

History of the Crusades.
Episode 122.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
Viscount Simon de Montfort.

Hello again. Last week we saw the city of Carcassonne fall to the Crusaders, and saw Simon de Montfort elected as the new Lord of Carcassonne.

Simon's new title, one which he created himself, is the rather grand sounding Count of Leicester, Lord of Montfort and Viscount of Beziers and Carcassonne. It all sounds very impressive, but as far as southern France is concerned, what exactly is Simon de Montfort, Count of Leicester, Lord of Montfort and Viscount of Beziers-Carcassonne, lord of? Well, he has the two major towns in the region, Beziers and Carcassonne, under his control. Beziers is a blood-splattered, burnt-out ruin containing no people, and Carcassonne is an intact city containing much booty, but also with a population count of zero. He also controls the abandoned towns on the road between Beziers and Carcassonne.

As to the remainder of his domain, the Viscounty of Beziers and the Viscounty of Carcassonne both contain a mixture of fortified towns and strongholds, some of which are now prepared to eject or kill their Cathars and submit to his rule, and some of which have decided to keep their Cathars and stand defiantly against the new northern French overlord. So I guess Simon de Montfort is going to have to take the Crusader army and systematically subdue every single one of these defiant strongholds in order to secure his position. But there is a major flaw in this plan, that flaw being the fact that the Crusader army is dispersing.

After the fall of Carcassonne the army pretty much slapped itself on the back, congratulated itself on a job well done, then with its sins cleansed and its soul saved, it started thinking about the harvest season back home which was just about to get underway. Then it prepared to wave goodbye to Simon de Montfort, wish him all the best, and march back home.†

The first nobleman to decide to leave was the Count of Nevers. Relations between the two original recruits to the Crusading cause, the Duke of Burgundy and the Count of Nevers, had been steadily worsening. They had begun to bicker and argue, and when one of the Duke's proteges, Simon de Montfort, was appointed as the new Lord of Carcassonne and Beziers, that was pretty much the last straw for the Count of Nevers. By this stage the animosity between the Duke and the Count was so intense that Peter the Monk reported that there were concerns that they might actually kill each other. So a couple of days after the fall of Carcassonne, turning a deaf ear to the pleas of both Arnold Amaury and Simon de Montfort, the Count of Nevers departed for home. More than half of the Crusading army left with him. The Duke of Burgundy promised that he would remain in southern France for the next month or so, when he too would follow the Count of Nevers' example and head back home.

So Simon de Montfort was faced with a huge task. In the space of just a few weeks, he had to tour around his new domain with the remainder of the Crusader army and subdue his new territory. Take for a moment a look at your map. For those who are scratching their heads in bewilderment, I'm referring to the map I posted in Episode 110. You can see it on the notes to Episode 110 on the website HistoryoftheCrusades.webs.com. You can see on the map that the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers actually cover a pretty

large area. Simon de Montfort was going to have to try to personally ride from town to fortified town across this vast region, and get as many of the towns to swear allegiance to him as possible, before the Duke of Burgundy and all his men returned to northern France.

It was a big job, so Simon got straight to work. The reaction of the townsfolk to the military advances of their new northern French overlord varied from town to town. Some towns who didn't want to submit to his rule took their Cathars and fled, abandoning their town and in some cases even burning it to the ground. Others threw their arms into the air and submitted, for various reasons: some because they wanted to avoid a Beziers-like situation, and others because they thought being ruled by Simon de Montfort might not be such a bad thing.

One such place was the town of Saverdun, in the county of Foix. Apparently the Count of Foix was not at all popular with his subjects, and many towns in the county were happy to swap him for Simon de Montfort. The people of Saverdun and their Abbot disliked the Count of Foix so intensely that they actually welcomed Simon de Montfort and his army as liberators. The Count himself ended up surrendering to Simon after most of his army abandoned him. Simon was busy besieging a castle at the time, but he accepted the Count's surrender and took one of the Count's sons as a hostage to ensure his ongoing loyalty.

And so the weeks passed, with Simon and the remnants of the Crusader army touring the countryside, occupying abandoned towns, accepting the surrender of others, overseeing the burning of heretics, and generally making the most of the might of the army to intimidate his new domain into submission. Of course, there were always going to be some places which would stand defiant and refuse to accept Simon as their overlord. One such place was Cabaret. You might remember the Lord of Cabaret, assisting Raymond Roger Trencavel during the siege of Carcassonne. Well, when the city surrendered, the Lord of Cabaret was allowed to leave, like everyone else in his undergarments. He returned to his holdings, along with members of the garrison from Carcassonne who, having lost their clothes, weapons and possessions, were keen to seek some revenge for their humiliation. What were the holdings that the Lord of Cabaret was returning to? Well, his lands were in an isolated, nearly inaccessible part of the Viscounty of Carcassonne, to the north of the city of Carcassonne. He controlled three castles, perched high on rocky outcrops in the formidable-sounding Black Mountains. Dotted with ravines, cliffs, and other natural barriers, the castles themselves could only be accessed by narrow, slippery, winding paths. Simon de Montfort did take a large portion of the army to the Black Mountains, intending to attack and subdue the castles of Cabaret, but apparently he got within one league of the fortifications, realised that they would be almost impervious to an assault, and left them alone.

Now, as the new Viscount of Carcassonne and Beziers is busy slashing and burning his way through his new territory, the question we all need to ask is: What does King Peter II of Aragon think about all of this? After all, Raymond Roger Trencavel was King Peter's vassal. With Raymond Roger languishing in the dungeons of his citadel, and the newly appointed Viscount of Carcassonne and Beziers throwing his weight around in the strategically important region with his northern French Crusade army, what is on the King of Aragon's mind? Well, in a nutshell, King Peter is not a happy man. His worst-case scenario has come to pass. A northern Frenchman with no ties to Spain is now ruling the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers, the lands that King Peter wants under his control because they connect his Kingdom in Spain with his land holdings in Montpellier and

Provence. His young vassal, Raymond Roger Trencavel, of whom King Peter is rather fond despite his shortcomings regarding heretics, is no doubt wishing from his dungeon that the King of Aragon would invade Carcassonne, rescue him from incarceration, and reinstate him as Viscount. But King Peter can't do this, because he is a vassal of Pope Innocent III, and doesn't want to upset relations with the Pope. He is also having marriage difficulties and is hoping that the Pope will grant a dissolution of his marriage to Maria of Montpellier, all the more reason why he needs to ensure that he doesn't incur any Papal displeasure. So there's really not much he can do. He does refuse to accept Simon de Montfort as his vassal, a political rather than a military way of indicating his unhappiness at the turn of events, and it is likely that he flagged the issue with Pope Innocent, as in September 1209, Pope Innocent wrote to the Archbishop of Narbonne and the Bishop of Barcelona, giving them both permission to excommunicate anyone who took any land belonging to the King of Aragon. Other than these small measures, King Peter's hands were effectively tied. All that he could do was to keep an eye on resistance to Simon de Montfort's rule, which was mainly coming from Cabaret, as well as from the Lord's of other isolated and well fortified strongholds -mainly those in Minerve, Termes, and Lavour and keep an open line of communication with his brother in law, Count Raymond VI of Toulouse.

Talking of Count Raymond, what is he up to at the moment? Well, he's making his way back to the familiar surroundings of his citadel at Toulouse. He may harbor some concerns about his new neighbor, Simon de Montfort, as on his way home he took advantage of the legal immunity he enjoyed as a Crusader to destroy several fortifications in the border region between the Viscounty of Carcassonne and the County of Toulouse, shoring up his defenses in case relations between the two regions soured. Then the Count of Toulouse made his way home to Toulouse, where he no doubt congratulated himself both on the downfall of the Trencavels and the fact that he himself had managed to dodge a pretty big bullet, or to use a more appropriate analogy for the times, a pretty big arrow.

Right, well, now it is late September 1209. Summer has ended, the weather is cooling, and harvest season is about to get into full swing in northern France. Yes, you guessed it, it's time for the Duke of Burgundy to head on home. Leaving with him was pretty much the rest of the army. Simon de Montfort was left with a laughably small force with which to defend his new territory, perhaps between fourteen and thirty knights and some paid soldiers, no more than a few hundred men all up. To make matters worse, the knights who remained behind with Simon weren't seasoned, experienced, and respected warriors. Far from it. They were the youngest sons, the disappointments to their parents, the dispossessed, the landless, and the ones who never really found their calling back home. Basically, they were the knights who had nothing to lose by staying in the south of France and seeing how things panned out.

This of course, was a far from ideal situation from Simon's point of view. The reality he faced was: not only didn't he have enough soldiers to subdue strongholds like Cabaret, which was still defying his rule, he didn't even have enough men to consolidate the territory that he did hold, and the danger was that towns and strongholds which had recently pledged a loyalty to him may very well change their minds and rebel, now that the army had departed.

So what did Simon de Montfort do? He wrote to Pope Innocent, introducing himself and pointing out the dire circumstances in which he found himself, and then requesting men, arms, and money. Simon fully expected the Pope to be sympathetic to his plight and to

promise to provide whatever assistance he could. The trouble was, without the support of one of the region's powerful secular rulers, such as King Philip of France, the support the Papacy could provide was always going to be unreliable and sporadic, dependent on raising taxes to fund the Crusade, and on pious knights and foot soldiers volunteering for duty. So Simon de Montfort knuckled down and tried to make the best of what he had, sending some of the more competent knights to strategic hot-spots such as Beziers and Limoges with a small garrison, to ensure that those areas at least remained in his hands. No doubt, Simon de Montfort's main concern at this stage was that a general uprising would occur, one that his tiny army would be powerless to stop, and that the true Viscount of Carcassonne and Beziers, Raymond Roger Trencavel, would be freed from his prison and restored to power. In fact, while Raymond Roger remained alive, there was always the danger that his former subjects would rally to his cause.

This problem was neatly solved on the 10th of November 1209, when Raymond Roger suddenly died in his prison. The official cause of death was dysentery, and indeed, in the unsanitary conditions of a medieval dungeon, it wasn't at all uncommon for prisoners to die of dysentery. Many people at the time however, and many people today, suspected foul play. Raymond Roger's death was just a little bit too convenient, and it would be a simple matter to order the Viscount to be poisoned or strangled, then declare him to have died of natural causes. Peter the Monk, no doubt aware of the controversy surrounding the death, only rates it a passing mention in his "Historia Albigensis". He merely states, and I quote, "Roger, Viscount of Beziers, who was being held in the palace at Carcassonne, was suddenly taken ill and died." End quote. Perhaps trying to win the hearts and minds of his new subjects, Simon de Montfort went out of his way to give his predecessor a decent send-off. He ordered Raymond Roger's body to be laid out in the cathedral of Carcassonne, and mourners were invited to travel to the city and file past the body of their former Viscount. He also granted a generous payment to Raymond Roger's widow.

Following Raymond Roger's death, Simon received some good news and some bad news. The good news came in the guise of not one but two letters from Pope Innocent. In the first letter, dated the 11th of November, Pope Innocent responded to Simon's letter expressing pleasure in the fact that Simon was now Viscount of both Carcassonne and Beziers, and advising him that he would write to the Kings of Europe requesting their immediate assistance. The second letter was dated the day after the first letter, and contained the formal Papal acknowledgment and confirmation of Simon as the Viscount of both Carcassonne and Beziers. Having now obtained the Pope's blessing and acceptance of his new position, Simon only really needed the acknowledgment and acceptance of his feudal overlord, King Peter II of Aragon, to complete his ascension to the Viscounties. In late November, King Peter agreed to meet with Simon on neutral ground in Narbonne to further discuss the matter.

And now for the bad news. As word spread around Simon's newly-won lands of the departure of the Crusader army, and of the minuscule number of knights and soldiers now left to support Simon de Montfort, lords and knights throughout the Viscounties, who had recently pledged their loyalty and support, began quietly, and not-so-quietly, withdrawing that support. So, as the winter of 1209 approached, Simon de Montfort was left wondering how on earth he was going to hold on to his newly-won Viscounties.

Things were also about to take a turn for the worse for Count Raymond VI. His period of self-congratulatory post-Crusade relaxation in Toulouse is about to be rudely interrupted

by a surprise visit from the Papal Legates. Join me next week as we see how things pan out for both Simon de Montfort and Count Raymond. Until next week, bye for now.

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