

## Duty and desertion: Simon of Montfort and the Fourth Crusade

*G.E.M. Lippiatt*

Simon V of Montfort (c.1175-1218) is chiefly remembered for his leadership of the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1218), with his participation in the Fourth Crusade (1198-1204) receiving only passing mention as an interesting but unrelated anecdote. The two crusades have largely been studied independently of each other; the popular allure of the 'Cathars' and the perceived brutality employed by Simon in their suppression provide the focus of interest in the Albigensian Crusade, while Fourth Crusade historians centre on the action surrounding the siege and appalling sack of Constantinople, events at which Simon was not present. As a result, references to Simon of Montfort in modern historiography focus heavily on the last nine years of his life, often to the neglect of earlier and equally interesting episodes. This article cannot, of course, attempt a comprehensive analysis of his character in Fourth and Albigensian Crusade sources, but will try to explore more fully Simon's actions during his first crusade experience, in particular his responses to competing crusade obligations leading up to his desertion from the main army in early 1203. This will provide an important building block in an historical reconstruction of Simon and, by extension, the crusading baron in the early thirteenth century.

The primary interest in Simon of Montfort's role in the Fourth Crusade comes from his opposition to the joint Venetian and crusader assault on the Dalmatian city of Zara in November 1202. The crusaders had contracted Venice the previous year to construct a fleet to transport them to Egypt; however, the crusading army that arrived at the city in 1202 was smaller than expected and therefore unable to pay the determined sum. The crusade leaders agreed to settle the outstanding balance by helping the Venetians to conquer Zara (a persistent thorn in the side of the Republic of Saint Mark) despite papal insistence that the crusade must not attack Christians. The expedition and Simon's hostility to it are well-documented in the contemporary histories of Robert of Clari and Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay. The greatest narrative of the Fourth Crusade, that of Geoffrey of Villehardouin, does not explicitly mention Simon among that party of crusaders which attempted to subvert the venture, but Geoffrey does agree with Peter in his account of the public defiance of the attack by Simon's

*Leidschrift, jaargang 27, nummer 3, december 2012*

close friend, and Peter's uncle, Abbot Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay.<sup>1</sup> This incident raises the question on which this article will focus: if Simon was so opposed to any move by the crusade against Zara, to the point of public dissent and finally desertion, why did he agree to accompany the enterprise when it sailed from Venice in the first place?

### The principal accounts

There exist two substantial eyewitness descriptions of the meeting between the Venetian and crusade leaders and the Zaran envoys on 12 November. The purpose of Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay's *Hystoria albigensis* is to celebrate and justify the Albigensian Crusade and its major leaders, especially his uncle and Simon of Montfort. Therefore, in order to provide an example of the outstanding virtues of his heroes, Peter gives a description of the crusader council in 1202, where his uncle played a prominent role in the opposition party. He records Guy reading a letter from Pope Innocent III threatening excommunication and forfeiture of crusading indulgences to those who participate in an attack on the city. Peter claims that the angry Venetians then attempted to kill Guy, but were prevented by Simon, who personally interposed himself in the centre of the council and told the Zaran envoys that neither he nor his followers would do any harm to the city. He then left the council with his vassals.<sup>2</sup>

Geoffrey of Villehardouin's *Conquête de Constantinople*, a memoir of and justification for the controversial course of events leading to the denouement of the Fourth Crusade, presents a slightly different picture of the council. The Zarans, cowed by the strength of the Venetian fleet combined with the crusader army, dispatched envoys to Doge Henry Dandolo offering their submission. However, while the doge conferred privately with the rest of the leadership about the terms of the city's surrender, another party of crusaders, labelled by Geoffrey as 'those who

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert of Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople*, P. Lauer ed. (Paris 1924) 14; Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Petri Vallium Sarnaii monachi hystoria albigensis* [The Albigensian History of the Monk Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay] I, P. Guébin and E. Lyon ed. (Paris 1926) 108-109, 293; Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople* I, E. Faral ed. and trans. (Paris 1961) 82-84.

<sup>2</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 109.

wished the host to disperse<sup>3</sup> stated to the envoys that neither they nor the other crusaders would attack Zara and relayed this same information to the citizens at large. The Zarans, confident that they could resist the isolated Venetians as they had in the past, abandoned the negotiations and returned to the city. After they left, Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay, in the name of the pope, forbade the assembled barons to attack the city.<sup>4</sup> Although Simon is not mentioned explicitly here, given his close association with Guy and later desertion with him, he seems to lurk just behind the text of Geoffrey's version of the council. The accounts of Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay and the less well-informed Robert of Clari noting Simon's prominent role in the dissenting party are corroborated by Geoffrey's description of his eventual defection and the later but independent chronicle concerning events in the Latin East attributed to Ernoul.<sup>5</sup> So why did Simon accompany the fleet from Venice to Zara if he was so opposed to the capitulation of the city under any circumstances?

### **Ignorance**

One possibility is that Simon was not informed of the crusade leaders' intention to attack Zara when the fleet departed. Robert of Clari claims that 'no one in the host knew anything of this counsel, except for the most important men.'<sup>6</sup> However, Robert was much lower on the social scale than Simon, and both he and Geoffrey of Villehardouin certainly count Simon among the 'most important men' in their histories, listing him alongside those of comital rank among those who took the cross.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Geoffrey of Villehardouin reports objections to the Venetians' proposal from the beginning among those crusaders 'who wished that the host would

---

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 82: 'qui voloit l'ost depecier'.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 82-84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem* I, 110-112; *Chronique d'Ernoul et Bernard le Trésorier*, L. Mas-Latrie ed. (Paris 1871) 351-352.

<sup>6</sup> 'tout chil de l'ost ne seurent mie chest conseil, fors li plus haut homme' Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 1-2; Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 66.

disband<sup>8</sup> while Gunther of Pairis, a German Cistercian who was not an eyewitness, tells of a heated and protracted debate over the plan, suggesting that word of the compromise had leaked beyond the handful of men who were party to the 1201 Treaty of Venice.<sup>9</sup> Thus Simon's social prominence and the probability of a general lack of secrecy make it unlikely that Simon did not know of the diversion to Zara.

Another possibility is that Simon was aware of or suspected the diversion, but did not oppose it until the publication of the papal letter forbidding it. Simon's stand, as recorded by Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, shows a determination and moral superiority out of keeping with this interpretation. However, this may only be a result of Peter's interest in portraying Simon as the *miles Christi*, guided positively by Christian principle rather than negatively by fear of excommunication. Perhaps Simon had no inherent moral problem with the attack on Zara, and only objected to it on the grounds that it was censured by the pope. After all, as Donald Queller and Thomas Madden point out, the Venetians' intention to subdue an antagonistic territory on their way to Outremer had precedent among previous crusading lords, such as Richard I of England in 1191.<sup>10</sup> Innocent had warned the crusaders against attacking Christians in his confirmation of the Treaty of Venice, but perhaps Simon had not heard of this initial prohibition, and the ambiguity of Peter Capuano, the papal legate, would have further confused the issue.<sup>11</sup> The greatest flaw in this theory of

---

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 66: 'qui volsissent que l'ost se departist'.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem* I, 66; Gunther of Pairis, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana* [The Constantinopolitan history], P. Orth ed. (Hildesheim 1994) 121-122; D.E. Queller and T. Madden, *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Philadelphia 1997) 61.

<sup>10</sup> Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> 'Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium' [The Deeds of the Bishops of Halberstadt], G.H. Pertz ed., *Monumenta Germaniae historica: Scriptorum etc.* XXIII (Hanover 1874) 73-123: 117; Gunther of Pairis, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 122-123; 'Gesta Innocentii PP. III' [The deeds of Pope Innocent III]: J.-P. Migne ed., *Patrologia Latina* CCXIV (Paris 1855) xv-ccxxviii: cxxxi; 'Innocentii III Romani pontificis regestorum sive epistolarum' [Of the registers or letters of Innocent III, bishop of Rome], Migne ed., *Patrologia Latina* CCXV (Paris 1855) 301-302; E. John, 'A Note on the Preliminaries of the Fourth Crusade', *Byzantion* 28 (1958) 95-103: 102; Queller, 'Innocent III and the Crusader-Venetian Treaty of 1201', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 15 (1963) 31-34; Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 19-20.

ignorance is that Simon had very likely seen the papal letter before the fleet sailed from Venice. Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay, who had the letter at Zara, had almost certainly received it before leaving port.<sup>12</sup> Given the intimacy between the abbot and Simon, it is difficult to imagine the latter not having the same information as the former.

### Opportunities and obligations

And yet Guy did not publish the letter in Venice, and both he and Simon departed with the fleet, knowing of both the diversion to Zara and the papal prohibition against attacking Christians. It is likely that Guy was one of the four Cistercian abbots attached to the army by Peter Capuano as vice-legates to prevent the shedding of Christian blood.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps a debate continued between Guy and Simon on one side and the crusade leaders and Venetians on the other, up to and after the fleet departed Venice. Failing to resolve the issue with the leadership and seeing the point of no return approaching, Guy may then have presented the letter to the barons in council at Zara in a final (unsuccessful) effort to ensure the pope's will was obeyed. The sources do not give any explicit evidence of such a debate while the fleet was en route, but if the plan was really a secret (even a poorly kept one) among the highest ranks, Guy and Simon may have felt it best to wait until the leaders plainly revealed their intentions, thus giving them an opportunity to save face and prevent further disillusionment and desertion in Venice. If the latter is the case, it is worth pointing out that Guy and Simon may have been trying to hold the crusade together by reserving the letter, an ironic hypothesis in light of Geoffrey's fulminations. The landing at Zara also may have been the first opportunity to address the entire assembled baronage, which would earlier have been spread amongst their various ships. Moreover, one should not discount the personal danger that an attempt to publish the letter might incur. Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay's

---

<sup>12</sup> A hypothetical reconstruction of the letter's journey to Zara is based on the evidence from 'Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium', 117; and 'Gesta Innocentii', cxxxviii-cxxxix; the most effective synthesis is summarised with citations in Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 244 note 105.

<sup>13</sup> 'Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium', 117; Gunther of Pairis, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 123; E.A.R. Brown, 'The Cistercians in the Latin Empire of Constantinople and Greece, 1204-1276', *Traditio* 14 (1958), 63-120: 73 notes 44, 74.

scene of Venetians threatening Guy with murder in the middle of a council may be largely for dramatic effect, but while at the mercy of the Venetians – as guests in their city or passengers in their fleet – the (explicit or implicit) threat of assassination to stifle dissent was not impossible. In this light, Simon's removal of his tents to some distance from the main crusader camp at Zara takes on more significance than simply refusing to associate with sinners; it also increased his personal security and that of his circle.<sup>14</sup> Thus for a variety of reasons, it may have been impractical for Guy to publish the letter any earlier than he did.

Still, Simon and his followers could have refused to embark at Venice and sailed for Syria from some other port. Many crusaders took this option out of diverse motives; a fact that seriously compromised the main host's ability to pay for their contracted fleet in the first place, thereby placing it in the debt of the Venetians. The controversial decision to attack Zara seems to have compounded this hæmorrhage of troops. As later events made clear, Simon could have followed the same course before arriving at Venice. After the mustering of the host, the author of the *Devastatio Constantinopolitana* and Robert of Clari report that the Venetians effectively imprisoned the crusaders on the island of San Nicolò in the lagoon, where food and potable water quickly became scarce; but as neither Geoffrey of Villehardouin, Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, nor Gunther of Pairis mention these hardships, it may be that these measures only seriously affected the poorer pilgrims. At any rate, crusaders did desert from Venice, and it is hard to imagine Simon not being able to make his escape when so many lesser men were able to do so.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, unlike modern armies, a crusading host was a very loose and entirely voluntary organisation. Simon seems to have implicitly approved of the Treaty of Venice, but could still conceivably

---

<sup>14</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 108-109; A.J. Andrea and I. Motsiff, 'Pope Innocent III and the Diversion of the Fourth Crusade Army to Zara', *Byzantinoslavica* 33 (1972) 6-25: 18.

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 62; Gunther of Pairis, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 122; Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 9-10; 'Devastatio Constantinopolitana' [The Devastation of Constantinople]: A.J. Andrea, 'The *Devastatio Constantinopolitana*, A Special Perspective on the Fourth Crusade: An Analysis, New Edition, and Translation', *Historical Reflections* 19 (1993), 131-138: 132; Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 53, 236 note 96.

have interpreted his crusading vows as primarily involving reaching the Holy Land rather than remaining with the main army.<sup>16</sup>

However, Simon did stay with the main army all the way to Zara. This fact alone seems to discredit Geoffrey of Villehardouin's accusation that Simon and his followers 'wished the host to disperse'.<sup>17</sup> They were obviously committed to the success of the enterprise, and believed that success depended on the unity of the host. The fact that Simon had fought on the opposite side from many of the crusade's leaders during the wars between King Philip II of France and Richard of England further suggests the gravity Simon attached to the crusade.<sup>18</sup> Simon's continued presence demonstrates his dedication to the central initiative of the crusade (before its agreement with Alexius Angelus, pretender to the imperial throne of Constantinople); what remains unclear are the reasons for his fidelity.

Monique Zerner-Chardavoine and Hélène Piéchon-Palloc believe that Simon was compelled to remain with the host, as well as to oppose the attack on Zara, by his own ambition. Looking at Simon's behaviour in light of his later successes on the Albigensian Crusade, they argue that his stand at Zara was a power-play intended to bring the crusade under his influence, a precursor to his pretensions to the county of Toulouse. Having failed to convince Duke Odo III of Burgundy in 1201 to lead the crusade, jealous of the subsequent election of Boniface of Montferrat in preference to himself, and sidelined in the negotiation of the Treaty of Venice, Simon hoped by defying the Venetians to turn the crusade from its cynical undertaking back to its true purpose, under his own (at least partial) direction.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the host's disregard for papal censure and new commitment to interfering in Byzantine politics had swept away all chance of directing that policy toward immediate embarkation for Outremer that Simon decided to abandon his ambition to gain control of the crusade.

---

<sup>16</sup> D.E. Queller, T.K. Compton, and D.A. Campbell, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', *Speculum* 49 (1974) 441-465: 445; R.H. Schmandt, 'The Fourth Crusade and the Just-War Theory', *Catholic Historical Review* 61 (1975) 191-221: 192.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 82: 'voloit l'ost depecier'.

<sup>18</sup> *Chronique d'Ernoult*, 337; L. Bréhier, *L'Église et l'Orient au moyen âge: les croisades* (Paris 1928) 152.

<sup>19</sup> M. Zerner-Chardavoine and H. Piéchon-Palloc, 'La croisade albigeoise, une revanche: Des rapports entre la quatrième croisade et la croisade albigeoise', *Revue historique* 267 (1982) 3-18: 16-17.

But this psychology rests on fairly shaky and entirely speculative grounds: to interpret Simon's behaviour on the Fourth Crusade in the light of his ambitions in the Midi a decade later is to strain the evidence. As noted above, Simon was certainly a noble of great repute and high standing in the army, but he was neither as wealthy nor as politically significant in 1198-1203 as Boniface or the great counts who took the cross. He may have disliked the Venetians (Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay certainly did),<sup>20</sup> but he apparently respected their importance to the crusade's success enough not to abandon the army at the first sign of trouble in Venice. Finally, his involvement in the embassy to Odo of Burgundy was more likely due to his personal intimacy with the duke than an influential position in the leadership that was later eclipsed.<sup>21</sup> Simon and Odo would crusade together multiple times in the Languedoc, and Simon's eldest son, Amalric, would marry Odo's niece, Beatrice of Viennois in 1214. A connection between the two men before the Albigensian Crusade is difficult to prove, but it is heavily implied by the fact that, in 1208, Odo 'asked the count of Montfort if he would join the army of Jesus Christ against the heretics with him and be in his company; presenting and offering many great gifts, if [Simon] would be willing to grant him this.'<sup>22</sup> Such relationships were important in mediaeval society, and the counts probably hoped that Simon's friendship, common loyalty to Philip II, and shared enthusiasm for the Cistercians might persuade Odo to leave his lands to aid the Franks in Outremer. However, Simon's participation in the embassy alone cannot be taken as proof that he had once been closely involved in planning crusade policy.

### **Taking a stand and practical concerns**

More importantly, by 12 November a crossing of the Mediterranean was nearly impossible, even if Simon had forced the fleet to move on from Zara immediately. The long delay at Venice meant that winter was now fast

---

<sup>20</sup> Peter of Vaux-des-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 107-108.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 6, 38-40, 102; *Ibidem* II, 122-124.

<sup>22</sup> 'rogabat comitem Montis Fortis ut cum ipso se accingeret ad miliciam Jhesu Christi contra hereticos essetque in ejus societate, magna donans et plura offerens, si in hoc acquiescere vellet ei.': Peter of Vaux-des-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 101-103, 113, 115-116, 119; *Ibidem* II, 182-185, 206-207.

approaching, and the coming season was dangerous for a mediæval fleet. Robert of Clari notes that even when the crusade departed from Venice, in the first week of October, it was already too late to travel all the way to its destination at Alexandria.<sup>23</sup> Simon may not have been a sailor, but after spending the summer in a maritime city and the last month on board of a ship, he must have known, as the lesser knight Robert did, that the fleet could not cross the sea until the arrival of spring and fairer weather.

The impossibility of sailing in November raises the question of what Simon was trying to accomplish by his intervention in the Zaran-Venetian negotiations. Geoffrey has the dissenters – after Henry Dandolo had stepped out to confer with the crusader barons over the surrender – tell the Zaran emissaries: ‘The pilgrims will not attack you. If you can defend yourselves from the Venetians, you will be safe.’<sup>24</sup> However, Peter places less subversive words in Simon’s mouth, spoken in the midst of the entire assembly of crusaders and Venetians: ‘I will do you no harm, and, whatever others may do, I hold you safe from me and mine.’<sup>25</sup> The discrepancy between these two eyewitness accounts arises from both their authors being partisan chroniclers trying to prove important, though unrelated, points through this single scene. For Geoffrey, the wrecking of the negotiations is another opportunity to heap accusations of ill will and treachery on those who did not accompany the crusading army to Constantinople. For Peter, Simon’s refusal to attack Zara reinforces the virtue of the anti-heresy expedition of 1209; as Simon would not fight against Christians on the Fourth Crusade, the enemies of the Albigensian Crusade must not have been true Christians. Both men are more concerned with the propaganda value of the event than in reporting it accurately.

Though Peter’s version of the council is suspiciously exciting, with threats of violence by cynical Venetians against a virtuous but unarmed abbot and the courageous intervention and dramatic exit of Simon, the principled hero, his version of the message of the dissenting party to the Zaran emissaries is preferable to Geoffrey’s. The reasons for the Doge needing to confer with the crusade barons before accepting the submission

---

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 86; Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 12; Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 54, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 82: ‘Li pelerin ne vos assailliront. Se vos vos poez defendre des Venisiens, dont estes vos quite.’

<sup>25</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 109: ‘Nullum vobis malum inferam, set, quicquid faciant alii, ego a me et meis facio vos securos.’

are unclear; if Zara surrendered, it would surrender to the Venetians, not the crusaders, who in any case could not have opposed a bloodless capitulation. The dissenters, for their part, seem to have had nothing to gain by inciting the Zarans to resist; sailing for the Holy Land before spring was impossible, and if the Zarans were about to surrender, encouraging them to fight would not help speed the crusade on its way. Simon may have been hoping to lead by example and thus take the wind out of the Venetians' sails, but the violent outcome of actively encouraging defiance in the Zarans was predictable enough. Geoffrey also routinely misconstrues the intentions of those who disagreed with the policies of the crusade leadership, consistently attributing to them a single-minded devotion toward disbanding the army.<sup>26</sup> In light of the circumstances, Peter's depiction of Simon and his followers personally abstaining from combat operations at Zara – an abstention which may have sufficiently emboldened the Zarans to cease trying to placate the Venetians – holds more plausibility than Geoffrey's accusations of outright treason and active subversion.

A reasonable reconstruction of Simon's actions and motivations (inasmuch as they may be perceived and understood) during the Fourth Crusade must therefore synthesise the evidence with the practical concerns discussed above. Although Simon likely knew of the diversion to Zara as well as the papal prohibition against it before or soon after the fleet departed from Venice, he remained with the army until it arrived. Both idealistic and pragmatic explanations present themselves for this apparent conflict. It is important not to downplay the significance of honour in the decisions of a man like Simon. While he was not bound by formal arrangements such as contract or vassalage to the Treaty of Venice, he had taken crusading vows which in a loose sense tied him to the body that was set to muster and depart from Venice. Furthermore, Innocent himself, in support of the treaty, had ordered those who had taken the cross to assemble at Venice with the main host.<sup>27</sup> After arriving in Venice, this sense of obligation would only have increased, as the expedition (slowly) gained momentum. Though he disagreed with the diversion to Zara and refused to

---

<sup>26</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 108-109; Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 62, 66, 82, 96, 100, 104, 116; Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade*, 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> *Devastatio Constantinopolitana*, 132.

participate himself, Simon's honour may have dictated that he stay with the fleet so long as it remained destined for the Holy Land.

These ideals would have been reinforced by practical concerns. Simon may well have sympathised – to a point – with Geoffrey's disparagement of those smaller bands who left the army; the fear that piecemeal contingents of crusaders would be unable to give much aid to the Kingdom of Jerusalem was a real one.<sup>28</sup> In the event, Simon and other crusaders who reached Outremer were able to achieve limited successes in 1203-1204 that bolstered the defences of the Frankish kingdom.<sup>29</sup> But it would be foolish to imagine that any of the crusaders could have foreseen that. A massed army, even if arriving a bit later than expected, would be better able to recapture Jerusalem than would small and staggered groups of knights. Thus Simon likely believed that the best chance of fulfilling his crusading vows lay with the army, so long as it remained destined for the Levant.

Financial concerns also would have made remaining with the crusade army at Venice preferable to a party the size of Simon's contingent. Important baron though he was, Simon could not hope to match the resources of the greater magnates like the counts of Champagne, Blois, or Flanders. It therefore made the most economic sense to pool his funds with these counts and the rest of the crusader army, as this would make transport much more affordable. When a large proportion of the army failed to muster at Venice and the crusaders could not pay for the fleet, many were forced to return home, unable to afford either other passage or further

---

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 97, 104, 118.

<sup>29</sup> *Chronique d'Ernoul*, 356-360; Ali 'Izz al-Din ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, 'Extrait de la chronique intitulée Kamel-Altevarykh', *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Historiens orientaux* 2.1 (Paris 1887) 1-180: 95-96; Shihab ad-Din abu i-Qasim abu Shama, *Le livre des deux jardins*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Historiens orientaux*, V (Paris 1898), 153; Jamal ad-Din ibn Wasil, *Mufarrij al-kurub fi akhbar Bani Ayyub* [The Dissipater of Anxieties of Reports on the Ayyubids] III, J. al-Din al-Shayyal ed., (Cairo 1960) 159, 162-164; Abulfeda Ismail Hamvi, *Résumé de l'histoire des croisades tiré des annales d'Abou 'l-Fedâ*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Historiens orientaux* I (Paris 1872) 1-165: 83; B.Z. Kedar, 'The Fourth Crusade's Second Front' in: A. Laiou ed., *Urbs capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences* (Paris 2005) 89-110: 99-101.

absence from their lands.<sup>30</sup> While Simon was certainly wealthier than these crusaders, he also had the expenses of a larger retinue. In the end, his desertion and departure for Outremer via a difficult journey to Barletta demonstrates that independent travel was not impossible,<sup>31</sup> but his responsibilities and limited funds dictated that such a decision could not be taken lightly.

### **The final straw**

The very point at which Simon did make the decision to abandon the army is perhaps most instructive for determining his attitude towards the extent of his obligations to the concerted effort. Despite his opposition to the attack on Zara and his failure to stop it, he did not leave the army in November. Robert of Clari claims that Simon wintered in Hungary while the crusaders camped in the ruins of Zara, and the Ernoul chronicle gives the same impression; but the former's chronology is notoriously unreliable, and the latter was not an eyewitness.<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, who was party to the councils surrounding the determination of crusade policy, reports Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay as once more opposing the diversion of the crusade in the winter of 1203; this time to Constantinople, at the behest of King Philip of Germany and Alexius Angelus. Geoffrey again glosses over Simon's involvement; perhaps because of Simon's prominent reputation as leader of the Albigensian Crusade at the time of Geoffrey's dictation. Guy, however, took a lively part in this debate and then, as the fleet set sail around Easter 1203, Geoffrey reports that he went his own way with Simon, Guy of Montfort, and 'many others'. This is confirmed by the *Devastatio Constantinopolitana*, where Simon's desertion is similarly attributed to the crusade leadership's decision to aid Alexius, and even the chronicle of Ernoul recognises that Simon was accompanied to the Holy Land by the abbot of Vaux-de-Cernay. It is odd that Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay makes no mention of the importance of the diversion to Constantinople in Simon's defection, but he may have wished to give the impression that Simon's

---

<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 60; Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 9-10; *Devastatio Constantinopolitana*, 132; Gunther of Paris, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 110.

<sup>32</sup> Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 14; *Chronique d'Ernoul*, 351-352.

departure was due to the attack on Zara – an event that unequivocally incurred excommunication – rather than the decision to go to Constantinople – a decision that at the time of Peter’s writing in 1213 was looked upon in a more favourable light, as it had established the Latin Empire and seemingly brought about the reunion of the Church.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Simon’s abandonment of the crusade army apparently was precipitated not by the Zaran affair – distasteful as he may have found it – but rather by the leadership’s continued policy of using the host for purposes other than attacking the Ayyubids in the Levant.

This fact, rarely noted in treatments of Simon in the Fourth Crusade, provides the key to understanding his attitude toward the crusade, both in his dedication to and desertion of the army. Far from being a saboteur or ‘*più papista del Papa*’,<sup>34</sup> he seems, with Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay, to have consistently upheld papal wishes, which emphasised both unity of effort and purity of purpose. The actions of Simon and his followers were harmonious with both of these aims. Refusing to participate in the attack on a Christian city, he remained with the army according to Innocent’s instructions in his absolution of the other crusaders. However, when the army set out to attack yet another Christian city in contravention to those same instructions, Simon could see that, despite the leaders’ assurances to the contrary, the crusade had lost its way.<sup>35</sup> At that point, preferring to save his own soul – the aim, after all, for which he had taken the cross – he and the abbot refused to sail with the fleet and made for Syria on their own.

---

<sup>33</sup> Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria albigensis* I, 110; Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 94-98, 110-112; *Devastatio Constantinopolitana*, 133; *Chronique d’Ernouf*, 351; see also Zerner-Chardavoine and Piéchon-Palloc ‘Une revanche’, 8-10, 17; and M. Zerner-Chardavoine, ‘L’abbé Gui des Vaux-de-Cernay: prédicateur de croisade’, *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 21 (1986) 183-204: 191-192. These articles claim Peter’s account of the Fourth Crusade is primarily an apologetic and therefore unreliable one, but their argument relies on unnecessary assumptions and tenuous interpretations of the evidence.

<sup>34</sup> L. Usseglio, *I marchesi di Monferrato in Italia ed in Oriente durante i secoli XII e XIII* [The Marquesses of Montferrat in Italy and the East during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries] II (Turin 1926) 210.

<sup>35</sup> *Innocentii III regestorum* CCVIV, 1178-1182; CCXV, 50, 106-110; Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Conquête de Constantinople* I, 92; Robert of Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*, 32.

This understanding of Simon's decision to abandon the army throws into stark relief the difference between him – and perhaps some of the other barons who formed part of the 'neglected majority' of the Fourth Crusade – and a man like Geoffrey of Villehardouin. Their conceptions of the crusade were not fundamentally opposed, but they measured the progress of the enterprise by different standards. For both men, the crusade was a means of performing service to Christendom and achieving salvation. For Geoffrey the most important element of pursuing this aim was maintaining fidelity to the corporate body of crusaders; for Simon it was fulfilling his own crusading vows by fighting in Syria or Egypt. The pope had stressed both, and Simon as well as Geoffrey recognised their interdependence. But the crisis presented by the Constantinopolitan option had made these elements – at least from Simon's perspective – irreconcilable, and he acted in accordance with his priorities. This independent impulse may foreshadow his spectacular later career in the Midi, but it does not speak only of ambition. Rather, it suggests a conception of the crusade that differed from that of the leadership – one that was likely shared, if not always acted upon, by many other nobles among the confusion of the Fourth Crusade.