

History of the Crusades.
Episode 175.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Authie Brothers.

Hello again, Last week we took a look at that most foul of centuries, the 14th century, and the horrible events it would bring to France. This week we return to the narrative.

If you cast your mind's way back to a fortnight ago, you might remember that we met Pierre Authie and his brother Guillaume. The Authie brothers were wealthy, respected lawyers aged in their fifties, who decided to leave Languedoc with a mass exodus of Cathars. While in exile in Lombardy, the brothers joined the ranks of the Perfect, and then made the momentous decision to return to Languedoc to preach the Cathar faith. Now, as the year 1300 approaches, the Authie brothers are likely feeling a little anxious, not because they are aware of the horrors the 14th century holds for their part of the world, but because of the future they have chosen. The brothers are currently in Lombardy. They are safe and are surrounded by others of the Cathar faith. They are able to practice their faith, if not openly then in some sort of safety, with discretion. However, the brothers have made the decision to leave Lombardy and return to the lion's den.

The situation for practicing Cathars in southern France in the year 1300 was bleak. The Inquisition was in full swing and was operating without restriction across the region, regularly using torture to extract confessions from the people it chose to interrogate. There were no longer any Cathar safe-havens within Languedoc. Montsegur had fallen 56 years ago, probably around the time the Authie brothers had been born. Queribus was the final Cathar stronghold to be conquered. It was defeated back in 1255. No Cathar strongholds meant no safe-haven for the Authie brothers and other Cathars in southern France. There was no where they could go to enjoy a brief respite from a life constantly on the run, constantly looking over your shoulder, and constantly dodging the long arm of the Inquisition. There was nowhere you could go to meet openly with other Cathars, discussing matters of faith and enjoying the company of like-minded people, without fear of being taken in by the Inquisitors.

The total absence of safe-havens meant there would be no downtime for the brothers in Languedoc. The danger they would be in would be constant and unremitting. They would need to be continually aware of their surroundings and be ready to flee at a moment's notice. They would always need to have one eye open and be one step ahead of the Dominican friars.

There were also no Cathar Bishops in Languedoc. Following the death of the Cathar Bishop of Toulouse at Montsegur. The hierarchy of the Catholic faith had dwindled and then collapsed without being replaced. This meant there was no one the brothers could turn to for guidance or support. Any questions of doctrine, or queries about any aspect of the Cathar faith which may arise, would need to be resolved by the brothers themselves. I think it's safe to assume that the brothers knew that returning to Languedoc in order to feed the dying flame of their religion was going to be no walk in the park. But they were both intelligent, resourceful men, and they were willing to make any sacrifices which needed to be made.

Their aim was to initially head to the city of Toulouse. Toulouse at that time was home to around 35,000 people, and perhaps the brothers hoped they could blend in with the

crowds of people in the city. The brothers wished to make some financial arrangements in Toulouse, so their mission could commence on a strong footing. Pierre Authie had connections to a banker in Toulouse who could open a line of credit, which could be readily accessed from a number of centers around Languedoc. The dwindling Cathar communities were in desperate need of finances, and Toulouse was the place to go to put the necessary mechanisms in place.

Importantly, there were also at least two places in the city of Toulouse where the brothers knew they would be welcome. Of course, any person who assisted or harbored a heretic placed themselves in peril, and risked getting caught by the Inquisition, so finding safe houses and places offering a bed and a meal would be a constant challenge. However, Pierre's daughter lived in the city with her husband, and Pierre knew the brothers could rely on her support if needed. There was also a safe house in the suburbs of Saint-Cyprien, where Cathars were welcome to stay, and the brothers decided to base themselves at that safe house. A Cathar from Limoges, Martin Francis, who acted as treasurer for the faith, would meet them in Toulouse, and would be involved in setting up the new financial arrangements.

So with things organized in Toulouse, the only problem facing the brothers now was how to travel from Lombardy to Toulouse without being noticed. Fortunately, this proved to be relatively easy. Pope Boniface VIII had declared the year 1300 to be the first ever Jubilee. People from across Europe were invited to travel to Rome to be granted remission from all their sins. All they were required to do in order to return from Rome sin-free and pure was to visit the four Papal basilicas inside Rome, and to make a financial donation. As a fund-raising exercise for the Church, the Jubilee was successful beyond anyone's wildest dreams. All over Europe, peasants and noblemen alike jostled for room on the roads, and headed to the Holy City. Estimates of how many pilgrims poured into Rome for the Jubilee vary from 30,000 to over 1,000,000, but it's probably safe to say that many thousands of people made the journey. Jubilees were originally intended to occur at the beginning of every century. However, its success meant that it was decided that maybe every 50 years would be a better idea. And then they started to be held every 33 years and then every 25 years. They are still held every 25 years to this day.

Anyway, back to the year 1,300. The reason why the Jubilee was of interest to the Authie brothers was that all these pilgrims, having visited Rome and parted with their money, would now have to take their sin-less selves back home again. The brothers simply joined the throngs on the packed road, and pretending to be returning pilgrims, made their way to Toulouse. Now I should say here, as a footnote, that some historians have the brothers traveling to Toulouse before the Jubilee, so there is some dispute about exactly when they made the journey. But to me it makes sense that they would have relished the anonymity provided by the throngs of returning pilgrims, and would have joined those pilgrims on the road to Toulouse, so that's what I have gone with.

Now, the brothers did make it safely to Toulouse, but unfortunately Pierre Authie's cover was blown shortly after he arrived in the city. Before he had left southern France to go into exile, he had attempted to convert a 14 year old boy to the Cathar faith, without success. The boy was fond of books and of learning, and despite choosing not to become a Cathar, remained close to the Authie family. Fast forward to the year 1300, and the boy Pierre de Luzenac, was now a law student attending the University of Toulouse. He was living in Toulouse lodging in a room where Pierre Authie's daughter was residing. Pierre Authie was strolling around the streets of Toulouse, near the church of Saint Sernin, when he

passed the student and was recognized by him. Now this, of course, put everyone in an awkward situation. Pierre de Luzenac was a law student, and if he wanted to abide by the law, he should head immediately over to the Dominican monastery, which was not far from where he had bumped into Pierre Authie, and let them know that a well known Cathar was present in the city. Fortunately for Pierre Authie, Pierre de Luzenac didn't do this. He returned to his lodging to think things over.

The following day, Pierre Authie sent a go-between, a local Cathar man and another Pierre, Pierre Sans, to the student's lodgings, to see if they could come to some arrangement. Fortunately for the Cathars, university students back in the year 1300 were similar to university students today. They were struggling to make ends meet, spending their days studying while also trying to scrape together enough money to make the rent and buy food. And it turns out that food was Pierre de Luzenac's weak point. When Pierre Sans went to visit the student, he took with him some tasty morsels, and it seems that Pierre de Luzenac was happy to keep silent so long as he was regularly supplied with culinary bribes. Over the next few months, Pierre Sans delivered to Pierre de Luzenac cuts of lamb, capons, and salmon. In return, Pierre de Luzenac kept his mouth shut. The Authie brothers may also have paid off some of Pierre de Luzenac's student debts.

While this fortunate turn of events meant that the Authie brothers weren't captured by the Inquisition before their mission had even started, it did serve as a lesson. Both brothers must have known just how close they had come to disaster. And of course, it was true that at any stage, Pierre de Luzenac could change his mind and report them to the Dominicans. It brought home to the Authie brothers that they were going to have to be very, very careful.

While Pierre Authie busied himself with constructing the financial framework for the future operation of the Cathar faith, his brother Guillaume left the city of Toulouse and journeyed southwards towards the town of Tarascon. He would spend the next few months staying at various safe houses, meeting local Cathars, and trying to find a place at which the Authie brothers could base themselves. The terrain in the countryside around Tarascon suited their needs perfectly. In the foothills of the Pyrenees, similar in nature to the terrain around the nearby Montsegur, the mountains and valleys provided excellent hiding places and getaway routes. The local Cathars had already put into place an informal underground network, but to survive the Authie brothers would need to strengthen and formalize this, providing a variety of safe houses, watch points where the movements of strangers and possible informers could be viewed, and getaway routes, which involved a scramble along a variety of pathways known by local shepherds, leading to the relative safety of the neighboring Kingdom of Aragon.

In his book "The Yellow Cross", Rene Weis relates an event from this time, which reveals a little bit about Guillaume Authie's personality. He had met up with a fellow Perfect, Pierre Raymond de Saint-Papoul, and they were both staying at a farm estate owned by the Marty family. There were a number of outbuildings on the farm, which was located around five miles southwest of the town of Tarascon. The farm itself was in a relatively safe location. There was only one way to access the property, and it was via a steep mountain pass, and the property itself looked down over the valley below, enabling the Perfect to keep an eye on the comings and goings of those traveling along the valley roads. So Guillaume and Pierre Raymond decided to spend the winter months there, bunking down in the dovecote on the property.

The Marty family who owned the property consisted of two elderly parents and their six adult children, three daughters and three sons. One of the sons, Arnaud, was a devout Cathar and would later be ordained as a Cathar Perfect. He was already participating in some of the dietary restrictions imposed on a Cathar Perfect, and this seemed to be a source of conflict between him and his father. During the period in which the two Perfect were staying with the Marty's, the youngest son, Bernard, returned home after falling ill while working as a shepherd. Bernard knelt in the presence of the two Perfect, but had forgotten to remove his cap. His disgusted brother Arnaud snatched the cap off Bernard's head and threw it on the floor. Guillaume Authie then picked up the cap and, with a flick of his wrist, tossed it into the air and sent it spinning across the room, where it landed perfectly on top of a nearby hat rack. Much to Bernard's puzzlement, this sent both Perfect into peals of laughter, and Guillaume eventually became known for his easy and infectious laugh.

Unfortunately for Bernard, his illness worsened. He developed a fever and may have contracted a dose of influenza. The Perfect cared for him while he was sick and when at one stage he seemed close to death, administered the consolamentum. Bernard, however, ended up recovering from his illness. Guillaume Authie spent the winter based on the Marty estate, traveling to and investigating nearby villages in the region, while Pierre completed his business in Toulouse.

During the following months, the brothers reunited and began their mission. What was their mission? To travel around the Sabarthes region between the towns of Tarascon and Ax, supporting and guiding local Cathars, converting others to the Cathar faith, ordaining new Perfects, establishing and protecting the infrastructure needed to keep the faithful out of the reach of the Inquisitors, and of course evading capture by the Inquisition themselves.

Now, just before we go, we might take a quick look at how the Perfect at this time lived and operated, so you can get the right picture in your minds as we move forward. Strangely, for people who were keen to avoid capture by the Dominicans, the Perfect wore a sort of uniform, which marked them for those in the know as one of the Cathar Perfect. Earlier Perfect wore black cloaks, however, this had been viewed as being too distinctive, so all the Perfect now wore dark green tunics topped by a dark blue hooded cloak. In his book "The Yellow Cross", Rene Weis speculates that perhaps the dark blue and green colors acted as a kind of camouflage for the Perfect as they traveled through the forests, and that the restriction of their garments to dark somber colors paid homage to the previous black robes worn by the earlier Perfect.

Both Authie brothers adopted the practice of fasting for three days a week, eating only plain bread and drinking water. For the remainder of the week, they restricted themselves to a diet that was almost vegan. They ate no meat, eggs or dairy products, but they did eat fish, so long as it wasn't cooked using animal fat or butter. When they arrived at a new place, there was a formal ritual observance, which took place between the Cathar Perfect and the Cathar faithful. It involved the Cathar faithful kneeling in front of the Perfect and formally asking the Perfect, in Occitan, for his or her blessing. The Perfect would reply, in Occitan, "May God bless you." This asking and response would occur three times, then the ritual, called the "melhoramentum", would be complete. It was presumably during this type of ritual that Bernard Marty forgot to remove his cap when Guillaume was staying with the Marty family.

For the next nine years, the Authie brothers will travel with the Sabarthes region, spreading and nurturing the Cathar faith, and for the next nine years, the Inquisitors will try to catch them. Join me next week as we continue to follow the brothers on their mission. Until next week, bye for now.

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