sides for the surrender of the Cathars defending Montsegur. The siege had begun and lasted for two years. Only after an especially sadistic Inquisitor and some of his staff had been murdered in a nearby village by Cathars sympathisers from Montsegur, was the siege intensified for the last ten months. Three months before the surrender two Parfaits slipped through the incomplete lines of the crusaders, carrying a load of Cathar treasure; gold, silver and coins. The Cathars were known to be prosperous and that their treasure and resources were stored in the safety of their most sacred site; Montsegur.

After the surrender the crusaders found no treasure. Stories abound and a likely theory is that Rennes le Chateau; also sacred to The Cathars, is only half a day ride away on horseback. Horses would have been necessary to carry such a heavy load. Around Rennes le Chateau are many caves and tunnels that would have been unknown to the crusaders, where treasure could be hidden indefinitely. At the end of the siege only about four hundred defenders had survived, many had been killed by falling masonry. There were 150 to 180 Parfaits and over 200 Mercenaries and their wives and children

The terms agreed were surprisingly generous. The mercenaries and their dependants would be allowed to walk free, and be allowed to keep all gifts and payments received from their Cathar employers. The Parfaits would be required to publicly renounce their beliefs, and to confess their 'sins' to the Holy Inquisition for which they would receive light penances then be allowed to walk free. The defenders offered hostages in exchange for fourteen days grace, ending 15th of March, time to consider the terms. This was granted with the warning that the hostages would be executed if anyone tried to escape from the fortress.

The Parfaits had a reason for demanding this period of time. They regarded Easter and the Crucifixion of Jesus as irrelevant. The 14th of March that year was Spring Solstice and for Cathars, a very important festival and ceremony. Also they knew that for them the last time it would be celebrated. Then, just as today, Mercenary soldiers offer their services for money. They have little or no interest in the 'Cause' their employer needs them to fight for, only the money. This makes it more surprising that during that last ceremony fifteen hard-bitten cynical mercenary soldiers and six women chose to receive the Consolamentum to become Cathar Parfaits.

They took the vow with the certain knowledge that by that action they would die a horrible death at the hands of the Inquisition. Though we cannot know what, clearly something very powerful and special happened for them during the Cathars Spring Solstice Ceremony. Apparently it gave them the strength and courage, next morning, to face the ordeal without flinching. At dawn on the 15th of March 1244, the Crusaders came for their answer. The waiting Parfaits opened the portals of the fortress. Over 200 Parfaits were shackled in chains and hustled roughly down the steep narrow paths to a meadow on the lower slopes of Montsegur. Each in turn when asked, refused to renounce their Cathar beliefs. There was no time for individual stakes.

Instead they all were dragged into a wood-filled stockade and burned to death ‘en masse'. Confined to the castle, the rest of the garrison was compelled to look on. There are many conflicting stories about the events of that final day. For example, that any Cathar children present in the castle would not have received the mercy

Page 10 of 14 Continued on [page 11](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CHome%20PC%5CDesktop%5CAST%20WEBSITE%5Cascensionsupportteam.com%5CFlavlang%20folder%5C11.Flavlang%20page11.htm)