

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 115.  
The Crusade Against The Cathars.  
The Murder.

Hello again. Last week we saw Count Raymond VI of Toulouse excommunicated by the Papal Legate Peter of Castelnau for failing to agree to expel heretics from his lands. In a stinging letter, Pope Innocent III confirmed Raymond's excommunication. We left the narrative last week with Peter of Castelnau riding to Toulouse in the year 1207, to personally inform Count Raymond exactly what the excommunication meant for him and the people of Toulouse.

The news he had to deliver was this. The excommunication meant that no religious service could be held at any place where Raymond was staying, no noblemen or officials were allowed to meet with Raymond, and no doctors or judges were to offer their services to him. This prohibition extended even to the farrier whose job it was to shoe Raymond's horse. Any individual who failed to comply with these requirements would themselves face excommunication. Even worse, because he had been expelled from the Church, Pope Innocent could now legally invade his lands and replace him with someone more pleasing to the Papacy.

Now, there are differing accounts as to exactly how the meeting between the Count and the Papal Legate played out. Peter of Castelnau no doubt relished being the carrier of bad news, and probably hoped that Raymond would quail beneath the might of the Church and finally take action against the heretics living in his domain. Count Raymond, on the other hand, like many of his Southern French counterparts, didn't take kindly to being told what to do by outsiders, especially those who were doing so under his own roof. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption reports that according to Peter of Castelnau, Count Raymond went so far as to boast that he could find plenty of heretical Bishops to prove the superiority of the Cathar Church over the Roman one. However, many years later, Raymond's friends denied that Raymond was as arrogant at this meeting as made out by Peter, and Raymond's son even went so far as to state that his father was upset by the excommunication, and would approach the closed doors of churches on Sundays to say his prayers. Jonathan Sumption believes that neither of these reports provides the whole picture and that Raymond probably viewed the excommunication as an irritant that he could endure.

Pope Innocent must have also been concerned that the excommunication wouldn't have the effect of bringing Raymond back under the control of the Church, because shortly after the meeting between Raymond and Peter, Pope Innocent wrote another letter to King Philip of France. Penned in November 1207, the letter expressed the Pope's concerns that the excommunication would have no effect on Raymond, and therefore the time had come to, and I quote, "Let the strength of the crown and the misery of war bring them back to the truth", end quote. Put simply, Pope Innocent wanted the King of France to invade Languedoc and take up arms against the heretics. Not only did Pope Innocent offer the lands and holdings of the Count of Toulouse as incentive for the invasion in his letter to King Philip, he went further. Unlike his previous two requests to the French King, this time, Pope Innocent offered the indulgences of the Crusades to all those who took up arms against the heretics.

To ensure that this carrot was dangled in front of as many prospective Crusaders as possible, Pope Innocent ordered copies of the letter to be delivered to noblemen from the north, whose loyalty to the Church he was sure of. These included the Count of Flanders and the Duke of Burgundy, amongst many many others. The Pope also ordered that the contents of the letter be read aloud in the Cathar strongholds of southern France. This last instruction meant that Raymond became aware of the letter and its contents much sooner than its intended recipient, the King of France.

In fact, the letter wouldn't make its way to the royal court in Paris until mid-December. When it finally did reach King Philip, his response will be pretty much the same as to the previous two Papal letters. King John of England looked set to invade France, and there was no way that the armies of the King of France could fight on two fronts at once. Therefore, wrote King Philip, he could only invade southern France if Pope Innocent arranged a truce between the King of France and the King of England. This was an astute move by King Philip, who was placed in an awkward position by Pope Innocent, who had effectively asked him to take up arms against one of his own vassals. King Philip knew, and Pope Innocent knew, that the Pope had no influence whatsoever over King John, and had no hope at all of forcing him to promise not to invade France. Like Count Raymond of Toulouse, King John of England seemed to be unwilling to take orders from the Roman Church, and in fact King John himself will be shortly excommunicated by Pope Innocent for failing to accept Papal instructions on the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. So, in a nutshell, King Philip will decline Pope Innocent's request to lead an invasion of Count Raymond's holdings in southern France.

Count Raymond however, was not to know this. Worried that his dispute with Peter of Castelnau looked like placing his lands and people at risk of military invasion, he threw his hands in the air and decided to agree to Peter of Castelnau's original request, which was that he take action against the heretics within his domain and stop hiring mercenaries. Count Raymond, of course, had no intention of actually complying with this agreement, but he hoped that by caving in and agreeing to the wishes of the Papal Legate he could avert the invasion of his lands. So in December Raymond wrote to Peter, indicating that he would be interested in complying with the original agreement, in exchange for the lifting of the ban of excommunication and the cancellation of any Papal plans to invade Languedoc. So they could discuss the matters further, Count Raymond invited Peter of Castelnau, and another Papal Legate who had recently been appointed, the Bishop of Couserans, to Saint-Gilles, where they could thresh out the details of the proposal.

The Legates arrived at the castle at Saint-Gilles in the second week of January 1208, and on the 13th of January, the three men met to agree upon terms. The meeting was tense and was probably doomed from the start. From Raymond's point of view, he would only agree to an arrangement which gave him enough flexibility to wriggle out of it, because he fully intended to keep using mercenaries, and the idea that he would actually use military force to drive his friends the Cathars out of Languedoc was, to him, absolutely preposterous. Yet he was being forced to agree to do these ridiculous things, otherwise, he believed that the King of France, his own overlord for goodness' sake, would be shortly invading his territory. As an aside, Count Raymond was unaware that a couple of weeks earlier, King Philip had written to Pope innocent, telling him that he wouldn't be marching on Languedoc. Count Raymond was not a fan of the Catholic Church, and in particular was not a fan of Peter of Castelnau, yet here he was, meeting with the Papal Legate in the seat of his family's ancient lands, in a castle he built contrary to Papal instructions, and he was going to have to agree to do something that he didn't want to do, otherwise these

obnoxious upstarts would put his entire County at risk of invasion. To say that Count Raymond was angry, resentful and defiant at this meeting is an understatement.

From Peter of Castelnau's point of view, he was there to make sure that any agreement reached was one that Raymond could not wriggle out of. Raymond had made a fool of Peter of Castelnau once before, by agreeing to terms and then ignoring them, and Peter was there to ensure that that didn't happen again. With his legal background, the Papal Legate was not going to let Raymond get away with anything other than a water-tight agreement which absolutely ensured that, this time, he would actually carry out the instruction to rid his lands of the Cathar heresy.

It's safe to say that the meeting did not go well. Count Raymond could be absolutely charming, but he also had the temper of a passionate man. Raymond would acquiesce and look like he was going to agree to something concrete, but just when the Papal Legate thought that he had the Count cornered, Raymond would lose his temper, yell, say a few unpleasant things and then back out of the agreement. By most reports, the meeting became pretty heated at times. Towards the end of the day, when things looked like they might really get out of hand, both the Abbot of the nearby Abbey of Saint-Gilles and some noblemen from the town of Saint-Gilles tried unsuccessfully to intervene and calm things down. But things didn't calm down.

Count Raymond knew that he had to come to some sort of agreement, but as the day wore on, the thought of agreeing to anything proposed by Peter of Castelnau just turned his stomach. As night began to fall, Peter of Castelnau came to the conclusion that relations between the two men had deteriorated to such an extent that no agreement of any substance was going to be reached.

Now, considering that we all know that Peter of Castelnau is about to be murdered, there are a few things that we should note, as day is turning to night on the evening of the 13th of January 1208. The first point is that by this stage in the proceedings, the Papal Legate Peter of Castelnau feels that he is under some sort of physical threat. Night is falling, and it's the middle of winter, yet Peter decides to leave not only the Castle of Saint-Gilles, where no doubt he was expected to stay the night, but the entire town of Saint-Gilles. Not only this, but the Abbot of Saint-Gilles has provided the Papal Legate with an armed escort. Whether this was requested by Peter or whether the Abbot provided them at his own instigation is not clear. According to most accounts, Raymond demanded that the Papal Legate remain at Saint-Gilles, because, to him, he needs to conclude this agreement, because otherwise he believes his family holdings are at risk. Peter though, seems to have made up his mind that he will not spend another minute under Raymond's roof or in Raymond's town, and instead will head out into the night and make straight for Rome to report back to Pope Innocent. And, of course, everyone knew that the report was not going to be saying anything nice at all about Count Raymond VI of Toulouse.

Now, at this point, most historians agree that Raymond made a comment that was later taken to be a death threat. The comment was to the effect that even if the Papal Legate left, there was no place on land or water where he would not be watched. I'm not convinced that this does amount to a death threat, but it wouldn't have made Peter of Castelnau feel any safer. So Peter of Castelnau and the other Papal Legate head out into the cold, dark night, mount their horses and joined by some bodyguards supplied by the Abbot, ride off towards the Rhone River, which they intended to cross the next day.

The next morning found the Papal Legates and their retinue camped on the west bank of the River Rhone around ten miles from Saint-Gilles. They then rode to a particular section of the river serviced by a ferry. While they were waiting to cross, an unknown horseman rode into their midst and thrust a sword into Peter of Castelnau's back. He died of his wounds soon after.

Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, was the chief suspect behind the murder. Not only had he argued with Peter for most of the previous day and made a comment to him that could possibly be construed as threatening, most importantly, the man who had actually wielded the sword which killed the legate, was one of Count Raymond's servants. In his "Historia Albigensis", Peter the Monk, who refers to Peter of Castelnau as an innocent soldier of Christ and to Count Raymond as a minister of the devil, accused Raymond of orchestrating the murder, and of dispatching accomplices to ambush the papal legate at the river crossing with the intent that he be killed. Current historians, however, suggest that the incident was more in the manner of the murder of Thomas Becket, which had occurred a few decades earlier in England.

You might recall the death of Thomas Becket, as it was THE scandal of the scandal-filled reign of King Henry II of England, and quite possibly even THE scandal of the medieval era. Thomas Becket was the archbishop of Canterbury and had quarrelled with King Henry. King Henry allegedly made the throwaway comment "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?", and upon hearing these words, a few particularly enthusiastic Knights in the King's retinue decided to take it upon themselves to fulfill what they believed to be their King's wish. They rode to Canterbury Cathedral, strode into the church and killed the Archbishop at his altar.

Historians believe that a similar situation may have occurred here. Count Raymond may have made a comment to the effect that nothing would please him more than to see Peter of Castelnau meet a quick and sticky end, and upon hearing this one of his servants may have taken it upon himself to carry out what he believed to be his master's wish. Why do historians believe this? Well, because the allegation made by Peter the Monk that Count Raymond had planned and orchestrated the murder of the Papal Legate just doesn't make any sense.

Count Raymond knew that he had to try and appease the Catholic Church. He believed that coming to an agreement with the Papal Legate was the only way that he could save his territory from an invasion by the King of France. Consequently, he had invited a man he despised, Peter of Castelnau, to stay in his castle at Saint-Gilles so that an agreement could be reached. While it was true that Count Raymond had lost his temper repeatedly during the negotiations, it was also true that Raymond knew that an agreement had to be reached. He knew that he had to somehow make peace with the Church, and that was why he was so insistent that Peter of Castelnau remain at Saint-Gilles, instead of wrapping up the meeting early and heading back to Rome. So it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever that Raymond would intentionally burn every single one of his bridges by murdering Peter.

Understandably, though, Pope Innocent didn't accept this line of thought. To Pope Innocent, when he was delivered of the shocking news, Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, harbinger of heretics, builder of fortifications on Church property and hirer of mercenaries, had just added one more title to his list of sins: murderer of the Pope's chosen

representative. Join me next week as we begin to discuss the fallout from the death of Peter of Castelnau. Until next week, bye for now.

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