

History of the Crusades.
Episode 142.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Decision of Pope Innocent III.

Hello again, and welcome to another year of podcasting. In our final episode for last year we saw Simon de Montfort emerged victorious, having conquered all of Languedoc except for the city of Toulouse, the town of Montauban, and a smattering of mountain strongholds to the south. To consolidate his rule, he imposed northern French laws and customs on his southern French conquests. In desperation, Count Raymond VI of Toulouse traveled to the kingdom of Aragon to meet up with King Peter II. King Peter had been unable to defend his southern French vassals from Simon de Montfort's advances because he had been away Crusading in Spain. Together, King Peter and Count Raymond hatched a plan which would result in King Peter assuming wardship over Count Raymond's lands, while severely curtailing Simon de Montfort's power, and handing the southern French counties of Foix and Comminges back to their Counts. The plan, in effect, would extend the power of the throne of Aragon right across the Languedoc region.

King Peter, whose estimation within the Catholic Church had risen mightily following his recent Spanish Crusade victory, wrote to Pope Innocent III, alleging that Simon de Montfort had exceeded his brief in his Crusade against the Cathars, by conquering lands devoid of heretics and by taking advantage of King Peter's absence in the Spanish Crusade to extend his territory. The Papal Legate Arnold Amaury, a longtime supporter of Simon de Montfort, sent his own letter to Pope Innocent, countering King Peter's arguments, but this letter was forwarded to Rome nearly one month after King Peter's letter to the Pope. King Peter then traveled to the city of Toulouse and declared that all of Count Raymond's extensive lands were now under the protection of the crown of Aragon. He also took the momentous step of declaring Simon de Montfort's vassalage to Aragon to be at an end.

Pope Innocent dispatched three letters to Languedoc in mid January 1213. All three letters supported King Peter's position and effectively called an end to the Crusade against the Cathars. Pope Innocent directed Arnold Amaury to cease recruiting for the Crusade and to instead concentrate on issues in the Middle East. He then withdrew all indulgences for Crusader service in southern France, meaning that any volunteers who fought for Simon de Montfort would no longer have their souls cleansed after their forty days of service.

And that was where we finished up at the end of 2015, with King Peter having successfully extended the influence of the throne of Aragon across Languedoc, with Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury seemingly out of favor with the Pope, and with the Crusade against the Cathars effectively at an end.

Now there were two ways Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury could choose to react to this news. The first choice would be to comply with the Papal directions. So far as Simon de Montfort was concerned, that would entail sending any Crusading volunteers back to their homes and disbanding his core Crusading army. Whether Simon would then remain in Languedoc and hold on to his counties of Carcassonne and Beziers, or return to the north to his humble holdings at Montfort in northern France, would be up to him. Arnold Amaury obeying Papal instructions would see him ceasing to provide support and recruits for the Crusade against the Cathars, and instead shift his focus to Pope Innocent's new project, a fresh Crusade to the Holy Land. Right, well that was the first choice.

The second choice available to Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury, was to place everything into a holding pattern and try to convince Pope Innocent to change his mind and give his blessing to the Crusade against the Cathars. I guess it will come as no surprise to anyone that they both went with the second choice. They were going to do their utmost to convince Pope Innocent to reverse his decision.

For Simon de Montfort, accepting the Pope's directive to cease Crusading would thwart his ambitions to rule the entirety of southern France. And Arnold Amaury, well it appears that the Papal Legate didn't view a Crusade in the Middle East to retake Jerusalem as being even slightly important. Back in the year 1211 Arnold Amaury, in a letter to the Cistercian chapter, had described the three great enemies of the Catholic Church as being, and I quote "schismatics from the east, heretics from the West, and Saracens from the south" end quote. The schismatics from the east were the Greek Orthodox Byzantines, with their rival to the Catholic Pope, the Patriarch based in Constantinople; the heretics from the west were the Cathars in the south of France and the pagans of northern Europe; and the Saracens to the south were the Moors of the Al-Andalus caliphate in southern Spain. To Arnold Amaury, the Muslims of the Middle East don't even rate a mention, and it's clear that he views the Crusade against the Cathars as a much more pressing matter for the Church than any attempt to retake Jerusalem in the Middle East. Besides, for both Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury, too much blood has been spilt, too much effort expended, and too many victories achieved for them to just call the whole thing off and walk away from their many years of hard work. No, it was time to get Pope Innocent to change his mind and restart the Crusade against the Cathars.

Now you might remember that King Peter II of Aragon had sent his envoys to Rome in December 1212, and it was only when Pope Innocent's response was being put in writing in January 1213 that Arnold Amaury convened a church council and placed his arguments in writing. Arnold Amaury's envoys had raced off to Rome to present Pope Innocent with their side of the argument, but of course by the time they arrived in Rome the decision had been made to call off the Crusade, and the letters confirming this decision had already been sent. Arnold Amaury's envoys, which included amongst their number his co-Legate Thedisius, stayed in Rome to petition Pope Innocent to reverse his decision, while King Peter's envoys also remained in the city, ready to counter any argument presented by Arnold Amaury's men, with a view to ensuring Pope Innocent stood by his decision to call off the Crusade.

Now, the personal ambitions of Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury aside, there was a lot at stake here. The decision made by Pope Innocent would alter the political, religious, and cultural landscape of Languedoc permanently. If he confirmed his decision to call off the Crusade, then Languedoc would most likely fall under the rule of the throne of Aragon, and would retain its quirky ways and its differences from northern France. Its cosmopolitan and tolerant courts of Jews and Cathars would once again mingle with the local Catholics. Women would enjoy a status on a par with men so far as inheritance was concerned, meaning that some strongholds, villages, and towns would be ruled by a Lady instead of a Lord. And the distinctive, colorful troubadour culture would flourish, although perhaps with a slightly Spanish flavor.

The flip-side of the coin was to let the Crusade continue and allow Simon de Montfort to enforce his northern French laws and customs on Languedoc. Then an aura of piety and intolerance would descend, the laws of northern France would be enforced in the South,

and Languedoc would become essentially a satellite state of northern France. In his book "The Perfect Heresy", Stephen O'Shea writes that the choice faced by Pope Innocent was stark. Calling King Peter "Pedro", Stephen O'Shea writes, and I quote "The choice before the Vicar of Christ was clear. Secular order or spiritual uniformity, the law of the land or the law of the Church, tolerance or bloodshed, peace or war, Pedro or Simon." End quote.

Pope Innocent had a legal background, which he put to good use analyzing both sides of the debate. Knowing that his decision would have massive consequences for the future of southern France, he carefully weighed up each argument. As the months ticked by, it was clear that Pope Innocent was not going to be rushed into a hasty decision. In the end, his final decree came down in May 1213.

So what did the main players do between January and May 1213, while they were waiting to hear from Rome? Well, Simon de Montfort acted as if nothing had changed. It was winter - not the season for campaigning. And since just about all the clerics in northern France had obeyed Pope Innocent's directions and were now recruiting for the new Middle Eastern Crusade instead of the Crusade against the Cathars, no volunteer Crusaders from the north were heading to Languedoc. So Simon had to make do with his core permanent army. Limited by this small force, he was unable to make any further military advances by besieging the city of Toulouse or Montauban in the Agenais, so he pretty much pretended the Crusade was still on, held grimly onto the territory he had conquered, and waited on Rome's decision.

King Peter and Count Raymond went into a bit of a holding pattern as well. The city of Toulouse had become a bastion of resistance. Being the only rebel-held town in the south, it was filled to bursting point with refugees. People in the south who wished to make a stand against Simon, and those who were now homeless, jobless, and landless due to the Crusaders habit of burning crops, uprooting fruit and olive trees, and destroying buildings, all gathered whatever possessions they had left and made for the city of Toulouse.

Jonathan Sumption, in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", provides a nice description of the city of Toulouse at this time, and I quote "Toulouse itself was crowded with hungry, embittered refugees. Disarmed mercenaries, landless aristocrats, and the peasant farmers of fields of charred rubble, blocked the streets with their cattle and carts full of belongings. By night, they slept out in the cloisters of the abandoned monasteries of the city. By day, they raided the outlying country, falling on isolated groups of Crusaders with the ferocity of men who had nothing to lose." End quote.

King Peter busied himself shoring up his position and making contingency plans in case Pope Innocent reversed his decision. King Peter had effectively sidelined the French crown when he assumed wardship of Count Raymond's lands. King Philip of France had been Raymond's overlord, but now the King of Aragon had taken that title for himself. To appease the French King, and to preserve to a limited extent his interests in Languedoc, King Peter came up with a fabulous plan, and that plan was to marry King Philip's daughter. That would mean that, by marriage, the French crown would maintain a presence in southern France, but King Peter would be the overlord. It was a fabulous plan, but it had one fatal flaw, King Peter was already married to Marie de Montpellier.

The marriage, by most reports, was not a happy one. Although, maybe it was happy in one way, because King Peter and Marie hardly ever saw each other. She stayed in her ancestral home in Montpellier, and King Peter based himself miles and miles and miles

away in Aragon. Still, there was a way around this problem. He could request Pope Innocent to annul their marriage. King Peter at this stage was milking his victory in the Spanish Crusade for all it was worth. While he was a shining light in Pope Innocent's eyes, well, he might as well use that to his advantage. So in January 1213, he wrote to Pope Innocent, asking that he declare his marriage to Marie to be annulled, which would leave him free to make a marriage alliance with the French crown. Pope Innocent said "No". So much for that plan.

Strangely, around this time, King Philip's son and heir, Prince Louis of France, took the Cross and decided to lead an army to Languedoc to join the Crusade against the Cathars. This was weird because, firstly the Crusade had effectively been called off by Pope Innocent, and secondly because the French crown had shown little interest in the Crusade to date and this was an odd time to get involved. Perhaps Prince Louis wanted to step out of his father's shadow and lead a military campaign, and maybe King Philip thought that the Crusade against the Cathars, which was essentially won and wouldn't see his son facing any stiff opposition, was a good place to start. Peter the Monk disagrees with this view, stating, and I quote "In February of the Year of Our Lord 1213, Louis, eldest son of the King of France, the most gentle of young men, of excellent disposition, took the Cross against the pestilential heretics. When they heard of this, a large number of knights from France were prompted by affection for him and by his example to take the Cross themselves. The King himself was very sad to hear that his son had joined the Crusade, but it is not for me to explain the reasons for his grief." End quote. Peter goes on to imply that King Philip hadn't yet received the news that Pope Innocent had called off the Crusade, which may well be the case.

King Philip set the date for the departure of the Prince's Crusaders as the 21st of April 1213. However, it never happened. King Philip decided to invade England in March 1213, and all available knights were ordered to abandon for the moment their pledge to take the Cross, and instead assist King Philip to give King John of England a beating. Prince Louis was made to put his Crusading plans on hold for a couple of years.

Now, as everyone was hanging around, waiting for Pope Innocent to confirm or overturn his decision on suspending the Albigensian Crusade, he released one of the definitive documents of his papacy, the "Quia Maior". The encyclical was published in late April 1213, and after reading it King Peter must have been confident that Pope Innocent intended to ignore the protestations of his Legates and confirm the end of the Crusade against the Cathars. Why? Well, because the Quia Maior stressed that the Crusades in the Middle East should take precedence over every other Crusade. In a crucial sentence within the document, he repeated his revocation of the indulgence for Crusading in Languedoc and extended this revocation to those Crusading in Spain. He stated that Catholics living in Languedoc could be granted remissions of their sins should they Crusade against their Cathar neighbors, but the Quia Maior made things pretty clear. Pope Innocent's priorities now lay in the Middle East and in preparations for the attempt to reclaim Jerusalem, which will later be known as the Fifth Crusade. All other Crusades were to cease.

It must have come as quite a shock then, when only a few weeks later Pope Innocent dispatched letters to the main players in the Crusade against the Cathars, effectively reversing the decision he had made back in January. Having apparently decided that the King of Aragon had taken things too far in his attempt to take over most of Languedoc, he advised King Peter that the deals he had made with Count Raymond of Toulouse and the

Counts of Foix and Comminges were invalid, and before any of the rebel counts could take back their Counties from Simon de Montfort, they would need to be absolved of their sins.

So yet again, fortunes have been reversed. We will take a closer look at Pope Innocent's decision of May 1213 and its effects, in our next episode. Until next week, bye for now.

End