

History of the Crusades.
Episode 141.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Kingdom Strikes Back.

Hello again. Last week we saw King Peter II of Aragon formulate a plan to strike back against the recent success of the Crusade against the Cathars. King Peter had recently risen high in the favor of the Catholic Church due to the key role he played in a major Spanish Crusading victory at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. However, while he had been away Crusading in Al-Andalus, one of his vassals in southern France, Simon de Montfort, had overrun most of Languedoc, leaving two of his other vassals, the Counts of Foix and Comminges, without territory, and leaving his brother-in-law Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, with only the city of Toulouse and the town of Montauban still in his hands.

For King Peter this situation was intolerable. Simon de Montfort was technically his vassal, but he had little control over him, and it's quite likely that King Peter disliked Simon intensely on a personal level. Throughout his reign, King Peter had been working on extending the influence of the Kingdom of Aragon into southern France and he'd been reasonably successful. In addition to holding a firm grasp on Montpellier, King Peter was overlord to all the southern French Counties bordering his Kingdom on the French side of the Pyrenees: the County of Comminges, the County of Foix, and the Viscounty of Carcassonne. While the French King, King Philip II, was overlord to Count Raymond's vast landholdings, King Peter held influence there too. Count Raymond was his brother-in-law, and just as importantly, the two men appeared to be genuinely close and fond of each other. But now all of this had been upset by Simon de Montfort.

Clearly Simon de Montfort's aim was to become ruler of the entire region of Languedoc, relegating the Counts of Foix, Comminges, and Toulouse to the feudal dust-bin, and bringing the customs, laws, and rule of northern France to the south. While Simon de Montfort was technically vassal to the King of Aragon, this wasn't the cause for any celebration by King Peter. King Peter was keen to see the laws and culture of Aragon spread across the Pyrenees into southern France. Catalonia, or the County of Barcelona, had a lot in common with the language and culture of the French lands across the Pyrenees, and King Peter viewed the laws and culture of Catalonia and Aragon as being a more comfortable fit for the Counties and Viscounties of Languedoc than the laws and culture of Simon de Montfort's homelands in northern France. But it looked for the moment, like Simon de Montfort was on the verge of imposing northern French rule over the entirety of the Languedoc region.

To counter this move, King Peter came up with a plan, a plan that would see the crown of Aragon replace Simon de Montfort as effective overlord over all of southern France. The plan was simple but effective. It involved convincing Pope Innocent III that Simon de Montfort had gone too far, and had overstepped his Crusading brief by conquering regions such as the Agenais, which didn't contain a significant number of heretics. King Peter would propose to Pope Innocent that the Church should rein in Simon de Montfort, and restrict his territories to those of the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers. The southern French Counts of Foix and Comminges should be restored to their Counties, and as their overlord, King Peter would promise to exert the appropriate amount of control over them.

What about Count Raymond VI of Toulouse? Well, this was King Peter's master-stroke. Count Raymond would retain his position in the Count of Toulouse and overlord of the Viscounty of Albi and his other extensive territories, such as the Quercy and Agenais regions, but in name only. King Peter would rule these regions as Ward for the Count of Toulouse. In addition, King Peter would take Raymond's son and heir, the future Raymond VII, to Aragon, where he would be raised in King Peter's court and taught the levels of Catholic piety appropriate to the future successor to Count Raymond VI. Upon reaching adulthood, Raymond VII would assume rule over his father's holdings, under the watchful eye of his overlord, King Peter II of Aragon. It really was a fabulous plan. The plan was quite likely concocted by King Peter and Count Raymond VI in late 1212, when Raymond visited Aragon following King Peter's return from the Spanish Crusade. Had the plan been formulated in modern times, it's likely that after the Count and the King had placed the final flourishes on their proposal, they would have high-fived each other and then gone out for a beer. The plan was that good.

The tricky bit was always going to be in the implementation of the plan. It wasn't just going to entail convincing Pope Innocent, but also to some degree mollifying the key people who were likely to be opposed to the plan. Who were the key people likely to be opposed to the plan?

Well, firstly, Simon de Montfort, obviously. He had the most to lose, but he didn't need to be appeased. It was clear to King Peter and Count Raymond that Simon de Montfort had overreached himself in his Crusading aims, and he needed to be pared back.

Next on the list was the Papal Legate and Archbishop of Narbonne Arnold Amaury. Arnold Amaury had been Pope Innocent's man-on-the-ground in southern France since the beginning of the Crusade against the Cathars, and had been unwavering in his support of Simon de Montfort and his victories. Persuading Arnold Amaury that Simon de Montfort needed to be brought down to size was going to be a challenge.

Then there was King Philip II of France. King Philip was the current overlord to Count Raymond, and his vast territories in southern France. While he hadn't shown any active interest to date in asserting his control over these lands, or preventing them from being overrun by Simon de Montfort, it's likely that he won't be happy to see his position handed over to the King of Aragon.

The first step in putting the plan into action was always going to be convincing Pope Innocent III that the Crusade against the Cathars had gone too far, and needed to be terminated or severely curtailed. In December 1212, King Peter sent two envoys to Rome with strict instructions to meet personally with the Pope and to confront him with the argument that Simon de Montfort had over-extended himself, and was now occupying lands which had never been tainted by heresy. The envoys were directed to point out that by accepting homage from people living in the lands he had conquered rather than killing or exiling them, Simon was tacitly admitting that those citizens were all loyal Catholics. King Peter also wished to direct Pope Innocent's attention to the fact that, unlike Count Raymond of Toulouse, the Counts of Foix and Comminges had never been excommunicated nor accused of any crime against the Church, yet their lands had also been seized by Simon.

The envoys would take a few weeks at least to travel to Rome, and it would be sometime after that before they would appear back in Languedoc with the Pope's response. King

Peter decided to use this time wisely, by meeting with the two people who would be most opposed to his plan and trying to convince them of its validity, those two people being, of course, Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury.

The ambitions of these two men had grown along with Simon's conquests. King Peter became aware that Simon de Montfort had been making enquiries as to how he could depose Count Raymond and have himself declared the new Count of Toulouse, while in his book "A Most Holy War", Mark Pegg states that Arnold Amaury, the Archbishop of Narbonne, had recently begun calling himself the Duke of Narbonne, assuming a secular as well as an ecclesiastical title over Narbonne.

King Peter wrote to Arnold Amaury and Simon de Montfort, advising them that he wanted to negotiate a compromise regarding Count Raymond, and requesting a suspension of the Crusade. To reinforce his point, he crossed the Pyrenees in the first week of January in the year 1213 with a large entourage, and made his way to Toulouse. In response, Arnold Amaury convened a council of Archbishops and Bishops, comprising himself as the Archbishop of Narbonne, as well as the Archbishop of Bordeaux, along with the Bishops of Albi, Toulouse, Comminges and Riez, and ordered them to meet on Monday 14th of January, in a village near the town of Lavaur. Arnold Amaury requested that King Peter set out his arguments in writing so that each point could be considered by the council. For his part, Simon de Montfort declared a truce and stated that the armies of the Crusade would not go on the offensive for a generous period of eight days.

King Peter submitted his arguments in writing to the council, stating among other things that Count Raymond wished to be reconciled with the Church, that the Counts of Foix and Comminges were not heretics and that the invasion of their Counties by Simon was unlawful, that Count Raymond's son and heir was a good Catholic, and that both Raymonds were prepared to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, or even the Holy Land, to prove their dedication to the Catholic religion.

Unsurprisingly, Arnold Amaury's Church council dismissed and rejected every single one of King Peter's arguments, then pointed out to King Peter that he risked incurring the stigma of excommunication even by communicating with Count Raymond, let alone coming to his active assistance.

By this time, well aware that King Peter had dispatched envoys to Rome, Arnold Amaury decided he'd better send one of his own. On Monday the 21st of January, he sent a letter to Pope Innocent, pointing out that the plague of heresy was far from vanquished in Languedoc, and that despite the armies of God doing their best to rid southern France of this dangers to the church, some pockets of heresy remained, and I quote, "namely in the city of Toulouse and a few castrum where, like filth sinking into a bilge hold, the residue of heretical depravity has collected" end quote. The letter alleged that poor King Peter had been tricked by the nasty southern French Counts of Toulouse, Foix and Comminges, who were deceiving and using him to further their wicked aims. Fortunately, and I quote, "That most Christian athlete of the faith, the Count of Montfort, has occupied almost all their lands, treating them as enemies of God and the Church in a holy and just war" end quote. The letter implored Pope Innocent to decree no land be returned to the southern French Counts, but instead the territory should be retained by Simon de Montfort, who would hold it for the Faithful of the Church. The letter was signed by Arnold Amaury and accompanied by such ecclesiastical heavy-weights as the siege-engine-loving Archdeacon of Paris, the Bishop of Comminges, and the Papal Legate Thedisius. The letter and its bearers hurried

along the road to Rome nearly a month after King Peter's envoys had hurried along the same path.

Knowing that it would be a while before he heard back from Pope Innocent, King Peter moved his chess pieces into place. He traveled to the city of Toulouse, and setting aside the rights of the King of France he declared that all lands belonging to the Count of Toulouse were now formally under the protection of the crown of Aragon. Two weeks after this, he took the momentous step of declaring Simon de Montfort's vassalage to Aragon to be at an end, despite the fact that King Peter's own six-year-old son and heir James, remained in Simon's household. Leaving a small garrison of his knights in the city of Toulouse, King Peter returned to Aragon in February, to raise an army to oppose Simon in the field.

Simon hurriedly sent a messenger to King Peter to indicate his displeasure at these moves. King Peter ordered the messenger to be thrown into the dungeon. King Peter II of Aragon had, effectively, just declared war on his former vassal, Simon de Montfort.

So King Peter now has his finger on the trigger, or his arrow nocked, if you want to use a medieval metaphor. But his next move depended on Pope Innocent. Everyone in Languedoc, from King Peter, to the southern French Counts, to Simon de Montfort, and to Arnold Amaury, anxiously waited for word to be delivered from Rome.

Now the Pope had made his decision back in mid-January, around the same time that Arnold Amaury convened his Church council. So, of course, the letter written by Arnold Amaury to the Pontiff, setting out his side of the argument and sent hurriedly down the road to Rome, hadn't yet arrived at its destination.

Pope Innocent wrote a total of three letters in response to the concerns raised by King Peter, and when those letters arrived in southern France, their effect was described by Laurence Marvin in his book "The Occitan War", as like thunderbolts descending from the heavens. The first letter, dated the 15th of January 1213, was directed to the Archbishop of Narbonne, Arnold Amaury. Let me read a short extract from the letter to give you an idea of its tone, and I quote. "You, Archbishop, ought to have been content with the spoilation of heretics, instead of which you have robbed loyal Catholics of their land and unashamedly usurped the domain of the Count of Toulouse." End quote. Ouch! The bombshell contained within this letter was a directive by Pope Innocent that Arnold Amaury cease recruiting for the Crusade against the Cathars. Then Pope Innocent withdrew the indulgence for Crusader service in southern France, advising the Archbishop that the Church now needed to concentrate its efforts on containing the Muslims of the Middle East.

So there you have it. Pope Innocent has effectively declared the Crusade against the Cathars to be at an end.

Two days later, Simon de Montfort received his letter from Pope Innocent. Here's an excerpt and I quote. "The King of Aragon has informed us that you have turned the Crusade against the faithful, shedding the blood of innocent people and appropriating the lands of his vassals while he was fighting the infidel." End quote. Simon de Montfort, after being thoroughly rebuked by Pope Innocent, was directed to restore the Counties of Foix and Comminges to the rebel Counts of Foix and Comminges.

Pope Innocent's final letter, dated the 18th of January 1213, was directed to the two Papal Legates, Arnold Amaury and Thedisius, and to the Bishop of Riez. In it, he blamed the Legates for permitting Simon de Montfort to invade King John of England's lands in the Agenais. Pope Innocent, then set out his views regarding Count Raymond VI of Toulouse. He decreed that Count Raymond VI be allowed to do penance for any sins he had committed, and went on to state that his young son Raymond VII shouldn't bear the sins of his father. Pope Innocent stated that if young Raymond VII were to be placed under the guardianship of King Peter of Aragon, then he was satisfied that the young future Count wouldn't be tainted by heresy.

Well, isn't that all neat and tidy? In our last episode of the year, the Crusade against the Cathars comes to an end. Woohoo! Actually, no, this isn't the end. As you can probably guess by the fact that today Languedoc is part of France and not part of Spain, the plan hatched by King Peter of Aragon doesn't play out how he intended. In fact, for King Peter II of Aragon things are about to go horribly, fatally wrong.

To see how the rest of the Crusade pans out, you'll have to wait a while, until the 5th of February, to be exact. Yes, you heard right. I won't be posting the next episode until the 5th of February 2016. Why? Well, it's summer in Tasmania. School's out for the next six weeks and I'm taking some time off to spend with my daughters. If you need me, you'll find me on a beach, somewhere watching my girls splash around in the water and hoping they don't get eaten by the sharks.

Now, since six weeks is rather a long time to be away, I thought I'd recommend a couple of other history podcasts to you, just so you're not left podcast-less over the holidays. These are some history podcasts which you mightn't have come across before, but which are terrific and well worth a listen.

The first one is "Medieval Death Trip". This podcast takes passages from medieval manuscripts, reads them, and analyzes them. This sounds a little dull, but it totally isn't. As you can probably tell from the title of the podcast, the manuscripts chosen tend to be of a quirky nature, and the topics covered are really very interesting. One episode concerns Simon de Montfort's son, also called Simon de Montfort and his death in England, and the issue of whether he should be made into a saint. To listen, go to ["medievaldeathtrip.com"](http://medievaldeathtrip.com) or search for it on iTunes.

The next podcast I'd like to recommend is "Wittenberg To Westphalia" by Ben Jacobs. Like the "History of the Crusades", "Wittenberg to Westphalia" deals with religious conflict, to be precise, the events of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. As a prelude to the events of the Reformation, Ben has been zooming in on particular areas of Europe and discussing their geography and history. Recently, he's posted an episode on the Principality of Andorra, in which the Counts of Foix make an appearance. You should check it out. It's really very good. You can find it at WittenbergToWestphaliaPodcast.weebly.com, or search for it on iTunes.

Finally, one of my favorite podcasts at the moment is "The Heritage Podcast". In it, the author, Will Webb, aims to provide a complete liberal arts education in podcast form. Basically, that's everything you could ever want to know about history, literature, philosophy, religion, the classics, the arts, and the sciences, in podcast form. It's an incredibly ambitious project. If you check out the syllabus he has listed on his Web page, I think there's a chance that Will Webb's great-grandchildren will be podcasting around one

hundred years from now, and they still won't be anywhere near finished. While it might be ambitious, so far Will Webb is totally nailing it. He has started chronologically from Paleolithic times, and he's currently up to Aristotle and Hellenistic philosophy. His episodes are entertaining, very informative and very thought-provoking. You should go and check it out and get on board now, before there are too many episodes to catch up on. Go to HeritagePodcast.com, or search for Heritage Podcast on iTunes.

Of course, if none of these take your fancy, head over to HistoryPodcasters.com, click on the directory and scroll through the oodles of history podcasts on offer. You're sure to find one which pleases. Right, that's it for me. I hope you all have a very merry Christmas, or if Christmas isn't your thing, I hope you have a great time wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Until next year, bye for now.

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