

History of the Crusades.
Episode 129.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
The Surrender of Cabaret and the Siege of Lavaur.

Hello again. Last week we saw Count Raymond VI of Toulouse part ways with the Church once again. Presented with an astonishingly harsh list of demands by the Papal Legates, and spooked by a terrible omen involving a particular species of bird flying to the left, Count Raymond did not even bother responding to the demands. As a result, he was once again excommunicated from the Church, and his entire domain was placed under interdict.

Now, you may recall that last time this happened, Count Raymond traveled to Rome, met with Pope Innocent, and managed to get the decision reversed. Unfortunately for Raymond, this time around Pope Innocent will confirm Raymond's excommunication without further consultation. Why did Pope Innocent do this? Well because at this point in his Papacy, Pope Innocent was a very busy man. In fact, to say he was busy is an understatement. Emperor Otto, who had been at one time an ally of the Church of Rome, had invaded Papal territory in Italy; King John was causing problems in England; and things weren't looking much better in Portugal. On top of this, two other major Crusades were underway, and they weren't exactly going swimmingly, either. In the Holy Land, Pope Innocent was wrestling with Bohemond of Antioch, who had installed a Greek Orthodox patriarch in his Principality, in defiance of Pope Innocent's wishes, and Pope Innocent's diplomatic overtures to the Armenians had backfired spectacularly, turning even more of the residents of Antioch against Rome. Al-Adil's forces were invading the County of Tripoli, and really things weren't looking so good. In Spain, the scene of the second major Crusade, a new North African invasion was about to take place, threatening the recent conquests of the Castilian crown.

Really, considering everything else which was going on, the excommunication of Count Raymond of Toulouse was not something that Pope Innocent could afford to spend any time on. As Jonathan Sumption stated in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Pope Innocent wearily confirmed Raymond excommunication, and Papal letters of confirmation were issued in Rome on the 17th of April.

Back in southern France, Simon de Montfort hadn't been sitting around idly waiting for Count Raymond's excommunication to be confirmed. No, he had a busy year ahead of him, and he was keen to get started right away. His campaigning season began early, as soon as spring arrived in March 1211. First up on Simon's to-do list was to take the rebel stronghold of Cabaret and its three castles.

Now this, of course, was bad news for Lord Peter Roger of Cabaret. If Cabaret fell to the Crusaders following a lengthy siege like it's two rebel counterparts Minerve and Termes, it was likely that those sheltering inside the castles would receive no mercy from the Crusaders. Not only had Cabaret been a safe haven for Cathars since the beginning of the conflict, it had also been a major thorn in Simon's side. Men from Cabaret had done their best throughout the campaign to disrupt supply lines, attack small groups of Crusaders, destroy siege engines and generally make Simon's life as difficult as possible. If Cabaret fell, Simon would no doubt to seek his revenge on the Cathars inside the stronghold and perhaps even the Catholic residents of Cabaret.

Then there was the little matter of desertions. With the supposedly impregnable strongholds of Minerve and Termes falling to Simon, some members of the garrison at Cabaret was so concerned about the likelihood of it falling to the Crusaders, and the consequences of that for themselves, that they had switched sides and declared their loyalty to Simon. Not only did this mean that the Lord of Cabaret now had fewer men with which to defend his three castles, it also meant that Simon would be privy to insider knowledge, and would be well versed in all the small defensive weaknesses of Cabaret, weaknesses that usually would be kept well hidden from a besieging army. With Simon starting his attack on Cabaret so early in the campaigning season, Lord Peter Roger was forced to face the unpleasant fact that it was highly likely that Simon de Montfort would eventually succeed in his attack.

With this in mind, there was only one thing that Lord Peter Roger could do to save the Cathars sheltering in Cabaret, the residents and garrison of the castles, and the mutilated men of Bram. He had to surrender. The manner in which he chose to surrender shows some ingenuity and creative thinking. Now you might remember back in Episode 123 that one of Simon de Montfort's most trusted knights, a man who also happened to be cousin to Simon's wife Alice, staged a ridiculously ambitious attack on Cabaret back at the start of Simon's military campaign, and was captured. That man was Bouchard of Marly. For the past sixteen months Bouchard has been held prisoner in the dungeons of Cabaret. Now I'm assuming that Lord Peter Roger of Cabaret had met with his prisoner during his lengthy captivity, and had taken a liking to him. If that was the case, it would go some way towards explaining what was about to happen.

Lord Peter Roger visited his prisoner and made him an astonishing offer. He offered to give him the castles of Cabaret. All Peter Roger wanted in return was a small plot of land to which he could retire and call home. Unsurprisingly, the shocked Bouchard of Marly thought that this was an excellent plan. Lord Peter Roger ordered Bouchard to be released from the dungeon and to be given a makeover. His hair and beard were combed and trimmed, and he was bathed in perfumed waters, then dressed in borrowed clothes befitting the new Lord of Cabaret, and, mounted on one of the best horses in the stables, he rode to Carcassonne to present the offer to Simon. While Bouchard was in Carcassonne, no doubt convincing Simon, to the best of his ability, of the brilliance of Lord Peter Roger's offer, and how it would be excellent for Simon if he accepted it, the residents of the three castles had plenty of time to remove themselves and their belongings out of harm's way and to find new places of safety.

To Bouchard's immense relief. Simon accepted the terms. The castles of Cabaret were handed over to Bouchard of Marly, who became Lord Bouchard of Cabaret. And in return, the former Lord of Cabaret, Peter Roger was provided with a harmless, un-walled village to call his very own.

With his campaign schedule now unexpectedly freed up, Simon turned his attention northwards, to the County of Toulouse. With Count Raymond VI's lands under interdict, they were ripe for the taking. Settling eventually on the town of Lavaur, on the borderlands between the territory formerly held by the Trencavels and the County of Toulouse, Simon readied his army to march to the north.

Now, Lavaur wasn't strategically important, although it was on the road to the city of Toulouse, and Simon's choice of it as a target was likely meant to send a signal to Raymond that his lands were under threat. Traditionally, the Lord of Lavaur was vassal to

the Trencavels, but some historians have pointed out that in recent times the city had become closer to the Count of Toulouse, and that perhaps Count Raymond was now overlord of the town. Regardless of who actually was overlord, there was no disputing the fact that Lavaur was around seventy kilometers from Carcassonne, but only thirty-two kilometres from the city of Toulouse. Simon's choice of Lavaur as his next target was definitely intended to send a clear signal to the Count of Toulouse.

Lavaur itself was a safe-haven for Cathars. It was ruled not by a Lord but by a Lady, the widow Giralda of Laurac. Giralda was sister to the powerful Lord Aimeric of Montreal, and their mother, Blanche de Laurac, was an influential and dedicated member of the Cathar faith. Giralda's mother and sisters were all members of the Cathar Perfect. While Giralda herself was not one of the Perfect, she was a Cathar, and her town was considered a place of refuge for heretics fleeing persecution in the counties ruled by Simon. The town of Lavaur itself was well fortified. It was located on the River Agout. The eastern side of the town bordered the river and overlooked the water, protected by a steep drop. The rest of the town was surrounded by thick walls. The walls were so thick, in fact, that a horse could comfortably be ridden along the top of them. The town was garrisoned by eighty knights drawn from the area surrounding the town, and they had assisted Giralda to prepare the fortifications. Around four hundred other men had also volunteered to assist in the defense of the town.

In late March or early April 1211, Simon arrived at Lavaur with a small army. And when I say a small army, I mean a small army. Peter the Monk estimates that initially the garrison of Lavaur, numbering less than 500 men in total, was nearly as large as the besieging force. Of course, with so few men, Simon couldn't hope to surround the town. At this early stage of the siege, he had to content himself with setting up camp on the opposite side of the river to the town, hoping to prevent people leaving the town via well-aimed missile attacks, and attempting to stifle river traffic, particularly boats bringing supplies to the town.

Now, as Simon is settling his small force in for a lengthy siege, we should leave Lavaur for a moment, and see what Count Raymond of Toulouse has been up to. Having fully absorbed the shock of being excommunicated once again, and having his lands placed under interdict once again, Raymond has now come to terms with the fact that Pope Innocent will not be intervening to save him. This means that Raymond has now officially split from both the Church and the Crusaders. This means that Raymond is now part of the rebellion, on the side of the heretics. For some time now, the forces opposing Simon de Montfort's rule have been searching for a leader, someone under whom they can unite and provide a cohesive force to drive out the northern Frenchmen from their lands.

In Count Raymond of Toulouse, they have found such a leader. From his capital Toulouse, Raymond sent appeals for assistance to a number of noblemen of southern France, hoping to find some allies against Simon, and he found some. Arnold Amaury's list of extreme demands had been circulating around Languedoc, and as a result Raymond found himself receiving quite a bit of support. King John of England, who was currently not Pope Innocent's Number One Fan, urged his allies in the region to throw their lot in with his former brother in law, Raymond. Just as an aside, you might remember that Raymond was once married to Joanna, sister of both Richard the Lionheart and King John. The Count of Foix fell into line behind Raymond, and the resistance started to build.

Raymond, however, still exercised little influence over his home city, Toulouse. Just prior to the commencement of the siege at Lavaur, the Bishop of Toulouse, and founder of the

White Brotherhood, Bishop Folquet, ordered the White Brotherhood to march to Lavaur to assist the Crusaders. Count Raymond rode into the place within Toulouse at which the White Brotherhood had been ordered to muster prior to their departure, and ordered them to disband. At the urging of their Bishop, they disobeyed this order, and managed to leave Toulouse via an alternate gate when Raymond's men barred the eastern exit to the city. Bishop Folquet accompanied his men to Lavaur. He wouldn't set foot in the city of Toulouse again for another three years.

Count Raymond was more successful in his attempt to prevent the siege engines and supplies gathered by the Bishop from leaving the city. Having to be content with this small victory, Count Raymond himself left his capital city and traveled to Lavaur. One report has him gifting two horses to two heretics he met on the road to Lavaur. The heretics were then able to travel to the town to assist in its defense.

The siege of Lavaur lasted a hard-fought five weeks. The Crusaders battered the thick walls of the town with catapult machines, and did their best to undermine the defenses. For their part, the townsfolk aimed their single catapult machine at the Crusaders' siege engines, and did their best to repair breaches in the walls as they happened. As the siege dragged on, more and more men arrived at the town to assist the Crusader cause. Eventually, a bridge was built across the river, and the Crusaders were able to travel from Simon's camp to the town, and surrounded completely.

Count Raymond's new allies did their best to prevent reinforcements joining the siege. The Count of Foix and Giraud of Pepieux, together with a large army of supporters, managed to successfully ambush perhaps 1,000 Crusaders from Germany who were intending to join Simon's forces at Lavaur. Deep in the forest of Montgey, the Germans were outnumbered and taken completely by surprise. They were all killed. Following this event, Count Raymond arrived at the siege, and two of his cousins, who were there in support of Simon, tried to convince him to pledge allegiance to the Crusaders. Count Raymond declined the offer and departed for the city of Toulouse shortly after, taking some members of the White Brotherhood back with him.

The siege dragged on. The men of Lavaur managed to capture a Crusader knight, and they executed him. The Crusaders built a cat and filled in part of the ditch surrounding the wall with branches, rocks and other debris, intending to move the cat across the ditch close to the wall. Unbeknown to the Crusaders, there was a tunnel under the walls nearby. The defenders traveled through the tunnel under cover of darkness and removed all the items from the ditch. The following night, they used the tunnel again, emerging this time to burn the cat to the ground. The cat was saved, but the Crusaders seemingly could not prevent the tunnel from being used by the defenders, and every night their carefully filled ditch would be cleared by men from the town.

Then someone came up with a cunning plan. They filled the exit place of the tunnel with flammable items, as well as a goodly amount of green branches, unripe corn, and grass. Then they set it alight. They blocked the top of the fire off with more wood, so the huge amount of smoke generated from the fire had only one place to go: up the tunnel. The defenders were unable to use the smoke-filled passage, and that night the obstacles remained in the ditch. The cat was duly dragged over the ditch and placed against the wall.

The undermining then began. As the men inside the cat worked furiously to breach the wall, the Bishops present led their men in a rousing rendition of the song "Veni Creator Spiritus", perhaps having become a little tired of pumping out the previous anthem to the Crusade, "Veni Sancti Spiritus". According to Peter the Monk, this chant struck fear into the hearts of the defenders and rendered them all but useless.

On the 3rd of May, the Crusaders succeeded in undermining the wall. With the defenses breached, they entered the town, and the slaughter began. Of course, having resisted the Crusaders, and having executed a Crusader knight, the defenders knew that they could expect no mercy from Simon and his men. Still, what occurred was more than a little shocking. Early on in the siege, the Lady of Lavour, Giralda of Laurac, had been joined by her brother Aimeric, Lord of Montreal, who had traveled to Lavour to assist in its defense. It was to Girada and her brother that Simon turned his full vengeance. It was no surprise to anyone when Simon ordered them both to be executed.

It was the manner of their deaths which proved so shocking. As a lord and nobleman, the traditional way of execution for Aimeric would be a beheading. Instead, Simon decided to humiliate the Lord of Montreal by hanging him like a common criminal. Some sturdy gallows were constructed, but they weren't sturdy enough. The gallows broke during the execution, possibly because Lord Aimeric was wearing his armor. A frustrated Simon ordered Aimeric and the eighty knights who had garrisoned the town to be stabbed to death instead. Simon had a special torment in mind for Aimeric's sister Giralda. She was pushed, screaming and weeping into a deep well, and to the shock of many present, Simon's men hurled stones down on her until she died.

Many of the townsfolk of Lavour were killed on the streets of the town. Even priests were slaughtered at the shoulders of their churches. The four hundred or so Cathars sheltering inside Lavour were taken to a nearby meadow, and burned alive. Most of the noblewomen inside the town were allowed to live, and many Catholics were allowed to walk free from the town. Lavour was then plundered and ransacked.

Simon's first incursion into the borderlands, of Toulouse had been successful. Join me next week as the Crusaders push further into the heartland of the County of Toulouse. Until next week, bye for now.

End