

History of the Crusades.
Episode 149.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
To the end of the year 1213.

Hello again. Last week we took a look at the immediate consequences of the rebel defeat at the Battle of Muret. At the end of last week's episode, Simon de Montfort was in Carcassonne planning a winter campaign, and the rebels were holed up inside the city of Toulouse.

Understandably, at this time the rebel cause was looking a little desperate. They had lost their one hope of victory in King Peter II of Aragon, and their priority in the aftermath of Muret was to find a replacement for him. It occurred to the rebel leaders that the obvious replacement for the crown of Aragon was the crown of England.

King John of England had promised to come to their assistance with his army earlier in the year, but had been prevented from doing so by "unfavourable winds". That was in high summer, and everyone knows that the winds are fickle in summer. Really, it was no wonder that the English fleet couldn't set sail. Well, now it is autumn and the equinoctial gales were starting to blow. Surely, with those winds behind them, the English ships, full of eager English knights, could head to southern France and help them defeat Simon de Montfort. It sounded like a fine plan.

King John's former brother in law, Count Raymond VI, and his son, were delegated with the task of traveling to England to meet with King John to seek his assistance. Of course, what Count Raymond wasn't to know was that when King John stated that he couldn't set sail for France due to "unfavourable winds", what he was actually saying was "I can't set sail and come to your aid because I'm almost universally loathed by my subjects, and when I ordered the knights of my realm to muster and board ships to sail to France to help you out, no one came." That's much more wordy and awkward than the "unfavorable winds" excuse, no wonder he didn't use it. Anyway, with no small amount of difficulty, Count Raymond and his son traveled to England and met with King John.

Unfortunately, there's no record of their conversation, but it would have been an interesting one. Despite his embarrassing problem with the knights of his realm, King John was still keen to help out the rebel cause in whatever way he could. To that end, he agreed to loan Count Raymond the staggering sum of 10,000 marks, which was the equivalent to one fifth of the annual income from his Kingdom. I'm sure the good people of England were absolutely thrilled to see King John dispensing their hard-earned taxation dollars to obscure foreign causes, when there was so much hardship and misery occurring in England. Chalk up another unpopular decision to King John. Count Raymond and his son arrived in England in December 1213, and they stayed at King John's court until they were forcibly ejected from the country by the English Papal Legate.

Talking of Papal Legates, Pope Innocent back in Rome is formulating a plan to curb Simon de Montfort's territorial ambitions in Languedoc. His decision to withdraw the indulgences for Crusading service in southern France hasn't had the desired effect. The Crusade hasn't wound up and petered out to nothing. Instead, Simon de Montfort has just scored a major military victory and killed a vassal of the Church, King Peter II of Aragon, in the process. The concerns Pope Innocent held about Arnold Amaury's worldly ambitions, which resulted in him writing a stinging letter to him back in January 1213, probably persisted as

well. So it was time for Pope Innocent to appoint a new Papal Legate for the Languedoc region, one who wouldn't join Team Montfort for as readily as the previous Legates, and one who would have the interests of Rome at the forefront of his mind at all times.

And what was the primary interest of Rome? Well basically, Pope Innocent just wanted this whole Crusade against the Cathar saga wrapped up as quickly as possible, with no more deaths, no more destruction, and particularly no more killing on the battlefield of heroic Catholic kings. Unsurprisingly, in his choice for the new Legate, Pope Innocent didn't choose a cleric from southern France. Instead, he chose someone very much like himself, an Italian lawyer who had risen through the Church hierarchy to become a cardinal, a man called Peter Benevento. Peter Benevento was Pope Innocent's "Mini-Me", a lesser version of the Pontiff who, despite his lack of political experience, could be set loose upon the traumatized region of Languedoc to place things into a holding pattern, until the fate of it and its people could be determined by an ecumenical council, which Pope Innocent hoped to convene the following year. Peter Benevento was given instructions to reverse the mass-excommunication made by the senior clergy traveling with Simon's army. Just prior to the Battle of Muret they had excommunicated Count Raymond VI and his son, the Count of Foix and his son, the Count of Comminges and every single person fighting for the rebel army. Peter Benevento was ordered to absolve all these people of their sins, along with the citizens of the city of Toulouse. The rebel stronghold of the city of Toulouse itself was to be placed under the protection of the Holy See, and in no way was it to be attacked or besieged by Simon de Montfort. In a nutshell, Peter Benevento was given instructions to calm things down and preserve the status quo, until the ecumenical council could meet to determine Languedoc's future. Well, Peter Benevento is going to have his work cut out for him as Simon de Montfort has other plans.

Simon de Montfort's overall plan for Languedoc hasn't changed. He wanted to defeat the remaining strongholds, in particular the cities of Toulouse and Montauban, and become the ruler of the northern-French-flavored, pious, heretic-free southern France. But he didn't have enough men to mount an attack on Montauban or Toulouse. In fact, with Pope Innocent's retraction of the Crusade indulgences for military service in southern France, he barely had enough men to maintain control over the areas he had already conquered. Because, let's be clear about this, despite his victory at Muret, southern France was not lying down submissively at his feet. He may have his foot on the throat of southern France, but Simon knows that as soon as he removes his foot, southern France is going to get up, brush itself off, yell at him in Occitan, make a couple of rude gestures, then go off to the tavern to listen to some troubadours singing about how great it is that heretics, Jews, and Catholics can all live together under the olive trees and grape vines in sunny southern France.

So Simon has to keep his foot on the throat of southern France. How is he going to do this? Well, ideally, it means garrisoning every town and stronghold in Languedoc with a group of loyal northern French knights who can keep an eye on things on Simon's behalf, and prevent any rebellions or insurrections from occurring. Trouble is, because of Pope Innocent, Simon doesn't have enough northern Frenchmen at his disposal to do this. How does Simon get around this problem? Well, he comes up with an extremely clever, and rather ironic, plan. To keep the rebellious southern French locals in their place. He's not only going to use northern French soldiers, he's going to use the Bishops of the Catholic Church. This really was an exceptionally clever move.

Back in the year 1211, when Pope Innocent was firmly on the side of Team Montfort, he had conducted an overhaul of the senior local clergy in the Languedoc region, retiring or transferring men who seemed sympathetic to the Cathar cause and replacing them with men fiercely loyal to Crusader ideals. Jonathan Sumption, in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", reports that during this purge, the elderly Bishop of Carcassonne, whose relatives had fought on the rebel side against Simon de Montfort at Termes, had been replaced by Peter the Monk's uncle Guy of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, a Cistercian from northern France. The Archbishop of Narbonne had been booted out and replaced by the Papal Legate Arnold Amaury, and another Papal Legate Thedisius had become the Bishop of Agde. This was repeated across the regions of Carcassonne, Beziers, and Albi, until the top positions within the Church were all held by clergy who were solid supporters of Simon de Montfort, solid supporters of the Crusade, and solid persecutors of heretics. So solid was their support that, as we have seen, they frequently accompanied Simon on his military campaigns. At the Battle of Muret no less than seven bishops, three abbots and an archbishop marched on campaign with Simon.

Simon was now going to put that loyalty to good use. The senior clergy across Languedoc were requested to be the eyes and ears of the Crusade, to keep a watch on happenings within their towns, to report any possible insurrections, and to actively persecute Cathars and their supporters. In some cases Simon even went further, actually installing a man of the Church in a castle or fortification as a sort of ecclesiastical garrison. The castle at Severac was turned over to a Bishop following its capture by Crusader forces, and in Beziers Simon restored tithes to the Church by local landowners, who had managed to get away with neglecting to make payments to the Church for the past century or so. So Simon has a diminished army of northern Frenchmen under his command, and he also has a loyal bunch of influential clergymen at his disposal. The interesting question is, since the paths of Simon de Montfort and the Church in Rome are now appearing to diverge, where would the loyalties of the senior clergymen lie? With their Pope, or with the all-conquering soldier of the Church, Simon de Montfort? Only time will tell.

At this point in our narrative, in the time immediately following his success at the Battle of Muret, Simon is keen to maintain the momentum, and subdue as much of Languedoc as he can while the southern French rebels are reeling in shock at the turn of events. His ability to mount a winter campaign was cemented in the weeks following Muret, when a small group of knights and foot soldiers unexpectedly showed up under the command of the Bishop of Arras. In the cooling autumn weather, Simon took the volunteer Crusaders on a raiding mission deep into the County of Foix. While he didn't have enough soldiers under his command to attack any of the impressively fortified mountain strongholds in the region, they did manage to destroy and wreck their way through a number of farms and properties, and reached the high point of their short campaign when, according to Peter the Monk, they managed to set the outer berg of the city of Foix itself on fire. In addition, according to Peter the Monk and I quote, "they rode further into the area and destroyed everything they came across outside that was not protected by fortifications." End quote.

Following this short expedition into Foix, Simon received some disturbing news that, way over in Provence to the east, some of the local nobility was stirring up trouble, acting against orders given by the Church, and trying to prevent Crusader volunteers from northern France and the Rhineland from using the well-worn route down the Rhone Valley to make their way into southern France. The last thing Simon needed was further impediments placed in the way of the trickle of volunteers coming his way, so he decided to take his army of Crusaders and travel east to the city of Narbonne, then make his way

from Narbonne even further east into Provence, where he would teach those pesky nobles a lesson they wouldn't forget. Naturally, he decided to do some raiding and conquering along the way, so it wasn't until late October that he finally appeared at the gates of Narbonne.

Unfortunately for Simon, if he had been expecting the warm welcome due to the victor of Muret, he was about to be disappointed. Why? Well, Because despite the fact that Simon's entourage included Arnold Amaury (the Archbishop of Narbonne) the citizens of Narbonne refused to open the city gates. So Simon de Montfort, along with the Archbishop of Narbonne and the small Crusader army, were forced to spend the night, not in the cozy citadel of Narbonne, but in an orchard outside the city walls. The next stop on their journey eastwards was the town of Beziers. Since Simon de Montfort was Viscount of Beziers he was actually admitted into the city. The next major destination on their trip to Provence was the city of Montpellier, which they reached in early November 1213, two days after leaving Beziers. The citizens of Montpellier followed the example of that set by Narbonne, although according to Peter the Monk, the people of Montpellier were even more hostile towards Simon and his Crusaders than the citizens of Narbonne. Once again, Simon and his army were forced to spend the night out in the open, having been denied entry into the city. The next stop was the city of Nimes. By this time, Simon de Montfort was not a happy man. The citizens of Nimes initially followed the example of Narbonne and Montpellier, and refused to open their gates. However, by this stage Simon had had enough. He lost his temper and, fearing military reprisals against their town, the citizens of Nimes reluctantly allowed Simon and his men into the city.

Simon spent the remainder of the year 1213 policing the County of Provence, bringing rebellious nobles to heel and recruiting sympathetic local lords and knights to the Crusading cause. By this time the volunteer Crusaders under the Bishop of Arras had left, having completed their forty days service, so Simon was forced to rely solely on his small core Crusader army. As the year 1213 draws to a close, Simon is still in Provence and will remain there for the next couple of months.

So 1213 has come to an end, and what a dramatic year it turned out to be. Will 1214 prove to be the same? Well, you'll soon find out. Join me next week as the Crusade against the Cathars enters its sixth year, and we journey into the Year of our Lord 1214. Until next week, bye for now.

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