

History of the Crusades.
Episode 124.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
Atrocities.

Hello again. In the last episode we saw Simon de Montfort, Arnold Amaury, and Count Raymond VI of Toulouse all undergo reversals of fortune. Simon began to see his newly-won territory slip through his fingers as his subjects began to rebel against him following the departure of the Crusader army. Count Raymond found himself unexpectedly in favor with Pope Innocent, who revoked his excommunication and went on to place some surprise limitations on the powers of his Legate Arnold Amaury.

So we left the last episode in January 1210, with Count Raymond leaving Rome, having secured an unexpected victory against his nemesis, Arnold Amaury. We left Simon de Montfort in late November 1209. Simon had failed in his bid to be accepted as the legitimate Viscount of Carcassonne and Beziers by King Peter II of Aragon, and had lost four of his knights to rebellions within his territory. At the end of the last episode, Simon had attempted to mollify a rebellious lord, Giraud of Pepieux by burying alive a Crusader who had allegedly killed Giraud's uncle.

Hoping that this would satisfy Giraud and keep him within the fold, Simon moved onto suppressing rebellions elsewhere. However, the move didn't satisfy Giraud. Instead of returning to his castle near Carcassonne and remaining a loyal subject of his new northern French overlord, Giraud gathered together some other disloyal knights and rode to the stronghold of Puisserguier, which was around fourteen kilometers west of Beziers. Puisserguier was garrisoned by two knights and fifty sergeants who were loyal to Simon de Montfort. Giraud managed to trick them into letting him through the gates. Once inside, Giraud and his band of knights managed to overpower the garrison, and imprisoned them inside the castle.

As soon as Simon de Montfort heard about this, he raced to Puisserguier, taking with him the Viscount of Narbonne and some fighting men from the city of Narbonne. However, to Simon's horror, as soon as they reached Puisserguier, the Viscount and his men, for reasons which are not at all clear, flatly refused to storm the castle, and departed back to Narbonne. Simon was left with only a handful of knights with which to lay siege to the castle.

Now, as castles go, this wasn't a particularly difficult one to attack. Its fortifications were not particularly strong. It lies on flat ground and would have been easy to surround. Well, it would have been easy to surround had the men from Narbonne stayed around to help. But following their departure, it was clear to Simon that he just didn't have enough manpower to attack the castle. As it was getting late, he and his men left to travel to a nearby town to spend the night. High on the battlements of the castle, Giraud had seen Simon arrive and then leave again. Not realizing that Simon had just been abandoned by the men of Narbonne, Giraud assumed that Simon and his no doubt massive army, which he had kept out of sight, had retired somewhere to rest for the night and would surely attack the castle the next day.

Fully aware of the castle's defensive deficiencies, Giraud decided to flee with his band of rebel knights before Simon could launch his attack. But there was one problem with this plan: he didn't want to leave the two knights and fifty sergeants behind. It had taken Simon

three days to reach the castle, and during that time Giraud hadn't fed any of his prisoners. They were now his sworn enemies, and he didn't want to gift them back to Simon. Perhaps he could take them prisoner? No, that wouldn't work. Giraud wanted to flee as quickly as he could through the darkness to safety, and he couldn't exactly do that with more than fifty prisoners to oversee. So really, the only option would be for the prisoners to conveniently die somehow. Prevented by his conscience from murdering the prisoners outright, Giraud instead took the fifty sergeants and ordered them into the dry ditch surrounding the castle walls. He and his men then proceeded to pelt stones at them, as well as flammable materials such as straw, hoping to either burn them alive or kill them with the stones. Leaving them for dead, Giraud then, burdened only by the two knights who he had taken as prisoner, fled the castle, intending to make for the rebel stronghold of Minerve.

Simon arrived back at the castle early the next morning to find it abandoned. Some, or perhaps even all, of the sergeants had survived their ordeal, probably by pretending to be dead, and were rescued from the ditch. In a rage, Simon burned the castle to the ground, then departed for Giraud's lands near Carcassonne, intending to do similar damage there.

Now, once he was safely at Minerve, Giraud decided to mutilate the two knights and expel them from Minerve. You need a pretty strong stomach to hear exactly what Giraud did to these two men. If you would rather not know the details, then fast forward through the next twenty four seconds of audio. For those who are still listening, Giraud blinded the two knights by gouging out their eyes. He then ordered their lips, noses and ears to be sliced off. The mutilated men were then stripped naked and ejected from the stronghold, and told to find their way back to Simon de Montfort through the freezing weather. One of the knights died through a combination of his injuries and exposure to the weather. The remaining knight was assisted by a kindly peasant who took pity on him and helped him to the city of Carcassonne. Peter the Monk describes this event as a wicked crime, unheard-of cruelty, and goes on to say, and I quote "This was the beginning of sorrows" end quote.

And he's exactly right. The Crusade Against the Cathars didn't end with the dispersal of the Crusading army. No, the war against heresy in southern France is really only just getting started.

The fortunes of war were against Simon de Montfort at the onset of winter in December 1209. In his "Historia Albigensis", Peter the Monk helpfully divides his narrative into paragraphs, each of which has a brief heading. I'll read the headings for the paragraphs covering early December, and they'll give you an idea of what is happening. The first heading is, and I quote "The inhabitants of Castres desert the Count" end quote. That is followed by the paragraph and I quote "The Count loses the Castrum of Lombers" end quote. Then, and I quote "The Count of Foix deserts our Count" end quote, and finally, quote "The Count loses Montreal" end quote.

Basically, by Christmas 1209, most of Simon's newly-won Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers were in revolt. In the space of only a month or so, Simon had lost more than forty castles, villages and strongholds. The only places which Simon could be sure he still held with the cities of Beziers and Carcassonne, the towns of Limoges, Saverdun, and Albi, and a handful of other towns and fortresses. To add insult to injury, in January 1210, Simon would discover the outcome of Count Raymond's surprisingly successful trip to Rome. With the leader of the Crusade, Arnold Amaury, seemingly losing favor with Pope

Innocent, and with his tiny army barely clinging to power in his recently won territories, Simon must have wondered what the new year would bring.

In contrast, the year 1210 had started really well for Count Raymond. Fresh from his successful visit to Rome, Count Raymond headed to northern Italy to pay a visit to Emperor Otto. Now Emperor Otto was Count Raymond's overlord for a handful of territories he held around Provence, which was part of the Holy Roman Empire, and Count Raymond decided to request military assistance from Emperor Otto against Simon de Montfort. No such military assistance was forthcoming, so the still jaunty Count Raymond traveled all the way to Paris to meet with the overlord for the rest of his domain, King Philip of France, asking him if he would like to throw his weight behind a military campaign to oust Simon de Montfort.

Count Raymond's meeting with the French King didn't go as well as he had hoped. The Count of Toulouse had never really mastered the art of diplomacy, and he probably should have realized that King Philip would be quite put out by the fact that Raymond had already met with, and sought assistance from, King Philip's bitter rival Emperor Otto, when really, a good vassal would have approached his main overlord, King Philip, first. So what did Count Raymond get from the French King in response to his request for an alliance against Simon de Montfort? Nothing more than a cold shoulder and some harsh and unpleasant words. Kicking himself both for his diplomatic blunder and the fact that he had wasted two months undertaking a pointless and unpleasant winter journey to Paris, Count Raymond returned to Toulouse.

Simon de Montfort, unsurprisingly, didn't carry out any military campaigns during the winter months of early 1210. Reeling from the setbacks he had encountered in late 1209, with a reduced force holding onto his handful of remaining strongholds, Simon bunkered down while the winter weather raged outside, and did his best to stay positive. Winter always passes, and as the days warmed and spring arrived in southern France in March 1210, so did someone else, someone who Simon was extremely pleased to see: his wife, Alice.

Now, if you are a thirteenth century lord trying to hold on to hostile territory with a ridiculously small army, it would be very helpful to be married to someone like Alice. Alice, it seems, was a very capable and practical woman, and when she arrived in Languedoc, it was at the head of an extremely welcome contingent of northern French knights. Simon, of course, was absolutely thrilled to welcome both Alice and the knights who accompanied her to southern France. He left Carcassonne and met them on the road in a small town twenty one kilometers northwest of Beziers. They traveled together towards Carcassonne, and while they were staying in the town of Capendu, less than sixteen kilometers from Carcassonne, Simon received word that the people of Montlaur, a stronghold less than six kilometers away, had risen up against their northern French-allied garrison, and were besieging them inside the keep of their castle. Leaving Alice in the safety of the castle at Capendu, Simon, his men and his newly arrived contingent of knights went straight to work. They rode to Montlaur, attacked the rebels, overran them and lifted the siege. As punishment, Simon rounded up as many of the rebels as he could lay his hands on and ordered their execution by hanging.

Buoyed by his victory against the rebels, the triumphant Simon and his wife returned to Carcassonne. Bolstered by the knights brought by his wife, Simon was then able to begin a campaign of subjugation. His aim was to base his newly expanded forces at

Carcassonne and to slowly spread out through the countryside, bringing the rebellious citizens to heel.

Now, at this stage of the conflict, the new Viscount of Carcassonne wasn't concerned about winning the hearts and minds of his subjects. No, a brutal suppression of any forms of rebellion and ruthless punishment of any disloyal citizens were the methods chosen by Simon to bring the southern Frenchmen into line. How did he do this? Well before commencing the siege of a rebel stronghold, Simon would ensure that anything of value to the citizens of the stronghold in the surrounding countryside was destroyed. Crops would be burned, fruit and olive trees uprooted, barns, farm houses and stables would be destroyed, as would any improvements made to the land by generations of southern French farmers such as dykes and dams. Once the stronghold was captured, more often than not it was looted, pillaged, burned, and destroyed, with its population fleeing and dispersing. The long-term effects of this type of campaign on the region would be devastating.

Simon's ruthlessness applied not only to the countryside but to the rebels themselves. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than Simon's treatment of the captured garrison in the small stronghold of Bram. The siege of Bram occurred at the beginning of Simon's campaign of subjugation, in March 1210. Bram was only a minor stronghold, and unlike many other castles in the area, it was located on flat ground, and its fortifications were weak. Simon and his newly expanded army laid siege to the castle and managed to take it with relative ease, without even having to resort to the use of siege engines. It was what occurred after the castle was taken, which elevated the punishment of the prisoners at Bram to a position alongside the sack of Beziers in the list of infamous events in the Crusade against the Cathars.

Now, Bram was not only harboring a number of the Cathar Perfect, it also held within its walls a certain priest who had been actively involved in the rebellion of Montreal late in the previous year. To make an example of the priest, Simon had him taken to Carcassonne. Once there, he was publicly defrocked by the Bishop of Carcassonne, before being tied to the tail of a horse and dragged through the city streets. He was then executed. A much worse fate awaited the hundred or so prisoners taken following the siege of Bram. The men refused to surrender, and Simon was intent on making an example of them. Again, the following passage is rather disturbing. If you'd rather not listen, fast forward through the next forty seconds.

Inspired by the atrocious punishment meted out to his two knights by Guiraud of Pepieux, Simon ordered the prisoners' eyes to be gouged out and their noses to be sliced off. However, one man of the one hundred prisoners was only blinded in one eye. That man was ordered to lead the column of blinded and mutilated men to the rebel stronghold of Minerve. Stumbling along the road with their hands on the man in front to guide them, the nightmare line of maimed rebels sent a message to the residents of southern France that they wouldn't be likely to forget in a hurry.

Peter the Monk is concerned that we might judge Simon de Montfort too harshly for this event, or form the impression that he is anything other than a perfect man. In his "Historia Albigensis", he is at pains to point out, and I quote, "The Count never took delight in cruelty or in the torture of his enemies. He was the kindest of men." End quote. Whether or not Simon de Montfort enjoyed mutilating the one hundred men of Bram, the fact remains that it occurred, and it showed Simon's ruthlessness. For Simon de Montfort, being the

Count of the regions of Carcassonne and Beziers, in fact as well as in name, was an end which justified just about any means.

Meanwhile, back in the city of Toulouse, things were getting rather interesting. Shortly after the mutilation of the prisoners took place at Bram, Arnold Amaury arrived in the city of Toulouse to negotiate with the town council, in accordance with the instructions handed down by Pope Innocent, following his meeting with Count Raymond in Rome. Now, over time, the city had become increasingly divided and was almost at the point of descending into a mini civil war. The influential Bishop of Toulouse, a man called Folquet de Marseille, was an avid supporter of Simon de Montfort, and a keen persecutor of heretics. To support his position, the Bishop called his Catholic followers inside Toulouse to arms, forming them into a militia called the White Brotherhood. The members of the White Brotherhood wore robes and crosses and emulated the crusaders. They were even granted the indulgences of the Crusade. In return, they hunted and persecuted heretics, paraded their might around the town and carried out the commands of their Bishop.

Toulouse, of course, was full of free-minded people, and as we've seen before was so independent that it was not even under the control of its Count. It was also home to many Cathars. There were many citizens within Toulouse who vehemently disagreed with the stance taken by the White Brotherhood. Wishing to be able to counter the activity of the Catholic militia, they formed their own armed gang, the Black Brotherhood. With the Black Brotherhood and the White Brotherhood frequently facing off on the streets of Toulouse, and with the conflicts often descending into violent clashes, tensions were high. It was into this volatile mix that Arnold Amaury strode in March 1210.

King Peter II of Aragon, is also about to make an appearance in southern France. With Simon de Montfort's army now making visible progress, pushing back resistance in Languedoc, the leaders of the rebel strongholds are keen to convince King Peter to become their overlord and provide them with military assistance against Simon; whereas other players are keen to use King Peter's influence to broker peace within the region. Will Arnold Amaury make peace with the people of Toulouse, or will he just make things worse? Will King Peter II of Aragon broker peace between the major players of the conflict, or will he just make things worse. Will, Simon continue his military successes? So many questions. To find the answers you need to listen into next week's episode.

Now, before I go this week, I just want to say something off script, for the first time ever. For those of you who don't know, I lost my husband unexpectedly a couple of weeks ago, and I wasn't sure whether I'd be podcasting again, but it turns out that I need podcasting more than podcasting needs me at the moment, so I'm back, and at least for the foreseeable future I will be putting out an episode per week as per normal. To all those people who left comments on the Facebook site or on Twitter, to my fellow history podcasters, to all the people who left donations, and to the people who left some nice comments at the historypodcasters.com network, thank you all so much. It made a huge difference. Yeah, I just wanted to say that. So I'll be seeing you next week. Until next week, bye for now.

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