

History of the Crusades.
Episode 176.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
Bernard Delicieux.

Hello again. Last week we saw two of the Cathar Perfect, brothers Pierre and Guillaume Authie, leave the safety of their exile and return to southern France, in particular to the Sabarthes region in the County of Foix. The brothers busied themselves building on the underground support network already in place to assist those of the Cathar faith, meeting with and preaching to local Cathars, and administering the consolamentum to those of the faith who were close to death.

The administration of the consolamentum was the brothers' most sought after function, and it was also the most dangerous. If a Cathar lay dying and wished to receive the consolamentum, their family members would have to try and locate one of the Cathar Perfect to notify him or her of the situation, then the Perfect would need to travel as quickly as they could to the household to administer the rights before it was too late. The first problem this posed was establishing the whereabouts of a Perfect, and the second was how the Perfect would travel to the household without being spotted. Locating a Perfect when you suddenly had need of one was always going to be problematic. In order to stay ahead of the Inquisition, all the Perfect needed to be constantly on the move, staying only briefly in any given location before moving on to the next hiding place.

In his book "The Yellow Cross", Rene Weis lists some of the places in which the Authie brothers hid or spent the night. Here they are, and I quote "bonds, dovecotes, lofts, cellars, secret chambers, corn pits, silos, wardrobes, and large chests" end quote. Rene Weis goes on to describe one of their regular hiding places, a grain silo at a farm owned by a loyal Cathar family. Apparently, from the pantry near the kitchen of the house you could enter the grain silo. Inside the silo was a trapdoor, which could be accessed by burrowing down through the grain. The trapdoor led to a secret room, which, as a hiding place, would have been pretty secure.

So if you needed a Perfect to attend a dying relative and with the Perfect currently hiding in places such as hidden rooms under a trapdoor inside a grain silo, how would you find them? Well, you would generally start your search at the house of Sybille Baille, in the town of Ax. Sybille was a dedicated supporter of the Cathar faith, and her house in the early 1300's seems to have acted as a de-facto headquarters for the Cathar Perfect. Sybille Baille's dedication to the Cathar cause was such that she had driven her husband, who didn't share her beliefs, from the house, and when her young children became old enough to speak, and to therefore pose a threat to the secrecy needed to preserve the comings and goings of various Cathar Perfect, she expelled them from the house as well, sending them all off to be raised by various relatives.

Sybille Baille's house contained a small secret bedroom, which was set up as a permanent safe haven for traveling Perfect. And it seems that the secret bedroom was nearly constantly in use, with Rene Weis describing Sybille as incessantly baking and cooking, preparing dishes of fish for the Perfect who were staying with her, and meat for the scouts who generally accompanied the traveling Perfect as guides and bodyguards. So, if you needed a Perfect in a hurry, there would likely be one staying at Sybille's house, and if the secret bedroom was vacant, she would likely know the best places to start looking for a Perfect.

The next problem was how to get the Perfect from their safe house to the house containing the person who required the consolamentum. For safety reasons, the Perfect preferred to travel at night. As we mentioned in last week's episode, they wore a uniform of a dark green tunic and a dark blue robe or cloak, which would immediately identify them to other Cathars, and presumably also to those on the side of the Inquisition, as a Perfect. Every Perfect also possessed a book, a copy of The Gospel of St John, which was central to the Cathar faith. They carried the book concealed within their robes. Now, at this time in history, books were incredibly rare and expensive luxury items. The printing press hadn't yet been invented, and books had to be hand copied, a time consuming and highly specialized skill. Accordingly, for an ordinary person to possess a book was extremely unusual and would immediately attract suspicion.

The Authie brothers loved books and even managed to acquire a small collection of them, including an exquisite illuminated manuscript written in Occitan. A member of the Authie family reportedly once asked Pierre Authie to try and find a Bible he could buy next time he was in Toulouse, and ordered the banker in Toulouse to transfer to Pierre the staggering sum of 20 pounds for its purchase. At this time, you could purchase a house for around 40 pounds, so that just goes to show that the purchase of a book was an incredibly expensive investment.

So clearly, if you were wearing clothing that identified you as a Perfect and were carrying with you a rare and precious book, night time travel was always going to be the preferable way to get from Point A to Point B. But of course sometimes, in order to reach a dying person in time to administer the consolamentum, there wasn't the luxury of waiting until nightfall. Traveling by day through cities and towns or along busy roads wasn't so much of a problem, although of course it helps if no one recognizes you or identifies your outfit. It was relatively easy to blend into a throng of people and enjoy the anonymity provided by the crowds.

Many of the Cathar faithful, however, lived in the mountains of Foix, in one of the isolated villages which dotted the dramatic landscape. Traveling through this part of Languedoc was difficult, and not many people attempted it. The only people who regularly traveled through the foothills of the Pyrenees, where shepherds and peddlers; shepherds, obviously, to move their sheep to new pasture; and peddlers to sell items which would be readily purchased in towns to the isolated villages who otherwise would not of had access to them.

So the Authie brothers, when they needed to travel through the mountainous regions of their domain, chose to disguise themselves as peddlers. I'm not sure whether their disguise would have stood up to close scrutiny, because they were both very wealthy men and the good quality of the cloth used in their clothing reflected this. But it did mean that they could carry with them various items and trinkets that might be useful on their journeys, items disguised of course, as peddlers wares.

Now, In the early 1300's the Authie brothers had another close call, but it wasn't due to the inadequacy of their disguises. Their nephew, named Guillaume de Rodes, who worked as a notary in the town of Tarascon, received a letter warning him that his uncles Pierre and Guillaume Authie were in danger, and requesting Guillaume to travel to Pamiers to discuss the matter further. The author of the letter was young Guillaume's brother Raymonde de Rodes, who was actually a Dominican. Now if you think that it would be useful for the

Authie brothers to have a relative inside the Dominican Order working at the heart of the Inquisition, you would be exactly right.

Raymonde de Rodes had heard word that a Franciscan named Guillaume Dejean had recently met with the Authie brothers, who believed him to be a Cathar. Immediately after meeting the Authie brothers, Guillaume Dejean had made his way to a Dominican friar and had offered to bring the Authie brothers in. Pierre and Guillaume Authie were now clearly in significant danger. The Dominican Raymonde de Rodes was unable to assist further without placing himself in danger, so he handed the matter over to his brother Guillaume de Rodes. Guillaume de Rodes decided to hand the matter over to his uncle Raymond, brother to Pierre and Guillaume Authie.

Raymond Authie was a man of action and decided to set a trap for the informer Guillaume Dejean. While the Authie brothers whom Guillaume Dejean was seeking to betray went into hiding, Raymond Authie convinced an ardent supporter of the Cathar Perfect, Guillaume Delaire, to lure Guillaume Dejean in.

The plan was for Guillaume Delaire to bump into Guillaume Dejean in a public place in the town of Ax. The meeting would need to look as though it happened by pure chance and somehow Guillaume Delaire was going to have to subtly bring the conversation around to the whereabouts of the Authie brothers. He was then going to have to dangle the bait carefully in front of Guillaume Dejean. He was going to need to tell him that he knew where the Authie brothers were hiding and that he was prepared to take Guillaume Dejean to the place where the Cathar Perfect were concealed. This wasn't going to be an easy task. Guillaume Delaire was going to have to carefully and delicately reveal the false information, without raising any suspicions that it was part of a plot. But he must have done well. Guillaume Dejean took the bait and asked Guillaume Delaire to lead him to the hiding place of the Cathar Perfect.

Taking Guillaume Dejean to the fictional hiding place of the Authie brothers involved traveling across a bridge which spans the river Ariege, and it was here that the Cathars sprung their trap. Four Cathars concealed themselves near the bridge. They attacked Guillaume Dejean and dragged him up the mountains. They questioned him about his intentions, and when he admitted to wanting to capture the Authie brothers, they pushed him over a cliff and killed him. Now Cathars, of course, are pacifists, and taking the life of another in the name of the Cathar faith is rare. The murder of the two Inquisitors and their nine supporters in Avignonet more than half a century earlier was the only other recorded incident of death by Cathar. That a group of Cathars were prepared to murder an informer to ensure the safety of the Authie brothers showed just how vital the work of the brothers was to the remaining Cathars, and their esteem amongst the Cathar community.

Right, so we will leave the now relatively safe Authie brothers there for the moment. They will be busy, both carrying out their duties as Cathar Perfect, creating and strengthening the underground network that will conceal them, and discreetly catching up with family members and friends. And, of course, trying to keep one step ahead of the Inquisition.

Talking of the Inquisition, Let's see how things are going for them. By the early 1300's the Inquisition had grown to be an extensive and powerful bureaucracy, with chief Inquisitors based in the main cities of Languedoc, overseeing a vast network of Inquisitors, informers and support staff. But in the early 1300's, the Inquisition in southern France was beginning to come under fire, not from Cathars or from the nobility, as had been the case in the

previous century, but from their fellow Catholics, more specifically from a sect of Spiritual Franciscans.

Now, you might remember that the Franciscan Order was founded by St Francis of Assisi, who we met back in the Middle Eastern Crusades, a man of noble birth who cast aside his wealthy upbringing to live a life of poverty in service of his faith. Accordingly, members of the Franciscan Order believed that the true path of Christianity was one characterized by poverty and humble service to the community. The Dominicans, with their growing power and authority, and their ability to inflict fear and terror while they tortured citizens in their mission to seek out and destroy heretical depravity, didn't really fit the Franciscan ideal of how monks should behave. I guess it was only going to be a matter of time until the two Orders clashed, and clash they did at the beginning of the 1300's.

The leader of the opposition to the Dominicans, and consequent thorn in the side of the Inquisition, was an interesting man with an unforgettable name. Bernard Delicieux. Delicious Bernard was a firebrand Franciscan, a charismatic, out-spoken cleric with a restless mind, who had the courage to stand up to the Inquisitors. Let's take a closer look at him.

Bernard Delicieux had been born into a family belonging to the lesser nobility in the town of Montpellier, somewhere between the years 1260 and 1270. He joined the Franciscan order in the year 1284 and his talents were quickly recognized. What were his talents? Well, firstly, he was an intellectual, with his interests ranging beyond theology into the world of science, alchemy and philosophy. Not content with limiting himself to studying works approved by the Church, he became friends with intellectuals from Catalonia, who introduced him to advances made in the Islamic world. His interests may even have extended to studies of the dark arts and necromancy. Bernard was also a gifted public speaker, able to whip crowds into a frenzy, and was a charismatic persuader of others, able to use diplomacy and subtle manipulation to get others to do his bidding. Bernard quickly rose through the ranks of the Franciscan order at Carcassonne.

Now, intellectually, theologically and emotionally, Bernard Delicieux was fundamentally opposed to the Inquisition and the work of the Dominican friars. He had grown up in Languedoc under the shadow of the Inquisition, and he was diametrically opposed to what he saw as the Dominicans' abuses of power, and their willingness to harm others to achieve their ends. It's probably not too much of an exaggeration to say that if pressed, Bernard would have been on the side of the heretics rather than the side of the Inquisitors. He was open to new ideas, and his intellect welcomed discussion of unorthodox thought and beliefs. This was always going to place Bernard not only at odds with the Inquisition, but at odds with the Catholic Church itself.

Shockingly, Bernard didn't view the Cathars as enemies of the Church. On the contrary, he believed them to be faithful Christians, who just possessed a different viewpoint to that of mainstream Catholicism. In this assessment, of course, Bernard was way ahead of his time. Further down the track, the Inquisitor Bernard Gui will label Bernard Delicieux as, and I quote "the Commander and Standard-Bearer of the Army of the Forces of Evil" end quote. I fear that interesting times are ahead for Bernard Delicieux.

But back around the year 1300 Bernard Delicieux is a Franciscan friar, living in the Franciscan monastery at Carcassonne. Now, in Carcassonne at that time was a building that served as a constant reminder of the power and oppression of the Inquisition. That

building, which now no longer exists, was called "The Wall", and was a massive and imposing prison complex run by the Dominicans, built to house those arrested by the Inquisitors and those undergoing interrogation. It's quite possible that this building made Bernard Delicieux angry each time he looked at it, and he probably would have looked at it often, as it was unmissable. It was located near the river in the city of Carcassonne, and you had to pass it on your way out of the city into the commercial outer suburb of the Bourg. It had been built under the orders of King Louis IX to house people who had fallen foul of either the Church or the French crown, and it was almost universally loathed by the citizens of Carcassonne.

I'm going to read you a long quote now, to give you an idea of just how much the people of Carcassonne hated The Wall. The quote comes from a letter written by a group of citizens from Carcassonne and forwarded to both the Dominican Order and King Louis IX in the year 1286. And I quote "We feel aggrieved in that you, contrary to the use and custom observed by your predecessors in the Inquisition, have made a new prison called The Wall. Truly, This could be called with good cause a Hell, for in it you have constructed little cells for the purpose of torturing and tormenting people. Some of these cells are dark and airless, so that those lodged there cannot tell if it is day or night, and they are continually deprived of air and light. In other cells are kept miserable wretches laden with shackles, some of wood, some of iron. These cannot move, but defecate and urinate on themselves. Nor can they lie down, except on the frigid ground. They have endured torments like these, day and night, for a long time. In other miserable places in the prison, not only is there no light or air, but the food is rarely distributed, and that only bread and water. Many prisoners have been put in similar situations in which several, because of the severity of their tortures, have lost limbs and have been completely incapacitated. Many, because of the unbearable conditions and their great suffering, have died a most cruel death. In these prisons, there is constantly heard an immense wailing, weeping, groaning, and gnashing of teeth. What more can I say? For these prisoners, life is a torment, and death a comfort, and thus coerced they say what is false is true, choosing to die once rather than endure more torture. As a result of these forced and coerced confessions, not only do those making the confessions perish, but so do the innocent people named by them." End quote.

The citizens of Carcassonne who wrote this letter did not succeed in their goal of getting the prison shut down. Join me next week when Bernard Delicieux does his bit to get the prison shut down. How does he do this? Well by traveling to Paris and personally informing the French King of the horrors perpetrated by the Inquisition in southern France. Until next week, bye for now.

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