

History of the Crusades.
Episode 165.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
Deliverance.

Hello again. Last week we saw Prince Louis of France revitalize the stumbling Crusade against the Cathars when he joined a sizable French army to the dwindling Crusader one at the siege of Marmande. With the siege successfully concluded and the citizens of Marmande safely massacred, the army made its way to the city of Toulouse. The siege of Toulouse however, only lasted six weeks before Prince Louis abandoned the siege, packed up and headed back to Paris.

Now, although Prince Louis did leave behind a contingent of 200 knights to bolster Amaury de Montfort's army, you can safely say that the departure of Prince Louis' forces, and the lifting of the third siege of Toulouse, was a major blow to the Crusader cause. With the massacre at Marmande doing nothing to raise the popularity of northern France, or for that matter the Church, and with the city of Toulouse emerging untouched from Prince Louis' siege, the rebellion took on a renewed vigor and momentum.

Having already taken much of the Agenais, young Raymond now turned his attentions closer to home. Not only the town's fortifications and strongholds of the County of Toulouse caught his attention, but those in the county of Carcassonne and Beziers as well. In quick succession, young Raymond and his rebel army secured the towns of Puylaurens, Saverdun, and Lavaur. With Castelnaudary also having declared for the rebels, Amaury de Montfort was forced into action. He besieged Castelnaudary for eight months but didn't succeed in retaking it. One casualty of this battle was Amaury's brother Guy de Montfort, who was killed during a failed assault on the city early on in the siege.

As town after town fell to young Raymond and as the Crusaders' territory dwindled further and further, Pope Honorius decided enough was enough. He recalled his Legate for the region, Bertrand, and replaced him with a German cardinal, Conrad of Urach. Conrad traveled to Languedoc, arriving there in 1220. What greeted him on his arrival must have made him rethink his decision to accept the position of Legate. He entered Beziers but was promptly set upon by a mob of rebellious locals and was forced to flee to the relative safety of Narbonne. The situation gradually became clear. Pretty much all of Languedoc was at this time in rebel hands, with Amaury de Montfort's possessions limited to the city of Carcassonne and a handful of strongholds. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption describes Amaury de Montfort, at this point in time, as dispirited and bankrupt.

Conrad came up with a novel idea to turn the tide of the Crusade: he would create a new military order. Modeled on the wildly successful creations of the Middle Eastern Crusades, the Templars and the Hospitallers, Conrad's military order was named the Order of the Holy Faith. However, the Order of the Holy Faith was a flop. Conrad appointed a Master of the Order, raised funds for his Order, went on a recruitment drive, and obtained Pope Honorius' blessing for the Order, but there's no mention of it after the year 1221. Probably facing the identical problems gaining recruits as that being faced by the failing Crusader army, it simply disappears from history.

Still, Pope Honorius continued to flog the dead horse which was the Crusade against the Cathars. Deciding to see whether threats would do the trick, Pope Honorius sent word to young Raymond in June 1220 that if he didn't submit to the Church, the lands in Provence awarded to him by Pope Innocent III following the Ecumenical Council would be withdrawn by the Church. As a threat, it wasn't a terribly effective one, and Raymond ignored it. Pope Honorius then wrote to the citizens of the towns of Toulouse, Nimes and Avignon, threatening to suppress their Bishoprics. Again his threats fell on deaf ears. Pope Honorius then sent three Archbishops from northern France on a recruitment drive, ordering them to tour northern France to drum up recruits for the Crusade. When this didn't work, he raised Church taxes in France and used the income to pay mercenaries to join Amaury's forces. Then Pope Honorius turned to Philip Augustus. In June 1221 he wrote to the French king, imploring him to at least send some volunteers down to Languedoc. But King Philip was unmoved.

Then in September 1221 Pope Honorius received the devastating news that the Fifth Crusade had just face-planted in Egypt. In the deluge of finger pointing and blame assigning which accompanied this humiliating setback for the Church, some fingers identified the Crusade against the Cathars as being to blame for the defeat. Jonathan Sumption writes that troubadours in southern France sung of the false Crusade launched against the Christians of Languedoc, which took men and resources away from the true battlefield of the Middle East. The songs of the troubadours initially did the rounds of southern France, but as word began to spread further north, the chances of Pope Honorius attracting more Crusader volunteers to southern France dwindled further. Possibly now getting a little desperate, in October 1221 Pope Honorius made good on his threat against young Raymond, and formally stripped him of his possessions in Provence.

Then, towards the end of 1221 the Papal Legate Conrad approached Philip Augustus with an astonishing offer. Amaury de Montfort, said Conrad, was now prepared to hand over all his possessions in Languedoc to the French crown. Admittedly, for Amaury this only meant giving up Carcassonne and the smattering of strongholds which were still loyal to the Crusaders, but for the Church, it was a big move. In a sure sign that, firstly, desperation was setting in, and secondly, that the Crusade itself was looking more and more like a lost cause, the Papacy was offering to give up the lands hard-won in the years of Crusading, to the French crown. For Philip Augustus, it would mean that his direct dominions would expand southwards all the way to the Mediterranean. There was only one problem. The King of France was not interested. In May of 1222 Pope Honorius made a direct request of Philip Augustus that he invade Languedoc and annex it to the French crown, and as a sweetener, he offered to pay an extra 5% tax on all Church property in the Kingdom of France if King Philip took up the offer.

But King Philip didn't take up the offer. Why? Well, no one knows. It's rare for a King, or any ruler for that matter, to turn down an offer to expand their territory to the extent proposed by Pope Honorius, but Philip Augustus was a wise and experienced monarch, and he no doubt had his reasons. Some historians have speculated that perhaps he was concerned at the reaction of the English crown to the proposal, since Languedoc was adjacent to possessions under England's control. Or perhaps he was aware of the extent to which northern France was despised in the south. I guess we'll never know. All we need to know is the Church offered to hand Languedoc to King Philip, and King Philip rejected that offer.

It was around this time, in May 1222, that Raymond VI died at 66 years of age, and his personal battle with the Church continued long after he passed away. Raymond senior had been excommunicated from the Church some time ago, but particularly towards the end of his days, Raymond considered himself to be a devout Catholic. As an indication of his faith he died wearing a monk's habit, and his dying wish, which was formally expressed in his last will and testament, was that he be granted a Christian burial. However, the Church decreed that, as he died excommunicate, a Christian burial was not possible. As a result, his remains could not be interred in sacred ground, so the body of Raymond VI was placed in a coffin on a stone plinth in the courtyard of the priory of the Hospitallers in the city of Toulouse. Young Raymond tried unsuccessfully for two decades to convince the Church to allow his father's remains to be accorded a Christian burial, but the Church refused. His coffin was still sitting on its plinth in the courtyard 200 years later. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption reports that at some stage during the 16th century, the wooden coffin holding Raymond senior's remains finally disintegrated, and both Raymond's bones and the rat-gnawed wreck of his coffin were lost to history.

Now we are left with a strange situation. Young Raymond has taken his father's position, and is now occupying most of Languedoc. Most of the citizens of southern France recognize him as Count Raymond VII of Toulouse. However, the man that the French crown and the Papacy recognize as the Count of Toulouse, and the legal ruler of most of Languedoc, is still Amaury de Montfort. With his efforts to hand his title over to Philip Augustus having failed, Amaury made a valiant attempt to counter Raymond VII's influence, and he had a brief taste of military success when he managed to break Raymond's siege of Penne d'Agenais in the Agen early in the year 1223. But really, he just didn't have enough local support, and he didn't have enough men. His long-term prospects and the likelihood of him being able to successfully rule Languedoc at any time in the future were looking more and more bleak.

Young Raymond, showing a talent for diplomacy never evidenced in his father, wrote polite and respectful letters to both Philip Augustus and Pope Honorius, asking that they formally recognize him as the Count of Toulouse and making conciliatory overtures towards the Church. Both men could see the sense in what Raymond was proposing, so a truce was called in mid-1223, and a peace conference was convened to see whether the whole matter could be sorted out amicably. According to Jonathan Sumption, early on in the process a settlement looked likely. Raymond visited Amaury in Carcassonne, and witnesses reported seeing both men laughing and joking together. However, when the formalities got going, the process became bogged down, so much so that Philip Augustus himself volunteered to intervene personally in the process, so a settlement could be concluded. This would have been an ideal way to end the Crusade against the Cathars, and I would love to be able to tell you that Raymond, Amaury, and the Papal Legate Conrad traveled to Saintes in northern France to conduct negotiations under the direction of Philip Augustus, and that a successful settlement was reached, bringing to an end years of bloodshed, restoring Raymond to the position of Count of Toulouse and leaving southern France in the state of independent rule they had always enjoyed. Unfortunately, history and fate had different ideas.

Raymond, Amaury, and the Papal Legate Conrad did travel to Saintes, but before they could meet with Philip Augustus, he died. As a result, the meeting was called off, Conrad headed to Rome to advise Pope Honorius of King Philip's death, and Raymond and Amaury headed back to Languedoc to resume their war.

Prince Louis was then crowned King Louis VIII of France, and while his father, Philip Augustus, had never shown a lot of interest in the goings-on in southern France, or in Crusading for that matter, King Louis was different. A pious, ambitious monarch, King Louis loathed heresy with a passion and fully embraced the concept of Crusading against enemies of the Church. One of his first acts as monarch was to send the amount of 10,000 silver marks to Amaury so that the Crusade could be kick-started. King Louis himself explained that he would like to do more to advance the Crusader cause, but he had a kingdom to administer, so he couldn't spare the time at the moment.

The 10,000 marks helped Amaury to struggle on a little while longer. When the money reached him, things were looking dire. Carcassonne was under attack by the combined armies of Raymond VII and the Count of Foix. King Louis's coins meant that he was able to pay mercenaries to help beat back the assault, but his attempts to use the mercenaries as King Louis had intended, to roll back the rebel successes and gradually retake southern France for the Church, were less successful. In fact, all he managed to do was to besiege one of Raymond's castles. The siege, however, went badly, and Amaury was forced to return to Carcassonne, whereupon most of his mercenaries decided to head back to northern France. Amaury was left defending the city of Carcassonne with only 500 knights. With the assistance of local Bishops, Amaury tried desperately to raise enough money to tempt the mercenaries back to Carcassonne, but without success. Showing the level of desperation he had sunk to, Amaury even tried to mortgage his ancestral estates in Montfort in northern France, but to no avail. He was now pretty much fully bankrupt. Only 20 of his knights now agreed to remain with him, on the basis that Amaury would pay their wages at some stage in the future when he had some money. His uncle Guy de Montfort was one of the 20 remaining knights.

However, it was clear to everyone that Amaury could not win back Languedoc with 20 knights, and could not even hold Carcassonne with only 20 knights. The time had come to surrender. On the 14th of January 1224 Amaury de Montfort formally surrendered the city of Carcassonne, the town of Minerve, and Penne d'Agenais to the rebels, and renounced his claims on the titles of Viscount of Beziers and Viscount of Carcassonne. These titles were then bestowed upon the 16 year old son of Raymond-Roger Trencavel, who had only been two years old when his father died in the dungeons of the citadel at Carcassonne.

Amaury did not, however, agree to relinquish his claim to the title of Count of Toulouse. He did agree to think about it, though. A truce would remain in force while Amaury travel back to Montfort in northern France to ponder his future and the future of the Crusade. Taking the bones of both his father Simon de Montfort and his brother Guy de Montfort with him, he left Carcassonne and travelled northwards. The remains of his father and brother would be buried in a priory Church founded by the Montforts a few weeks later.

So is this it? Have we come to the end of the Crusade against the Cathars? No, we haven't. Join me next week as the King of France himself goes to war against the heretics of southern France, in an episode unsurprisingly entitled the Crusade of King Louis the Eighth. Until next week, bye for now.

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