

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 171.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
The Last Stand.

Hello again. Last week we saw resistance against both the Inquisition and rule by the French crown in Languedoc rise, culminating in a failed attempt by the Trencavel family to take the city of Carcassonne in the year 1240. Following the failed uprising, which the Inquisition attributed to disaffected Cathars, which may have been correct, the Inquisition enjoyed a resurgence. Count Raymond VII of Toulouse, continued to walk a difficult line between accepting northern French rule while secretly supporting ways to undermine it, and promoting the persecution of heretics while also moving to curb the Inquisition of its excesses.

In the year 1242 however, it seemed like Count Raymond's chance to eject King Louis from Languedoc once and for all had finally arrived. It all really came about due to a personality clash between King Louis' formidable mother Blanche of Castile, and the widow of King John of England, Isabella, who had remarried Hugh of Lusignan, the Count of La Marche. Isabella had once been Queen of England, and although she was now only married to a Count she still liked to be treated with the respect due to a Queen. One person who insisted on treating her like a Countess and not a Queen was Blanche of Castile. The two women had never really hit it off, and things came to a head in mid-1241 at an investiture ceremony in which King Louis IX knighted his brother Alphonse, husband of Count Raymond VII's daughter Joanna, and formally handed to Alphonse the Counties of Poitou, and Auvergne. The haughty Isabella was outraged at the ceremony to be brushed off by Blanche of Castile, who she believed treated her in a manner which bordered on contemptuous. So furious was Isabella at Blanche's insistence on treating her like the Countess she was instead of the Queen that she had once been, that Isabella decided that a war was in order. She convinced her husband, the Count of La Marche, to declare war against King Louis.

Now, if you are a lowly Count facing off against the Kingdom of France, it's always good to have some allies, and this is where Count Raymond VII comes in. Count Raymond had seen trouble brewing between the Count and the French crown for some time, and in October 1241 he had thrown his support behind the Count of La Marche. He had signed a formal treaty of alliance with the Count, and had started sending feelers out across Languedoc and even across the Pyrenees into the Kingdom of Aragon to see if anyone else wished to throw their lot in with La Marche. As it turned out, quite a lot of people wanted to throw their lot in with La Marche. Not only the traditionally rebellious Counts of Comminges and Foix put up their hands to oppose King Louis, they were joined by the Counts of Armagnac and Rodez and the Viscounts of Narbonne and Lautrec, and a raft of lesser lords and nobles. Even King James of Aragon looked like he might lend his support to the cause. With most of Languedoc backing him, and with the Kingdom of Aragon and possibly even the Kingdoms of Navarre and Castile making positive noises, the Count of La Marche then managed to attract a key backer for his plan, the King of England, King Henry III. From their base in Gascony, the Count and Countess crunched the numbers and assessed the strength of their new allies, and by the beginning of 1242 they were ready to go to war.

Trouble was, so was King Louis IX. Blanche of Castile was well aware of the plot against the French crown and had urged King Louis to make the first move. In January 1242 that's

exactly what King Louis did. He invaded Poitou and began systematically and ruthlessly attacking castles loyal to La Marche and bringing them forcefully back under royal control. In response to this move, King Henry of England landed in France with 500 knights, and the army of the French crown immediately stopped attacking the castles and marched to meet the English invaders.

Meanwhile, Count Raymond VII fell ill. Maybe the stress of going to war against the King he had sworn solemnly to serve, and his own son-in-law, Alphonse of Poitou, contributed to his illness. Who knows? But Count Raymond's illness progressed to the stage that by March 1242 there were fears for his life. Bed-ridden at Penne d'Agenais, he finally mustered the strength in early April to summon the southern French rebels to his bedside to formulate a plan of attack. It took two months for the attack to be launched, and by that time the Count of La Marche was having second thoughts about the whole caper, and was giving serious consideration to seeking peace terms with King Louis.

Meanwhile, word that the nobility of southern France were about to make a stand against the French crown had fired up the Cathars, and had motivated them to stage an uprising of their own. In May of 1242 an illegitimate relation of Count Raymond, called Raymond of Alfaro, became aware of the itinerary of a pair of Inquisitors, their support staff and servants, who were traveling within the County of Toulouse. Raymond of Alfaro sent word to the Cathar stronghold at Montsegur, and as a result, the commander of Montsegur, Peter Roger of Mirepoix, mustered a group of armed men and left the mountain fortress to ride to the lowlands to confront the Inquisitors and kill them. They rode all the way to Avignonet, some 50 miles away, gathering support as they traveled.

The evening of the 28th of May 1242 saw them hiding outside the city gates. They met up with Raymond of Alfaro and employed the services of a spy, who entered the city and returned to the group with regular reports on the activities and location of the Inquisitors. Reports were received of the comings and goings of people meeting with the Inquisitors, then that the Inquisitors were sitting down to their evening meal, then finally the report they had been waiting for, that the Inquisitors had retired for the night and were safely tucked up in their beds.

Now, there were eleven people in the Inquisitors' party. Only two of the men were actual Inquisitors, those being William Arnold, who we met in last week's episode, and Stephen of St Thibery. With them were two Dominican monks and a Franciscan, an assistant to the Inquisitors, along with his clerk and notary, two servants, and the Prior of the town of Avignonet, who had the misfortune to decide that it might be nice to spend the night with the visiting Dominicans. Arrangements were made to open the town gates to the men from Montsegur, and in they crept into Avignonet. they met up with Raymond of Alfaro and a small group of supporters, who lit torches to light the way to the castle where the Inquisitors and their companions were staying.

Entering the castle, the group were guided to the hall containing the guest quarters. The door to the hall was locked and barred, but the attackers broke through with the assistance of axes. Unsurprisingly, the sound of axes hacking through the barred door woke the Inquisitors and their party, but there was no escape. All eleven were set upon and killed. In his book "Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France" Walter Wakefield lists the plunder that the attackers stole from the dead men, and I quote "garments and bedding; a little money; some books, no doubt Inquisitorial registers which were later sold; a box of ginger and other trifles" end quote.

The booty was divided up amongst the attackers, and they fled from the scene of their crime, taking the horses belonging to the Inquisitorial party on their way out of the castle. They rode back to Montsegur and, according to Walter Wakefield, they rested at a village on their way, where they were applauded by the villagers and given a meal by the local priest.

The murders sent shock waves across Languedoc, and the ripples were felt even in Count Raymond's camp. There were rumors circulating that Count Raymond himself had been behind the attack, or had at least been aware that it was going to occur, but that may not have actually been the case at all. Montsegur was in the County of Foix, outside Count Raymond's direct domains, and it's more than possible that the plot was planned and carried out without Count Raymond's knowledge or approval.

While the murders of the Inquisitors gladdened the hearts of the Cathars and their supporters, its effect on Count Raymond's uprising was actually a negative one. Many people in Languedoc linked the two events, and saw the armed rebellion against the French crown by the southern lords as being supported by a parallel Cathar uprising. This had a negative effect on mainstream support for Count Raymond's stand against the French crown, as many people who would have supported the overthrow of northern French rule in Languedoc did not want to be seen as also supporting heresy. As a result, widespread general support for Count Raymond's stand wavered and began to weaken.

In mid-1242, around a month after the murder of the Inquisitors, Count Raymond led his army down through southern France to Narbonne. The people of Languedoc rallied to his cause, but once again the support was tempered by fear of the Church, and the concern that supporting Count Raymond would be seen as supporting heretics. The Viscount of Narbonne threw his support enthusiastically behind the rebel cause, while the Archbishop of Narbonne and the senior clerics from the town fled to the relative safety of nearby Beziers. The Archbishop then excommunicated Count Raymond, the Viscount of Narbonne, and all the supporters of the rebellion against the French crown. However, if Count Raymond had hoped that his parade across Languedoc would draw the Spanish Kings into the rebellion, he was about to be disappointed.

Back in northern France, the wheels had pretty much fallen off the rebellion wagon. King Louis had defeated King Henry's army in battle on the 20th of July, and one month later, on the 20th of August, the Count of La Marche surrendered. King Louis, then sent the French army under the command of Humbert of Beaujeu southwards to quash the rebellion in Languedoc. Count Raymond desperately tried to spur his allies into action, but the Kings of Aragon, Navarre and Castile, who presumably had been sitting back waiting to see how events played out before committing their armies, suddenly found pressing matters to attend to elsewhere.

Count Raymond struggled on, determined to win his fight against the French crown, but without the support of the English crown, the Spanish Kings or any of the northern French noblemen, the situation was hopeless. In early October, as Count Raymond was battling to eject northern French fighters from Penne d'Agenais, the final blow came. The Count of Foix decided to switch sides, and both the Count of Foix and the Count's army placed themselves at King Louis' disposal.

With his opportunity to eject the northerners from Languedoc once again having slipped through his fingers, Count Raymond was forced to offer his unconditional surrender to the French crown. He traveled to Paris in January 1243 to receive terms from King Louis. Surprisingly, the terms weren't overly harsh, and some historians have speculated that perhaps Blanche of Castile intervened to soften the harsh measures proposed by her son King Louis, possibly to ensure that the County of Toulouse was preserved intact, ready to be inherited by her son Alphonse. What was Raymond required to do as part of the terms of surrender? Well, he agreed that all of his vassals in Languedoc would swear allegiance to King Louis. He gave three castles to the French crown for a period of five years, and once again he promised to destroy the fortifications of his main towns, as he had previously promised in the Paris peace treaty in 1229. He also reiterated his previous promises to rid his lands of heretics. The Viscount of Narbonne made similar promises, as did the other rebellious noblemen.

All of them, that is, except the Count of Foix. The Count of Foix took the unusual step of rendering direct homage to the French crown, effectively breaking the traditional bonds between the Counties of Foix and Toulouse, and setting the County of Foix onto a different trajectory to that of the County of Toulouse. For the remainder of his life, another seven years or so, Count Raymond's relationship with the Count of Foix would be prickly, with border disputes frequently erupting between the two Counties.

The rebellion of 1242 would be Count Raymond's last stand against the French crown. In 1243, with the support of both King Louis and Emperor Frederick II, Count Raymond was absolved of his excommunication and was reconciled once again with Rome. Count Raymond was now firmly under the thumb of both the Church and the French crown. Any hope the Cathars may have had of Count Raymond championing their cause, and forcing the Inquisition out of southern France, vanished along with the failed rebellion.

Join me next week as the Inquisition continues, and as the Cathar cause is dealt a devastating blow at the stronghold of Montsegur in the year 1244. Until next week, bye for now.

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