

History of the Crusades.
Episode 117.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
The Gathering Force.

Hello again. Last week we saw Pope Innocent III call for a Crusade against the Cathar heretics of Languedoc, following the murder of the Papal Legate Peter of Castelnau. After doing all he could to avert the Crusade, and failing miserably, Count Raymond VI then surprised everyone by taking the Cross himself, and joining the Crusade against the heretics. The Papal Legate, Arnold Amaury, formally proclaimed the Crusade in September 1208, and across France and beyond noblemen, clergymen and common folk are busy putting their affairs in order so they can join the campaign. Arnold Amaury has decreed the forces of the Crusade should muster at Lyon on late June 1209. On the 18th of June. Count Raymond had undergone his embarrassing ordeal at the church of Saint-Gilles, and he had taken the Cross a mere week before the mustering date.

You may have noticed that the Papal Legate Arnold Amaury seems to be calling the shots here. That's because, surprisingly, Arnold Amaury has been appointed leader of the Crusade. Despite being a religious man with no military experience to speak of, Arnold Amaury, doesn't appear at all daunted by the task set out before him. He wasn't even the first choice for leader. No, the man Pope Innocent wanted to lead the Crusade was none other than King Philip of France. Yes, Pope Innocent had written the French King letter number six, requesting him to either take leadership of the expedition or to appoint someone else to do the job on his behalf. In a by now very familiar response King Philip declined, stating that he had two fierce lions at his flanks, those being King John of England and Emperor Otto, and couldn't leave northern France. He also declined to send his son or any other representative to lead the Crusade. He did however make two concessions. He sent a moderately large contingent of knights southwards to join the expedition, and authorized any of his vassals to take the Cross should they wish to do so.

So what was the size of the force gathering at Lyon, and of whom did it comprise? Well, contemporary sources state that the Crusading army numbered between 40,000 and 200,000 men. However modern historians view this number as being wildly exaggerated. Medieval armies, at this stage in history, tended to be relatively small in size. This was an era of siege warfare, where a handful of defenders inside a well-fortified building or town could hold off large numbers of attackers. Major battles were actually pretty unusual during this era, and the size of medieval armies reflected this. During his reign, King Phillip of France gathered together all the knights he could muster in a time of crisis, and he managed to find a total of 900 men, although on paper the fighting force of the Kingdom of France comprised around 9,000 men. Remember, there are no standing armies in this period of history, so the army of the Kingdom of France comprised men who owed allegiance to the King, and could spare the time and effort required to answer his call to arms. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin does some pretty nifty detective work, and concludes that the army embarking on Crusade against the Cathars probably comprised around 20,000 men, and most modern historians seemed to agree with this figure.

So who were these 20,000 men? Well, along with the Duke of Burgundy and the Count of Nevers, who you may recall from last week's episode were Arnold Amaury's original two recruits, an impressive number of Counts, Viscounts, Lords and other noblemen were lined up at the starting gate, along with their retinue, the various servants and squires that

a thirteenth century lord couldn't do without. Next came the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which included the Archbishop of Sens, the Bishop of Clermont and the Bishop of Nevers. The remainder of the twenty thousand strong force was made up of a rabble, which a contemporary chronicler endearingly described as a "vulgarium numerus infinitus", roughly translated as an "unlimited number of vulgar common people". These would have included foot soldiers, crossbowmen, mercenaries, cooks, farriers, blacksmiths, armourers, clerics, beggars, monks, servants, wives, prostitutes, and general hangers-on. An important subgroup of these were the siege engine crew. The carpenters, engineers and sappers who comprised the essential team of people who would operate the all important siege engines were sent on ahead by barge to Avignon.

All but lost inside this throng of people were four renegades from the siege at Zara. If you cast your mind back to Episode 72, you might recall that at the commencement of the Fourth Crusade, the crafty Venetian Doge Dandolo convinced the leaders of the expedition to lay siege to the Christian city of Zara. You might also recall that a handful of Crusaders, including Simon de Montfort refused to take part in the siege, on the basis that they did not wish to attack Christians. Well, four of these dissidents from the siege of Zara, which took place around six years ago, are lined up ready to embark on the Crusade against the Cathars. One of the dissidents is Abbott Guy of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, uncle of our chronicler, Peter the Monk, and one is the soon-to-be famous Simon de Montfort.

Now, there are actually two Simon's de Montfort who managed to become famous, and before we go any further, we should clarify who they are. One Simon de Montfort inherited the Earldom of Leicester in England, led a rebellion against King Henry III of England during the Second Barons War, and actually became the de-facto ruler of England at one stage. He is not the Simon de Montfort who is lining up with the other Crusaders at Lyon in 1209. No, our Simon de Montfort is the father of the aforementioned Earl of Leicester Simon de Montfort, and he will become famous due to the role he will play in the Crusade against the Cathars. At the moment, however, he's not terribly famous. He's just one face amongst the thousands thronging the streets of Lyon.

The Crusaders are able to be distinguished from the non-combatants in the crowd by the cloth Cross sewn on their garments. The Cross worn by the nobility tended to be made of expensive cloth, and in some cases was made of ribbons of silk, embroidered with gold thread. The Cross worn by the rank and file was generally made of wool or cotton. At this stage, most of those gathered were from northern France, although there were people from as far away as Flanders, Germany and northern Italy. The plan was to march from Lyons to Montpellier, where they would be joined by the southern contingent.

Now, this Crusade seemed to attract more than its fair share of poorer participants, and it's easy to see why. Those who had always wanted to undertake a Crusade but just couldn't afford the expense or inconvenience of traveling to the Holy Land could get the same benefit, receive the same indulgences, and have similar stories to tell the grandchildren, just by traveling the relatively short distance to southern France.

So at the beginning of July 1209, Arnold Amaury led the nobility, the clergymen, the common Crusaders and the hangers-on out of Lyon, down the Agrippan Way, which followed the left bank of the River Rhone. As we have mentioned, the siege equipment and other heavy material was loaded onto barges, and the first wave of departees initially kept pace with the barges by riding or walking along the river bank. The pace was slow. The expedition covered only around seven kilometres a day. Their journey was hampered

by the number of war horses, which had to be led along, around three thousand of them by some estimates, and the huge amount of baggage: the tents, weapons, ropes, nails, boiled hides, spare arrows, horseshoes, cooking pots, blankets and horse fodder, most of which was loaded onto pack horses or mules.

Now their destination had originally been Toulouse, however, a quick change of plan was required after Count Raymond joined the Crusaders. Showing just how much of a savvy move it was on Raymond's part, the expedition couldn't, of course, attack the lands of one of its fellow participants, so Arnold Amaury ordered them instead to travel to the domain of Count Raymond's biggest rivals, the Trencavel family. Count Raymond himself, with a cloth Cross sewn onto the right shoulder of his garment, met up with the main force at Valence, on the way to Montpellier, where they would be joined by around two thousand other Crusaders from the south. He wasn't exactly welcomed into the army with open arms. Most people knew of his background, and many were suspicious of his motives and his true commitment to the cause.

Now, although we find the main contingent of Crusaders heading towards Montpellier in the south of France in July 1209, there is action occurring elsewhere, and it's to this new venue that we will now turn, because the Crusade against the Cathars actually commenced far away from the main army, to the west. In the late spring and early summer of 1209, a group of southern French Crusaders gathered in the Agenais region, the westernmost part of the lands under the control of the Count of Toulouse. The Crusade was most likely instigated by the Bishop of Agen, a man who possessed a hard-line attitude towards the Cathars heretics, and who had also been in conflict with Count Raymond over land rights within the Agenais region. Most of the Crusaders in this small army came from the neighboring Quercy region. The small force was led by five noblemen, including one Ratier of Castelnau-de-Montratier, a man who would later come into conflict with the Crusade. Accompanying the secular nobility were four ecclesiastical noblemen: the Archbishop of Bordeaux, the Bishop of Limoges, the Bishop of Carhors, and, of course, last but not least, the driving force behind the expedition, Arnaud, the Bishop of Agen. In his book "The Occitan War", Lawrence Marvin writes that the small force led by these men occupied the undefended town of Puylaroque, then destroyed another small town thirty eight kilometers northwest of Agen, before going on to attack a third town. Apparently none of these towns had a noticeable heresy problem and may have been targeted for more secular reasons, such as to settle old scores, or to gain some economic advantage.

Buoyed by their successes, the army then turned its attention towards the larger town of Casseneuil. This well-fortified town did have a noticeable heresy problem, and oddly, the Lord of the town was none other than Hugh, brother to Arnaud, the Bishop of Agen, the leader of the expedition. The Bishop of Agen ordered his forces to attack his brother's town, but the best the inexperienced army could do was to lay siege to it. The success of the siege was marred by a quarrel between the Count of Auvergne and the Archbishop of Bordeaux, who argued over concerns held by the Count that the Crusade might adversely affect property interests he held in the area. The siege dragged on, the quarreling continued, and eventually terms were reached with the town. Casseneuil didn't appear to be in any danger of falling to the Crusaders, but regardless, they agreed to hand over the known Cathars within the town, in return for the attackers sparing the town and its garrison. The sources aren't clear about what happened to the Cathars, but it's likely they were given the opportunity to change their faith, with those who refused being burnt alive. The army then marched to the town of Villemur on the Tarn. By this time, word of the fate

of the Cathars at the previous town had spread, and around one hundred Cathar Perfect fled before the arrival of the army.

There is no further record of this prelude to the Crusade Against the Cathars, and it appears that the small army dispersed, possibly because they received word that Count Raymond had joined the Crusade, and therefore the lands that the Crusaders had just attacked were under the protection of the Church. Oops.

Back in Valence, Count Raymond was called to a meeting with the leaders of the Crusade. It was pretty clear to everyone that Raymond's lands were full of heretics, and Raymond needed to convince the gathering of his sincerity in taking up the Cross to ensure the safety of his lands. The Count of Toulouse did his utmost to convince those present of his commitment to the Crusading cause, and of his intention to obey the Church and the orders of the leaders of the Crusade. He even went so far as to offer both himself and his twelve year old son, Raymond Jr, whose mother was the late Joanna, as hostages. The leaders of the expedition were convinced, and the focus of the Crusade officially turned to the lands of Raymond's nephew and greatest rival, Raymond Roger Trencavel, who governed the land in the Viscounties of Beziers. Carcassonne and Albi.

The army headed southwards and reached Montpellier on the 20th of July, where they were joined by Crusaders from southern France. It was around this time that a fateful decision was made. Montpellier itself was a possession of the King of Spain, but the neighboring Viscounty of Beziers, was a possession of the Crusaders' new target, Raymond Roger Trencavel. No doubt with Count Raymond's blessing and approval, the leaders of the Crusade decided that the expedition would march into the Viscounty of Beziers and attack the main city in the region, the city of Beziers. The sack of Beziers is one of the most notorious events of the Middle Ages, and is remembered in some parts of southern France to this day.

Join me next week as we examine one of history's most horrible events, the attack on the town of Beziers, and the subsequent massacre. Until next week, bye for now.

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