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The Song of the Cathar Wars

A History of the Albigensian Crusade

WILLIAM OF TUDELA

and an

ANONYMOUS SUCCESSOR

translated by

JANET SHIRLEY

ASHGATE

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Laisse 205

'We'll go and attack the cat, for that must be done. Together we shall take it, and Toulouse and *paratge* will never be parted again.'

All night long they grew more eager, and as day¹ was breaking Sir Arnold of Villemur, a determined man and fine warrior, went through their quarters and made the best knights, the good companies and brave mercenaries take arms and prepare. They placed crossbows, good handbows, quarrels, arrows and linen-workers' combs² ready for the defence of lists, ditches and platforms. Outside on the left flank Sir Estolt of Linars, careful and thorough, had ladders placed, and garrisoned the approaches, paths, lanes and cross-passages. When they were all assembled, the townsmen and the commanders agreed to capture the cat together.

Advice offered

Sir Bernard of Cazenac, an excellent speaker, laid it all before them, talking like a man of sense:

'My lords, men of Toulouse, those enemies you see there have killed your sons and your brothers and caused you great grief. If you can kill them, it will do you good. I know how these showy Frenchmen behave - they'll wear fine double armour on their bodies, but down below on their legs they'll have nothing on but their hose. Keep hitting hard at the backs of their knees and when the fight is over, they'll be carrion.'

'And they deserve it!' answered the men, and said to each other, 'There are plenty of us here.'

'Plenty at the moment,' said Sir Hugh of La Mota, 'but when it comes to hitting and being hit, it will be more even.'

The attack begins

Out they went down the ladders, deployed onto open ground and occupied the levels, shouting,

'Toulouse! Now the fire's alight! Kill them, kill them, it's the only way!'

The French and the men of Berry received their attack, shouting,

'Montfort! Montfort! Now we'll show up your lies!' Fierce was the struggle wherever they could meet; with swords, lances and sharpened steel they fought and struck on helmets from Bavaria.

Twice Sir Arnold of Lomagne³ cried out to them:

'Strike, sweet comrades, remember freedom! Today sets *paratge* free from the powers of hell!'

'Yes,' they answered him, 'yes, and so it shall!' And the outcry, the din and clash of arms of citizens and men of the Capitol broke out afresh.

Present were: brave and active Sir Raymond of Lasbordes,⁴ Bernard of St Martin, who is swift and alert, fierce William Peter of Montlaur,⁵ Sir Peter of La Isla who can take blows and give them, and Sir Bernard of

1. Dawn on 25 June 1218.

2. The sharp steel teeth of combs used for dressing linen; these were used as arrows.

3. Eldest son of Vézian, viscount of Lomagne (laisse 199).

4. Raymond of Villeneuve of Lasbordes in the Lauragais, whose son Arnold testified in 1243 that his father had sheltered heretics at Lasbordes.

5. Probably a dispossessed lord from the Carcassès.

Comminges, ever fast and keen, with William Bernard of Luzenac,¹ always alert, Sir Gaudin and Sir Ferrando, courageous and agile, Godfrey, Sir Arbois, Sir Henry Campanier² and the men of Toulouse, impatient to come to blows.

'Have at these drunkards!' shouted Sir Raymond Isarn.³ 'To arms, knights, and remember Sir Bernard's advice!' With swords and lances and great stones the struggle began again. The townsmen did very well, they forced their way inside the fences and fought them there, hacking the gold and crystal off their helmets. Under this pressure the crusaders gave way and abandoned the shelters. Once they remounted their chargers, however, the bloodshed began again with such fury that feet, fists and arms flew off and the ground was red with blood and brains. And on the river sergeants and sailors fought. Outside at Montoulieu the engagement was general and Sir Bartas⁴ spurred his charger right up to the approach to the gates.

Count Simon urgently called from mass

At this point a squire came up to the count shouting,

'My lord count de Montfort, you are too slow! This piety is disastrous! The men of Toulouse have killed your knights, your troops and your best mercenaries. William is dead, so are Thomas, Garnier and Sir Simon of Le Caire, Walter is wounded.⁵ Sir Peter of Voisins, Sir Aimery and Sir Rainier⁶ are holding the attack, they're defending the men behind the shields.⁷ If we have to stand this slaughter any longer, you'll never keep the fief!' The count shook and sighed, his face black with grief, and at the moment of the elevation⁸ said,

'Jesus Christ the righteous, now give me death on the field or victory!'

Count Simon leads his charge

Immediately after this he ordered all his troops, his mercenaries and the barons of France to assemble with their Arab chargers. At once a good sixty thousand of them gathered. Then the count rode out fast at the head of them all, followed by Sir Sicard of Montaut and his standard-bearer, by Sir John of Berzy, Sir Foucaud, Sir Richard⁹ and the whole mass of pilgrims. Their shouts, trumpets, horns and warcries, death flying from the slings and stones clattering from the mangonels came like a snowstorm, like thunder and tempest, and shook the town, the river and the riverbank. Fear struck the men of Toulouse and many fell into the ditches as they ran. But very soon they recovered, they made a sally across the orchards and gardens, and sergeants and javelin-men filled the area. Slender arrows and double quarrels,

1. A knight from Foix.

2. None of these are identified. Ferrando may have been from Aragon.

3. Two men of this name are known, one from Toulouse, another from Fanjeaux.

4. Peter William Bartas; his name occurs in a list of southern knights who in 1243 promised obedience to the Peace of Paris of 1229.

5. None of these are identified, except that Walter may be Walter Langton.

6. Probably Aimery of Blèves and Rainier of Aubusson.

7. The archers and crossbowmen firing from behind shelters.

8. Count Simon is at mass: the elevation of the sacred host.

9. Not identified.

round stones and fast strong blows came flashing like flame from either side, like wind and rain, like a rushing torrent.

Guy de Montfort wounded

Now from the left-hand parapet an archer let fly and his bolt hit Count Guy's horse on the head and drove half its length into its brain. As the horse turned, another crossbowman with a bow fully wound and ready shot at Sir Guy from the side and struck him in the left side of the groin, leaving the steel deep in his flesh; his side and breeches were red with blood. Guy rode up to his brother, his good friend, dismounted and said, as a devil might:

'Brother, God has thrown me and my comrades to the ground, it's the robbers he's helping. This wound will make me an Hospitaller!'

Death of Count Simon, 25 June 1218

As Sir Guy was speaking and beginning to shout and yell, there was in the town a mangonel built by a carpenter and dragged with its platform from St Semin. This was worked by noblewomen, by little girls and men's wives, and now a stone arrived just where it was needed and struck Count Simon on his steel helmet, shattering his eyes, brains, back teeth, forehead and jaw. Bleeding and black, the count dropped dead on the ground. Jocelyn and Sir Aimery² galloped to him at once and hurriedly covered him with a blue cape; but panic spread. How many knights and barons you would have heard lamenting, weeping under their helmets and crying out in anger! Aloud they exclaimed,

'God, it is not right to let the count be killed! How stupid to serve you, to fight for you, when the count who was kind and daring, is killed by a stone like a criminal! Since you strike and slay your own servants, there's no work for us here any more!'

Then they carried the count to the clergy and learned men, and the cardinal, the abbot and Bishop Fouquet received him sorrowfully with cross and censer.

Joy in Toulouse

But a messenger brought the news into Toulouse and such was the joy that all over the town they ran to the churches and lit candles in all the candlesticks and cried out,

'Rejoice! God is merciful and *paratge* shines forth, victorious for ever! The cruel and murderous count is dead, dead unshriven because he was a man of blood!' Trumpets, horns and universal joy, chimes and peals and clamouring bells in belfries, drums, tabors and slender clarions rang through the town till every paving-stone echoed.

Siege of Toulouse abandoned

The siege was then abandoned and the men across the river and holding the foreshore went away along every track. Behind them they left a great deal of

property, pack-beasts, pavilions, tents, armour and money; and the townsmen took many of them prisoner. But the men of Toulouse lost one man they could ill spare, and that was young Sir Aimery,¹ courteous and pleasant. This was a great grief to the whole town.

Celebration in Toulouse

Laisse 206

The whole town was filled with such joy at Sir Simon's death that darkness shone like the day, light blazed and flowered, it raised up *paratge* and buried arrogance. Resounding trumpets, horns, bells and clarions and joy at the deadly stone brought new strength to hearts and minds and wills. Every man seized his weapons and went out into the open to burn the cat, a fire that nothing could quench. All night long and all day too the city celebrated, and outside it the besiegers groaned and shook.

Anxiety in the Narbonnais castle

Very early as dawn was breaking the cardinal from Rome and the other great lords, the bishop and the abbot carrying the crucifix, met on the ancient paved floor to consult each other. The cardinal spoke so that all could hear him:

'My lords, barons of France, hear what I have to say! This town and our enemies have done us great harm, great loss, grief and distress, for the count's death strips away our whole strength, grain and ear together. I cannot understand how God could let it happen and did not keep him safe for holy Church and for us! But dead he is, and we must act at once. Here and now let us make his son Amaury² count, for he is brave and wise and has a noble heart. Let us give him the fief his father conquered, and so let us die here together as the count has died! Preachers and speakers must go to every land and we must send to France, to our good friend the king, and ask him to send his son Louis to us next year, so that he may raze this town and lay it so flat that no one ever builds here again!'

'My lords,' said the bishop, 'there is nothing to prevent this. And the lord pope who approved and chose Count Simon will place him in the consistory where he interred St Paul;³ let him become a most holy relic, for he obeyed the Church, he is a saint and martyr. This is so, I tell you, for no count in this world ever did less sin, nor since God died on the cross has he ever granted a greater death than the count's. Neither God nor holy Church had a better friend.'

'My lords,' said the count of Soissons, 'I strongly advise you not to describe him as most holy, or holy Church itself will ring false. Count Simon, holy? No one ever told a more thorough lie, for he died unshriven. But if he gave love and good service to holy Church, ask Jesus Christ not to punish his soul.'

1. A black joke: Hospitallers were vowed to chastity.

2. Jocelyn, not known; Aimery, perhaps of Blèves.

1. Probably one of the Castelnau family (*laisse* 174).

2. Amaury was knighted in 1213, and so was probably not much more than eighteen at this period.

3. M.-C. suggests that Fouquet had seen Innocent III's restoration of the chapel of St Lawrence in the Lateran palace, with an altar containing the heads of St Peter and St Paul; M.-C., iii, p. 215, n. 4.