

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 170.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
The Inquisition, Resistance Rises.

Hello again. Last week we saw resistance commence in Languedoc against the arbitrary, unjust methods used by the Dominican Friars in their inquiries against the heretics of southern France.

In the city of Toulouse in the winter of the year 1234 to 1235 there appears to have been a decline in the number of people being pursued by the Inquisition. However, in Easter 1235 the situation was reversed, when seven heretics were hunted down and discovered in a hideout just outside the city.

Then one of the Inquisitors of Toulouse, a Dominican friar named William Arnold, decided to up the ante. Up until now, virtually all the Toulousans dragged before the Inquisitors had been from the working and artisan classes. In the autumn of 1235 however, William Arnold issued Inquisitorial citations against twelve citizens from a more prominent class. These twelve citizens were in fact, members of the consular families, people related to the powerful group of men who ran the citizen's council of Toulouse. All twelve citizens, confident of the support of the town council, refused to answer the summons directed to them by the friar, and demanded that the citations be dismissed. William Arnold's fellow-friars, however, insisted that he stand firm, and stand firm he did, refusing to withdraw the notices and renewing his demand that the twelve citizens appear before the Inquisitors.

The Council of Toulouse decided that it needed to intervene, and it did so, expelling William Arnold from the city. But William Arnold was not prepared to back down. Basing himself in the city of Carcassonne, he issued even more citations against prominent citizens within the city of Toulouse and, being unable to deliver them himself, he ordered some local clerics to go to Toulouse and serve the notices. The Council of Toulouse expelled the clerics from the city, then ordered a general boycott of the Dominican order. According to a report later sent to Pope Gregory IX, this led to the Bishop's palace within Toulouse being broken into and looted. The Bishop of Toulouse, who was ill at this time with a fever, was forced to vacate the palace and ended up leaving the city altogether. Then the angry citizens turned their wrath upon the monastery of the Dominican Order. The building was surrounded and effectively besieged for three weeks.

These events didn't seem to deter William Arnold. From his base in Carcassonne he once again issued his citations, but this time he ordered that they be personally served not by lowly clerics, but by friars from the Dominican Order. Four friars answered the call and, fearing for their lives, managed to serve all of the summons. Despite their concerns, they didn't encounter any violent resistance to their actions. The worst thing that happened was a scuffle at one of the houses where summons was being served.

While the friars survived the experience, it was all too much for the members of the Toulousan council, who came to the momentous decision in November of 1235 that the Dominican Friars were no longer welcome in Toulouse, and needed to be ejected from the city. Accompanied by a crowd of supporters, the councilors made their way to the Dominican monastery. The friars had been given ample warning of the expulsion and had managed to remove their personal possessions and items of value from the monastery.

When the councilors came to eject them, they stood firm in refusing the order to vacate, and one by one they were forcibly, but not violently, escorted from the monastery and taken across the bridge into the suburb of Saint-Cyprien, where they were released. Only one frail elderly and seven sick friars were allowed to remain with the in the monastery with a carer to attend to their needs, but even they were expelled a few days later. The friars found places within the Orders established in other towns, and their monastery within Toulouse lay vacant.

Was Friar William Arnold happy about this turn of events? No, he was not. He excommunicated Count Raymond VII and all the members of the Council of Toulouse, while the Bishop of Toulouse and the exiled Prior of the Dominican monastery wrote letters of complaint to Pope Gregory. Pope Gregory responded by ordering Count Raymond to let the Dominican friars return to their monastery in Toulouse.

Now, both Count Raymond and Pope Gregory were in tricky positions here. Count Raymond had been content to turn a blind eye when the Inquisition focused on the working people of Toulouse, but now that influential families were being targeted, his hand was forced. He was pretty much facing the same dilemma as that faced by his father before him. He knew quite well, that many influential citizens within the city of Toulouse and within the County of Toulouse were Cathars, but he bore no ill will towards them and had no burning desire to see them identified as heretics and punished. However, he also needed to keep the two most powerful players in southern France, the Church and the French crown, on side. Taking on the Catholic Church hadn't gone so well for Raymond Senior, and Raymond VII was keen to do his best to protect influential Cathars within his County, without directly confronting the Church or the French King.

Pope Gregory too was walking a bit of a tightrope. Emperor Frederick II was getting a bit big for his boots, and there was a chance that he would actually begin to threaten Papal possessions in Italy. So due to the geopolitical situation he was faced with, Pope Gregory needed as many powerful allies as he could muster, and Count Raymond still had a goodly portion of southern France under his control. Plus, importantly, he still exerted some influence in Provence, in lands which were part of Frederick's Holy Roman Empire. So Pope Gregory needed to keep Count Raymond on side. But he also couldn't let Count Raymond be seen to be overruling or dictating the operations of the Dominican Friars in Languedoc, friars which Pope Gregory himself had appointed to hunt down and punish the Cathar heretics. So Pope Gregory made the seemingly reasonable request that Count Raymond let the friars of Toulouse return to their monastery.

In response to the request, Raymond ducked and weaved around the matter, and it was many months before he finally allowed the Dominicans to return. In his book "Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France", Walter Wakefield suggests that Pope Gregory may have had a quiet word to the friars, asking them to tread a little more softly in Toulouse.

However, just when Raymond was content that things were quietening down and that perhaps even the Inquisition in Toulouse was on the verge of being suspended, an event occurred which was a huge bonus for the Inquisition, and a huge letdown for the Toulousans. A resident of Toulouse named Raymond Gros, who had been a faithful Cathar for more than two decades, decided for reasons only known to himself, to voluntarily renounce his faith.

Now, Raymond was a well known and influential figure in Cathar circles, and rumor had it that not only was he prepared to point the finger at himself as a heretic, but he was intending to reveal the identity of other heretics to the Inquisitors. As Raymond was on familiar terms with just about every single Cathar within the city of Toulouse, this sent shock-waves around the town. The penalties meted out by the Inquisition to those who volunteered to renounce their faith were much more lenient than those who were announced as heretics by a witness. So the rumor that Raymond was about to let slip the identities of most, if not all, of the Cathars within the city of Toulouse led to a floodgate of voluntary renunciations by townsfolk, across all classes. The friars must have been rubbing their hands together in delight. According to the chronicle of an Inquisitor at this time, nearly as many deceased heretics as living heretics had their identities revealed, with the result that grave diggers were kept busy, digging up bodies from cemeteries and parading them through the streets before being consigned to the flames.

While this was all taking place, Count Raymond decided to write a letter of complaint to Pope Gregory. In the summer of 1237 his envoys delivered the letter to Rome. The letter outlined Raymond's grievances against the Inquisition and included a list of requests. The list of requests included such items as a request that the excommunication of both Count Raymond and the councilors of Toulouse be lifted, that the body of his father, Count Raymond VI, be allowed to be buried in consecrated ground, and that the inquiries by the Church into matters of heresy be taken out of the hands of the Dominican Friars and placed instead back under the control of the Bishops. Again, keen to keep the Count of Toulouse on side but not to allow him to dictate matters about heresy to the Church, Pope Gregory agreed to lift the excommunications and hinted that perhaps the methods of the Inquisitors might be softened a little. However, he refused to allow Raymond senior's body to be accorded a Christian burial, and also refused to take the Inquisition out of the hands of the Dominicans.

As the year ticked over into 1238 however, it seems that Pope Gregory's need to appease Count Raymond and keep him on side as a possible ally against the territorial ambitions of Emperor Frederick II triumphed over his desire to eliminate heresy from Toulouse, because in May 1238 Pope Gregory suspended the operation of the Inquisition in Toulouse. The suspension was intended to operate for a limited period of three months, just until Pope Gregory's newly-appointed Legate could make his way to Languedoc. However, the Legate was delayed, with the result that the suspension of the Inquisition was extended for a period of three years.

But if you think that means we're in for a boring three years, you would be wrong. Why? Well, firstly because the Inquisition is still under way in the rest of Languedoc, and secondly because the disinherited son of Raymond Roger Trencavel is about to invade southern France with the armies of the Kingdom of Aragon, in an attempt to win back the Viscounty of Carcassonne.

Now, you might remember that young Raymond Trencavel was only two years old when his father, Raymond Roger Trencavel, died in the dungeons of the citadel at Carcassonne. The vast lands of the Trencavel family, which included the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers, were then claimed by Simon de Montfort. The teenage Raymond Trencavel was briefly restored to his ancestral lands in 1224, only to have them absorbed into the French crown after the region was conquered by King Louis VIII in 1226. Now the Trencavel family had traditionally enjoyed close ties to their overlord, the King of Aragon,

and when young Raymond reached his majority he served in the army of Aragon, fighting under the command of King James against the Muslims of Andalusia.

In August of 1240 Raymond Trencavel gathered together some loyal knights and a bunch of mercenaries from Aragon and Catalonia and rode from Aragon into the Viscounty of Carcassonne, reaching the city of Carcassonne on the 7th of September. Now, on their journey through southern France, the invaders sought allies from the local nobility, and there were plenty of southern French noblemen and knights who were keen to fight the northern French in the name of the son of the much loved martyr to the Cathar cause, Raymond Roger Trencavel. As a consequence, by the time the Trencavel army reached the city of Carcassonne, it contained around 200 knights, many of them aging rebels who had previously fought against the Crusaders.

Supporters of the French crown in Carcassonne raced to the city to oppose the invasion, and the French seneschal in Carcassonne wrote an urgent letter to Count Raymond VII, telling him about the invasion and ordering him to come to the assistance of the city. Count Raymond, however, replied that he needed to confer with the councilors of Toulouse before he could obey the summons. It turns out that Count Raymond's consultation process with the councilors was pretty thorough and lengthy, and it didn't end up concluding until the fighting was over, meaning that Count Raymond managed to avoid fighting his old allies.

Back at Carcassonne, the sympathetic citizens of the Bourg, an outer fortified suburb of Carcassonne, opened the gates of their suburb to the invaders, who were welcomed with open arms. Not all the inhabitants of the Bourg were happy to see the return of the Trencavels, however. A number of priests trapped in the suburb negotiated to surrender and were granted safe conduct to leave the area. However, the rebels fell upon the priests before they could leave, killing all 33 of them.

While the army had been able to enter the fortified suburb with ease, it was a different story in regard to the actual city of Carcassonne. The city's defenses were as impressive as ever and the city was well provisioned and ready to face a lengthy siege, and a siege was exactly what occurred. The rebels surrounded the city and over the next few weeks attempted repeatedly to enter it by undermining its walls. Every attempt, however, was stymied by the northern French garrison inside Carcassonne, which responded by counter-mining or by erecting barricades to block the progress of the attackers.

By the 11th of October, Raymond Trencavel came to the realization that his plan to take the city of Carcassonne was doomed, and he ordered his men to withdraw. The Trencavel army destroyed a convent and a monastery as they withdrew and many of the residents of the Bourg, not keen to hang around and see what reprisals the northern French seneschal of the city would subject them to for opening the gates to the invaders, decided to accompany Raymond Trencavel's army as it departed. Most of the core of the army withdrew to the town of Montreal, where they in turn found themselves besieged by an army loyal to the French crown.

By this time, with Count Raymond of Toulouse's extensive meetings with his councilors having come to an end, he, along with the Count of Foix, intervened on behalf of Raymond Trencavel, and in the end he was granted permission to withdraw with his army back to Catalonia.

What became of Raymond Trencavel? Well, some six years after this event, following a lengthy period of negotiation, he agreed to submit to the French crown, and was granted, as a reward, a modest landholding in the Rhone Valley near Beaucaire. He was made to parade through the Trencavel ancestral lands in the former Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers on his way to Beaucaire, publicly indicating to the residents of the region that the Trencavel family were renouncing their claims to their former lands. He joined the Egyptian Crusade of King Louis IX two years later, and when he returned from the Middle East, he left Beaucaire and moved back to Languedoc. He died some 20 years later, and his only son, known as Roger of Beziers, appears to have been completely loyal to the French crown.

Reprisals by the French crown following Raymond Trencavel's failed invasion of 1240 were swift and brutal. Montreal, which had housed the rebel army after its failure to take Carcassonne, was ransacked, as was the town of Montolieu, which had hosted the army on its way to Carcassonne. The suburb of the Bourg was destroyed by men loyal to the French crown, and its inhabitants were not allowed to return for seven years, at which time they were allowed to construct a new suburb for themselves only after they had paid fines covering damage done to Church property in the original suburb. Knights and rebel fighters who had failed to flee to Montreal with Raymond Trencavel's forces were captured, and were either executed or consigned to the dungeons of the citadel in Carcassonne.

So is this the last major resistance against the French crown in Languedoc? No, of course it isn't. Join me next week as Count Raymond VII makes one last stand against the occupiers. Until next week, bye for now.

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