

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 157.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
Early 1216.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Ecumenical Council meet and determine the future of Languedoc. Pope Innocent had intended the Council to restore the rebel Counts of Foix and Toulouse to their lands, while confirming Simon de Montfort's rule over the two Viscounties of Beziers and Carcassonne. However in a by-now-familiar move, Simon's supporters were able to alter the outcome in Simon's favour. In the end, the council ruled that Count Raymond VI of Toulouse should lose his County and be permanently exiled from his lands. His son, young Raymond, would inherit only a fraction of the land previously held by his father, while the Count of Foix's fate was placed on hold while he was investigated for war crimes.

The new Count of Toulouse was Simon de Montfort, meaning Simon had achieved his aim of becoming the ruler of most of southern France. The happy news reached Simon in January 1216 when his brother Guy returned triumphantly from Rome. However, as always, just because you are the ruler of territory in southern France didn't mean that the southern French would just lay down submissively and accept your rule. So Simon moved slowly, and it wasn't until March 1216 that he began calling himself the Count of Toulouse and the Duke of Narbonne.

Now, just before we move on, there is one person, of course, in the Church hierarchy who is not happy to see Simon de Montfort installed as the Duke of Narbonne, and that, of course, is Arnold Amaury. Arnold Amaury had been calling himself the Duke of Narbonne for some time now, in addition to the Archbishop of Narbonne, and if you think Arnold Amaury is going to accept the Pope's decision on this point, well, you'd better think again. Simon and Arnold Amaury had parted ways around a year ago, and Simon, never one to forgive a friend who changed allegiances, had gone so far as to receive homage from the Viscount of Narbonne back in February 1215, sidelining Arnold Amaury from any hold on secular power.

But Arnold Amaury wasn't going down without a fight. At the Ecumenical Council he had been one of only a few clergy to support Count Raymond VI, and in February 1216 Arnold Amaury, in his role as Archbishop of Narbonne, actually excommunicated Simon de Montfort, the new Duke of Narbonne, and laid an interdict upon his own flock, the people of Narbonne, to prevent Church services being performed while Simon was in the city. According to Laurence Marvin in his book "The Occitan War" this didn't worry Simon de Montfort one little bit, and he continued to perform his duties as the Duke of Narbonne, as if the excommunication didn't occur and as if the Archbishop of Narbonne didn't exist.

In early March 1216 Simon de Montfort formally took possession of the city of Toulouse and the seat of power of the Counts of Toulouse, the Narbonnais Castle. Now there is a reason why Simon has taken two months to install himself as the Count of Toulouse. He knows he needs to act cautiously because the city of Toulouse hasn't changed its rebellious ways. It still loathes Simon de Montfort, and Simon knows that he has to proceed with some care to prevent the city from rising up against him. On the 7th and 8th of March 1216 Simon de Montfort publicly swore oaths of allegiance to the city of Toulouse and the County of Toulouse, and the officials of the city and the citizens of the city were required to swear oaths of allegiance to Simon.

As soon as he was formally sworn in as the new Count of Toulouse, Simon began taking measures to ensure his new city would not defy him again. Some of Toulouse's defensive walls had been dismantled as part of Prince Louis' Crusade, and Simon now ordered them to be destroyed even further. As well as ordering sections of its walls to be pulled down, Simon required a number of defensive ditches to be filled in, and some towers within the city to be demolished. He then made some modifications to his new residence, the Narbonnais Castle. Now, you might recall that the Narbonnais castle had been built around one of the city gates, the gate leading to the road to Narbonne. Simon ordered a new gate to be built on the eastern side of the Narbonnais castle, which meant that Simon could come and go from the city without being observed and that, if needed, his troops could be moved into the city in secrecy. He also had ditches dug around the castle and surrounded it with a palisade of sharpened stakes, effectively defending the castle against its own city.

Simon completed his ascension to power with a gesture of goodwill. He ordered Peter Benevento to return the citizens that the Church had taken from Toulouse as hostages the year before.

With formalities within Toulouse itself completed, Simon now needed to go and pay homage to his new overlord, the King of France. In April, he traveled north to Paris to receive formal recognition from King Philip II. Did the people of northern France welcome their compatriot, who had subjugated southern France and emerged victorious from the Crusade against the Cathars. Oh yes, they did. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin describes Simon de Montfort's triumphant journey through northern France as the highlight of Simon's life, and it's not hard to see why. He was hailed as a conquering hero. People lined the streets and cheered as he rode by, and there was nowhere in northern France where he wasn't given a reception worthy of a celebrated demi-god.

In his description of the occasion, Peter the Monk goes a bit overboard and parallels Simon's journey into northern France with the biblical passages describing Christ's entry into Jerusalem, but his passage is worth repeating. OK. So here is Peter the Monk, talking about Simon traveling to meet with King Philip, and I quote. "I cannot easily describe the honor shown to him in France, nor will the reader readily believe me. Wherever he went, be it city, fortress, or town, the clergy and the people came in procession to meet him, crying 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' Such was the piety and devotion of the people that any man who could but touch the hem of the count's garment proclaimed himself blessed." End quote.

Following his ego-boosting journey, Simon de Montfort was formally received by King Philip II at his court in Paris, whereby King Philip bestowed upon Simon the titles of the Count of Toulouse, the Duke of Narbonne and the Viscount of Beziers and Carcassonne, and granted to Simon all the lands previously held by the Count of Toulouse, which formed part of the possessions of the French crown. Now sticklers for detail have pointed out that the King of France probably didn't have the power to make some of those appointments. Technically, Simon's overlord for the Viscounties of Beziers and Carcassonne was the new young King James of Aragon, and also included within the package were some lands belonging to the Holy Roman Empire. But these inconveniences were overlooked by the recent victor of the Battle of Bouvines Philip Augustus and the new conqueror of southern France Simon de Montfort

While Simon de Montfort was doing a victory lap around northern France, what were the rebel Counts, or ex-Counts perhaps, up to? Well, I'm glad you asked. By Christmas 1215, most people who had attended the Ecumenical Council had left Rome. Count Raymond VI and the Count of Foix spent Christmas together in Viterbo before travelling on to Genoa.

Young Raymond, however, stayed in Rome, hoping for an audience with Pope Innocent. After making him wait a few weeks, the Pope finally agreed to see the disinherited teenager. According to the anonymous troubadour, young Raymond raised concerns that the lands that he had been left with, which was basically just the Marquisate of Provence on the eastern side of the Rhone River, would not be enough to support him financially, to which Pope Innocent, reportedly replied that the lands he had been allocated were more than enough to keep him out of poverty. Young Raymond then stressed to Pope Innocent his unhappiness at the way things had turned out and reportedly stated that since Simon de Montfort had taken his father's lands by force, would it be okay with the Pontiff if he, young Raymond, took his lands back by force? The anonymous troubadour has Pope Innocent dodging a direct response to this question, leaving young Raymond with the impression that Pope Innocent hadn't forbidden him to take military action against Simon, and had perhaps even tacitly given his approval to it. Buoyed by this outcome, Young Raymond left Rome and traveled to Genoa to meet up with his father.

Now, it's likely that around this time the two Raymonds came up with a plan. Young Raymond had not inherited his father's aversion to military action, and despite having no experience whatsoever on the battlefield, young Raymond decided he was going to go to war with Simon de Montfort. He was going to assess support for his campaign in the area of Provence, which was now the only region owing him any loyalty, and his ultimate goal would be to take back the County of Toulouse and the city of Toulouse from Simon de Montfort. While young Raymond was drumming up support for his campaign in Provence, Raymond senior would travel to Aragon to see whether young King James, or his regent, would be willing to lend what was left of the Army of Aragon to their cause. Both Raymonds landed in Marseille, and to their relief the citizens of young Raymond's tiny new realm seemed more than happy to join his cause.

Now this in itself needs us to pause and think for a while. Young Raymond's territory, as we've stated, lies to the east of the Rhone and covers the cities of Arles and Avignon and the surrounding smaller towns and countryside. The region is technically under the control of the Holy Roman Empire, although only loosely. In fact, Provence is about as under control of the Holy Roman Empire as Languedoc was under the control of the Kingdom of France. The lords of Viennois controlled lands to the north of the region, to which Simon de Montfort had strong ties due to the marriage of his son to Beatrice of Viennois and the area to the west of the Rhone, containing the city of Nimes and Saint-Gilles, is under Simon's control.

Now, young Raymond's new domain had never had any heretical leanings. According to Yves Rouquette in his book "Cathars", the Perfect had repeatedly traveled to the region on the eastern banks of the Rhone, but hadn't managed to convert any of the inhabitants to the Cathar's cause. So the area was safely Catholic. It had also never been in any danger of being invaded by Simon. So why were the residents so eager to take up arms for their young overlord for a cause which really had nothing to do with them? It is actually a bit of a mystery. The region had become a bit of a highway for Crusade volunteers coming from northern France, so perhaps the locals resented this. Certainly it seems that Simon de Montfort was unpopular in this part of Provence as he was in Languedoc to the west.

Anyway, regardless of the reasons, when the Raymonds sailed into Marseilles in the spring of 1216 they were given a rapturous welcome. They were invited into the citadel of the Viscount of Marseilles, where three hundred lords from the Rhone Valley met with them to pledge their loyalty and their military support. The following day, both Raymonds set out on horseback to travel to Avignon, which was 86 kilometres away, accompanied by the three hundred lords. Avignon was at the centre of young Raymond's new domain, and the citizens of Avignon greeted him and his father with rapturous celebrations. With the warm welcome they were given serving as an indication that the people of Avignon would support him, young Raymond and his father then embarked on a brief tour of his new domain. Town after town welcomed them and pledged their support for their young lord, all of the local barons apparently happy to lend their swords and their men to the rebel cause.

Right. So with his new vassals firmly on his side and with his father about to depart to travel to Aragon, young Raymond has to make a decision. He has already pledged to take up arms against Simon de Montfort, but where best to start? Young Raymond is only nineteen years old at this point in time, and untried in battle. He is surrounded by people he doesn't know and has never run a military campaign, so best to start small. In the end, having consulted with his father and his new military commanders, young Raymond decided to cross the Rhone and attack the castle of Beaucaire, which was situated on the west bank of the river.

Why Beaucaire? Well, its position on the banks of the Rhone made it strategically important, but the main reason was a sentimental one. The Counts of Toulouse had always had a soft spot for Beaucaire. Being not terribly far from their ancestral seat of power, Saint-Gilles, Beaucaire had a long history of hosting generations of Count Raymonds, and young Raymond himself had actually been born there. Rumor had it that the citizens of Beaucaire had remained loyal to Toulouse, despite the northern French garrison which was occupying the castle. Simon de Montfort had only taken the castle the year before, and if you wanted to get technical about it, there was some question over whether he was legally entitled to keep it. The castle didn't lie within any of the domains granted to him by Pope Innocent at the Ecumenical Council, and there was a possibility that the castle legally belonged to young Raymond, as it formed part of the dowry of Count Raymond VI's wife. So for all of these reasons, Beaucaire seemed like the perfect place for young Raymond to get some military experience and to take the first step in his ambitious plan to retake the county of Toulouse from Simon de Montfort.

So in April 1216 Count Raymond senior left to travel to Aragon and young Raymond, along with his army of men from Avignon and beyond crossed the River Rhone and prepared to lay siege to the castle of Beaucaire. It's an ambitious and gutsy move. The rebels haven't had a good record in the siege department, their only real success being at Pujol back in 1213. The siege at Pujol involved three armies and the combined military experience of the Counts of Toulouse, Foix and Comminges. Yet here we have the teenage young Raymond, a youngster with no military experience whatsoever leading a rag-tag army of men he doesn't know on an ambitious mission to wrestle a castle from Simon de Montfort. Will he succeed, or will it all end in tears? Join me next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

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