Gameiro's 1917 painting, *Conquest of Santarém*.

21. Lopes, David, 94–95; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 77.


23. Herculano, Alexandre, 82.


Having cleared the road to Évora, Geraldo's force split into two groups. The first group entered the tower and sent an alarm signal to the city. The others mounted their horses and made themselves visible to the town. The garrison in the city saw the small number of Christians, and, thinking they would be easily overcome, dispatched the greater part of their forces in pursuit of the retreating Portuguese. In the meantime, the first group, being led by Geraldo, quickly broke through the city gates, overran the city, and killed anyone who offered up any resistance.\(^{26}\)

The garrison that pursued the decoy force eventually lost them and decided to return to their stronghold, only to discover the loss of the city to a small band of Portuguese cavaleiros-vilãos. Brandão states that after hearing the cries of the people trapped within, the Moors threw themselves at the city gates. Geraldo and his men held them off in a fierce encounter until the second group returned and took them by surprise from the rear. This brilliant tactic effectively crushed the Moorish resistance, and many fled to the countryside. Those who remained turned the city over to Geraldo. For his part, Geraldo gave any that wanted safe passage to Moorish lands.\(^{27}\) Having demonstrated fearless valor in the face of superior forces in the conquest of Évora, Geraldo was given the epithet “Sem Pavor,” or “the Fearless.”

The capture of Évora was a radical break from the previous twenty years of raids and ransoming. Various reasons are cited as Geraldo’s motivation to begin taking cities, with the most traditional story stating that Geraldo was either a noble of low status or in king Dom Afonso Henriques’ service in some way and was forced to flee to the lawless borderlands after committing a serious crime.\(^{28}\) Another source states that he was tired of the “shame of his vile craft” of being a cavaleiro-vilão.\(^{29}\) Either way, both concur that Geraldo decided to take Évora to regain the favor of Dom Afonso Henriques. It is equally likely that the impetus for the conquest came from a desire for fortune and prestige. Much like his famous Spanish counterpart, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, or El Cid, this behavior was typical at the time for those devoid of opportunities for social advancement in the crowded north. These instead campaigned in the south and carved out a living for themselves where the lands were plentiful and famed for prosperity and richness.\(^{30}\)

---

27. Brandão, Frei António, 225.
29. Herculano, Alexandre, 80.
30. Almeida, Fortunato de, História de Portugal: Tomo I, Desde os tempos préhistóricos até a aclamação de D. João I (1385) (Coimbra, Imprensa da universidade, 1922), 150; Fernández, Emilio Mitre, 162, 216; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 79–80; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 48.
Regardless of the motivation, the capture of Évora had a profound effect. Previous to the conquest, Dom Afonso Henriques had effectively left the southern border to the cavaleiros-vilãos as his focus was absorbed with military activities on the Galician border in the north. In March or June of 1166, Dom Afonso Henriques was busy officiating a crucial marriage between his daughter Urraca and Ferdinand II of León. Being soon informed of the conquest of Évora, he quickly returned to the south to negotiate with Geraldo. That meeting saw the city of Évora turned over to the Portuguese ruler and Dom Afonso Henriques, understanding the importance of maintaining the stronghold, quickly seized and rebuilt the castle at Coruche, which was strategically located between Santarém and Évora. Even more consequential, the capture of Évora inaugurated a new wave by Dom Afonso Henriques and the Portuguese crown of conquest and settlement south of the Tagus river. It was soon after that Dom Afonso Henriques took Moura, Serpa, and Alconchel.

Sources disagree on how Geraldo was rewarded for his generosity to the crown. Brandão and Herculano argue he was made captain-mayor of the new town. Brandão also says he was awarded the ancient house of Quintus Sertorius. Meanwhile, Mattoso declares he was awarded substantial material compensation. Whatever the reward, the gift of Évora to the crown by Geraldo marked the beginning of a longstanding, cooperative relationship in the newly begun southern campaign.

With royal backing and new recruits, Geraldo embarked on a new string of attacks, which took various cities in rapid succession. Cáceres fell first in 1166, followed by Montánchez, with Serpa and Juramenha surrendering soon after. Other conquests included Monfragüé, Lobón, Valle de Matamoros, and Monsaraz.

31. Mattoso, José, 296–97.
32. Brandão, Frei António, 225–26; Mattoso, José, 299.
33. Mattoso, José, 299–300; Herculano, Alexandre, 82.
34. Brandão, Frei António, 229; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 92.
35. Brandão, Frei António, 226; Herculano, Alexandre, 81; Lópes, David, 96.
37. Mattoso, José, 299.
40. Lópes, David, 100. The exact list of cities captured by Geraldo is uncertain as there is confusion over which cities were taken by him or Dom Afonso Henriques. This list of cities has been compiled by comparing several sources.
These cities and forts cover a vast area of the Alentejo and Extremadura regions; the distance between Beja and Monfragüe alone is roughly 190 miles. The key to Geraldo’s success was his force’s ability to strike quickly by traveling light and a preference for nocturnal assaults. Additionally, in complete contrast to the accustomed tactic of raiding in spring and summer, Geraldo and his men often took advantage of bad weather and winter conditions that caught many of the Moorish forces off guard.41 The Arabic chronicler, Ibn Sahib al-Sala, gives us a glimpse of these effective tactics:

The dog [Geraldo] marched on rainy and very dark nights, with strong wind and snow, towards the cities and, having prepared his wooden instruments of scaling very large [walls], so that they would surpass the wall of the city, he would apply those ladders to the side of the tower and catch the sentinel [by surprise] and say to him: “Shout, as is your custom,” in order that the people would not hear him. When the scaling of the group had been completed on the highest wall in the city, they shouted in their language with an abominable screech, and they entered the city and fought whom they found and robbed them and captured all who were there in [the city, taking] captive and prisoner all who were there.42

While covering a vast area, the cities and fortifications seized by Geraldo were not random targets but strategic vantage points in the overall reconquest effort. The key to this effort was the city of Badajoz. Badajoz was the Muslim capital of Extremadura and was, therefore, the largest urban center of the region. The city was an important trading and military hub for Islamic Al-Andalus and was accompanied by a strong fortress.43 If Geraldo could capture the city, Portugal would control the whole of the ancient Roman province of Lusitania, which gave the Portuguese people their name of ‘Lusos.’ Each of the fortifications and cities conquered to that point by Geraldo were part of an interconnected defensive system centered on Badajoz. With the fall of these, the city was virtually isolated.44 By the time Geraldo and his men installed themselves in Juromenha, a mere 18 miles away from Badajoz, it became clear to the neighboring Christian kingdom of León and to the Moorish Almohads that Portugal intended to expand eastward as well as south. The only question that remained was when the assault would begin.

41. Mattoso, José, 299; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 38.
42. Ramos, Julián Clemente, 653 note 14.
43. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 39; Ramos, Julián Clemente, 648, 655.
44. Mattoso, José, 298.
Political map of 1157 that shows the rough boundaries between Christian Portugal (P), León (L), Castile (C), Navarre (N), Aragón (A), and the Muslim Almohad state. Image is in the public domain. Country Studies Program, Map of Spain at the time of the Almohads (Library of Congress Country Study: 1988). Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almohad_map_reconquest_loc.jpg.

Stationed at Juromenha, Geraldo constantly harassed the roads and hinterland of Badajoz for the next three years. He finally made his gambit in 1169 and laid siege to the city. His forces breached the outer walls and took the majority of the city on May 3rd, 1169. Only the Alcázar, or citadel with the remaining defenders, continued to resist. Meanwhile, Dom Afonso Henriques was in the process of expanding Portuguese territory eastward into Leonese lands. When news of Geraldo's siege reached the Portuguese monarch, he quickly gathered his forces and rushed to Badajoz in order to help secure that important city. Simultaneously, the surrounding Christian kingdoms grew uneasy with Geraldo's activities. For Ferdinand II of León, the conquest of Badajoz invalidated the 1158 treaty of Sahagún, which had been made between the kingdoms of León and Castile and which reserved the conquest of Badajoz along with the lands of Alentejo and the Algarves to León. Predicting Gerardo and Dom Afonso Henriques' actions, Ferdinand II sent an envoy to Sevilla in July or September prior to the assault on Badajoz. The envoy was meant to secure a defensive pact with the Almohad Caliph, Yusuf I. As a result, when Badajoz was on the brink of defeat, Yusuf sent his forces from Sevilla to join the Leonese, who were already en route to neutralize the threat.

Once the combined Hispano-Moorish force was camped outside the city, Ferdinand sent a message to the defenders in the Alcázar, encouraging them to continue resisting. Abu Ali Umar ibn Timsilt then led the defenders in a sudden and desperate sortie out of the Alcázar and managed to reach the exterior

46. Powers, James F., 109. Furthermore, Badajoz was also a tributary state to the kingdom of León, which means its capture by the Portuguese would result in a loss of parias.
47. Almeida, Fortunato de, 163; Powers, James F., 110.
gates, opening them for their allies. With the situation rapidly deteriorating, the combined Portuguese force abandoned the city. During the panicked flight, Dom Afonso Henriques struck his right leg on the gate bolt and broke his femur. The extreme pain slowed his retreat, and he was soon captured by Leonese forces in Caia. To secure his release the Portuguese king was forced to return the lands he previously conquered in Galicia in the north and the recently captured cities in Extremadura. Thus, the whole debacle became known as the Badajoz Disaster. The catastrophe had further consequences for Portugal as the once valiant warrior-king, now unable to mount his horse, was effectively forced to prematurely abdicate his campaigns to his son, Dom Sancho I. More importantly, it put an end to Portugal's meteoric expansion into the north and east, signaling the end of Portuguese control of Extremadura and a switch from offensive to defensive policies.

Sources disagree on the fate of Geraldo. Some state that he managed to escape to Juromenha, while others argue that he too was captured. Regardless, he lost several of the forts he had conquered to the kingdom of León. Yet, he managed to maintain the holdings immediately south and west of Badajoz. After this first failure, Geraldo dug into Juromenha and continued to harass Badajoz for the next several years. On one notable occasion in May 1170, in the aptly named Valle de Matamoros, Geraldo and his men, now consisting of cavaleiros-vilãos and local Moorish forces, ambushed an Almohad force guarding a supply chain of 5,000 mules on its way to relieve Badajoz with food and weapons. Low on food in the midst of a drought and rocked by an epidemic, this reversal placed Badajoz in a perilous situation considering that the city's defenses were still in ruins.

Sources disagree on the fate of Geraldo. Some state that he managed to escape to Juromenha, while others argue that he too was captured. Regardless, he lost several of the forts he had conquered to the kingdom of León. Yet, he managed to maintain the holdings immediately south and west of Badajoz. After this first failure, Geraldo dug into Juromenha and continued to harass Badajoz for the next several years. On one notable occasion in May 1170, in the aptly named Valle de Matamoros, Geraldo and his men, now consisting of cavaleiros-vilãos and local Moorish forces, ambushed an Almohad force guarding a supply chain of 5,000 mules on its way to relieve Badajoz with food and weapons. Low on food in the midst of a drought and rocked by an epidemic, this reversal placed Badajoz in a perilous situation considering that the city's defenses were still in ruins.

---

49. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 42.
50. Almeida, Fortunato de, 163–64; Powers, James F., 110; Martins, Miguel Gomes, 42.
51. Lopes, David, 96.
52. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 42.
53. Mattoso, José, 305; Powers, James F., 112; Ramos, Julián Clemente, 649; Almeida, Fortunato de, 165; Powers, James F., 112. This siege also caused a retaliatory attack by the Almohads on Santarém in 1171.
54. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 42.
55. Just like cavaleiros-vilãos that worked similar to privateers, there were often Muslim forces that acted in a similar manner. Thus, it is not uncommon to see bands of mixed forces operating on the borders, such as what happened in El Cantar de Mio Cid.
56. Lopes, David, 96, 98; Martins, Miguel Gomes, 43.
57. Mattoso, José, 337; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 43–44.
Seeing another chance, Geraldo once again laid siege to Badajoz in September of 1170. This time, Geraldo skillfully waited to breach the outer walls until Dom Sancho himself arrived with reinforcements on 15 August. Once again on the brink of collapse, a combined Christian and Muslim force led by King Ferdinand and Abu Hafs Umar rapidly struck a counterattack and saved the city. Tired of the Portuguese threat, the Caliph sent a sizable armed force ahead of a supply chain from Sevilla to aid Badajoz in 1171. The goal was to remove Geraldo and reprovision the city. This Almohad force managed to retake many of Geraldo's forts, and he fled to the last stronghold in the area in Lobón, where the Almohad forces laid siege, eventually taking the fort and capturing many of his men.

Frustrated by subsequent defeats and the loss of his own strongholds, Geraldo began to focus his efforts elsewhere. Accordingly, on an August night of 1172, he and his men overtook the city of Beja to the south. The city was easy prey as it was still being repaired from an attack years earlier and was defended by a small armed force. The goal was to retain the city, but Geraldo's weakened forces and Dom Sancho's unwillingness to send more troops resulted in the new Portuguese monarch ordering the evacuation of the recently conquered city. Beja was the beginning of divergence between Geraldo and Dom Afonso Henries, whose relationship must have soured with the recent events. This division further grew when Portugal, Castille, and the Muslim Almohads signed a five-year non-aggression treaty. Dom Afonso Henries was one of the main forces behind the agreement because it allowed him time to consolidate his territorial gains of the recent decades. Knowing the unruly knight would not remain inactive during that time, Dom Afonso Henries disavowed Geraldo

58. López, David, 96–98. David López states that this force was headed by Dom Afonso Henries himself, but this is unlikely due to his injured leg.
59. López, David, 97–98; Martins, Miguel Gomes, 44.
60. López, David, 98; Mattoso, José, 338. Mattoso states that there is evidence that after fleeing to Lobón, Geraldo continued to pester the Badajoz highways a little longer before the fort was also besieged and overtaken; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 78.
63. López, David, 99, 103; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 68–69. This is further manifest as Geraldo's presence in the area was replaced by religious orders of knights as D. Afonso Henries was worried about the security of his successors' throne.
64. Martins, Gomes Miguel, 46.
65. Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 68.
since his usefulness to the crown had ended—not unlike the Cid’s exile nearly a hundred years earlier.

The king’s actions struck Geraldo hard as he depended on the crown’s support to maintain and reinforce his constant push into enemy lands. Furthermore, frontier men like Geraldo required ongoing campaigns to maintain themselves and pay their men.\(^66\) As such, without the support of Portugal, peace was not an option.\(^67\) With these considerations, Geraldo surprised all in 1173, when he suddenly abandoned his remaining holdings and appeared in Sevilla with 350 of his men and offered his services to the Caliph.\(^68\) Surprisingly, the Caliph, Abu Yaqub Yasuf, welcomed Geraldo without reservation despite the rogue knight’s decade-long campaign of terror.\(^69\)

This decision had further consequences for Geraldo. One of the reasons for this willful forgetfulness is probably due to the strained relationships after the Badajoz disaster, which was further alienated after Geraldo later switched camps and offered his services to the Caliph. This switch must have appeared to the Portuguese host as a betrayal, one that would not be easily forgiven. Furthermore, it is significant to take into consideration the precarious political position of the Kingdom of Portugal at the time. Portugal had only become its own kingdom in 1139, and though it was gaining territory rapidly, it was surrounded by giants. After Geraldo changed his allegiance, Dom Afonso Henriques sought approval and approbation from the Pope, and was forming ties to various religious orders, such as the knight’s templars, in order to secure the sovereignty of the kingdom and as insurance for his son’s reign.\(^70\) Therefore, it is easy to see why it would be advantageous for the Portuguese scribes to attribute as many heroic deeds to the first king as possible in order to strengthen his legitimacy.

After this shift, Geraldo and his men participated in various expeditions under the Caliph against the Kingdom of Castile until around 1176, when the


\(^{67}\) Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 68. Furthermore, it is important to note that the peace treaty would have been harshly enforced as it would be seen as invalidating the sacred word and troth of the King.

\(^{68}\) Mattoso, José, 339.

\(^{69}\) López, David, 100; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 69.

The Thetean Caliph was obligated to return to Morocco to quell a rebellion in the Maghreb region.\textsuperscript{71} Geraldo was ordered to accompany the Caliph, who wanted to use his tactical prowess to end the rebellion and perhaps separate Geraldo from Portugal and thereby ensure his loyalty.\textsuperscript{72} After arriving in Africa, Geraldo and his men were stationed in the valley of the river Sus, most likely around the city of Taroudant, which is a distance east of the important coastal city of Agadir.\textsuperscript{73} Some evidence points to his being awarded a fiefdom in the region.\textsuperscript{74} However, at this point there is a general dearth of evidence regarding Geraldo's activities.

In addition to the rebellion of the Berber tribes against the Almohads, economic and military issues joined discord among the ruling family to create instability in the Almohad dynasty; Geraldo saw his opportunity and began sending secret letters to Dom Afonso Henriques urging the Portuguese king to send a naval fleet to Agadir. For his part, Geraldo promised to aid the naval attack with his force augmented with various allies among the rebellious Berber tribes.\textsuperscript{75} Nevertheless, Geraldo's overtures arrived in Portugal during the period of non-aggression, and it seems his letter received no response.\textsuperscript{76}

Sometime between 1177 to 1178, the Caliph sent Geraldo and his forces further inland to Sijilmassa in the Draa region (modern Tafilalt).\textsuperscript{77} However, at the same time, a missive was sent to the regional governor with orders to detain Geraldo as the correspondence between him and the Portuguese king had been discovered.\textsuperscript{78} Once again, in this final period, there are few concrete details. What is known is that after some time in prison, knowing the indomitable spirit and restless character of this knight, the Caliph made his decision. Thus, this Portuguese knight who had fought so long and who was so far from his homeland, was decapitated.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{71.} Collins, Roger, 31; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 47; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 71.
\textsuperscript{73.} Lópes, David, 102.
\textsuperscript{74.} Collins, Roger, 31.
\textsuperscript{75.} Collins, Roger, 28. There is also the possibility that he was also attempting to negotiate his return to Portugal; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 47–48; Pereira, Armando de Sousa,71.
\textsuperscript{76.} Martins, Gomes Miguel, 48–49.
\textsuperscript{77.} Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 72.
\textsuperscript{78.} Collins, Roger, 28; Martins, Gomes Miguel, 48–49.
\textsuperscript{79.} Lópes, David, 101–2; Pereira, Armando de Sousa, 71–72.
Despite the historical record only covering a short twelve years, Geraldo’s impact on the trajectories of modern Spain and Portugal is beyond doubt. Before he first appeared in 1166, Portugal’s southern progress had floundered, devolving from campaigns of conquest into mere raids. A dramatic shift occurred in the geopolitics of the Alentejo and Extremadura regions with the capture of Trujillo and Évora. Until the Badajoz Disaster in 1169, he and his cavaleiros-vilãos were able to take every fort and town with surprising ease and efficiency, including the most critical Extremadura strongholds, excluding Badajoz. His impact on the region continued after his 1172 departure for Sevilla and his service to the Caliph as the Almohads began an intensive effort to retake cities and fortify weaknesses exposed by Geraldo. In the immediate aftermath many of the fortresses conquered by a few dozen men became nigh-impregnable castles by the end of the century. Many Portuguese and Leonese soldiers lost their lives fighting to take these same regions a century later. Cáceres, in particular, shows how dramatic this transformation was as it withstood four sieges in 1184, 1213, 1218, and 1222 respectively. The city finally fell to the Castilians in 1229.

The Portuguese city of Évora followed a different trajectory. In the aftermath of the conquest in 1166, Dom Afonso Henriques awarded Évora a new type of foral, or a city charter, making it the first city across the Tajo in the Alentejo region to receive such. Geraldo’s presence looms large to this day in the city, and he is portrayed in the coat of arms on horseback above the severed heads of the Moorish watchman and his daughter. The central plaza was even named after the conquistador.

80. Ramos, Julián Clemente, 653.
81. Mattoso, José, 346–47; Ramos, Julián Clemente, 651.
82. Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 91–91; Ramos, Julián Clemente, 653–54, 677–79. In the vital city of Badajoz, the extensive damages caused by Geraldo were repaired, and it was transformed into an impressive work of defensive engineering that posed serious issues for Christians when they attempted to take the city, taking them until 1230 to finally conquer it; Ramos, Julián Clemente, 653–54. The same happened to the cities of Cáceres and Trujillo, which were easily retaken by the Muslim forces in 1174, showing how weak and incapable they were, and thus they were rapidly converted from minor holdings into a formidable stronghold in the area, becoming considered as the keys to the Extremadura frontier.
83. Ramos, Julián Clemente, 655, 670. Meanwhile, Trujillo was the last city taken in the Extremadura region, holding out until 1234.
84. Ramos, Julián Clemente, 654.
85. Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 80; Powers, James F., 110, 125.
More influentially, Geraldo the Fearless featured in a portion of the famous 1572 epic *Os Lusiadas* by Luís Vaz de Camões. That poem, often compared to the Roman *Aeneid*, celebrates the discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco de Gama and is considered Portugal's national epic. In Canto III verse sixty-three, Vasco de Gama recounts the early history in Portugal, with particular mention of Geraldo:

Here is the noble city, sure seat  
Of the rebel Sertorius formerly,  
Where now the bright waters of silver  
Come from far to sustain the land and people  
By the royal arcs,\(^{86}\) that, hundred by hundred,  
our airs are nobly lifted up  
Obeyed through the courage  
Of Geraldo, who had no fear

Geraldo is mentioned once again in Canto VIII verse twenty-one:

Look at he who descends by the lance,  
With the two heads of the watchmen  
Through the hidden ambush, with which he reaches  
The city, by artfulness and bravery.  
She for crest has taken the likeness  
Of the knight who [with] the cold heads  
In hand he carried (deed never before done!)  
Geraldo the Fearless is the courageous one.\(^{87}\)

Clearly, his impact on Portuguese identity and his "fearlessness" surpassed his own lifetime to influence later generations of explorers and intellectuals.

---

86. Refers to the aqueduct built by Dom João III, which watered the city.  
87. Monteiro, Campos, *Os Lusíadas de Luís de Camões anotados e parafraseados por Campos Monteiro* (Porto, Livraria e Imprensa Civilização, 1925), 190. 482. "Eis a nobre cidade, certo assento / Do rebelde Sertório antigamente, / Onde ora as águas nítidas de argento / Vêm sustentar de longo a terra e a gente / Pelos arcos reais, que, cento e cento, / Nos ares se alevantam nobremente, / Obedeceu por meio e ousadia / De Giraldo, que medos não temi." (3.63) "Olha aquele que dece pela lança, / Com as duas cabeças dos vigias, / Ande a cilada esconde com que alcança / A cidade, por manhas e ousadias. / Ela por armas toma a semelhança / Do cavaleiro que as cabeças frias / Na mão levava (feito nunca feito!): / Giraldo Sem-Pavor é o forte peito." (8.21)
More importantly, his actions, when carefully scrutinized, open important debates on the trajectory of Portugal as a nation and empire. As soon as the non-aggression pact between the Muslims and the Portuguese expired after 1178, Dom Sancho headed an attack on the lands around Sevilla. 88 Had Geraldo's letters not been discovered, there is a real possibility that the Portuguese could have staged a two-pronged attack against the Almohads, a terrestrial campaign in Sevilla and a naval expedition against Agadir. 89 More concretely, Geraldo's actions, when fully analyzed, rewrite the Iberian reconquest narrative of Portugal being a junior partner alongside other aggressive Spanish kingdoms in the reconquest of Iberia. Furthermore, Geraldo's letters clearly outline Portuguese territorial ambitions beyond the peninsula long before the age of discoveries that, according to historians, only began under Prince Henry the Navigator in 1415 with the conquest of the North African city of Ceuta.

Had Geraldo succeeded in his designs, Portuguese expansion would have begun nearly 240 years earlier. An earlier Portuguese conquest of North Africa most likely would have tipped the balance of power in the Iberian Peninsula, which very well could have elevated Portugal as a major player among the European monarchies. As intriguing as it is to consider hypotheticals, there is no way to know for certain what would have occurred. What is certain is that Geraldo the Fearless rose from obscurity, and with his sword, left an indelible mark on Luso-Hispanic history before disappearing once again.

88. Almeida, Fortunato de, 165; Brandão, Frei António, 287–91; Mattoso, José & Armindo de Sousa, 91.