

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 151.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
Narbonne, 1214.

Hello again. Now, just before we get on to this week's episode, I've a pronunciation correction to make. Last week we were introduced to the roaming dispossessed noblemen whose name I mispronounced as "roit-i-ay". Luckily, Twitter came to the rescue, and now I can advise that the proper pronunciation is a "root-i-ay" because, of course, they are en-route, constantly en-route, they are men of the road. "Routier". It all makes so much more sense now. So thank you to Twitter follower Paul Apostate for the correction. It's always good to be able to get things right. Okay, let's launch into this week's episode.

Last week we saw things take a turn for the worse for Simon de Montfort. He must have wondered where his decisive victory at Muret had left him. While it was true that he had managed to wipe out the army of Aragon, a goodly portion of the southern French cavalry, and the Toulousan militia at Muret, the rebellion against the northern French Crusaders continues unabated. The role played by the southern French and Aragonese armies seems to have been replaced by roaming bands of angry men, men from Aragon and the County of Barcelona eager to avenge the death of King Peter II of Aragon, and the routiers from southern France, men dispossessed by the Crusaders who, now landless and homeless and with nothing to lose, spend their days in groups roaming the countryside, attacking any northern Frenchmen they come across and generally making life as difficult as possible for Simon and his Crusaders.

When we left last week's episode, it was early in the year 1214, and Simon de Montfort was facing a couple of major problems. The first problem was in the form of the city of Narbonne, which had declared itself to be part of the rebellion. At the same time, as Narbonne was rising in defiance of the Crusaders, King John and the English army looked to be menacing his territory in the Agenais.

Now, if you look at a map of southern France, you can see that these two events are taking place at the opposite ends of Languedoc. The Viscounty of Narbonne is on the coast of the Mediterranean, and is surrounded by territory indisputably under Simon's control, the Viscounties of Beziers and Carcassonne. Traditionally, the Counts of Toulouse had loosely considered the Viscounty of Narbonne to be under their control, and some previous Counts of Toulouse considered themselves overlords of the Viscount of Narbonne. The city of Narbonne itself was a significant town in the Languedoc region, and if Simon de Montfort had ambitions to become the Count of Toulouse, which he did, then he would probably have grounds to assert control over Narbonne.

Arnold Amaury, however, had other plans. He was already the Archbishop of Narbonne and had begun calling himself the Duke of Narbonne. Arnold Amaury asserted that he was the rightful ruler of Narbonne, not Simon, not the current Viscount of Narbonne, and not the Count of Toulouse.

The city of Narbonne itself decided that neither Simon nor Arnold Amaury should rule their town and decided to make a stand against the Crusaders. Alarm bells had probably started ringing for Simon de Montfort back in November 1213, when the city of Narbonne had closed its gates to both himself and the Archbishop of Narbonne Arnold Amaury, and had refused to let either man or the Crusader army into the city.

This action probably also caught the eye of the southern French rebels, and in the months since November 1213, Narbonne had become a magnet for rebel resistance. Not only had bands of routiers and Aragonese soldiers been attracted to the place, some senior figures from the rebel side of the conflict, the Counts of Foix and Comminges, and numerous noblemen, and senior clergy from Aragon, along with a Master of the Temple of Aragon, made their way to Narbonne. By February 1214, enough disaffected soldiers from Aragon and routiers had been drawn to the city that organized raids against the northern French presence in the Viscounty of Narbonne could begin.

In his "Historia Albigensis", Peter the Monk speculates, probably quite accurately, that the men from Aragon and Catalonia who were stationed in Narbonne, began attacking the northern French to avenge the death of their King. But then he goes on to say that the reason the southern Frenchman inside Narbonne launched raids into the countryside was because they thought that no more Crusader volunteers from the north would be coming to Languedoc, not because they bore any ill feeling against Simon de Montfort, who had never attacked the city of Narbonne itself. That may not be quite as accurate.

Anyway, whatever their motivation, raids against northern French occupation began in earnest, and it looked like the city of Narbonne was going to be joining the city of Toulouse as a rebel stronghold. This, of course, was a totally unacceptable situation, as far as Simon de Montfort was concerned. Narbonne was not that far away from the cities of Carcassonne and Beziers, and it sat on the main road linking Simon's two Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers. A full blown rebellion in Narbonne was just not something he could ignore.

In March 1214, Simon was in the area around the city of Toulouse. He had a decision to make. King John of England was in Poitou, and was rumored to be marching south towards Simon's holdings in the Agenais region. So Simon could head north and face the King of England and his army, or he could head south and deal with the city of Narbonne. He decided to head south and deal with the city of Narbonne.

Now, at this time, we should remember that Simon doesn't have a large army. His forces are scattered across Languedoc, assisting northern French garrisons of the countless strongholds, fortifications, and towns across the region, to keep them under control and to stop them from rising up in rebellion. So it must have come as a huge relief to Simon when he met up with William of Barres, a nobleman from northern France who had journeyed to southern France with a contingent of two hundred volunteer Crusader knights.

Now, as we have mentioned previously, Peter the Monk has stated that the people of Narbonne believed that no more Crusaders would be arriving from northern France. Likely aware of the fact that Pope Innocent had declared the Middle East to be the new Crusading priority, it's not surprising that the rebels inside Narbonne believed that Pope Innocent putting a stop to recruitment for the Crusade against the Cathars meant that no more Crusaders would be making their way south. But what the people of Narbonne may not have realised was that some of Simon's supporters had decided to defy the wishes of their Pope, and had headed north to preach the Crusade in northern France, Peter the Monk's uncle Guy of Les Vaux-de-Cernay the Bishop of Carcassonne, being one of them.

The fact that two hundred knights had just showed up in southern France, ready to start their forty days Crusading service, showed that their plot was working. Simon put the

volunteers to good use, conducting raids of his own across the Viscounty of Narbonne, attacking any Aragonese soldiers or groups of routiers he came across, and seizing fortifications, villages, and strongholds loyal to the Viscount of Narbonne, and forcing them to submit to northern French rule.

In early April 1214 he came within sight of the city of Narbonne itself. Simon arranged his army into three groups, one of them led by William of Barres, and prepared to assault one of the city gates. It seems that Simon had intended to surprise the defenders of Narbonne by taking what Peter the Monk describes as a difficult and inaccessible path to the gate. But the men of Narbonne had seen him approaching, and had come out of the city, and had positioned themselves in front of the gate. The two forces clashed.

The men from Narbonne having the advantage of higher ground and with the city gate at their backs, drove at the Crusaders with such force that Simon's saddle broke and he fell off his horse. If the rebels had wanted to kill or capture Simon de Montfort, this was the perfect moment to do so. They knew it, and so did the Crusaders. Peter the Monk, states and I quote "The enemy rushed in from all sides to capture or kill him, our men likewise to protect him". End quote. The focus of the attack had been on the gate into the city, but now the focus of the attack was on the unhorsed Simon de Montfort. After a fierce skirmish, the Crusaders were able to lift Simon out of the melee, probably hauling him up onto a horse, behind another rider. As Simon retreated to safety, William of Barres surged towards the men of Narbonne, forcing them to retreat back into the city. Everyone then brushed themselves off and declared it a day.

Now hostilities didn't resume at Narbonne. Why? Well, because Pope Innocent's new Legate, Peter Benevento, sent word that he was on his way to Narbonne on a mission of peace and harmony, and he sent a strict instructions, both to the men inside Narbonne and Simon de Montfort, that they were to stop fighting immediately and await his arrival. His orders were obeyed, and in April 1214 Peter Benevento arrived at Narbonne, intent on reconciling everyone to the Church and finally ending the Crusade. He brought with him letters of instruction from Pope Innocent, which he had penned a few months ago, in January 1214.

What did these letters say? Well, in a blow to the ambitions of Simon de Montfort, the letters expressed the Papal intention that the rebel leaders be reconciled with the Church, and they also ordered Simon to hand King Peter's son, young James of Aragon, over to the Legate, so that he could be returned to his Kingdom over the Pyrenees. Peter Benevento's soothing words of peace and reconciliation made an impact on the rebels, but not on Simon de Montfort.

The two rebel leaders present at Narbonne, the Count of Foix and the Count of Comminges, promptly presented themselves at the palace of the Archbishop in Narbonne, where they swore allegiance to the Church and received absolution from the Papal Legate. As a sign of their good faith, the Count of Foix turned over a castle to the Church, not just any old castle, but the castle of Foix itself, while the Count of Comminges offered a castle as well as his own son as a hostage. In return, both men agreed not to support heresy within their lands, not to use routiers to fight against the Church, and not to assist the city of Toulouse until it, too, had reconciled with the Church.

Now you may have noticed that Count Raymond of Toulouse isn't at the palace, kneeling prostrate before the Pope's representative. That's because he isn't in Narbonne at the present time, but is far away to the north in Moissac. More on him later.

After the Counts of Foix and Comminges had received absolution, it was the turn of Narbonne itself. While the city had never actively supported heresy, and had only recently joined the rebellion, the Viscount of Narbonne and the senior officials from the city of Narbonne also pledged their allegiance to Peter Benevento, and swore oaths that they would not fight the Church and would end any support they had given to the Cathars and the routiers.

Content that he had fulfilled his mandate so far as the rebels were concerned, Peter Benevento then turned his attention to Simon de Montfort. Simon de Montfort advised him that he would love to stay and chat, but he was urgently needed elsewhere. Then, without making any promises to the Legate and without discussing the hand-over of young James, Simon and his men promptly left Narbonne and headed for the northwest of Languedoc.

Actually, Simon was urgently needed elsewhere. He received word that King John had moved out of Plantagenet territory in Aquitaine, into the border agents of territory controlled by Simon. Not only that, but some strongholds which had sworn allegiance to Simon, promptly expelled their northern French garrisons, and had surrendered to the English. Time for Simon to head north, to put a stop to this.

While Simon was making the long journey from one end of Languedoc to the other, he also received word that the city of Moissac, which had been hard-won by him back in 1212, had switched allegiance to the Count of Toulouse. The northern French garrison of the city refused to leave and had barricaded themselves inside the citadel within the city. Count Raymond of Toulouse was currently besieging the citadel, assisted by a large group of routiers. Simon's plans abruptly changed. He was now headed to Moissac.

Now the big question is, what is Count Raymond doing so far north? Does he intend to meet up with King John and the English Army? Well, the truth is, no one knows. He doesn't have an army with him, and knowing as we all do Count Raymond's intense dislike of military conflict, it's probably unlikely that he intends to lend military support to King John's plan to take territory from Simon de Montfort. He may have just journeyed north to meet with King John. After all, he had just spent December in England as a guest at King John's court, and may have been surprised and pleased when Moissac just happened to surrender to him as he was moving through the region. Anyway, I guess we'll never know what his intentions were. In true Count Raymond style, as soon as he received word that Simon de Montfort was heading to Moissac with the Crusader forces, Count Raymond promptly lifted the siege and raced back to the safety of the city of Toulouse.

As Simon de Montfort continued his journey towards the Agenais region, the Papal Legate Peter Benevento also left Narbonne and traveled through the Viscounty of Carcassonne. When he was staying in Castelnaudary, he received a delegate of representatives from the city of Toulouse. The representatives were keen to reconcile the city to the Church, and in return for promising not to support heretics and to cease aiding the Count of Toulouse and his son, the Toulousans turned over 120 of its citizens to the Church as a sign of its good intentions.

That meant only the Count of Toulouse was left out in the cold. But then he, too, received the warm embrace of the Church. At some stage (the closest historians can get to an actual date is "on a Friday in April 1214"), Count Raymond VI of Toulouse swore two separate oaths to the Church. In the first, he pledged to place himself, his son, and his lands in the hands of the Church, and to obey all future instructions from Pope Innocent. In the second oath, he agreed to place his lands under the control of the Church, and to exile himself to England or to another place of the Legate's choosing, until such time as he could personally journey to Rome to plead to the Pope for mercy and grace. As Count Raymond headed back to Toulouse to pack up his things and head into exile, Peter Benevento sent a message to Simon de Montfort to stop whatever he was doing and head back southwards, where firm arrangements could be made for the hand-over of young James of Aragon.

What Simon happened to be doing was laying siege to a castle in the Agenais which had defected to King John. The siege wasn't going so well, mainly due to Simon's lack of siege engines, so upon receiving the demand from the Legate, he obeyed its instructions. Turning his weary men around, he retraced his steps back southwards towards the Viscounty of Carcassonne. Arriving at Carcassonne, he collected young James, then proceeded to the designated meeting spot, a castle near Narbonne. There, young James was duly handed over, and another one of Peter Benevento's boxes was ticked.

At this stage, Peter Benevento is having a mission-accomplished moment. By the end of April 1214, he had pretty much fulfilled his brief. The rebel leaders, as well as the rebellious cities of Toulouse and Narbonne, were neatly reconciled to the Church and had promised not to support the Cathars. So in theory, at least, Peter Benevento had just ended the Crusade against the Cathars. Woohoo!

Well, before you get too excited, and before you think that this series of episodes on the Crusade against the Cathars, which I estimated initially would be all wrapped up in thirty or so episodes, is about to finish sometime soon, time to think again. While Peter Benevento and Pope Innocent are basking in the glory of their success, let's rain all over their parade. Yes, in theory, on paper, from the point of view of a person sitting far away in the Vatican in Rome, and from the point of view of an Italian man who's only been in Languedoc for a couple of months, the Crusade is over. But for all practical purposes, the Crusade is still continuing unabated. What Pope Innocent has failed to realize is that his Crusade is no longer about heresy. It has morphed into an entirely different war, a war for land and power. What many political leaders then, and across the ages, have failed to appreciate is that sometimes when you cry "Havoc" and let slip the dogs of war, you end up having no control over where those dogs of war end up. The dogs may end up allying themselves with other dogs in the neighborhood, who then turn feral and end up turning against your dogs. Or the dogs may develop territorial ambitions of their own, and will not return to their kennels when you whistle at them to come home.

As a result of Pope Innocent's Crusade, Simon de Montfort has become ruler of a vast swathe of territory. There is no indication whatsoever that he is about to give this land back to its rightful owners and returned to his humble landholdings in northern France. Nope, as far as Simon de Montfort is concerned, the Crusade against the Cathars is still in full swing. Defying the orders of his Pontiff, he intends to continue to use Crusade volunteers from the north to achieve total military domination of southern France. And the rebel Counts? Well, despite the fact that they are all safely restored to the Church, they are not going to rest until their lands are back under their control.

Oh dear, it looks like Pope Innocent's Crusade has gotten away from him, and is continuing on its merry way without him. Join me next week as we also continue on our merry way, in a saga that really seems to promise to take up quite a bit of storage space on my hosting site. Until next week, bye for now.

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