

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents  
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain  
Episode 102  
The Conquest of Valencia, Part Two

Hello again. Last time we saw King James of Aragon begin his slow and methodical conquest of the region of Valencia when he launched a crusade against it in the year 1232. The reason why he decided to go about this conquest in a slow and methodical manner was due to the fact that he very much wanted to preserve the wealth of the region, which basically meant ensuring artisans, farmers, and local producers remained in place after their lands had been Christianized. In the year 1234, two years into his campaign to take Valencia, King James raced northwards to claim the throne of Navarre, but as we saw at the end of the last episode he was beaten to it by a Frenchman, Thibaut, the Count of Champagne, who has now been crowned as King Thibaut I of Navarre. A disappointed King James has now returned southwards back to his kingdom.

Now, you would think that King James would just pick up where he left off and continue his campaign to conquer Valencia. Trouble was, many of the crusaders and noblemen who had been fighting under his command were reluctant to head back to the battlefield. The campaign was taking ages. The King of Aragon's insistence that the province be taken slowly and carefully meant that there were few spoils to be handed out to the Christian fighters, and, to put it simply, many of them were running out of money and didn't want to spend the next couple of years gradually taking parts of Valencia, politely and without upsetting too many of the locals, while burning through their cash reserves and not scoring much in return.

While King James pondered how to convince his army to regroup he took some time out to remarry. He had previously been married to Eleanor of Castile, whom he had married back in 1221 when he was only thirteen years old. They had been married for eight years and had fathered a son called Alfonso (of course). However the marriage had been annulled due to consanguinity. For his next wife King James chose a Hungarian woman, the twenty-year-old Yolanda, who was a daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary and whose dowry included a number of properties in northern France and the low countries. Now Yolanda, who will be known by the Catalan version of her name, Violante, will end up being an ideal match for the King of Aragon. She was intelligent, feisty, an adept political player, and was not at all reluctant to involve herself in the politics and intrigues of the Royal Court. Over time King James will come to value her insight and her input.

Anyway, pretty much as soon as the marriage was formalised Queen Violante decided to start her marriage the way in which she intended to continue it. She demanded of her new husband that he immediately take action to preserve the inheritance of their future children. Concerned that King James' son Alfonso, who was considered legitimate and who was the heir to the throne of Aragon, would be getting all the spoils of his father's kingdom, leaving Violante's future children with just a bunch of crumbs, she threw down the gauntlet to King James, letting him know that she expected him to award Majorca and all of his conquests in Valencia to the children they would bear together. This will turn out to be a savvy move as Violante and James will end up producing ten children, but of course no one knew that at the time she made her demand, which was likely met with a degree of eye rolling in the Royal Court.

It also put King James in a bit of a bind. As we've stated, his noblemen on the whole had lost interest in pursuing the conquest of Valencia, but now his new queen, Violante, was super keen for him to conquer as much of Valencia as possible. So, sensibly deciding to take the side of his wife, King James embarked on a mission to convince his noblemen to once again join him in a campaign to conquer Valencia. He did this predominantly by dangling the possibility of gaining riches from the conquered province in front of them. He declared that all debts owed by men accompanying him to Valencia would be placed on hold while they were on campaign, so in effect they would not need to make any payments in service of any of their debts until they had finished fighting and had returned home. Acknowledging the fact that the spoils of war had been pretty scant to date, King James promised them that, once they had conquered the city of Valencia itself, there would be plenty of loot to share around. He would distribute some of the conquered land amongst his most loyal vassals and the city itself would produce enough wealth to make everyone happy. As stated by King James himself at the time, and I quote "once we have the chicken, then we will also have the eggs" end quote, meaning, I suppose, that the chicken which was the city of Valencia would produce so many eggs in the form of money and loot that everyone will go home satisfied.

Defeating the mighty city of Valencia, though, was going to be no small task, and would need a sizeable army to ensure it was done successfully, so King James decided to drum up some extra fighters in the form of crusaders from over the Pyrenees. He reached out to Pope Gregory IX, who in February of the year 1237 ordered a Crusade to be preached across the provinces of southern France, offering crusading indulgences to any person who joined King James's proposed campaign to take Valencia, and even telling Christians who had vowed to go crusading to the Holy Land that they could fulfil their vow without actually having to go to the Holy Land just by contributing funds to King James' Crusade.

With high hopes of recruiting a sizeable army of crusaders, all those who wished to take part were told to gather at Terver, which was inside the Kingdom of Aragon near the Valencian border, the following spring. Unfortunately, the numbers of crusaders who arrived at the appointed time and place to embark on the crusade were disappointingly low. King James ordered the army to set out and to cross the border into the region of Valencia, their destination being an abandoned fortress called Puig de Cebolla, which was located only twelve miles from the city of Valencia on a hill overlooking the city. The King of Aragon had decided to use this abandoned fortress as his base. While the crusaders were settling themselves into the vacant fortress, King James left to drum up some more fighters for his campaign.

You would have to say that the campaign started pretty badly. The ruler of Valencia, Zayyan, attacked the fortress while King James was touring Catalonia and Aragon on a desperate recruitment drive. The Crusaders were able to repel the Muslims but it was all looking a bit grim, with many of King James's noblemen urging him to abandon the Crusade due to its high cost and its slim chances of success. King James rejected these appeals, telling his men that he wouldn't give up until the city of Valencia was taken. Once the King had rounded up all the recruits he could muster, and once all the late-coming crusaders had made their way to the abandoned fortress, King James found himself in command of around 100 knights and between 2,000 and 3,000 foot soldiers. In April of the year 1238 the forces mobilised out of the fortress and headed for the city of Valencia to commence a siege. At the same time, King James ordered a fleet of ships to blockade the seaport of Valencia to ensure that no food or other supplies could reach its inhabitants.

Desperate for assistance, Zayyan made himself vassal to the Emir of Tunis in exchange for supplies. Shiploads of weapons, food, and money left Tunis in August of 1238 heading for Valencia. The fleet arrived on the coastline outside the city of Valencia, but finding it blockaded by the Christians the ships were unable to dock or offload their supplies. Instead, they sailed southwards to Denia, where they dropped anchor, unloaded their cargo, then sailed back home. Of course, the desperately needed food and equipment was completely useless to Zayyan sitting on the dockside at Denia. He was unable to spare enough men to transport the supplies to Valencia, and even if he had been able to haul them all the way to Valencia, due to the tight siege put in place by the Christians he wouldn't have been able to get the supplies into the city.

By September of 1238 things were looking very desperate for Zayyan. He was actually inside the besieged city and was himself close to starvation, as were all the other residents of the town. With no relieving army coming to the city's aid and with no prospect of food or other supplies being able to make it past the siege, Zayyan reached out to King James seeking terms of surrender.

A chronicler who was present at the meeting reported that Zayyan came out of the city accompanied by the head of his household and the heads of the city's civil and military administration centres. He met King James at an agreed place to the south-east of the city. King James was dressed sumptuously in his regal finery and was accompanied by a group of his noblemen. Terms were agreed whereby the city would surrender to the Christians in return for a truce lasting seven years. The defenders of Valencia, amounting to a total of around 50,000 men, were allowed to leave the city unharmed, accompanied by their families and whatever goods they could carry. They were granted safe passage to go as far south as Denia, around 60 miles away. Zayyan also agreed to hand over a bunch of strongholds and towns in the region surrounding the city. The truce was formalised, then King James's royal banner was raised inside the city. When he saw his banner flying high over Valencia King James stated, and I quote "we dismounted from our horse and turned toward the east and tears fell from our eyes, and we kissed the ground because of the great favour that God had done us" end quote.

He entered the city in triumph on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October. The city's mosque was transformed into a cathedral, and the Archbishop of Tarragona presided over a mass of thanksgiving in the newly consecrated cathedral on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October.

Of course, the Muslims of Valencia viewed the events quite differently. A Muslim resident who was present when the city was handed over to the Christians stated, and I quote "Like a bird of prey the enemy seized the city - elegant, beautiful, brilliant Valencia - by the throat. The call to prayer in the mosque was quickly reduced to silence. The life of the Muslim faith was ripped from its body. The infidel has destroyed the Muslim faith there, and the bell has replaced the call of the muezzin" end quote.

With the celebrated and wealthy city of Valencia now officially Christian, and with a huge chunk of the Muslim residents of the city having departed under the terms of the truce, it now fell to King James to decide how the city should be administered. Basically, everyone wanted a slice of Valencia. The Bishop of Tarragona declared Valencia to be part of his diocese, only to be blocked by Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, who wanted it for himself. Likewise, the noblemen of Aragon had, since as far back as anyone could remember, viewed Valencia as rightfully belonging to Aragon. The Catalans though had different ideas. People from Catalonia streamed southwards, keen to take up residence in one of the many houses which were now vacant and up for the taking in the city of Valencia. So

many of them made the journey, in fact, that the Aragonese were quickly outnumbered. In a desperate bid to maintain their dominance, Aragonese settlers attempted to introduce Aragonese laws and charters to the city. The issue was eventually settled in the year 1239 when King James introduced a new territorial custom into Valencia, decreeing it to be its own distinctive realm with its own laws and customs, but according to T. N. Bisson in his book "The Medieval Crown of Aragon", the laws and customs introduced to Valencia ensured that Catalonian influence, rather than that of Aragon, would prevail. This prompted the further migration of residents of Catalonia to the region. T. N. Bisson states that King James himself later estimated that, once the migration was complete, there were around 30,000 Christians who now called Valencia home, although Christians were still in the minority. Muslim residents still outnumbered the Christian newcomers.

Over the next seven years King James will complete his conquest of the province of Valencia, defeating strongholds, towns, and fortresses and subduing attempted uprisings by Muslim residents. In many of the places he conquered local Muslim laws and customs were left in place, and the residents were granted a degree of independence along with the right to freely practise their religion.

So King James I of Aragon, later known as James the Conqueror, has succeeded in doing what many of his predecessors had tried and failed to do. He has conquered Majorca and Valencia, extending the boundaries of his kingdom into a significant chunk of Muslim territory. Not everyone in the Christian part of the peninsula was happy with this turn of events, though. Join me next time as King Fernando of Leon and Castile clashes with King James. Until next time, bye for now.

This podcast is powered by Patreon. If you can spare \$1 per month and would like to support this podcast, go to [patreon.com](https://patreon.com) and search for "History of the Crusades", or go to our website, [crusadespod.com](https://crusadespod.com), and click on the Patreon link. Your \$1 contribution will mean you get access to an extra episode every fortnight on topics related to the Crusades, and it means that you are powering the History of the Crusades podcast. Thank you to all who have signed up so far.

End