

History of the Crusades.
Episode 126.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
To Termes.

Hello again. Last week we saw Simon de Montfort score a victory in the form of the surrender of the stronghold of Minerve, which occurred following a prolonged siege. After the intervention of the Papal Legate Arnold Amaury, the terms of the surrender involved the burning alive of 140 Cathar Perfect, all of whom refused to renounce their faith. The execution of the heretics occurred on the 22nd of July 1210, on the feast day of St Mary Magdalene.

Earlier in July, Count Raymond of Toulouse had been summoned to appear before a Church council. Count Raymond had been attempting to appease the two Papal Legates Arnold Amaury and Thedius following his successful expedition to Rome. However, things weren't going as smoothly as he had hoped. Back in May, he had met with Arnold Amaury in Toulouse, and had presented him with the fortified palace at the southern gate of the city, a grand gesture which Raymond hoped would see the two men firmly reconciled. But Count Raymond was about to be disappointed.

Instead of welcoming the Count of Toulouse back into the fold of the Church with open arms, the two Legates met in secret and tried to find a loophole in Pope Innocent's instructions; a loophole which they could use against the Count. They found one. Pope Innocent had decreed that Count Raymond should obey the instructions of the Legates until his formal reconciliation with the Church. Ah-Ha, thought the Legates, Count Raymond's lands were still full of Cathars. He had been instructed many times to clear his lands of heretics, yet this hadn't occurred. Therefore, he must have failed to obey his instructions, meaning that he couldn't be reconciled with the Church. Rubbing their hands together in anticipation, the Legates summoned Raymond to appear before a Church council.

Raymond appeared before the council in good spirits, expecting that the council was meeting to formally welcome him back into the Church. However, both he and his legal advisers were in for a shock. In a carefully rehearsed move, Arnold Amaury rose and addressed the council, magnanimously stating that he had no objections whatsoever to Count Raymond being welcomed back into the church. Thedius, however, then raised his objection. Reading out the relevant passage in the Papal Bull about Raymond needing to obey instructions, no reconciliation could occur, he stated, until the council was satisfied that Count Raymond had obeyed all the instructions previously given by the Church. Thedius then read out the now familiar list of all the things that Raymond needed to do, one of which was to cease using mercenaries.

Now, southern France at this time was clearly in a state of conflict and uncertainty. It was vital that strategically important strongholds across the County of Toulouse were appropriately garrisoned. The only way Count Raymond could do this was to hire soldiers to man the strongholds. Should Raymond be required to dismiss these men, the strongholds would be vulnerable to attack. Count Raymond pleaded with the council and tried to make them see that the viability of his entire County would be a risk should he dismiss the mercenaries. He was so upset at this unexpected turn of events that he broke down and wept openly in front of the council. The council was unmoved and Count Raymond returned to his citadel at Toulouse.

Meanwhile, back in Carcassonne, Simon de Montfort was keen to maintain the momentum from his recent military success. Following the capitulation of Minerve, there were two main rebel strongholds which needed to be subdued: Termes and Cabaret. Simon decided that it was time to force Termes into submission.

The stronghold of Termes was located in the mountains a little over thirty kilometers southeast of Carcassonne. Well, that's thirty kilometers as the crow flies. Actually, by the time you traveled along steep switchback tracks hugging the sides of mountains, and narrow winding mountain roads, you will have traveled at least twice that distance. Even today, it takes around two hours to travel by car from Carcassonne to the ruins of the castle at Termes.

The Lord of Termes at this time was a crusty old warrior, another Raymond - Raymond of Termes. Raymond of Termes was used to fighting his overlords. Over the years as Lord of Termes, he had come into conflict with just about every person in authority of note in the region, from Count Raymond of Toulouse, to the Trencavels, and even King Peter II of Aragon. Raymond of Termes was definitely his own man. He didn't like being told what to do, and he most certainly was not going to submit to Simon de Montfort without a fight. Fully aware that his castle was on Simon's hit list, he had strengthened his garrison with mercenaries, and had stocked the castle with supplies of fresh meat, bacon, wine, water and bread. Then he sat back and waited for Simon to arrive.

Peter the Monk provides a detailed description of Termes in his "Historia Albigensis", and I quote, "The castrum of Termes was in the territory of Narbonne, five leagues from Carcassonne. It was marvelously, indeed unbelievably strong, and in human estimation appeared to be quite impregnable. It was situated on the summit of a very high peak, overlooking a huge natural cliff and surrounded on all sides by very deep and inaccessible ravines, with water flowing through them surrounding the whole castrum. In turn, the ravines were surrounded by huge crags, so difficult to climb down from, that anyone wishing to approach the walls would need first to throw himself into a ravine and then, as it were, crawl back towards heaven. Moreover, a stone's throw from Termes itself, there was a crag on whose summit, there was a small but very strong fortified tower known as Termenet. So situated, Termes could only be approached from one side only, where the rocks were lower and less inaccessible." End quote. In short, Termes was a formidable stronghold, and Simon de Montfort was going to need all the men he could muster to attack it successfully.

Maintaining a trained army of Crusaders was proving a bit of a headache for Simon. Northern French volunteer Crusaders tended only to stay as long as required by the Church to obtain the Crusader indulgence, a period of forty days, after which, with their sins cleansed and their souls saved, they tended to make their way back home. Accordingly, most of the men from the siege of Minerve had already dispersed. In addition, Termes hadn't picked a fight with Narbonne in the manner of the previous rebel stronghold Minerve, so the Viscount of Narbonne hadn't volunteered his army for this siege. That left Simon relying on his own small force of men and own recent arrivals from northern France. One of the recently arrived men reported that a sizable group of Crusaders was making its way south from Brittany, so Simon felt confident that he would have enough men to attempt a siege of Termes. So in late July, he gathered his forces and left Carcassonne to begin the journey to Termes.

He left behind a small group of men to garrison Carcassonne during his absence. One of the jobs these men were given was to load the disassembled siege engines onto transport vehicles in readiness for them to be moved down the road to Termes. Accordingly, the man in charge of the garrison, one William of Contres, directed that the wagons which would carry the engines be lined up on the southern road to the city, outside the city walls near the river. The siege engines would then be loaded onto the wagons in readiness for the journey to Termes, where they would be reassembled and used to attack the stronghold.

Now, at this time, the Lord of Cabaret had a reliable network of spies operating around Carcassonne. The spies had already let him know that Simon and most of the army had headed off to Termes. The spies then let him know that the siege engines to be used against Termes were currently lying in pieces on wagons outside the city walls. Seizing the chance to attack and destroy the vital siege engines, Lord Peter Roger of Cabaret personally led a group of three hundred men out from Cabaret. Riding in the dead of night, under cover of darkness, the Lord of Cabaret hoped to surprise the garrison and destroy the siege engines. Unfortunately, three hundred men on horseback make a fair amount of noise, and the men guarding the wagons were able to send word to William of Contres inside Carcassonne that they were under attack. Peter Roger's men attacked the wagons with axes, doing their best to destroy them, while others tried to set them alight. William of Contres arrived at the scene with eighty men from Carcassonne, intent on driving the attackers away before they could damage the precious siege engines. And it looked like they managed to do just that. After an intense bout of hand to hand fighting, which saw some heavily armored men fall into the river and drown, the men from Cabaret appeared to retreat back into the hills.

But it was a ruse. Lord Peter Roger led his men away from the city and waited until William and his men had retreated back inside the city walls. Then just before dawn, they staged a second raid. This time they managed to get some piles of straw alight before they were discovered. Once again, William of Contres hastily gathered his men and rode out of the city to drive off the attackers. As dawn was breaking, a fight broke out on the banks of the river, and the Lord of Cabaret found himself isolated from his men. Having taken heavy casualties and realizing that their chance of destroying the siege engines had passed, the men from Cabaret made their escape, not realizing that Peter Roger was fighting alone near the river. Thinking quickly, Peter Roger saved himself by pretending he was a Crusader. Holding his sword high in the air and yelling "Montfort" at the top of his voice, he galloped through the garrison after the rebels. The Lord of Cabaret was saved, but so too were the siege engines.

Unaware of all this drama, Simon de Montfort and the Crusader army arrived at Termes in mid-August 1210. Immediately he would have seen the enormity of the task before him. As we saw from Peter the Monk's vivid description of Termes, the fortifications of Termes were rather formidable. Consisting of a main castle built on a solid mountain summit, which, of course, was impossible to undermine, and a separate tower called Termenet, and a fortified suburb to the south, the fortifications were protected on most sides by vertical cliffs. The sole access to the castle was via a single path from the south-east. Unfortunately for Simon when he arrived at Termes, he was not only without his siege engines, which of course, were now somewhere on the road heading towards Termes, he didn't have enough men to surround the castle and besiege it.

It was at Termes that the forty-day Crusader requirement, really first became a problem for Simon. As we have mentioned, if a northern Frenchman decided to head south to assist a Simon in his endeavors, his service qualified as a Crusade so long as he stayed for a minimum of forty days. Of course, in practice, this meant that just when men were getting the hang of the whole Crusader caper, and had some experience under their belt, and were starting to benefit from the training provided to them, they would pack up and leave. This first seemed to be a real problem at the siege of Termes. This has led some historians to speculate that perhaps the Papal Legates established the forty-day rule around this time. Others argue that it had been in place since the beginning of the Crusade. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin speculates that the Crusaders may have taken it upon themselves informally to serve forty days before Termes, but then at Termes the period may have been formalized by the Legates. However it came about, the forty day Crusader requirement was about to become a big headache for Simon.

Another issue which was about to become a headache for Simon, was that of supply. The fortress of Termes was located in inhospitable terrain in the mountains. Even today, no crops grow there. While crusty old Raymond of Termes had ensured that his castle was fully stocked with the food and supplies they would need for a lengthy siege, Simon's men couldn't rely on the surrounding area to supply them with the food they needed. No, they had to transport their food in from farmlands surrounding Carcassonne. This long supply line, stretching back through the mountains all the way to the open country near Carcassonne, was of course vulnerable to attack, and this vulnerability was fully exploited by the Lord of Cabaret, causing Simon's third and final main headache.

The men of Cabaret, of course, were used to mountainous terrain, and knew how to take advantage of the landscape to ambush small groups of Crusaders who had been sent down the road to gather food supplies. Often these unfortunates were mutilated by the men of Cabaret, who blinded them and sliced off their noses and lips before sending them stumbling back into Simon's camp. The isolated fortress of Cabaret had been nursing the men of Bram for the past few months. You'll probably remember from Episode 124 that Simon de Montfort had ordered one hundred or so prisoners following the siege of Bram, to have their eyes gouged out and their noses sliced off, all except for one man who was only blinded in one eye and was tasked with the mission of leading the men to Minerve.

The men were later moved to Cabaret, where they were being cared for. This, of course, put quite a strain on Cabaret's resources. They were already harboring a goodly number of Cathars, who were also non combatants. The hundred men from Bram and the unknown number of Cathars all had to be housed and fed, yet would be of no assistance whatsoever in combat activities. The psychological effect of living with one hundred mutilated ex-soldiers would likely also have had an effect, and perhaps it's understandable, although maybe not excusable, that the men of Cabaret decided to take their revenge by delivering the same fate to the Crusaders they captured.

Added to these woes was the fact that the men from Termes kept taunting the Crusaders about the small size of their army, hurling verbal insults at Simon's men from the safety of their stronghold. So you can say that for Simon de Montfort the attack on Termes had not started well.

Towards the end of August, however, things markedly improved for the Crusaders. The lumbering wagons containing the siege engines arrived at the Crusader camp outside Termes, along with an impressively large contingent of volunteer crusaders from Brittany,

who were keen to start their forty day term of service. The men from Brittany had met up with the men transporting the siege engines on the road, and they had decided to travel together to Termes.

With the arrival of the men from Brittany, Simon finally had enough men to besiege Termes. The stronghold was duly surrounded, and the siege engines were assembled. The siege of Termes had begun. Join me next week to see how the siege pans out. Until next week, bye for now.

End