

The East and Northeast: Aragon and Valencia

The richest remaining region to be ruined was the Spanish east coast or *Levante* as it was called and which was ruled under the milder Crown of Aragon. Ferdinand had been its king, while Isabel was queen of Castile. The crowns fused under Charles I (Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire). For us, the areas around the cities of Valencia and Zaragoza are what interest us particularly.

The Ebro and Jalon valleys near Zaragoza had been known for their mosques and learned Muslims like Ibn Bajjah or "Avempache", a philosopher of the 12th century. Much of this material was rescued through the efforts of Professor Julian Ribera during the last century. The Banu Mid were an Arab clan who had lived on this "Upper Frontier" along the Ebro valley since the days of Roland and Charlemagne, French invaders whom they (and the Basques) defeated. They intermarried with the Visigothic nobility who had been Arians or Unitarian Christians when Tariq ibn Ziyad and Miisa ibn Nupyr invaded Spain in 711.

These Visigothic nobles lived in three principal areas: around Murcia in south-eastern Spain under Count Theodomir; around Seville with Princess or Countess Sara the Goth, *al-Qutiyah* as she was called in Arab chronicles, including her great-grandson Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Qutiyah, who honoured her by using her surname; and in the Zaragoza region of what the Arabs called their "Upper Frontier" in the Ebro Valley facing France. Those in Aragon hired the Cid as a mercenary in the 12th century.

The ever-tightening of the screw by the Spanish state and church thus came at generational or approximately thirty-forty-year intervals—in 1499–1502, seven years after the fall of Granada and Cardinal Cisneros' intrusion into prostrate Granadine society; then in 1525–26, with the extension of these regulations into Castile and Valencia; and then again in 1568, forty years later with the second Alpujarras campaign; and finally towards the end of the first decade of the following century, in 1609–1614.

Hundreds if not thousands of Spaniards, both Muslim and Protestant, were burned at the stake all up the East coast of Spain or its *Levante*; thriving towns in and around Zaragoza and Valencia were ruined economically and culturally by these official abuses. The Sierra de Espadán west of Valencia was one

set of mountains where these poor souls took refuge, as they did in the Alpujarras, all to no avail. The Inquisition was relentless in its "holiness" under Philip II and his priestly advisors, who followed the decrees of the Council of Trent.

Desperate stands occurred in the mountains west of Valencia like the Muela de Cortes and the Sierra de Espadan; others took place also in Murcia in the valley of Ricote, a community of six towns in the hills northwest of the city of Murcia. Thousands of peaceful Muslims were butchered by troops up and down the East coast, and by Catholic civilians, as they had been twice previously in the Alpujarras mountains southeast of Granada.

Muslims were disarmed, and rendered helpless so that any criminals who wished to, might rob or kill them, just as shipmasters did on the Mediterranean if any refugees tried to sail to North Africa or further east. Violence was by no means one-sided, and Christians generally possessed the weapons. The oppression was devastating in its effects as able-bodied men were hanged on the gallows, burned at the stake, and banned to the galleys. Muslim women and girls suffered other forms of abuse.

This policy led to a desperate state in Spanish defences. King Henry IV of France became aware of this and was ready to take advantage of it. He had been a Protestant from Navarre, the northern part of that kingdom lying in southern France which King Ferdinand had not taken in 1512, and the fourth of the five Spanish kingdoms. Henry became a Catholic to win the French throne when he declared that "Paris is worth a mass!" His intervention into this Spanish quarrel had a dismal effect that hastened the wholesale expulsion of the Spanish Muslims.

The whole land was again ablaze as thousands of people were uprooted and killed, the peninsula ruined. Tax returns fell; two-fifths of Valencia's tax revenues had been collected from Muslims, especially as rent from the farmers in the Huerta, the irrigated district around Valencia. The taxes of feudal payments that the lords of Valencia and Aragon collected were levied generally on Muslim farmers and Mudejars or craftsmen.

Absurd and humiliating regulations were promulgated against the Moriscos, who were really harassed Spanish Muslims whose sincere faith could not be subverted, except for a few perhaps who had been obliged to attend Catholic schools from childhood: they could not truly believe in the Christian trinity and the arcane dogma of the catechism that was rarely explained clearly to them, nor in saints' worship, as the valiant Hornacheros showed. Watched and denounced as they were, their constant irritation can be understood.

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