

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 148.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
Muret Aftermath.

Hello again. Last week we analyzed the Battle of Muret and its disastrous surprise defeat for the southern French rebels. In this episode, we will take a look at the consequences of the battle.

Of course, the major shock outcome of the battle was the death of King Peter II of Aragon. Now, as we all know, the ruler of Aragon was constantly having to perform a balancing act between maintaining healthy relations with the other Spanish Kingdoms and the Caliphate in Al-Andalus. This was tricky at the best of times, but in September 1213, following the Battle of Muret the Kingdom of Aragon suddenly found itself without a King. The heir to the throne, Peter's son James, was only five years old and wasn't even in Aragon. He was living at the court of the man who bettered his father on the battlefield, Simon de Montfort.

To add to the Kingdom's problems, its barons started getting restless and considering their options, to see whether they may be able to gain an advantage from the situation. King Peter had risked everything on one roll of the dice at Muret. As a result, the Kingdom was close to bankruptcy, and the cream of Aragonese fighting men, its knights and its most talented sons, were lying dead on a battlefield in southern France. It was no wonder, then, that the noble families of the Kingdom, with only an absent child King to keep them in check, were having whispered conversations in the halls of power, testing their allegiances, and assessing their chances of making a grab for power.

Really, to survive, the Kingdom of Aragon needed its child King back, and it needed someone competent to rule Aragon on James' behalf, and it needed these things as quickly as possible. Initially, things looked problematic. Legally, James' wardship with Simon de Montfort was binding until he came of age. However, Pope Innocent III was amenable to negotiations on this point, and in the spring of 1214 he arranged for James to be taken from Simon's custody and delivered to a delegation of noblemen from Catalonia.

Their first problem was, who was going to raise young James? Clearly his mother, Maria de Montpellier, would be the prime candidate, or she would have been had she not died in late 1213 in Rome. So, in one year the hapless James lost both his parents, a blow perhaps softened by the fact that he really didn't know either of them. Back in 1209, Maria had made a will in which she decreed that on her death, James should be raised by the Knights Templar. Shortly before she died she updated her will, and decreed that Pope Innocent should have the custody of her son. In the end, the Aragonese noblemen decided to take heed of her first testament, and handed young James over to the local Chapter of Templars, to be educated in the ways of the Church and in the ways of warfare.

The second problem was, who was going to rule Aragon on James' behalf until he came of age? In the end, James' great-uncle was chosen, and he ended up being a wise choice. His first move was to pacify the restless barons. In the summer of 1214, the Regent called all the influential families across Aragon and Catalonia to a meeting at Larida, where he took the extraordinary step of requiring every layman in the kingdom aged fourteen or over to swear an oath of peace and an oath of fealty to young James. Years later, in his memoirs, James recalled his six-year-old self taking the oaths from the many men present, in a ceremony that T. N. Bisson in his book "The Medieval Crown of Aragon" describes as

unprecedented. The ploy worked, along with some sweeteners, such as a moratorium on new taxes. The barons stopped scheming against the crown, and settled into being ruled by their child King and his Regent.

Fortunately for Aragon, Al-Andalus at this stage was experiencing some problems of its own. The Caliph who had been defeated on the battlefield at Las Navas de Tolosa died in late 1213, possibly due to poisoning. His son and heir was also a child, and truces were immediately arranged between the Caliphate and the Spanish Christian Kingdoms. In October of 1214, the mightiest of the Christian Kings, King Alfonso VIII of Castile, also died, leaving an eleven year old boy as heir to the Castilian crown. With most of Spain seemingly being ruled by children, it was a good time for everyone to arrange truces, sit back and wait for the youngsters to come of age.

Young James himself didn't seem to be adversely affected by the untimely death of both his parents, by spending early years with Simon de Montfort, or by spending his formative years being raised by Templar Knights. By the tender age of twelve he was taking an active interest in the politics of the region, and at age seventeen he took over the reins of power. James would go on to have a long and successful reign, leading Aragon into its golden age. He is now known as James the Conqueror, and he will go on to extend Aragon's borders and influence in a manner probably not even dreamt of by his father, King Peter.

All this is well and good for the Kingdom of Aragon, but where does it leave the southern French cause? Well, the Battle of Muret simultaneously changed everything, and changed nothing, so far as Languedoc was concerned. It changed everything in the way it put to rest, once and for all, the dream of a Languedoc free of northern Frenchmen, presided over by the Kingdom of Aragon. The Battle of Muret was a real fork-in-the-road moment in the history of the Crusade against the Cathars. The outcome of the battle offered two separate and distinct paths for the future of southern France. A victory for King Peter would have edged Languedoc closer to being ruled by Aragon, and a decisive victory may well have seen the expulsion of the northern French occupiers. The alternative path, involving a victory by Simon de Montfort would see the Crusade continue, and the fist of northern French rule would be tightened across the region. So the crushing defeat suffered by the Kingdom of Aragon and the rebel Counts, coupled with the death of King Peter, meant that the political landscape of Languedoc was changed forever.

But at the same time, nothing changed. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin points out that all the Battle of Muret did was to take things back to a point before the involvement of the Kingdom of Aragon in the conflict. While the cream of the Aragonese fighting men lay dead on the battlefield, and while the casualty rate amongst the Tolousan militia was devastatingly high (one chronicler pointed out that there was barely a family in Toulouse who didn't have a member dead or injured in the battle), the main players in the rebel camp survived. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse and his son, having taken no part in the battle, were fine, as was the Count of Foix and his son, and the Count of Comminges.

Victory in the Battle itself scored Simon de Montfort no land. True, he retook Muret, which had been briefly in rebel hands, but the two rebel strongholds, the city of Toulouse and Montauban, were still in rebel hands, and the people of southern France, though deeply shocked by the event, still resented their northern French overlords and had not been cowed into submission. So despite the fact that he had scored a crushing and unlikely

victory, the Battle of Muret didn't really advance Simon's cause. It merely removed the Kingdom of Aragon from the equation.

Today, the town of Muret has expanded well beyond its medieval boundaries, but if you want to go there to check out the site of the battlefield, I'm not sure you should bother. Understandably, the people of Muret, back in the Middle Ages, were not all that keen to commemorate an event which dashed their hopes for an independent Languedoc. On their website, the people at Catharcastles.info, who conduct tours around places of interest concerning the Crusade against the Cathars, report that the site of the battle is now covered with houses, as urban sprawl has spilled out beyond Muret's medieval walls and now covers the fields and marshes around the old city. Many years ago, a monument was erected to mark the place where King Peter fell in the battle, but in more recent times planners decided to construct a new highway, and the proposed route took the road straight over the monument. They solved the problem by relocating the monument to the center of a nearby roundabout. So now, if you visit Muret, you can check out the monument which, along with another memorial erected in 1913 to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the battle, is standing proudly in the middle of the road on a grassy mound in a roundabout. History lives people, history lives.

In the immediate aftermath of Muret, the surviving rebels retreated to the relative safety of the city of Toulouse, while Simon and his men cleared the battlefield of bodies and treasure. King Peter II of Aragon's corpse had been stripped naked by Crusaders seeking a souvenir or trophy from the royal personage they had killed. A group of Knights Hospitaller requested that King Peter's body be handed over to them. Their request was granted and the body of the King of Aragon was conveyed to their priory within the city of Toulouse.

Count Raymond VI of Toulouse and his son, the Count of Foix and his son, and the Count of Comminges all made it safely to the city of Toulouse along with all other rebel fighters able to make the journey. Concerned that Simon de Montfort may take advantage of the fact that most of the city's militia had been killed at Muret to attack the city of Toulouse, its gates were ordered to be securely barred, and the townsfolk, refugees, and survivors from Muret all waited nervously to see whether Simon's victorious momentum would carry him towards their safe-haven.

They needn't have worried. Simon didn't launch an assault on Toulouse. Some military historians have criticized him for this. Others have pointed out that his men were tired, Toulouse was well fortified, and it was probably a sensible decision to call it a day. Instead of attacking Toulouse, Simon's men busied themselves preparing a mass grave on the outskirts of Muret. Over 1,000 corpses, men from Aragon, the County of Barcelona, and Languedoc, shared their resting place in the soft river mud. Other Crusaders helped round up the spooked and riderless horses of fallen knights, and gathered discarded swords and other weapons from the battlefield, loading them onto carts to be taken to Fanjeaux or Carcassonne.

As news of the battle spread, the death of King Peter was mourned throughout Aragon and the County of Barcelona. Pope Innocent too was deeply saddened when he heard the news a few weeks after the event. Despite King Peter's recent split with the Church, he seemed to have forged a strong relationship with the Pontiff, and his death was mourned in the halls of the Vatican. One person, however, was not sorry to hear of his passing. As

Mark Pegg writes in his book "A Most Holy War", and I quote, "Maria de Montpellier never mourned her husband." End quote.

After the battlefield was satisfactorily dealt with, Simon and his victorious army made their way back to Fanjeaux and then on to Carcassonne, where Simon was greeted by a very relieved Alice, her dream of blood pouring from her limbs and the ominous meaning it may have held for her husband totally forgotten. Simon settled back into the citadel at Carcassonne, allowed himself to celebrate his victory and, keen to keep the momentum going, started planning a winter campaign, which he intended to commence in a few weeks' time.

The Bishops and senior clerics who had been at Muret were also keen to continue the momentum of the victory. Certain that this would be the perfect time to convince those rebellious and pesky Toulousans to repent and bow to the will of the Church, they rode to the city of Toulouse, hoping to follow Simon's military victory with a diplomatic one. Initially, the citizens of Toulouse were amenable to their suggestion and they offered the Bishops 60 hostages as a guarantee of their future compliance. According to Laurence Marvin in his book "The Occitan War", Count Raymond urged the city's counselors to take whatever deal they could get from the Church. Apparently, he told the citizen leaders of Toulouse that he intended to travel to Rome and give Pope Innocent a piece of his mind, and make him rein in Simon de Montfort once and for all.

It seems that ultimately the citizens of Toulouse didn't listen to their Count, which is just as well, as he never did make that trip to Rome. After rejecting the offer of sixty hostages, the Bishops made a counter offer saying that they would accept 200 hostages in exchange for the reconciliation of the city to the Church. The Toulousans refused, and didn't make another offer. The Bishops then took a backward step and said they would accept the initial offer of sixty hostages. The city's counsel at that point refused to hand over any hostages whatsoever. In the end, all the counselors were prepared to do was to swear an ambiguous oath of loyalty. Realizing that that was as much of a concession as the city would make, the Bishops returned to Carcassonne and the city was left alone.

Join me next week as Simon de Montfort attempts to subdue Languedoc in his winter campaign, while Pope Innocent tries once again to put an end to Simon's ambitions, all while the rebel leaders remain quivering inside the city of Toulouse. All of them, that is, except for Count Raymond and his son, who decide to go on a journey to visit good old King John in England. With Muret behind us, the Crusade against the Cathars continues.

Now, just before I go, if you can't get enough of medieval battles, check out Carl Rylett's podcast "History of Europe, Key Battles". He has just completed a five part series on Las Navas de Tolosa, and is planning on tackling Muret shortly. So search for "A History of Europe, Key Battles" on your preferred pod-catcher. Until next week, bye for now.

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