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**Contemporary Texts describing the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosas
(16th July 1212)**

(a) Innocent III grants a Crusading Indulgence (10th December 1210)

*This document was part of an intensive papal diplomatic campaign before the expedition was launched, reflecting the close links between Spain and the Roman Curia in the early thirteenth century.*¹

[Translated from Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 216, col. 353: Innocent III, Register XIII no. 183]

To the archbishops and bishops appointed throughout Spain.

Our beloved son Fernando, the eldest born of our son in Christ Alfonso, the illustrious King of Castile,² has intimated to us that he wishes to dedicate the first fruits of his army to Almighty God, to drive the enemies of the Christian name from the land of his inheritance which they have impiously occupied, and is busy devoting all his efforts to carrying out this intention. He humbly requests and devotedly seeks that we grant him Apostolic assistance for the faithful fulfilment of this plan, and that we encourage others to provide appropriate help. We therefore commend his pious plan to the Lord, and through this Apostolic letter we instruct your fraternity to persuade and vigorously encourage those of your kings and princes who are not pledged to observe truces with them to undertake this operation, counselling those subject to you on behalf of God and ourselves, and enjoining upon them the remission of all their sins, that they provide all necessary assistance, both from their property and in person, both to the aforesaid eldest son of the king of Castile and to your other kings and princes who are rightly taking part in this work, so that through this and the other good works which they will have done they may deserve to obtain the glory of the Heavenly kingdom. We grant also that pilgrims (*peregrini*) who travel from other regions faithfully to take part in this undertaking will enjoy the same remission. You

¹ See especially Damian J. Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon. The Limits of Papal Authority* (Aldershot 2004), pp. 89-92, 95-99.

² Prince Fernando died on 14th October 1211: Alfonso VIII was King of Castile 1158-1214.

should thus try so to fulfil what we order that your solicitude may be reflected in the result, and [thus] we can justly commend your devotion.

(b) A Letter of Arnaud-Amaury, Archbishop of Narbonne, describing the battle.

Arnaud-Aimery was the papal legate accompanying the army, who gave an report of the battle in a letter to the Cistercian general chapter (he was the former abbot of Cîteaux).³ This account, by a Frenchman, is somewhat different from the other contemporary reports by the Spanish, including by Alfonso VIII of Castile, which display a markedly anti-French bias.⁴

[Translated from *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, xix.250-4]

Glory be to God on high and on earth peace to men of good will, since the Lord has been pleased in our time to gain victory with his Christian people over His enemies, granting peace to His people. For this victory He ought greatly to be praised, in that he has deigned to confer victory over a more powerful enemy. Thus we announce the glad tidings to you that Miramomelinus, the king of Morocco,⁵ whom as many people have informed us had waged war against all those who worship the Cross, has been defeated in open battle and put to flight by those same people who cherish the Cross. Indeed, faithful Christians from all parts of the world travelled to bring help to the Christians of Spain for this campaign, in consequence of the remission of sins granted by the Lord Pope, vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ. They gathered at Toledo, to which they had been summoned [to meet] on the eighth day of Pentecost by order of the kings of Castile and Aragon.⁶ Among those who mustered there were the venerable father Archbishop William of Bordeaux and other prelates of the Church; along with barons and knights from Poitou, Anjou, Brittany, and from the dioceses of Limoges, Perigord, Saintonge and Bordeaux, and some from other regions beyond the mountains. We ourselves arrived at Toledo on the Tuesday after the

³ Arnaud Amalric was successively Abbot of Poblet, in Catalonia, 1196-8, Abbot of Grandselve (near Toulouse) 1198-1201, Abbot of Cîteaux and thus head of the Cistercian Order 1201-12, and Archbishop of Narbonne from March 1212. He died in 1229.

⁴ For these, see Peter Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (Oxford 1993), pp. 295-8.

⁵ The Almohad Caliph Muhammed al-Nāsir.

⁶ Peter II, King of Aragon 1196-1213.

Octave of Pentecost, that is the 5th June,⁷ with a company of most distinguished and well-armed knights and infantry from the dioceses of Lyons, Vienne and Valence; and we held discussions with the kings concerning the best interests of Christendom (*respublica Christiana*), and concerning the arrival of the king of Navarre, who was then at odds with the king of Castile.⁸ We had indeed made a detour on our journey to meet this same king of Navarre, in order to persuade him to come to the help of the Christian people.

The army had already been lodged at Toledo for more than four weeks, and was tired of this, as is usual, for it burned with desire to undertake its expedition against the Saracen peoples. On the fifteenth day after our arrival at Toledo, a Tuesday, all of us from north of the mountains struck camp – the king of Castile having granted us as our guide and companion for the journey a nobleman called Diego.⁹ On the next Sunday, that is the feast of St. John,¹⁰ we reached a castle of the Moors, called Malagón; and as soon as the tents had been set up the northerners immediately attacked the castle, and within an hour, so we believe, all the area around the citadel had been taken. Thereafter we attacked the citadel itself for a day and a night without ceasing with arrows and stones, meanwhile undermining the walls with pickaxes. This was a square tower made of stone and mortar, having individual towers attached to each side, of which the barbicans (*propugnacula*) were very strongly built. Once these four towers had been taken by storm and captured, it was possible to dig away at the base of the main tower. The Saracens who were in the upper storeys of the keep defended themselves as best they could, nor could our men easily climb up there, because there were very strong galleries on its sides, and the Saracens defended themselves by throwing down lime and gypsum from above, to prevent our men climbing up to them. The surrender of the castle was discussed, for indeed the Moors were willing to surrender themselves on condition that they would always be prisoners, but this was not pleasing to our men. The castle was then surrendered by the castellan in return for his life and that of his two sons – the remainder of the

⁷ The text says the ides of July (i.e. 7th July), but this is clearly wrong. In June the ides fell on the 5th.

⁸ Sancho VII, King of Navarre 1194-1234.

⁹ Diego Lopez de Faro, lord of Vizcaya, cf. Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada, *Historia de Rebus Hispanie*, ed. J. Fernández Valverde (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis 72, Turnhout 1987), VIII.5, p. 264.

¹⁰ 24th June 1212.

garrison being left to the mercy of the pilgrims. Therefore all but a very few of those who were found there were slain.

The kings of Aragon and Castile arrived a day later, and the day after that everyone rested around the said castle. On the fourth day we marched more than two leagues and came to Calatrava. The castle of Calatrava was heavily fortified with numerous strong towers, in many of which were mangonels. Therefore on the Sunday, which was the Commemoration of St. Paul,¹¹ the whole Christian army attacked the fortress, and aided by Divine help, the outer part facing the water, which was the weaker part, which the king of Aragon, our men from Vienne and the brothers of Calatrava attacked, was taken in a very short time that day, and our banners were placed on two towers that were in that part [of the castle]. Next morning the Saracens made offers of peace. Since the part that had been captured was weak, while that which had yet to be taken was held with great determination, it was pleasing to the kings, in order to avoid expense and Christian casualties, to receive the castle on the following terms: that the people would leave, free and with their clothes, and might take with them thirty-five of the horses that were there.¹²

Three days later, certain prelates from beyond the Alps, accompanied by a great multitude of both knights and infantry, left the army and departed for home. It was estimated that those who returned home with the aforesaid prelates numbered more than forty thousand.

On the following Sunday,¹³ leaving the king of Aragon at Calatrava, where he was sharing out the victuals that had been found there with his knights, we went to another castle which was called Alarcos, near which there had once been a battle in which the Christians, as a consequence of their sins, had been defeated by the king of Morocco.¹⁴ The king of Navarre arrived that day. Then we and the three kings

¹¹ 30th June.

¹² Al-Nāsir, however, had the governor, Ibn Qādis executed for his failure to defend the castle, Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon*, p. 111.

¹³ 8th July.

¹⁴ The disastrous defeat of the Castilian army led by Alfonso VIII by the Almohad Caliph Ya'qub in July 1195, for which the Castilians blamed the other Spanish kingdoms for not bringing them support and those from the other kingdoms on the Castilians for not waiting for the help that was coming before engaging the enemy; see Peter Linehan, 'Spain in the twelfth century', in *New Cambridge Medieval History* iv(2).504-5.

marched for two days and came to Salvatierra. This was strongly fortified and we left it alone, while we marched for a further two days to the foot of the mountain that is called Puerto de Muradel. Lo and behold, some of our men climbed up to the top of the mountain, and [from there] saw as if a league or two away the tents of the Saracens. Some of the Saracens also climbed up the mountain and fought with our men on the peak. It was rumoured in the army that the king of Valencia, the uncle of Miromelinus, was in these tents with Saracen soldiers from this side of the sea who are called ‘Andalucians’ [*Fandaluzes*], with the intention of preventing our advance. For the place through which the army intended to cross was narrow and steep, and the Moors had pitched their tents nearby so as to block that pass to our men.

The next day, indeed, Miromelinus himself arrived with the rest of his army. On that day, which was a Friday, we climbed up to the summit of the mountain, and we did not march further on that day.¹⁵ The Moors promptly abandoned a certain castle that was on that mountain. Also on that day the Saracens launched an immediate attack on the Christians who had advanced some way beyond our tents and put them to flight. They slew some of them, and they would have slain many more if the men of Vienne and the Poitevins who were present there, few as they were, had not manfully advanced towards these same Saracens and pursued them beyond the water, which the enemy had wanted to deny to our men. Thus the Saracens were frustrated by the attack of our men.

Since we were unable to move forward by the route we had intended, both because of the narrowness and steepness of the pass and because of the Saracens who were stationed on the other side to prevent our transit, on the next day, Saturday, we made a circular detour through steep and rocky places.¹⁶ When we arrived at the intended campsite, behold the battle lines of the Moors were drawn up in the vicinity, and a little while later they sent out Arabs and archers in front of their main ranks, who harassed our men with lances and arrows. Our men were, however, busy pitching their tents, and avoided fighting a pitched battle that day. When dawn broke the Saracens once again arranged their battle lines in the same way that they had been drawn up the previous day. Our men also avoided battle that day; only the archers and

¹⁵ 13th July.

¹⁶ 14th July.

a few others scurried about hither and thither.¹⁷ Many Arabs from their ranks skirmished with our men, not in the French manner but according to their own custom of skirmishing, which they do with lances and javelins. On that day Miromelinus showed what he could do more fully than on the Saturday.

There then came that Monday, a day indeed of joy, a day which the Lord made, a day to be remembered through the ages. And behold that morning, before the first battle line of the Moors had descended from the hilltop by which they had come to the plain, our men left camp and immediately occupied that plain, on which they drew up their array. For indeed they had previously feared that if the Moors were able to occupy the plain first, our men would have been unable to draw up their battle lines [properly] before the conflict began, because of the constricted nature of the place. Thus once our troops were arrayed, at about the third hour they charged the Saracens stationed on the hilltop. The first line of the Moors, who were not expecting to be attacked, fled at that charge, as did the Arabs who were on another hillock as though on the flank. The latter are said never to come into the front line, rather they fight by wandering around in a disorderly manner, as though detached. They clearly panicked, for no dead Saracens were found in that place. Our men followed the fleeing Saracens, and when they crossed over the ridge and descended to the valley [beyond] they found many Moors drawn up there, whom they killed. When the Moors who were in flight came to the top of another hill they made a stand there, for another and very strong force of Moors was drawn up at that spot, and Moromelinus himself was, so it is said, in that division. Thus with their musical instruments, which the Spanish call drums, making a great din, the Saracens checked their flight, and not only did they resist our men, they even launched a powerful attack on them. They made some of the 'men of the Sierra' [*Serrani*], that is the people from the kingdom of Castile, both horse and foot, take flight; so that almost the whole of the army which was in front of the rear line appeared to be in retreat, apart from a few Spanish noblemen and those from north of the Pyrenees. Many of our men lost heart, fearing that the Lord would deprive us of victory that day. It is thought that this happened through Divine disposition, to repress the pride of our men, so that when we saw our men flee from

¹⁷ A letter from Alfonso VIII's daughter Berenguala to her sister Blanche, (see below, document (d) and Linehan, *History and the Historians*, p. 296n), suggested that the king had been unwilling to fight a battle on a Sunday.

the face of the enemy, we would ascribe the victory that afterwards followed not to ourselves, nor to the arms and horses of our people, for we had many of these in our army while there were few or none among the Saracens, but to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Cross which these same infidels had insulted, and which our men wore on their breasts, for they were doing as the Apostle says, namely: 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp'.¹⁸

The rear battle line, however, stood its ground, and each of the kings with his bodyguard (*comitatus*) most energetically attacked the Saracens. Some men rallied through our encouragement, and with others also returning to the conflict not only were those Saracens who were threatening the rear of the men of the Sierra driven back, but indeed those who were in that strong division were scattered and slain. And then the army of the Saracens fled in irredeemable confusion, following Miromelinus their king, who had been the first to take flight. It was also said, and is to be believed, that during the previous night, having a presentiment that he would be defeated, Miromelinus had that same night sent back on camels and mules the uncountable wealth which he had [brought with him]. Our men pursued the fleeing Saracens right through their camp. On their arrival there our men found many tents cast to the ground. They continued to pursue the enemy for a good four leagues, and they killed so many of them that they reckoned the total number of those who were killed in the battle or slain afterwards to be 60,000 or more; and what is more remarkable, or so we think, is that our dead amounted to less than fifty. So many lances were found, albeit broken, in three or four different places, that all who saw them were absolutely amazed. So many little bows, with sheaves full of arrows and quarrels, were similarly found in three or four piles that many people maintain and estimate that two thousand pack animals were not enough to carry them away.

Blessed in all things is our Lord Jesus Christ, who through his mercy in our times, under the happy apostolate of the Lord Pope Innocent, has granted victories to the Catholic Christians over three plagues to humanity and enemies of His Holy Church, namely the eastern schismatics, the western heretics and the southern Saracens. Therefore we give thanks for these good things and great gifts granted to us,

¹⁸ *Hebrews*, 13: 13.

by Him who gives generously to all and has not hesitated [to do this]. We tell you that you should be grateful to Him, even if you are not worthy, as much and as best you can. This battle was in the year of the Lord 1212, on 16th July, the second day before the feast of the Magdalene, at a place called Las Navas de Tolosa. There was indeed a certain fortress of the Moors, which is called Tolosa, which now through the grace of God has been brought into our power, so that the heretics of Toulouse shall similarly fear the wrath of God, unless they repent.¹⁹

On the third day after the battle had taken place, that is on the Wednesday,²⁰ we abandoned the place where the tents of the Moors had been, where we had slept for two nights, and we came to a certain place that is called *Gandolien*. We found so many corpses of dead Moors killed by the Christians along our route, as far as a fortress along that road which is called Vilches, that it was impossible to count them. That same day the fortress was surrendered to the lord king of Castile. For there were there a few Saracens who had escaped alive from the battle and had taken refuge therein. These natives now fled from the face of the Christians. The army rested there next to the aforesaid water for two days. On the Friday we came to the city of Baeza, which we found [to be] completely deserted by its inhabitants; for many of them had taken refuge in a certain noble castle (*villa*) called Ubeda. However, a large part of our army came to Ubeda that same day. We ourselves arrived there with the rest of the army the day after. At dawn on the Sunday a substantial part of the army was preparing itself to attack that castle, but it was pleasing to the kings to return to camp and postpone the assault. On the Monday the castle was attacked. After our men had already been engaged for three hours and had been unable to make much progress, almost everyone had returned to their tents downhearted. Then, behold, on the side that the lord king of Aragon was attacking, half of a tower which they had undermined fell down. As the Aragonese entered the castle through this breach, the Saracens started to abandon the walls. The Christians now broke in through various different sections of the walls. The Saracens abandoned two parts of the castle, and quickly retreated to the third part, which was more strongly fortified [than the other two]. Afterwards a peace agreement was negotiated on the following terms: that the

¹⁹ Arnaud-Amalric had been the legate who had accompanied the Albigensian Crusade in 1209. By the summer of 1212 it seemed as though Simon de Montfort and the Crusaders were finally in control of most of Languedoc.

²⁰ 18th July, counting the 'third day' inclusively.

Saracens of Ubeda would give to the king 200,000 *mazmutinae*,²¹ and they would remain in the town with all their property. Since indeed this agreement was contrary to God, for not only were arms and corn sold to the Moors (which is prohibited by the canons under pain of excommunication), but part of the castle had already been captured and there was every hope that the part which had not yet been taken would easily be captured, certain prelates who were in the army began to criticise the Agreement and tried to persuade them to reject it. However, others among the Christian ranks gave their opinion that it was not in our interests to disavow the agreement. Finally the kings had a change of heart, and a further agreement was concluded to this effect: that the Moors would hand over the sum of money specified, and they would surrender the castle which was to be destroyed, while these same Moors would be allowed to leave in safety with their goods. But through the disposition of Divine judgement it happened that the Moors were unable to fulfil what they had promised, and thus they were led by the Christians into captivity, while the walls of the castle were destroyed. Let us therefore bless and praise the Lord of all, and may we trust in Him, since He has granted to us this great mercy. On account of which we request your holiness that you each institute in your own monasteries some commemoration in praise of God and of His generosity to mark this great good fortune that God has conferred on the Christian people.

(c) A Letter of King Alfonso VIII to Pope Innocent III, describing the campaign.

[Translated from Julio Gonzalez, *El Reino de Castilla en la Epoca de Alfonso VII* (3 vols., Madrid 1960), iii.566-72 no. 897: also in *Patrologia Latina* 216, cols. 699-703]
²²

To the most holy father and lord Innocent, by the grace of God supreme pontiff, Alfonso by the same [grace] king of Castile and Toledo, greets him with by kissing his hands and feet. We believe that our intention to attack the perfidious race of the Saracens has not been forgotten by your holiness, for we have devotedly and

²¹ Almohad gold dinars (*masmudi* = Almohads).

²² This letter has also, independently, been translated into English by Colin Simith, *Christians and Moors in Spain ii 1195-1614* (Warminster 1989), pp. 14-25.

humbly imparted it to you through our envoys, seeking your assistance in all matters as from a father and lord, which indeed we acknowledge that we have obtained in both kindly and pious manner from our religious father.

Therefore we made no delay in sending our messengers, men whom we thought most suitable for carrying out this task, to France with your letter, also adding that we would furnish the costs of provisions, insofar as these could reasonably be sustained, for all the knights and sergeants coming to this war, as was appropriate. Hence, after hearing of the remission of sins that you have granted to those coming, there arrived a great host of knights from the regions beyond the mountains, along with the archbishops of Narbonne and Bordeaux and the bishop of Nantes. Those who arrived numbered up to two thousand knights with their squires (*armigeri*), up to ten thousand sergeants on horseback, and up to fifty thousand sergeants without horses, for all of whom it was necessary for us to provide victuals. Our illustrious friends and relations the king of Aragon and the king of Navarre also came with their forces to aid and support the catholic faith. While we remained for a while at Toledo, awaiting the arrival of some of our men who were coming on this campaign, we did not fail to provide all that they needed, just as we had promised through our envoys, even though the costs were heavy and indeed all but insupportable for us and our kingdom because of their great numbers. For we had to provide for them not only what we had promised, but also money, and in particular clothing, which almost everyone, both knights and sergeants, lacked. But God, who ‘multiplies and increases the fruits of righteousness’,²³ provided abundantly for us through the generosity of his grace, and gave all that could be needed, equitably and in abundance.

When therefore the host both of our and their men had been mustered, we set off on the path of the Lord, and came to a strongly-fortified tower called Malágon – the men from beyond the Pyrenees arriving a day before us – and with the help of God they immediately attacked and stormed it.

However, although we had furnished them most generously with all the supplies they needed, they became concerned with the difficulty of the terrain, which

²³ *II Corinthians*, 9:10.

was barren, and it was [also] a little bit warm; and so they wished to turn back and return home. Finally, after much pleading from us and the king of Aragon, they marched as far as Calatrava, which was only a couple of leagues from the aforesaid castle, and we launched an attack upon it in the name of God, we from one side, the king of Aragon from another, and they from their own side. The Saracens who were within realised that they were unable to resist the army of God, and they proposed to surrender the town to us, on condition that they might leave unharmed, but without taking their goods [with them]. We were determined not to accept this proposal, but the king of Aragon and the northerners (*transmontani*) who discussed the matter saw that the town was strongly fortified with walls and barbicans (*antemurales*), with deep moats and high towers, and decided that it could not be captured without undermining the walls and thus demolishing them, which would be much to the detriment of the brothers of Salvatierra, to whom it belonged, and would make it impossible to hold in case of need.²⁴ Hence they urged us most insistently that the town should be surrendered to us safe and intact, along with the arms and a great supply of foodstuffs that was therein, which the army [now] very much lacked, and the Saracens be allowed to depart empty-handed and unarmed.²⁵ We acceded to their firmly-expressed wishes on this matter and granted their request, so that half of everything that was therein was handed over to the king of Aragon, and the other half to the northerners, nor did we wish to retain anything for ourselves and our men. Even though the lord God was showing us grace and favour, and we were willing to provide them with supplies on a generous scale, the northerners still declared their intention of returning home. Urged on by this desire for their homeland, and even though we knew that there would be a battle with the Saracens, almost all of them abandoned the Cross and headed for home, along with the archbishop of Bordeaux and the bishop of Nantes. Only a few remained: the archbishop of Narbonne and Thibault de Blazon, who was one of our vassals (*naturalis noster*),²⁶ with their men and with a few other knights who came from Poitou. Those who remained, both knights and [mounted] sergeants numbered barely a hundred and fifty; while none of their infantry stayed.

²⁴ The knights of the military order of Calatrava, whose base had been recaptured by the Muslims in 1193, and who had then made their headquarters at the castle of Salvatierra, which had itself been captured by al Nāsir in September 1211.

²⁵ Linehan, 'Spain in the twelfth century', 507, suggests that this interpretation was for papal consumption, and that it was more probable that it was the king who wanted to recover the fortress intact, and the French who wanted to destroy it and massacre the garrison.

²⁶ The phrase is ambiguous; this could be translated that he was the king's bastard son.

Since the king of Aragon delayed at Calatrava waiting for some of his knights, and the king of Navarre had still not joined us, we set out with our men, and came to a castle of the enemy called Alarcos. We captured this castle, despite its strong fortifications, and another three as well, called Caracuel, Beneverte and Pietrabuena.

Then marching onwards we arrived at Salvatierra, where the king of Aragon met us. He had not brought many of his men to the army, but only a few noble knights, and similarly the king of Navarre was accompanied by a following of barely two hundred knights.

And since the king of the Saracens was now in our vicinity, we were reluctant to attack Salvatierra, but rather we marched to meet the host of Saracens, and we came to the mountains, which could only be crossed in a handful of places. When we on our part were at the foot of that mountain, the Saracens coming from the other side reached the summit, seeking to prevent our passage. But our soldiers climbed up bravely, and since only a few Saracens had as yet reached that peak with the help of God they manfully drove them off the summit. They also took a certain castle called Ferrat, which the king of the Saracens had built to block the pass. Once that had been occupied, the army of the Lord could climb up in safety to the summit of the mountain, although it suffered greatly through lack of water and the barrenness of that place. Seeing that they could not block this pass, the Saracens occupied another pass that was further down the mountain side and was very narrow and difficult – so much so that a thousand men could defend it against all the men who are under Heaven – and on the other side stood the entire army of the Saracens, with its tents already pitched.

Since we could not remain there because of the lack of water, nor could we advance further because of the difficulty of the pass, certain of our men suggested that we should descend to the foot of the mountain and seek another pass two or three days' march away. Considering, however the peril to the faith and the personal shame that we might incur, refused to accede to this advice, preferring rather to die for the faith while forcing the pass rather than seeking an easier way round or making some sort of withdrawal from this enterprise of the faith. And when we had confirmed our

resolve, our magnates, who were to strike the first blow in the battle, were informed by a certain peasant, whom God had sent to us through his command, that there was another quite easy pass nearby.²⁷ The Saracens were unaware of this pass, and thus the army was able to establish its camp in a place that was not far from them, albeit dry and waterless. Once the army of the Saracens realised what was going on they advanced to prevent that camp being made, but our men, although few in number, defended themselves bravely.

Meanwhile both we and the kings of Aragon and Navarre waited, fully-armed, with our knights in the place of the first camp, which was on top of the mountain, until the entire army of the Lord advanced safely to the place where our advanced guard had pitched camp. Thanks be to God, it happened that we lost none of our men, even though the path was difficult, waterless, rocky and heavily wooded. This took place on Saturday 14th July. That evening the Saracens, realising that we had safely pitched all our tents, drew up their battle lines and approached our camp, skirmishing with our men as their opening gambit in the battle.

At dawn the next day, which was a Sunday, the Saracen [ruler] arrived with his vast multitude and drew up his battle lines. Wishing to study the numbers of their people, their condition and how they were drawn up and reacted to various circumstances, we took the advice of our wise men who were experienced in these matters and decided to wait until the next day, that is the Monday. Given this situation, we stationed our knights and infantry to ensure that the enemy was unable to make any impression on our flanks, which indeed thanks to Divine grace turned out to be the case.

On Monday we armed and drew up our forces, and marched forth in the name of God, ready to do battle with them on behalf of the Catholic faith. They had occupied certain hillocks (*promontoria*), which were very steep and difficult to climb because of the woods that were between us and them, and [also] because of some very deep arroyos, all of which was a great hindrance to us and was of the utmost advantage to the enemy. Then indeed He by whom, in whom and through whom all

²⁷ Later sources suggested that this peasant who revealed a route through the Sierra Morena was in fact St Isidore in disguise, Linehan, 'Spain in the twelfth century', p. 507.

things are done worked wonders, for He stretched out His hand and so directed the army against His enemies that our advance guard, and our middle ranks, through the strength of the Lord's Cross, laid low those many ranks of the enemy who were stationed on the lower ridges. When they reached the enemy's last line, which was indeed composed of vast numbers and where the king of Carthage was, they met ferocious resistance, from cavalry, footmen and archers, which placed them in the utmost danger and which they were indeed barely able to withstand. We realised that the battle was all but lost, and so we launched a cavalry charge, with the sign of the Lord's Cross to the fore alongside our banner, with its image of the Blessed Virgin and her Son placed above our coat-of-arms.²⁸ Seeing the Cross of Christ and the image of His Mother dishonoured by the stones and arrows that the enemy hurled at them, we now resolved to die steadfastly for the faith of Christ. Brandishing our weapons we broke through their line, despite their vast numbers and courageous resistance as they stood firm around their lord. The Lord [then] slew with the sword of His Cross an uncounted multitude of the enemy, and the king of the Saracens and a handful of others turned and fled. His men resisted our attacks for a time, but after dreadful slaughter the survivors were put to flight. We pursued them until nightfall, and we killed more of them during the pursuit than we did in the battle. And so the Lord's battle was brought to a happy conclusion by the Lord alone, and through Him only. To God be the honour and the glory, for he gave victory to his Cross through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As were afterwards learned from a true account of some servants of the king of the Saracens, whom we took prisoner, 185,000 Saracen knights had been present there, while the number of the infantry was incalculable. The Saracens whom we later captured reckoned that more than 100,000 men-at-arms on their side had fallen in this battle. Incredibly, and indeed miraculously, only some twenty-five to thirty Christians from the army of the Lord were slain out of our whole force – one ought not to say this one without rendering the most profound thanks. Oh what joy! Oh what cause for thankfulness! The only reason for regret is that so few from this great army went as martyrs to Christ.

²⁸ *Imago ... in signis nostris superposita.*

Something that gives credence to how great the multitude of the enemy was is that during the two days when our army rested after the battle in their camp, the arrows and spears belonging to them that were laying about sufficed as wood for all fires which were needed to cook our food, bread and other things, and [even then] we only burned about half of them. After such a long time spent in barren and waste territory the army was short of food and other supplies, but there we found an abundance of both food and weapons, and so many war horses and other beasts that although our men all selected for themselves as much as they wanted, more than half of the great stock that was captured still remained.

On the third day we marched out and came to the enemy fortresses of Vilches, Baños and Tolosa, which we immediately captured. We eventually arrived at two cities, one called Baeza and the other Ubeda, which are the largest towns this side of the sea apart from Cordoba and Seville. We found the first of these, Baeza, already destroyed, while a great host of people from all the villages round about had fled to Ubeda, which was very strongly protected both by the strength of its site and of its defences. They thought that they could save their lives by taking refuge there, since they knew that this town had never been stormed or made to surrender by any emperor or other king of Spain. But thanks to Divine assistance we captured this in a very short space of time; and since we did not have the vast number of people who would be needed to populate the region, we raised it to the ground. Some 60,000 Saracens perished there. We slew some of the Saracens there, but took others prisoner for service to the Christians and to rebuild the monasteries which are in the border regions.

We have therefore ordered, most holy Father, all this to be recorded in writing for you, rendering all the thanks we can for the assistance provided by the whole of Christendom, and humbly requesting that you whom the Lord has raised to the highest rank of the priesthood should render thanks with your lips and sacrifice to Him for the salvation of our people.

(d) A Letter from Alfonso's daughter Queen Berenguela of Leon to her sister Blanche, giving news of the battle.

Berenguela had married Alfonso IX of Leon in 1197, but the marriage was clearly incestuous since they were cousins, and Innocent III ordered it to be dissolved in 1204, by which time they had already had four children. She eventually died in 1246. Blanche (Blanca) was married to the future Louis VIII in 1200, although both bride and groom were only in their early teens, and their eldest son was not born until 1209.

[Translated from Gonzalez, *El Reino de Castilla en la Epoca de Alfonso VIII*, iii.572-4 no. 898]

Berenguela, by the grace of God Queen of Leon and Galicia, to her beloved and lovable sister Blanche, wife of Louis, eldest son lord king of the French, with sisterly love and best wishes to her.

I make known to you the happy news that thanks to God, from whom all power comes, our lord and father the king has triumphed in a pitched battle with Miramolinus. We believe him to have acquired particular honour from this event, since previously one has never heard of a king of Morocco being vanquished in open battle. You should know that a servant from our father's household brought news of his to me, but I was reluctant to believe it until I saw our father's own letter.

What happened in the battle was this. As I said in my earlier letter to you, our father gained the castles that lie between Toledo and the pass while awaiting the battle. Then, seeing Miromelinus advancing, he started to advance through the pass. On the far side towards the exit the pass was extremely narrow. Miromelinus then ordered his men to make sure that our people could not cross. Seeing that they were unable to go through there, our men went through another pass, which was on Friday 13th July. There was no little fighting before they crossed this pass, both on the Friday and the Saturday. The Saracens pitched their tents on Sunday morning, and Miromelinus advanced until he was very close to the tents of our father. The Saracens

were ready to fight a battle that day, but our father was unwilling out of reverence for that holy day. However, our archers and slingers displayed no little daring and courage that day, so much indeed that Miromelinus had to move his camp three bow shots away from where it had been established.

On that day father told our men that they should be ready at dawn on the Monday, and be drawn up fully-armed. Our father then divided up our men into three divisions. Diego Lopez and three other barons with their men and those pilgrims who had remained on this side of the pass, and all these formed the first line. In the second was the king of Aragon and his men, along with three *conrois* which our father had entrusted to him; and on the other side was the king of Navarre and his men, with another three *conrois* which our father had given to him. The king our father and his men formed a fourth line. The first line attacked the Saracens and drove them from their position. The enemy regrouped and forced our men to retreat, driving most of the first line back into the second. Seeing this, our father foresaw an attack from the flank of the two battle lines; he joined his force to the first line and valiantly drove back the Saracens and forced them to retreat, while our first line recovered its ground, and he then returned to his own station with all his own division. The Saracens once again attacked our men, as they had done previously. Seeing this, our father once again went with his wing (*cornus*) to join the first wing, and he forced the Saracens to retreat right back to the division of Miromelinus [himself]. The Saracens indeed steadfastly regrouped once again, and their resistance continued into the afternoon. Realising that his men needed help, our father ordered all those whom he had earlier sent back to the rear to join in. When the Saracens saw our father's banner they panicked and turned in flight. Our father and his men pursued them until sunset, and for another two leagues after dusk. Our father and the kings of Aragon and Navarre then returned to the tents of Miromelinus, safe and unharmed, leaving many of his men to continue chasing the fugitives until dawn.

The number of the dead is reckoned to be up to 70,000 men and 15,000 women. About 200 of our own men are reported to have died. The booty that was found in the tents of the Saracens, gold and silver, clothing, and animals, was so vast that it cannot be counted accurately. The javelins and arrows alone needed almost 20,000 pack animals to carry, while it is estimated that the tents of the fugitives

numbered 100,000. Our father retained nothing of all that was gained as booty for his own benefit or that of his men, rather he shared everything out with the kings of Navarre and Aragon and with those who accompanied them and with the whole expedition, as so we believe a king should behave.

Inform the king of France of this, from our lord H, ²⁹ and with all that you have thought to include. Although all the [other] French went home, however the lord Thibault de Blazon did not but faithfully served our father and fought bravely in the battle.

(e) The Las Navas Campaign and its Aftermath, according to Bishop Lucas of Tuy

The 'Chronicle of the World' by Lucas, Bishop of Tuy 1239-49, was an ambitious attempt to write the history of Spain from the time of the Visigoths until the union of Castile and León in 1230. It was the principal Leonese chronicle of the early thirteenth century, and offers a valuable corrective to the more voluminous contemporary Castilian sources, as well as a very different interpretation of the ecclesiastical history of early medieval Spain, a subject on which Lucas and Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo were at odds. ³⁰ The following extract, however, from the fourth and last book of the Chronicle, refers to more recent history. This account shows how the campaign of 1212 was regarded some twenty-five or thirty years later, ³¹ as well as being surprisingly frank about the internecine disputes that continued to hamper the Christians in early thirteenth-century Spain.

[Translated from Lucae Tudensis Chronicon Mundi, ed. Emma Falque (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 74, Turnhout 2003), pp. 327-32, Book IV, cc. 87-93.]

²⁹ Probably their half-brother Henry (who died 1218).

³⁰ Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, pp. 357-8, 368-85, 395-405.

³¹ Quite when the chronicle was written is uncertain, but it was most probably during the late 1230s, when Lucas was still a canon of S. Isidro, León. It was certainly no later than 1246. *Chronicon Mundi*, introduction, pp. Xx-xxi.

(87) Alfonso, the distinguished King of Castile, wanted to put into effect a plan he had long had in mind, to have an excuse for waging war against the Saracens, with whom he was at peace. He settled people at a town called Mora, which was on the frontier with the barbarians. King Miramolinus Abenjacob sent envoys to him, saying that he would not have peace with him if he installed people at this township. But when the king of Castile refused to abandon this settlement, the barbarian king came with a host of Saracens and with such warlike preparations that one cannot describe the extent, and he besieged a castle called Salvatierra. Since the knights of the Cistercian order in that fortress bravely resisted the Saracens, the Moors manfully approached it and broke down the wall with their siege engines, [even though] many of them were killed. King Alfonso was in a tight spot, for he could not easily meet the Saracens [in battle], and so he summoned the king of Aragon and the king of Navarre, entreating them and offering them gifts, that they join him against the barbarians to fight for the Catholic faith. He also sent suitable envoys to the king of León, asking that he deign to assist him at this time of great danger. But although the king of León wanted to come to assist him, after taking the advice of his men he responded that he would willingly come, if the king of Castile returned the castles that he had [previously] taken from him. Since the king of Castile was busy with many matters and in a difficult situation, he was unable to respond to every demand, but he directed all his efforts to revenge in every possible way the injuries inflicted upon him by the Saracens.

(88) At this time the Archbishop of Toledo, named Rodrigo, a most learned and knowledgeable man who was distinguished for his way of life and conspicuous for his good qualities, was deeply touched with heartfelt sorrow, and as a son of the Catholic Faith he did not refuse to labour and suffer danger for the defence of Catholic truth. Hence, supported by the authority of the lord Pope Innocent, he went to Gaul, where assiduously preaching the word of God he persuaded the people to muster for the defence of the Faith, having granted them remission of all sins and furnishing them with the sign of the Cross. The Lord touched the hearts of many people who heard the word of God, and they hastened enthusiastically against the barbarians. But while this was happening, the son of the king of Castile, named Fernando, whom it was hoped would reign after his father, was struck down by death. His decease filled all the Christians of Spain with grief, so that almost everyone lamented the loss of a father,

lord, companion and shepherd. Nor was this unmerited, since he was clement, brave, handsome, wise, generous and catholic. Indeed he served the Catholic Faith with such great enthusiasm that when one day he had had the passion of Christ explained to him and he had learned from this account that the ancient catholic kings had expelled the Jews from Spain, and that the city of Toledo had been surrendered to the Saracens by the treason of the Jews, he conceived such great hate against them that he persecuted their wickedness in whatever way he could. Since the Jews feared that he might destroy them, it is alleged that they procured his death by poison, since the world was not worthy to be glorified by so great a prince. He was buried with great honour at Burgos in the nunnery of St. Maria.³²

(89) Although King Alfonso was distressed by the death of his fine son, he received consolation from the great number of troops mustering. For the distinguished King Peter of Aragon came with a host of people. Sancho, the most brave King of Navarre, arrived with a very strong force of knights. The Portuguese were there, and also Franks and Gauls, who hastened to battle as though they were going to a banquet. When King Miromolinus heard of this, he was very fearful and lamented that he had boasted proudly, namely that he would conquer in open battle those who worshipped the Cross of Christ. Hence at this time he strove not to attack the Christians, but rather to defend himself. The various Christian peoples gathered at the royal city of Toledo, and since they were short of funds the king of Castile so generously supplied each one of them from his treasury that nobody could desert the army because he lacked food. When the barbarian king did not come to meet the Christians in battle as they were expecting, our men first moved their camp forward and captured the castle of Malagón, putting everyone in that place to the sword. Then they captured Calatrava, Pietrabuena, Benaverte, Alarchos and Caracuel. After this the French, overcome by homesickness, began to complain; and thinking that nothing was left [to do] and there was no expectation of battle, they returned home. But King Alfonso was strengthened by the Lord and ordered the people of the Spanish kingdoms to march to the pass of Muradel, where they discovered many armed Saracens, who fled from the Christian knights attacking them with their swords. And since the height of the mountains and the narrowness of the passes did not permit the Christians to advance against the

³² Las Huelgas, which his father had founded.

Saracens, a certain man sent from on high went to King Alfonso in the guise of a shepherd, who showed them a passable way, and with him as their guide they came to the camp of the Moors, and [then] this shepherd disappeared. As the Saracens caught sight of the army of the Christians, they set fire to the thorn bushes and [other] vegetation, for the wind was coming from their side, so that the smoke would hamper the Christians. But through Divine grace the smoke blew back, and spread through all the camp of the Moors, and greatly hampered them. The army of the Christians remained on the mountain during the following night, and at daybreak King Miramolinus ordered trumpets and drums to sound to rouse the Saracens to battle.

(90) The Christian kings then took counsel and remained inactive that day; that they might prepare for battle on the next. They drew up their ranks, so that the noble and valiant Diego Lopez with his nephew Sancio Fernando, son of the former king of León, commanded the first rank of the army. When battle was joined, the excellent Diego and his men charged with great bravery, but although the Saracens were thrown into disorder they continued to resist him. Seeing this, the armies of Christians were roused for the fight, and smote the Saracen camp with their swords on all sides. King Miramolinus and his men were defeated, and such a multitude of the barbarians were slain that nobody living could count the numbers of the dead. This most fortunate battle, the like of which there had never previously been in Spain, took place at Las Navas de Tolosa. After this our men captured Vilches, Ferral, Baños and Ubeida, in which many thousands of Saracens were killed. But since as a result of their efforts the Christian people were starting to fall seriously ill, the distinguished King Alfonso ordered them to return home, which they did with a great deal of booty and much glory.

(91) While these events were taking place, King Alfonso of León had with him that mighty man of power Pedro Fernando of Castile, who nobly aided and counselled him. Having entrusted this said Pedro Fernando with this task, the latter recovered from those towns which the king of Castile had taken from him Roda, Ardón, Castro Tierra, Villaluga, Castro Gonzalo, Albadalista, Luna, Gordón, Arboleo, Alion and various others. King Alfonso of León also waged war against the king of Portugal, and captured Balsamo, Ulgosa and Fresno, and on the other side Lanosa, Melgazón and Contrasta, which he razed to the ground. The Portuguese then mustered all their

forces for battle against him, but, even though the king of León was accompanied by only a few men, he defeated them at a place called Portela de Arenas, and he returned home with great booty and glory. However, King Alfonso of Castile, who after his most happy victory was reluctant to march against the Leonese in anger and with his arm raised on high, came rather in a very humble manner, praising God who had rendered victory to the Christian people. He asked the king of León to make peace, and granted to him all the towns which he had seized from him, and so he restored to him Peñafiel, Almazán and Colem in the land of León, Miranda de Nieva in Asturias, and he allowed him to destroy the castle of Carpio and Monreal in the territory of Salamanca. As a result of his agreement with the king of Castile, the king of León handed back to the king of Portugal all the castles that he had taken from him. This most wise king of Castile did this so that with all the kings of Spain at peace [with each other] he might rouse them against the Saracens. King Alfonso then destroyed Gordón and Arboleo, so that the city of León might enjoy peace and security. (He had previously long before destroyed the castle of the Jews near León, since this had often inflicted a great deal of harm upon that city). He also destroyed Miraveto, near Mayorga; and having received from the king of Castile the assistance of that most mighty man Diego Lopez, he took up arms against the Saracens, and besieged and took Alcantara. His son Fernando died at this time. He was a most handsome youth, whom he had fathered with Queen Teresa; he was buried in the church of St. James the Apostle [*Compostella*]. The king of León and his kingdom greatly lamented his death. At this time those mighty men Diego Lopez and Pedro Fernando [also] died. King Alfonso of Castile took strength from the Lord and besieged Alacarez, a most strong castle of the Saracens, and captured it. He returned to Castile happily and with great glory; but finishing the term of his life he died in the territory of Arévalo, and as was fitting with so great a king he was gloriously buried at Burgos in the nunnery of Las Huelgas, which he himself had built. He reigned for fifty-five years.

(92) Henry his son began to reign in the kingdom of Castile in the year 1252, when he was ten years old.³³ Queen Eleanor died at Burgos twenty-seven days after her husband and was buried next to him. When King Henry of Castile was at Palencia, a certain boy of noble birth who was playing threw a piece of tile and accidentally

³³ By the Spanish calendar; actually 1214.

struck the king on the head, inflicting a serious wound from which he died. He was buried at Burgos next to his father and mother. He reigned for two years and eight months.

(93) In the year 1255,³⁴ Fernando the son of King Alfonso of León began to rule in Castile, after his mother Berenguela had handed the kingdom over to him. For indeed the nobles of Castile had granted the kingdom to Queen berenguela, because she was the first-born child of King Alfonso of Castile, and she , as said, gave the kingdom to her son Fernando. King Fernando was a handsome young man, only just into adolescence, but not, as that age so often is, engrossed with worldly lasciviousness, but notable for his good character, [for he was] pious, prudent, humble, catholic and kind to the elderly. And although he had been raised to the royal throne, he was still obedient to his mother, the most prudent Queen Berenguela, as if he was the least of boys subject to the cane of his master. He had with him most wise and catholic men, by whose advice both he and his mother were guided. He ruled valiantly over the great kingdom subject to him, filled with a burning fire for Catholic truth; he devoted all his efforts to persecuting the enemies of the Christian faith, and wherever he found heretics he committed them to the flames, and he himself, rather than his servants, provided the fire and wood to burn them.

[Trans © G.A. Loud (2011)]

³⁴ Spanish era: actually 1217.