

History of the Crusades.
Episode 113.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
Count Raymond VI of Toulouse.

Hello again. Last week we saw the religion of the Cathars expand across Languedoc, despite efforts by the Catholic Church and Count Raymond V of Toulouse to suppress the heresy. In the year 1194 the political landscape of southern France shifted. In that year Raymond V of Toulouse died, and his son Raymond VI became Count of Toulouse.

Raymond VI was 38 years old when he became Count, and his rule was markedly different to that of his father. Where Raymond V had been willing to bend to the authority of the Pope, Raymond VI was more liberal and tolerant in his acceptance of other religions. Whereas Raymond V, who had been married to the sister of the King of France, felt allied to the King of France, Raymond VI didn't feel those ties as strongly. In fact, Raymond VI was altogether quite a different man from his father. He had been raised in the wealthy surrounds of the noble house of Toulouse, and until he became Count at the age of 38 he really didn't have to do anything, other than sit back, enjoy life, and watch on with amusement as his father ducked and weaved around the political minefield that was France in the late twelfth century. Understandably, he developed a taste for luxury, for women, and for high living.

Surprisingly, though, he didn't seem at all keen to engage in warfare. His sole military experience when he became Count was his engagement in a few minor military skirmishes. At a time when your prowess on the battlefield was how you gained respect from your peers, this was actually pretty unusual, and in fact, Raymond VI would avoid becoming actively involved in warfare, even at the height of the Crusades which in the future will sweep his region.

By most reports, Raymond VI was a likable, good looking and charming man. A supporter of the troubadours, Raymond kept an impressive court, which made him popular amongst his fellow noblemen. He was also tolerant of other religions. His court and his circle of friends contained an interesting mix of people from the Catholic, Jewish, and Cathar religions. In fact, Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay was convinced that Raymond VI was a closet Cathar.

Who was Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay? Well, he's a very important man so far as the history of the Crusade Against the Cathars is concerned, so before we proceed any further, we need to take some time out to examine him. Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay was a Cistercian monk, not any old Cistercian monk, but one with contacts in high places. Peter's uncle was Abbot at the Abbey of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, and he would later become the Bishop of Carcassonne. Importantly, Peter's uncle was directly involved in the Crusade Against the Cathars. Even more importantly, Peter accompanied his uncle on the Crusade. Even more importantly still, Peter wrote his recollection of the events down, when he returned to his Abby. This epic historical narrative, which he named "Historia Albigensis", took him six years to write and is one of the primary sources for the Crusade Against the Cathars. However, we must keep in mind that Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay is clearly, undisputedly, and most definitely on the side of the Crusaders. Of course he is, he's a monk in the service of the Catholic Church. In fact, from here on in to remind us of this and to ensure that I don't have to say Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay any more than is absolutely necessary, I'm going to be calling him Peter the Monk.

So, according to Peter the Monk, Raymond VI had been a Cathar from, and I quote "the very cradle" end quote. To support his claim, Peter the Monk alleges that Raymond's court was filled with Cathars, and that he protected the Cathar Perfect within his County. To top it all off, Peter the Monk alleges that Raymond once invited the Bishop of Toulouse to hear Cathar sermons at his castle in the middle of the night. In reality though, modern historians tend to believe that Raymond VI was likely not a Cathar. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption points out that, while Raymond was undoubtedly tolerant of the Cathar heresy, he also demonstrated signs of being a conventional follower of the Catholic faith, and in his will he expressed the desire to die wearing the attire of a Knight Hospitaller. He also bequeathed the Order of the Hospital a large financial sum in his will.

Raymond VI was, however, a very different man to his father Raymond V. Shortly after he became the Count of Toulouse, two incidents occurred which indicated just how different his rule would be to that of his father. The first incident is one of conflict, the second, one of conciliation. We'll deal with the conflict one first.

The conflict incident centered around the fact that Raymond had ordered a castle to be constructed at Saint-Gilles, the same castle that in around fourteen years time the hapless, and very patient, Peter of Castelnau will be traveling away from in January 1208, to his violent death. The Pope didn't want Raymond VI to build the castle, but Raymond decided to build it anyway. Centuries ago, the Counts of Toulouse had bequeathed land in Saint-Gilles to the Catholic Church, and an abbey had been built on the site. There was a tacit understanding between the Church and the County that the Church would watch over the Count's interests in the region. That was important because, to the Counts of Toulouse, there was no town more dear to their hearts than Saint-Gilles. Why? Because Saint-Gilles was the ancestral seat of the Counts of Toulouse; their forebears had originated from this town. In fact, the Counts of Toulouse occasionally still referred to themselves as being from Saint-Gilles.

Raymond IV, who founded the County of Tripoli in the Holy Land following the first crusade, ensured that the name of Saint-Gilles lives on in the Middle East. The castle he built in the city of Tripoli, which is now located in Lebanon, is today called in Arabic "Qala'at Sanjil". Saint-Gilles didn't just have a sentimental hold over the Counts of Toulouse, it was also important for strategic reasons. It was situated next to a vital trading river, the River Rhone, and was on one of the old land trade routes, making it an important commercial center. Not only that, it was in essence a border town, marking the end of the territory directly controlled by the Count of Toulouse, and the beginning of the pesky neighboring County of Provence, which could become aggressive and dangerous at short notice.

But Saint-Gilles was also close to the heart of the Catholic Church. There had been an abbey at Saint-Gilles since the seventh century. It was also an important resting place for pilgrims making their way from Italy to the Church of Santiago de Compostella in northern Spain, along the centuries-old pilgrimage route known as the Via Tolosana. So important was its abbey that it itself had become a destination for pilgrims in its own right.

So back to the original issue, Raymond VI wanted to build a castle on land occupied by the Abbey of Saint-Gilles, and the Abbott had declined to give his permission. When Raymond persisted with his plans, the Pope intervened and threatened to excommunicate him if he didn't desist. Raymond didn't desist and was promptly excommunicated. This marks a

substantial shift away from the manner in which his father had dealt with the Church. Raymond V's approach to the Papacy had been one of conciliation and generally obedience, whereas Raymond VI commenced his rule by showing he placed his own interests over that of the Church, and wasn't going to be swayed by threats of excommunication.

Now we come to the second incident which would mark a departure from his father's policies, the incident of conciliation. Raymond V had generally maintained strong ties with his overlord, the King of France. As we have mentioned, he was married to the King's sister, Constance. Raymond's son, Raymond VI, turned this policy on its head, becoming allied instead with the French King's nemesis and sworn enemy, Richard the Lionheart, who is the current King of England and of a goodly portion of western France. It's really not surprising that the two men became friendly. Both Richard the Lionheart and Count Raymond VI spoke the southern dialect of Languedoc, and shared a love of the troubadour culture. Both men were charming and personable, and both appeared keen to distance themselves from the way their fathers ruled their realms. Whereas Richard the Lionheart's father, King Henry II, had made it clear that he would be keen to invade the County of Toulouse and take it over, Richard wanted to make peace with the region. Whereas Raymond's father, Count Raymond V, was allied with the King of France, Raymond VI seemed happy to extend the hand of friendship to King Phillip's bitter enemy, the English King. The two men got on so well, in fact, that Richard the Lionheart offered his new pal Count Raymond VI the hand of his favorite sister Joanna, in marriage.

Now Count Raymond VI at this stage is in his late thirties and has been married a few times before. His first wife was a widow and wealthy heiress, being the last in line of the Counts of Melgueil. She died three years into the marriage, and upon her death, the County of Melgueil was incorporated into the County of Toulouse. Raymond's second wife was a Cathar. She was Beatrice, the sister of Roger II Trencavel. Their marriage may have acted as a bridge between the warring Trencavels and the Counts of Toulouse, but when Raymond divorced her after having fallen for another woman, that bridge was blown apart. Beatrice then devoted the rest of her life to Catharism, possibly becoming a Perfect in her later years. The woman for which Raymond ditched Beatrice was none other than Burgundia, the niece of King Guy of Jerusalem, and the, eldest daughter of King Amalric, who at that time was King of Cyprus and King of Jerusalem. Small world, isn't it? Unfortunately, the marriage was not a happy one, and the pair divorced a few years later, leaving Raymond free to marry Joanna.

Joanna had been married off to the King of Sicily at the tender age of twelve, and had been imprisoned by the new King, Tancred, upon the death of her husband. Luckily for her, she was rescued by her brother Richard the Lionheart on his way to the Third Crusade. She became firm friends with the Richard's new Queen Berengaria, who was also on her way to the Holy Land. Then in her early twenties, you might remember from Episode 63 that Richard tried to use her as a bargaining chip, by suggesting that she marry Saladin's brother Al-Adil. Of course, we know that Joanna refused point blank to be betrothed to her brother's Muslim friend, and now we find her in her early thirties, marrying Count Raymond VI of Toulouse.

Unfortunately, Raymond's marriages tended to be short and unhappy, and his marriage to Joanna was no exception. She did, however, bear him a son, two years into their marriage. They named him Raymond, which must have come as no surprise to anyone.

This takes us to the year 1199. The year 1199 was an absolutely awful one for Joanna. To start with, she was pregnant with her second child to Raymond, and for reasons that the best medical minds of the day could not fathom, the pregnancy was not going at all well. Raymond was off suppressing a rebellion by one of his many fickle vassals when another rebellion broke out in Toulouse. Knowing that Raymond was miles away and deciding, having picked up some tips from her days on Crusade, that she could tackle the matter herself, Joanna gathered together an army and rode to the town of Cassee, where the rebels were making their stand. She set up camp outside the fortified town and was settling in for a prolonged siege, when she was betrayed by some knights from her own army. Clearly deciding that they would only take orders from the Count and not the Countess, the knights took provisions from Joanna's army into the town, then set fire to Joanna's tent.

Escaping with her life but receiving some minor burns, and in a desperate state with no idea who to trust, who did Joanna decide to turn to? Well, the man who got her into this mess in the first place, her brother Richard the Lionheart. However, while riding on her way to meet with him, Joanna received the devastating news that Richard had died from an infection, following an arrow wound which he had received while himself besieging a castle. By now, absolutely distraught, Joanna instead made her way to her mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Unfortunately, Eleanor had her hands full trying to convince Richard's former subjects to accept her younger, unpopular, and incompetent son John as their new King, so she sent Joanna onto Fontevrault Abbey, where she could be cared for by the nuns. Joanna's health deteriorated rapidly over the following months. Count Raymond refused to provide her with an allowance, so Eleanor persuaded John to give her enough money to see her through.

It soon became clear that Joanna was dying. She was in the last stages of pregnancy, and her dying wish was that she be allowed to take vows and become a nun. This was an astonishing request, as Joanna was married and pregnant, while Canon Law required nuns to be virgins. However, she must have been very persuasive because she convinced none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was present at the time, to admit her to the order of Fontevrault. Joanna was so weak at the ceremony that she was unable to stand to take her vows. She died shortly afterwards and was buried at Fontevrault, near her brother, Richard the Lionheart. Amy Kelly, in her brilliant biography of Joanna's mother, entitled "Eleanor of Aquitaine and The Four Kings", summarizes Joanna's life in just four words: Queen, Crusader, Countess, Nun. And that is a pretty interesting life.

Well, that brings us to the year 1200. I'd hoped to be able to bring Peter of Castelnau to his death during this episode, but he's going to have to wait a little bit longer. Next week, Peter of Castelnau, next week. Until next week, bye for now.

End