

THIBAUT OF NAVARRE

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[*Click to listen to Chanson Pieuse "Dou tres douz non"*](#)

Theobald I (May 30, 1201 – July 8, 1253), called the Troubadour, the Chansonnier, and the Posthumous, was Count of Champagne (as Theobald IV) from birth and King of Navarre from 1234.

Born in Troyes, he was the son of Theobald III of Champagne and Blanca of Navarre, the youngest daughter of Sancho VI of Navarre. His father died before he was born, and Blanca (Blanche in French) ruled the county as regent until Theobald turned twenty-one in 1222. He was a notable trouvère, and many of his songs have survived, including some with music.

The first half of Theobald's life was plagued by a number of difficulties. His uncle, Count Henry II, had left behind a great deal of debt, which was far from paid off when Theobald's father died. Further, Theobald's right to the succession was challenged by Henry's daughter Philippa and her husband, Erard I of Brienne, Count of Ramerupt and one of the more powerful nobles of Champagne.

The conflict with Erard and Philippa broke into open warfare in 1215, and was not resolved until after Theobald came of age in 1222. At that time he bought out their rights for a substantial monetary payment. Some years later, in 1234, he had to spend still more to buy off Philippa's elder sister Alice, Queen of Cyprus. The settlement of 1222 did not end Theobald's problems, for in the following years he antagonized Louis VIII.

At the death of Louis VIII, Theobald's political situation was difficult: he had abandoned the king in his campaigns, there were rumors that he had poisoned him, and he was barred from the coronation of Louis IX. At the beginning of the regency of Blanche of Castile, he abandoned a conspiracy against the French king, which also included Hugues de Lusignan and Pierre Mauclerc, and cemented a strong relation with the regent. Many have hinted at a possible love for Blanche, and he wrote a poetical homage to her. He became so influential at court, that other barons resented him and started a rebellion in 1229.

The first chronicler to report the rumors about a love affair between Theobald and Queen Blanche was Roger of Wendover. Wendover claims that Theobald, "tormented by passion" for the queen, tried to poison King Louis VIII at the siege of Avignon. Matthew Paris adds a story that the French nobles goaded the young King Louis IX to challenge Theobald to a duel to avenge his father's death, but that Blanche put a stop to the duel.

In the following years, however, he antagonized the young king of France Louis IX, which led to an invasion of Champagne by a group of French barons. They were driven off at the cost of further expense and hardship in Champagne. Thus in order to settle with Alice, Theobald had to sell his overlordship over the counties of Blois, Sancerre, and Chateaudun to the king.

Theobald experienced a reversal of his fortunes in 1234, when he succeeded his uncle Sancho VII of Navarre as King of Navarre. While Sancho's will named James I of Aragon as his heir, the Navarrese ignored this and elected Theobald, son of Sancho's sister. Theobald was in Pamplona at the time of Sancho's death and he immediately affirmed the fueros of the realm. This greatly increased his resources (not to mention his prestige), and the remaining years of his rule were far more peaceful and prosperous.

As king, Theobald sealed pacts with the Crown of Castile and that of Aragon, and the Kingdom of England. He entrusted most of the government to nobles of Champagne and divided Navarre into four new districts based on fiscal functions and maintenance of public order. He began the codification of the law in the *Cartulario Magno* and wrote down the Navarrese traditions known as the *Fuero General*.

In order to gain the support of Castile, he married his daughter Blanca to the infante Alfonso, later Alfonso X. By the marriage pact, Ferdinand III of León offered the lands of Guipúzcoa as long as Theobald lived, but not those of Álava to which the Navarrese monarchs had long laid claim. But with Guipúzcoa he would have attained direct access to the Cantabrian Sea. This alliance was never effected, however, as it would have meant the incorporation of Navarre as a feudum of Castile. The next year, Theobald engaged his daughter to John I, Duke of Brittany, the son of his close crusading ally Peter of Dreux.

It was in 1238 that Theobald directed a crusading host to the Holy Land. Militarily, his crusade was not glorious. He spent much time dallying at pleasant Acre (where he wrote a poem to his wife) before moving on Ascalon, where he began the construction of a castle. He fought two minor battles, one was a slight victory. The second battle, near Gaza was a decisive defeat.

He negotiated with the Ayyubids of Damascus and Egypt and finalised a treaty with the former against the latter whereby the Kingdom of Jerusalem regained Jerusalem itself, plus Bethlehem, Nazareth, and most of the region of Galilee with many Templar castles, like Belfort. Some contemporary sources even imply that the whole of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean was put back in crusader hands. It is debatable how much of the ultimate success of the crusade (the most successful since the First in territorial terms) was attributable to Theobald's intentions and how much was just fortuitous. He returned from Palestine late in 1240, before Richard of Cornwall arrived, because he did not wish to be present during any more debating over the leadership and direction of the enterprise.

Theobald passed most of the remainder of his reign travelling back and forth between Navarre and Champagne. He was at odds with the bishop of Pamplona, Pedro Jiménez de Gazólaz, who held a provincial synod in 1250 to excommunicate him. He refused to respond to papal tribunals, but Pope Innocent IV conceded him the privilege of kings: nobody could excommunicate him save the Holy See.

Theobald married three times. He married Gertrude of Dagsburg in 1220, and divorced her two years later when he came of age. Later, in 1222, he married Agnes of Beaujeu. After she died in 1231, he married Margaret of Bourbon (1232).

Theobald died at Pamplona, on a return from one of his many visits to Champagne. He was buried in the Cathedral of Pamplona. He was succeeded first by his elder son Theobald II and then by his younger son Henry I, both children of his third marriage.