

History of the Crusades.
Episode 183.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Net Closes.

Hello again. Last week we took time out of the narrative to take a closer look at the little village of Montailou, a community distinguished by the fact that its priest was actually a Cathar. This week we return to the chronology.

If you cast your minds back to Episode 181, an episode entitled "Betrayal", you may recall that the network of Cathars painstakingly built up by the Authie brothers in the County of Foix was betrayed by Pierre Authie's personal assistant Guillaume Peyre, who reported the activities of the Authie brothers to the head inquisitor in Carcassonne, Geoffroy d'Ablis, after becoming annoyed that the Cathar hierarchy hadn't paid a debt he had incurred while he was imprisoned inside The Wall.

As the spotlight of the Inquisition turned away from the cities of Albi and Carcassonne and focused instead on the County of Foix, the ramifications for the Cathars in this region, as you could imagine, were huge. The reaction of the Cathars in the Authie network seems to have fallen into one of two categories. They either bunkered down, strengthened their networks, and were more stringent than ever in hiding their faith and concealing the Cathar Perfect, or they recanted their faith.

When we left the narrative in Episode 181, a group of Cathars from the town of Ax had come to the momentous decision to travel to Rome, confess their heresy, and throw themselves at the mercy of the new Pope, Pope Clement V. Now actually, as a way of circumventing the Inquisition, a detailed interrogation, and perhaps torture by the Dominican Friars, this was quite a good plan. So, only a fortnight or so after the two Perfects had escaped the trap sprung for them by the Inquisition in September 1305, and incidentally around the same time that the councilors from Carcassonne who had been involved in Friar Bernard Delicieux's doomed Majorcan plot were being brutally executed, the group of Cathars from Ax set off on their journey to Rome.

In the end, they were gone around ten weeks. They didn't end up traveling all the way to the Holy City. Instead, they found what they were seeking in the city of Beziers. They confessed their heresy to the Bishop of Beziers, who issued letters of absolution to the members of the party in December 1305, on behalf of the Papacy. A second letter confirming the absolution was issued on behalf of the French crown in Carcassonne, and the absolved former Cathars made their way back to Ax.

Now, as you can imagine, the Cathars who renounced their faith in this way, as the Inquisition turned its gaze to their corner of the world, found their lives forever altered. While the danger of being caught up in the Inquisition subsided, their connections to their communities were abruptly severed. Ties between the Cathars in the Authie network were strong, but these were all broken when the former Cathars renounced their faith. To maintain their safety net the former Cathars had denounced steer well clear of their friends, family members and neighbors who were still of the Cathar faith.

Understandably, the feeling was mutual. On the whole, Cathars who had held to their faith despite the increased danger had no time at all for those who had crumbled under pressure and renounced their faith. Lifelong ties of friendship were broken, debts and

business deals were abandoned, and the former Cathars found themselves having to forge new ties and friendships within the communities in which they had lived their whole lives. For the Cathars within the County of Foix who had stayed true to their faith, the increased activity of the Inquisitors in the region meant that they had to be extra careful, and the heightened danger seemed to strengthen rather than weaken the ties between them.

Interestingly, the activities of the Inquisition in the County of Foix following the betrayal of the faith by Guillaume Peyre seems to indicate that Guillaume only gave general information to Geoffroy d'Ablis in exchange for absolving his prison debt. While the focus of the Inquisition turned to the region in which the Authie brothers had been operating, they didn't appear to have inside knowledge about hiding places or specific Cathar individuals or their families, information which Guillaume Peyre was certainly privy to. Instead, the Dominican friars, accompanied in some cases by soldiers, conducted raids on seemingly random villages and country properties in the County of Foix. In one memorable move, the entire population of the village of Verdin-en-Lauragais were arrested and imprisoned inside The Wall.

As Stephen O'Shea notes in his book "The Friar Of Carcassonne", the previous restrictions imposed on the Dominicans by the French crown appeared to be no longer operating by this point. Following the disastrous royal tour of the region, King Philip IV seemed to lose interest in the welfare of the people of southern France, and the Inquisition was given full rein to carry out their inquiries as they wished. Stephen O'Shea states, and I quote "The King no longer placed a break on the Inquisition. There was no authority to oversee the Dominicans. There was only complicity." End quote.

Along with Geoffrey d'Ablis, two further appointments were made in the top echelons of the Inquisition following Guillaume Peyre's betrayal. The Dominican Bernard Gui, of "Name of the Rose" fame, was appointed as Head Inquisitor in Toulouse, and the Cistercian Jacques Fournier moved to the top of the Inquisition pecking order in Pamiers. These two men will, in the future, have a huge impact on the persecution of Cathars in the County of Foix.

Now, around eighteen months after the arrest and escape of the two Cathar Perfect, around the same time in fact as Bernard Gui's appointment as Head Inquisitor in Toulouse, Bernard Clergue, the bailiff of Montailou, married into a local Cathar family. The Cathars who had remained committed to their faith following the betrayal seemed to undergo a sort of revival at this time. Marriages between local Cathar families strengthened ties between them, and this certainly seemed to be happening in Montailou. The Authie brothers were still operating in the Sabarthes region, on a business-as-usual basis. Despite the renewed attention of the Inquisition, Guillaume Authie made regular visits to Montailou, and tended to favor the family of Bernard Clergue's new wife, choosing to stay at their residence while he was in the village. From this time up until the end of 1308 there would be another three weddings in Montailou, all of them strengthening the bonds between the Cathar families within the village.

Really, the increased activities of the Inquisition didn't seem to slow the Authie brothers down at all. The Perfect were doing as they always had, moving stealthily from place to place, using their hiding places and disguises, preaching, offering support, and performing the consolamentum. In his book "The Yellow Cross" Rene Weis reports that the Authie

brothers even began operations back in Ax in late 1307, despite the fact that most of the Cathars of Ax had turned their back on their religion and had renounced their faith.

Around this time, the Inquisitors were regular visitors to Montailou, frequently staying at the Clergue's residence, after choosing to detour to Montailou on their way to visiting the town of Ax. Since Pierre Clergue, the village priest, was a Cathar, and since Bernard Clergue's wife was a Cathar, these would have been interesting times for the Cathars of Montailou, and would have elevated tensions within the village to unthinkable levels. But it seemed that the villagers were able to go about their day-to-day activities without attracting the suspicion of the visiting Inquisitors. In a nice touch, Rene Weis reports that around this time the Cathar Perfect Guillaume Authie changed his preferred lodgings in Montague. He stopped staying with Bernard Clergue's wife's family and instead began lodging with the Clergue's themselves, ironically using the same bedroom as that used by the Inquisitors when they stayed in Montailou.

In early 1308 however, things began to get real for Guillaume Authie. Guillaume's wife, who had remained in the region while Guillaume and his brother Pierre went into exile, and had stayed living in the family home while her husband performed his duties as a Perfect, was summoned to Carcassonne by the Inquisition. Due to the betrayal of Guillaume Peyre, it was common knowledge in Inquisition circles that the Authie brothers were the instigators of the Cathar revival, and everyone knew that it was only a matter of time until Guillaume Authie's wife was called to provide evidence to the Dominicans. One of Pierre Authie's sons agreed to accompany her on her journey to Carcassonne. Her husband Guillaume Authie was staying in Montailou, and his wife, whose name incidentally was Gaillarde Authie, was able to detour to Montailou to seek his advice. Apparently Guillaume spent a considerable time talking to his wife, and urged her not to betray the Cathar network. She responded that she would need to tell the truth, whereupon Guillaume stated that at least she could leave some things out. For instance, he told her she shouldn't mention the fact that they were meeting now during her journey to Carcassonne.

Gaillarde Authie continued on to Carcassonne and was interrogated by the Inquisitors. Unfortunately, the record of the information she provided has not survived, but Rene Weis speculates that she would have done her best to protect her husband and his network of Cathar faithful. However, the Inquisition did conduct two raids on Montailou later that year. Whether it was as a result of Gaillarde's evidence, or whether it was just part of a general crackdown in the region, we will never know.

The first raid by the Inquisition into Montailou occurred in May 1308 and was led by none other than Pierre de Luzenac. Remember him? He was the law student who spotted Pierre Authie when the brothers first arrived in Toulouse and was bribed with food and other inducements not to report the newly-arrived Cathar Perfect to the Inquisitors. Well, it seems that by 1308, Pierre de Luzenac had flipped, changed sides, and was now working for the Dominican friars. Apparently, things hadn't turned out all that well for Pierre de Luzenac. He had developed a gambling problem, and Rene Weis speculates that it was the money offered by the Inquisitors which may have induced Pierre to betray his friends. It's unclear whether Pierre de Luzenac ever converted to the Cathar faith, but he certainly had maintained his ties with the Authie brothers over the years, and was considered, to some extent, to have inside knowledge of the Cathar network. Rene Weis states that Bernard Gui, the new head inquisitor at Toulouse, probably groomed Pierre de Luzenac as a spy. Pierre lived in the village of Comus, which was not far from Montailou, and from

Comus it would have been relatively easy to monitor the comings and goings of the Cathar Perfect visiting Montailou.

Interestingly, Pierre Clergue, the closet Cathar priest for Montailou, had no prior knowledge that the raid was going to occur. Pierre's sources of information about the activities of the Inquisition were based in Carcassonne. This raid, however, was conducted under the authority of Bernard Gui at Toulouse. As a result, Pierre Clergue hadn't been able to play both sides as he had been able to in the past.

Luckily for the people of Montailou, despite the fact that they were not forewarned of the raid by their priest, the raiding party was spotted before it entered the village. It was difficult to approach Montailou unseen, and a party of strangers led by Pierre de Luzenac would have attracted some attention. So the Cathars of Montailou had a short time to warn the two Perfect who were staying in the village, Guillaume Authie and Prades Tavernier.

The Perfect had been drilled on what to do in this type of situation, Prades Tavernier having of course, already escaped from the clutches of the Inquisitors following the betrayal a few years earlier. The two Perfect donned disguises that they had created for just this type of emergency, and with the assistance of a Cathar in the village they were rushed from their current hiding place to an alternate house, right on the fringe of the village, which was well placed for the Perfect to be able to flee into the mountains. According to Rene Weis, the two Perfect were still in the process of being moved to their new hiding place while the raiders were in the village. Distracted by searching houses which the inside knowledge of Pierre de Luzenac pointed to as being likely hiding places for the Perfect, the two Perfect and their guide made it safely to their destination. The raiding party was unable to find any evidence that the Perfect had been staying in the village. They discovered the loft that Guillaume Authie had recently been occupying, but failed to recognize it as a hiding spot. In disgust the raiding party arrested five villagers, only two of whom were Cathars.

Rene Weis states that the fact that only five arrests were made, and that only two of those arrested were heretics, indicates that Pierre de Luzenac didn't, in fact, possess a lot of inside knowledge about Montailou. While he clearly knew that the Perfect regularly stayed there, he didn't know the extent of the spread of the Cathar faith in the village, and he didn't know who was a Cathar and who wasn't. The unfortunate villagers who had been arrested were locked up inside the castle at Montailou to await transportation to the place of their interrogation.

Meanwhile, the two Perfect and their guide, who was a local man named Arnaud Vitale, had slipped out of the village, and were heading down one of the many mountain tracks. They passed through a meadow being used by some local shepherds to graze their sheep.

One of the shepherds, Jean Pellissier, later made a detailed statement to the Inquisition about what he saw. Here is an extract from that statement. It's quite lengthy, and I quote, "It was nearly noon as Pierre Bailie, Jean Marty, and I were grazing our sheep in those meadows, there came away from Montailou, on the same track the late Arnaud Vitale, who was wearing a blue cloak and an ax around his neck. With him walked two strangers who were not from Montailou, and I had neither seen them before, nor did I know them. Over their other clothes they each wore a large brown shepherd's cloak made from two

pieces of cloth, so that the sides of their clothes were visible. Their tunics, or their inner garments, were of blue or green cloth. Each carried an ax on his shoulders. These three men came towards me and the other two. When they were next to the meadow of the Belots, they turned off the communal track and crossed over a stone wall into the Belot's meadow. They walked through the meadow where Pierre Bailie was grazing his sheep. Arnaud Vitalle greeted him, and in return, Pierre greeted Arnaud. Then they reached Jean Marty, whom they also greeted, as he did them. After this, I saw Arnaud Vitalle and the two strangers go cross-meadow as far as the wood, which they entered. Immediately afterwards, Arnaud Vitalle came out bearing a huge faggot on his shoulders, which he balanced with an ax." [By the way, a faggot is a piece of firewood, just so you know. Okay, back to the quote.] "Arnaud Vitalle went up directly to Pierre Bailie and Jean Marty, while the two strangers stayed in the wood. And when he joined Pierre and Jean, he rebuked them, in my hearing, for allowing their sheep to stray into freshly sown fields. When Arnaud was gone, Jean and Pierre grazed their sheep next to that wood until evening that day, and I saw no one else that day go to that wood." End quote.

OK, so disguised as woodcutters / shepherds, the two Perfect made it safely into the woods, while their guide pretended that he was just out for a walk with a couple of strangers to cut a piece of firewood before heading back to the village. The shepherd, Jean Pellissier, who gave the statement, returned to Montailou in the evening with his sheep, where he was informed about the raid and the escape of the Perfect by his Cathar grandma. Jean included in his statement the fact that the next morning he saw Arnaud Vitalle returning once more from the wood, suggesting that perhaps the two Perfect had stayed in the wood overnight, waiting for news about the raid, so they could carry information about who was arrested and where they were to be taken back to their network.

The raid on Montailou was by no means an isolated incident. Raids were occurring regularly in villages across the County of Foix as the Inquisition stepped up their activities in the area. Around this time, Geoffroy d'Ablis alone took 51 depositions, only 17 of which have survived the passing of the centuries. To say that the raid of May 1308 rattled the Cathars of Montailou is an understatement. While the Perfect had managed to escape, and while the extent of Catharism in the village remained a secret, it had all been a rather close call. Too close for comfort. Worse still, their Cathar priest, Pierre Clergue, had been unaware of the raid, and his inside connections within the Church had failed to protect the village.

Well, it's time that everyone buckled in, because the Inquisitors are only just getting started, and firmly in their sights are both the village of Montailou and the Cathar Perfect in the Authie network. Join me next week as we take a look at the darkest years yet for the Cathars of the County of Foix. Until next week, bye for now.

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