

History of the Crusades.
Episode 173.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The End of the 13th Century.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Cathar stronghold of Montsegur come under attack by the combined forces of the French Crown and the Church. After holding out for ten months, the castle surrendered to the besiegers and more than 200 Cathar Perfect were burned alive. The fall of Montsegur was the beginning of the end of the Cathar religion.

The fact that none of the noble families of southern France had come to Montsegur's assistance was a signal to the Cathars that, unlike the days of the Crusade, this time they were on their own. Gradually the grandsons of the men who had led the fight against Simon de Montfort submitted to both the Catholic Church and northern French rule. Count Raymond VII, who had previously sacrificed so much to preserve southern French independence, not only failed to come to the aid of the Cathars in their hour of need, he joined the active persecution of them. In June 1249 he ordered 80 Cathars to be burned as heretics in the town of Agen, and he no longer opposed the spread of the Inquisition within his domains. His late conformity to Church wishes and demands was rewarded when he died in September 1249. His body, accompanied by no less than five Bishops, was taken to Fontevrault, the traditional resting place of the Plantagenets. His effigy lay within Fontevrault Abbey, amongst such luminaries as King Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Richard the Lionheart, until the year 1638, when his effigy was destroyed to make way for some building works to extend the abbey. Following his death, Count Raymond's lands were inherited by King Louis IX's brother, and Raymond's son in law, Alphonse of Poitiers.

Alphonse of Poitiers was of a frail disposition and disliked traveling, with the result that he only visited Languedoc twice during his lifetime. However, this was not an indication that he was disinterested in his new territory. On the contrary, he took a great interest in its administration. He was constantly writing and sending detailed letters of instruction to his administrators in Languedoc, and his officials were adept at carrying out his wishes. Unlike Simon de Montfort, Alphonse didn't impose his rule by sending garrisons of northern Frenchmen southwards. No, his method was to slowly grind Languedoc into submission by means of a well-oiled, efficient northern French bureaucracy, and it worked. Slowly, the power and influence of the townsfolk who were accustomed to self rule such as the Council of Toulouse, were ground down, and under the stability and conformity imposed by the new regime, the economy flourished. The opposition of the previously-rebellious noble families to both northern French rule and the Inquisition against the Cathars dwindled, to the extent that the surviving heir of the Trencavel family pledged his loyalty to the French crown and the Church, and accompanied King Louis IX on Crusade to Egypt. And Oliver of Termes, whose predecessors had fought unwaveringly against the Crusaders, pledged his arms and men to King Louis, and upon his death pledged most of his wealth to the Church.

But the loss of the support of the southern French nobility for their cause was not the only reason for the rapid decline of the Cathar faith after the fall of Montsegur. Montsegur had been both the Cathar headquarters, and its safe haven. Senior figures from the Cathar Church could meet there in safety, discussing the finer points of the Cathar doctrine, debating any areas of confusion or conflict, and achieving doctrinal cohesion and uniformity. Following the fall of Montsegur, the very structure of the Cathar Church fell apart. While there were other Cathar strongholds still holding out (the fortress of Queribus

wasn't defeated into 1255), they just didn't play the central role in the faith as that previously carried out by Montsegur.

The respected Cathar Bishop of Toulouse was one of the Perfect who threw themselves into the pyre following the surrender of Montsegur, and the remaining Bishops either went to ground or fled into exile. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption notes that after the year 1246, only two years after the fall of Montsegur, there are no reports of any Cathar Bishops operating in southern France. With its hierarchy having disintegrated, there was no one to provide guidance or support to the remaining Perfect, and their numbers also went into a rapid decline. The Italian Inquisitor Rainier Sacconi estimated that by the year 1250 there were fewer than 200 Cathar Perfect in Languedoc. The cohesion of the Cathar faith had previously been achieved by the Bishops clarifying the finer points of the Cathar doctrine, and providing information and support to the Perfect, who would then travel far and wide, preaching the Cathar faith to the faithful as well as to possible converts. As the hierarchy of the Cathar faith vanished, and as the number of Perfect dwindled, the Cathar religion existed only in isolated pockets, with Cathars debating and ruling on points of faith for themselves, with the result that the religion itself became fractured and contradictory.

To make matters worse for those of the Cathar faith, the Inquisition ramped up its activities following the fall of Montsegur, completing its transition from a handful of friars conducting isolated inquiries, to a vast and complex bureaucracy which was able to seek out and interrogate thousands of suspects.

In his book "The Perfect Heresy", Stephen O'Shea identified two Inquisitors, Jean de St-Pierre and Bernard de Caux, who towards the end of the 1240's, compiled a complex, cross-referenced document based upon the confessions of tens of thousands of citizens who had been interrogated. In accordance with their reputation as learned men, the Inquisitors were meticulous in the notes they took and in the detailed nature of the questions they asked. Stephen O'Shea states that 5,065 transcripts of their interrogations survive until this day, and this represents merely a fraction of the work they undertook.

Bernard de Caux must have been particularly dedicated to his work. In his spare time, he compiled the first instruction book for his fellow friars, a volume entitled "Manual of the Inquisitors of Carcassonne". This manual served as the inspiration for a later Inquisitor from Toulouse, Bernard Gui, who wrote an even more detailed instruction book, which would later influence the Spanish and Aragonese Inquisitions. If the name Bernard Gui is ringing a bell for some of you, it might be because he appears as a villain in Umberto Eco's excellent novel "The Name of the Rose".

The thorough and dedicated work of the Inquisitors, seeking out heretics and finding out everything they could about contacts they may have had with other heretics, was applauded by the Church. In a sinister move, one which would herald the future direction the Inquisition would take, the new Pope, Pope Innocent IV issued a decree in 1252 that permitted the friars to use torture, to better enable them to uncover the truth. Procedures involving torture were euphemistically called "putting the question". Deciding that he didn't want things to get out of hand, Pope Innocent IV decreed that the Inquisitors should not sever any limbs while putting the question, nor allow the victim to lose too much blood, nor kill anyone. With those safeguards securely in place, torture was added to the Inquisitors' arsenal.

With the Cathar hierarchy now having disintegrated, and with the tentacles of the Inquisition extending across Languedoc, with the screams of tortured suspects resounding across the country, and with Cathars who had confessed their heresy naming in detail every other Cathar or supporter of heresy they had ever known, it's not surprising that many Cathars chose to go into exile.

Now, quite understandably, some Cathars viewed the decision by many of the Perfect and many of the upper echelons of the Cathar religion to flee Languedoc as a betrayal, and as acts of self preservation, which hastened the decline of the Cathar faith. And I guess that's true to some extent, although the thorough and all-pervading work of the Inquisitors was pushing the remaining Cathars far underground, and perhaps the idea of kick-starting the Cathar religion outside the reach of the Inquisitors was a tempting one. So many Cathars who could afford to do so upped and left, making the long trek to the traditional neighboring safe havens: Lombardy to the east; and over the Pyrenees into the Kingdom of Aragon.

The Inquisitors were well aware of this exodus, but couldn't do much about it, although there were reports of an Inquisitor in Carcassonne paying spies or bounty hunters to cross the Pyrenees and trick influential Cathars into straying over the border, where as soon as they entered the jurisdiction of the Inquisitors they would be arrested and interrogated.

One such man to leave Languedoc at this time was the esteemed lawyer Pierre Authie. Now Pierre was a member of a prestigious legal family and operated a legal practice in the town of Ax in the County of Foix, along with his brother Guillaume. Their law firm was very successful, and they counted amongst their clients the Count of Foix himself, whom they had assisted in resolving a jurisdictional dispute, between the Kingdom of Aragon and the County of Foix, over the ownership of some castles in the Sabarthes. In the year 1296 Pierre Authie was a well respected, wealthy middle-aged man with nine children, two of them by his mistress and seven of them legitimate, all of whom were grown up and most of whom were married and starting families of their own.

Pierre Authie was also a Cathar, as was his brother and partner in his law firm, Guillaume. The Cathar faith ran strongly in the Authie family. Some of their ancestors had been Perfects, and one of Pierre's sons, Jacques, would one day also become a Cathar Perfect. It was during the year 1296 that Pierre and his brother made the decision to leave Languedoc and join the exodus of Cathars. Rather than simply heading over the Pyrenees into Aragon, Pierre sold some of his livestock and raised the sum of 15 shillings, the cost of a passage from Toulouse to Lombardy. There are rumors that Pierre was being pursued by a man to whom he owed money, and that this fact may have contributed to his decision to go into exile in far Lombardy, but I guess we'll never know.

Pierre and Guillaume undertook the lengthy journey to Provence, then over one of the frequently-crossed passes through the Alps into Italy. When they were nearly at their destination they stayed for two months with a group of Cathar refugees in the town of Corneo, where both Pierre and Guillaume were ordained as Cathar Perfects. A few years later, around the year 1300, the Authie brothers will return to Languedoc, their mission, to preach to and support those of the Cathar faith, and to convert others to Catharism. If you are thinking that this is going to be a crazy mission, fraught with danger and adventure, you will be exactly right.

We are now entering the final chapter of our examination of the attempt by the Catholic Church to extinguish the Cathar faith. Fortunately for us, although not fortunately for the remaining hardy and brave Cathars in Languedoc, there will be in southern France a couple of extremely thorough Inquisitors, who take their job of interrogating suspected Cathars and recording their answers very seriously. Their extremely detailed Interrogations were all recorded and the records still exist today. Those Inquisitors of whom we speak are Jacques Fournier, a Cistercian who would one day become the Pope, and the Dominican friar Geoffroy d'Ablis, who became the head Inquisitor in Carcassonne in 1303 before being joined by his fellow Dominican Bernard Gui, of "Name of the Rose" fame, in 1307. The transcripts of Jaques Fournier's interrogation at Pamiers are known as MS 4030 and are now located in the Vatican Library. The transcript of the interrogations of the Inquisitor Geoffroy d'Ablis are known as MS 4269, and are kept in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

Now, for the episodes on the last days of the Cathars, I will be relying heavily on the work of two historians: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Rene Weis. Both these men have spent countless hours examining those transcripts of the Inquisitors and have managed to create a snapshot of the lives of the Cathars caught up by the Inquisition in the first few decades of the 14th century, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, in his highly celebrated and rightly famous book "Montaillou: Portrait of Life in a Medieval Village", and Rene Weis in his fabulous book "The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars". If you are at all interested in zooming in on the lives of the Cathars at this stage in their history, I urge you to track down and read both these books. They are both absolutely fascinating and provide a level of detail that I won't be able to replicate here. While I won't be going into a huge amount of detail, I will be going into some detail, so I invite you to join me as we see how the Cathar Perfect Authie brothers fare, as they return to the danger zone.

But I'm afraid you will need to wait for a week for this because, before we get back to the Cathars, we're going to spend an episode looking at France in the 14th century. Why will we be doing this? Well, because I want to. Why do I want to? Well, because France in the 14th century was one giant hell-hole, and before we put a grimace on our faces and step from 1299 into the year 1300, I think we should have some idea about what we are getting ourselves into. So join me next week, as we take a look at France's Century from Hell, the foul and godforsaken era which was the 14th century. Join me if you dare. Until next week, bye for now.

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