

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 101
The Conquest of Valencia, Part One

Hello again. Last time we passed a milestone in the Reconquista as King Fernando III of Leon and Castile took Cordoba. With Cordoba now a Christian city the fallout from this momentous event came down most heavily on Ibn Hud, who was assassinated following his failure to come to Cordoba's defence. With Team Black and Ibn Hud now no longer on the scene, Muslim power in the south of the peninsula now resides mainly with Ibn al-Ahmar of Team Red, who has set up headquarters for himself at Granada.

While the southern part of the peninsula settles into its new circumstances, we are going to head to the north-east to catch up on events in Valencia. We last checked in on Valencia in Episode 99, when we saw a new ruler rise to power, a descendant of Ibn Mardanish, a man called Zayyan, who had managed to depose the previous ruler of Valencia, a man called Abu Zayd, in the year 1229. Now, Abu Zayd had impressive bloodlines. He was actually a descendant of the first Almohad Caliph, but with Almohad rule having collapsed he had been struggling to hold on to Valencia. Desperate to reduce the number of enemies he was fighting, he formed an alliance with Aragon whereby Zayd would send an annual tribute to King James of Aragon in return for King James agreeing not to attack Valencian territory. However, as we mentioned back in Episode 99, the amount of tribute flowing out of Valencia in accordance with this deal was huge. It amounted to one fifth of the annual revenue of the province, so while it did mean Zayd didn't have to worry about his powerful neighbour, the Kingdom of Aragon, it did mean that his worries at home grew. Domestic unrest inside Valencia, caused by the flow of money into its Christian neighbour, eventually led to him being ousted from power by Zayyan. Abu Zayd and the core members of his Almohad court fled to the border regions, taking up residence near Aragonese territory, likely hoping that his ally King James would oust Zayyan and place Abu Zayd back in power.

Now, incidentally, this won't happen. Abu Zayd will never rise back to prominence, although he will remain a staunch ally of King James. Abu Zayd and his children will even convert to Christianity, with Abu Zayd changing his name to Vincent, the patron saint of Valencia. He didn't completely assimilate into Aragonese society though. In his book "Kingdoms of Faith", Brian Catlos describes how Vincent attempted to straddle the two religions and the two cultures of the Iberian peninsula for the remainder of his life. While he had converted to Christianity and had changed his name, he followed Muslim customs and wore the clothes of a Muslim man, which meant, in effect, that he didn't fit in anywhere. Despite the fact that he travelled extensively around the peninsula for the next forty or so years, he appears to have been spurned by many Christians as still looking like and acting like an infidel Muslim, while many Muslims spurned him for his apostasy. Brian Catlos reports that in the year 1264 Vincent wrote to Pope Urban IV and ended up receiving a personal blessing from Rome in recognition of the sacrifices he had made and the suffering he had endured as a result of his conversion to Christianity.

Anyway, with Abu Zayd / Vincent now relegated to the sidelines, how did the descendant of Ibn Mardanish, Zayyan, fare as the new ruler of Valencia? Well, from the beginning of his period of rule, it was clear that Zayyan was going to be kept extremely busy trying to keep Valencia from being overrun. He attempted to make alliances across the Muslim world, pledging his support to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, like Ibn Hud, while also

maintaining his independence from Ibn Hud. His main worry, though, was King James of Aragon. With Abu Zayd out of power, King James was no longer bound by his pledge not to attack Valencia and, with his victory over the Balearic Islands under his belt, King James was absolutely itching to have a crack at taking the wealthy, fertile province of Valencia from Zayyan. He wanted to make it clear, though, that he wasn't just intent on taking Valencia for his own reasons or to satisfy the noblemen of Aragon, who had been pestering him to attack Valencia for years. No, King James wanted everyone to know that he would be conquering Valencia on behalf of the Christian religion. To that end he took Crusading vows in the year 1232, and when he launched his campaign, invading Valencia on the northern part of its coastline, he took with him not only the armed forces of Aragon and Catalonia, but bishops and members of four different military orders: the Knights Templar; the Hospitallers; the Order of Calatrava; and the Order of Santiago.

Now, this wasn't going to be a shock-and-awe campaign. In fact, it will be the exact opposite. Instead of hitting Valencia hard with overwhelming force, King James will instead conduct a slow, methodical, and very well considered campaign. It will actually take King James nine years to conquer the whole of Valencia, but to King James' mind that was likely nine years well spent.

The reason why King James was willing to spend so much time taking Valencia was basically because he wished to preserve its wealth. Although King James was conquering Valencia on behalf of the Church, he would be holding it as vassal to Rome. As described by Brian Catlos in his book "Kingdoms of Faith", the reason why Valencia was such a wealthy and desirable region was due to the extremely productive market gardening and craft industries which its residents had perfected over centuries. To maintain the output of the province and to keep its lucrative tax and tribute system in place, King James really needed the Muslim artisans, farmers, and producers to remain in place, so he needed to conquer their homeland carefully, winning the hearts and minds of the Muslim residents as much as possible along the way, so that the conquered residents would be content to remain on their land and in their professions.

As such, he approached his conquest of Valencia in a sort of carrot-and-stick type manner. If a Muslim town or stronghold surrendered to King James, then the Christian King offered the town or stronghold peace, security, and a degree of independence. The Muslim residents could keep practising their religion and keep their homes and their livelihoods so long as they remained loyal to King James and paid him tribute. If a town or stronghold put up a fight though, all those who had resisted the Christian forces were expelled from their homes after the fall of the town. As stated by Brian Catlos, and I quote "it is clear the King went to great lengths to establish a rapport with his Muslim foes and subjects by treating them as near equals, or at least pretending to, respecting their traditions, scrupulously honouring the agreements he made with them, as long as it suited him, and not hesitating to punish his own subjects should they break his treaties. This, together with his great valour in battle and his unyielding determination, made him a figure respected and feared by the inhabitants" end quote.

The first couple of years of the campaign saw King James capture border towns, then steadily move down the coast until the city of Valencia itself seemed within reach. It was at this point, though, that King James shelved his campaign while he focused on the politics of the Christian north. The kingdom of most interest to King James was his neighbour, the tiny Kingdom of Navarre.

Now, the Kingdom of Navarre had been ruled very ably by King Sancho VII of Navarre since the year 1194. King Sancho was now a highly respected elder statesman of the Christian kings. He was aged in his seventies and had been suffering from poor health. The thing which interested King James the most about King Sancho was the fact that, despite his impressive age, he hadn't managed to produce an heir. He had married twice. He had taken a French wife, Constance, daughter of Raymond VI of Toulouse, back at the beginning of his reign, but the marriage had only lasted a few years before being annulled. He did remarry, but many details about the second marriage have been lost to history. Even the identity of his second wife is under question.

Anyway, the thing that everyone can agree on is the fact that the elderly and ailing King Sancho of Navarre had no living heirs. So in the year 1231, the year before he began his campaign in Valencia, King James managed to persuade King Sancho to adopt him, King James of Aragon, as his heir, with the result that upon King Sancho's death the regions of Aragon, Catalonia, Zaragoza and Navarre would all be united and ruled by a single monarch, King James. However, this was an arrangement that displeased just about everyone except King James, so when King Sancho died in the year 1234, while King James was busy in Valencia, someone else raced to Pamplona and claimed the crown. That someone was a man called Thibaut of Champagne.

So who is Thibaut and why has he claimed the crown of Navarre? Well, Thibaut is currently the Count of Champagne, and his mother was Blanche of Navarre, the youngest daughter of Sancho VI of Navarre, which made him nephew to the recently deceased King Sancho VII. In fact, not only was he King Sancho's nephew, he was his closest living relative and so arguably the rightful heir to the throne of Navarre, despite the fact that King Sancho had apparently selected James of Aragon to succeed him upon his death.

Needless to say, James of Aragon was extremely displeased about Thibaut jumping the gun and declaring himself to be the new King of Navarre. Likewise, King Fernando of Leon and Castile was also unhappy. So unhappy in fact that he met with James of Aragon and they came up with a plan to invade Navarre, boot Thibaut off the throne, and split Navarre between them. But, spoiler alert, this isn't going to happen. The Frenchman Thibaut of Champagne will in fact hold on to Navarre and will rule it for the next couple of decades, where its fortunes will very much be tied to the Champagne region of France and to the dynasty presided over by the Count of Champagne.

So, who is Thibaut of Champagne? Well, since he's going to be ruling Navarre for the next twenty or so years, let's take a closer look at him. Thibaut had actually been the Count of Champagne ever since he was born back in the year 1201, due to the unfortunate fact that his father, the Count of Champagne, had died only a week before his son's birth. Clearly, the baby Count of Champagne couldn't rule by himself, so his mother, Blanche of Navarre, ruled the county as regent until young Thibaut came of age in the year 1222. Early on in his rule Thibaut faced a number of challenges. The County of Champagne was impressively wealthy and was a place which many people would like to have ruled, so Thibaut spent much of his time fighting off challengers and trying to secure his hold on power. He did find time though to indulge in his great passion, which was music. He became an accomplished troubadour and even managed to compose some songs.

While eventually managing to place a lid on his domestic issues Thibaut also made waves across the wider region of France, particularly when strong rumours began to circulate that he was having an affair with the formidable Blanche of Castile, the widow of the recently deceased King Louis VIII of France, whom he wrote a bunch of songs for, which led to

further rumours that Thibaut had somehow managed to plot the death of the French King, which was completely unlikely but that didn't stop the rumours circulating. As Thibaut became closer to Queen Blanche his star rose inside the royal court, gaining him both influence and a lot of enemies. He made so many enemies, in fact, that the County of Champagne was actually attacked a number of times, and poor Thibaut fell into debt defending his county. His financial crisis was averted when Thibaut scored the crown of Navarre, a move which greatly increased his prestige and ended up silencing his enemies and alleviating his debts, so Thibaut really needed to hold on to the throne and fend off attempts by Castile and Aragon to dethrone him and split his new kingdom in two.

Thibaut in the end was saved by his allegiance to Rome. He had been an avid crusader as the Count of Champagne and pledged to serve the Papacy further in his role as the King of Navarre. As such, Rome forced its vassal, King James of Aragon, to back down and leave Thibaut be. Without Aragon, King Fernando had no chance of defeating Thibaut, so now we have a new player, King Thibaut I of Navarre.

Join me next time as, having abandoned his attempts to take Navarre, King James returns to Valencia. Until next time, bye for now.

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