

**A FLAVOUR OF THE LANGUEDOC.
(THE HERETIC'S VIEWPOINT)**

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A FLAVOUR OF THE LANGUEDOC, A HERETIC'S VIEWPOINT.

Anyone who has travelled and explored the English countryside may be left with the feeling that the land has been conquered and tamed by man. From the far horizon flatness of Essex and the Wash, to the rolling graceful western counties, the firm hand of man has shaped and used the land for his own purposes. He has built cities, towns, villages, and hamlets where he will. He has enclosed as farmland or country estates, areas large and small anywhere he has chosen. The traveller only has the freedom of the roads because someone or other owns all of the land on either side of the roads.

Islands of wildness still exist, for example the Yorkshire Moors and Dartmoor and in the far south west of Cornwall but these are islands set amid and surrounded by Man's unmistakable presence. If the traveller then heads south across the English Channel, continuing south through the heart of northern France, still the hand of man clearly shows a similar controlling imprint on the land. Only when this journey to the south reaches a line marked across France by the Midi Canal, does the traveller realise that whoever does control the land, it is not Man. The Midi Canal connects the Atlantic at Bordeaux with the Gulf of Leon in the Mediterranean at Narbonne. In traversing France the Midi Canal also links the ancient cities of Toulouse, Castelnaudray, and Carcassonne. Historically Narbonne was the capital and sovereign city of a kingdom called Septimania that today is shown on the map as Languedoc/ Roussillon. As the traveller moves further south the border is reached that divides France from Spain and as our interest be in the land between the Midi and the Spanish Border, a word picture may help you to visualise it.

Back in the mists of prehistory Spain was a separate continent that as part of a Tectonic Plate, crashed with irresistible force against the immovable plate that carries France. Before that happened, what was the northern coast of Spain would have been divided from the then southernmost coast of France by a gradually narrowing sea channel from the Atlantic to the Med. The enormous forces from below the channel and the relentless pressure exerted by the drifting continent would have crushed the coastlines of both continents and the seabed in between, and also the underlying rock strata. Then because the pressure continued to mount of both drift and volcanic forces, the crushed seabed and coasts would have been forced upwards and then hurled on either side of a newly emerging range of mountains, huge fangs of rock driven upwards amid the fire and lava to a height of thousands of feet. The Pyrenees, "The Mountains of Fire" stretch from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea.

From the Midi Canal to the foot of the Pyrenees the land resembles a heavily rumpled bedcover, twisted and convoluted, a mixture of high foothills and twisting steep valleys. Long strangely shaped ridges and sudden sheer cliffs, deep sheer gorges and steep narrow hills with tiny ancient stone villages perched on top. Time and the elements have softened the tumbled effect with a light covering of alpine type grass, Dwarf Oak trees and many others able to survive in such surroundings.

A closer look at the terrain shows clear evidence of its violent past. Rainfall run-off on these foothills is rapid and carries with it many small pieces of rock that cut and gouges as the rushing water tumbles them down to the valleys below. Many of these steep streambeds have been cut over the centuries. Some are deep enough to hide a double-decker bus, and so to stand in a stream bed looking at its sides, is to be able to see the underlying strata to a depth of maybe twenty feet or more at a glance. What rushing water has revealed is typical of the surrounding lands.

Alpine grass, Wild Lavender and Gorse overhang the cliff-like sides, their roots revealed having forced their way down through a thin layer of soil mixed with pieces of rock. Below this, maybe strata of huge blocks of rock held in place by a mixture of soil and sand. Under this a layer of clay several feet thick and even lower, more shattered rock, then a few feet of sandstone. Below this if we crouch down, we see just a few inches above the streambed, a layer of dark green clay, two to three inches thick. It is moist and has lumps embedded in it. The rushing rock-laden water dissolves and scours at the clay to reveal that the lumps in this streambed, maybe seven hundred metres above sea level, are in fact Oyster shells. Some are fossilised, but others the shells complete with their colouring, look as though they just came out of the sea.

When taking in the view from some high point, the predominant colour is a deep rich blood red of the soil with its rich content of iron. So much soil, hills of soil on which lay half-embedded rocks as big and square as houses. The hills have their covering of grasses but their steepness combined with heavy rainfall will often cause landslides to reveal once again the redness that lies below. Many dinosaur bones have been excavated in this region and are displayed amid life-sized models and Prehistoric Scenarios, of the Aude Valley at Esparaza.

The Pyrenean Foothills have their origins in a mixture of enormously powerful forces, some of which are still in evidence today. For example, through Rennes les Bains flow two rivers that merge as they enter the village. One is the Blanc into which a natural form of Sulphur runs from a spring. The other river is the Sals, and this bubbles and rushes from its source a few miles away in the hills, its waters rich with mineral salts. Halfway through Rennes les Bains village the two blended rivers are joined by another powerful natural spring of near boiling water heated by not so deep volcanic activity. "Les Bains" is the Francais for "The Baths" and from pre-Roman times to the present day Rennes les Bains is renowned for its Thermal and Mineral water baths and therapies.

Volcanism and mountain building long ago bulldozed vast quantities of rock to rest on top of soil. It is the dryness of the soil that locks this uneasy structure in place. For this reason a third powerful force is rainfall and its effect when as well as draining into the rivers, finds its way down below the surface to turn bone dry soil into a liquid mud that in time is washed away. The result of this erosion over the centuries is an extensive and widespread system, or rather, systems of tunnels and caverns. Some known and used by men even in prehistoric times, their painting and artwork can be seen in caverns of the nearby Ariege. Others not known to man because they lack an entrance can only be suspected from the jumbled makeup of the terrain.

What effect would a land as described have on the people who would eventually make it their home?

A land that had been shattered, its age-old strata and energy patterns twisted, distorted and converted into entirely new configurations, a terrain that is always changing, settling, dissolving, revealing something new. All lands radiate their own type of energies. Even a person who has never given a moment's thought to their own psychic aspects will experience an unaccountable exhilaration when in one location, but will have a feeling of unexplained depression in another, possibly quite near to the first location.

These are Earth Energies. Each human being is a linking blend of physical and spiritual energies even at their most subatomic structural level. For this reason it is not surprising that their sensitivity detects these energies even though consciously they may not realise what they are. The effect of this land on humans is neither depressing nor exhilarating.

The effect is of magnifying what that human has become. For example, a person who has become materialistic to the exclusion of everything else, will become even more materialistic; even to the point where that person at last realises what they have become. This effect is less noticeable on local people born and bred in this area, but more noticeable on visitors and newcomers. To live in this strange land is to have your traits magnified until even you notice them. Native or visitor, those effects affect daily life in more or less subtle ways that have led populations; current and throughout history, to regard this mysterious rugged area as sacred, a place of pilgrimage to be respected.

Here, farmers cannot tame the land but must fit in where the land will allow them, an entire hillside here or a tiny patch of land there high above a valley floor. Even then only certain crops will grow, including the hardy, deep-rooted grapevine and plantations of Pine Trees. Similar limitations are set by this convoluted terrain on anyone who would build a factory or a home, with very few sites available that are flat enough to build on without first shifting many tons of rock, or discovering cavities that first must be filled

These special Earth energies; though unseen, have had their effect on many races that in turn have moved into this area. Many of the valley sides are dotted with very ancient man-made structures. No one today is really sure who built them or why. All are built from small chunks of flat rock that abound on most hillsides. No cement has been used; the stones are cleverly stacked with dry joints. The largest structures form walls that mark boundaries of some sort, and these may be four to six feet wide with an original height unknown; as much stone has since been removed by local builders. Often the walls have been built across valleys to continue up the hillsides on either side. The people who built the walls also built other structures, some clearly to live in, with circular upright walls of the same dry stonework and a conical roof made of flat stones that keep the interior as dry today as when it was built.

Several people at a time could have inhabited them because some structures are about ten feet across inside. Other smaller structures are shaped more like stone igloos. Sometimes clustered together in encampments, but others entirely alone. Many of the structures built by these ancient people lack any obvious function or purpose. From the amount of toil invested into building the structures, they were very important and had a purpose that meant a great deal to those people.

For example: visualise a dry stone structure thirty to forty feet long, about seven or eight feet wide, and about four feet six inches high. Flat top and rounded ends, and at each end a seat shaped cavity that you could sit in with your legs and feet dangling over the end. The whole structure is solid, rather like a stage, and stands alone now concealed by shrubbery. Others are different shapes and designs and sizes, all are completely filled with stone. For defence purposes they would have been useless. It has been suggested the purpose of them had a religious nature. Seen from above some of them form mystifying designs that someday someone may understand.

Literally there are thousands of these various types of stone structures built in a three to four mile radius of Rennes le Chateau. RLC has a remarkable history, and is a tiny village set on a small mountain above the large village of Couiza in the Aude Valley. Legends handed down the generations from the time of Jesus Christ tell us how the family of Jesus was saved from Roman persecution.. Joseph of Arimathea, a prosperous merchant, used his merchant ships to carry the family to a safe haven at Marseilles in the Gulf of Leon. There they were made welcome by the local rulers and treated as nobility.

Later Joseph took Christianity to Glastonbury in England. The family stayed as part of a growing Jewish community. There they continued to teach what previously they had heard Jesus teach to the people. As the Royal bloodline of the House of David, when they married into the local Visigoth nobility they merged that blood of Jewish royalty. Thus began a dynasty of mythical Healer Kings that was known as the Merovingian or Red-haired Healer kings. Whilst The Family, taught the original teachings in the safety of Septimania, the early Christians who still existed under Roman rule and domination were compelled to either worship in secret, or to alter the Christian teachings to make them acceptable to their Roman rulers. Those who chose the former were hunted down and usually died in Roman prisons or as victims in the Roman Sports Arenas. Those who chose the latter changed Christianity so that when Rome finally accepted it as the official religion, it was a very different message to the Word as taught by Jesus, and later by his family in France. Many centuries later when the official teachings violently clashed with the original teachings, the effect on the Languedoc was bloody and traumatic.

Because Rome accepted this version it was enshrined as the message of Jesus to be taught by the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Priests were sent to every land to teach it throughout the vast Roman Empire. When previously the Empire destroyed the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem they removed the treasure first and took it back to Rome. Later when the Roman Empire was invaded and conquered by the Germanic Tribes known as the Visigoth Hordes, the Visigoths spared the Christian temples. Legend says they removed the treasure of Solomon's Temple and brought it back to France, At the time most of France was part of the Visigoth Empire that also straddled the Pyrenees Mountains into Northern Spain.

Though the Roman Empire was crushed, the Holy Roman Church with its many far-flung priests was more powerful than before. Also it was more powerful than the petty kings and warlords who, individually, were trying to grab pieces of the shattered Roman Empire. Each to retain what they had fought for, had to swear allegiance to the then Pope and in this way the Pope became a Maker and Breaker of kings. Part of the allegiance sworn was to defend the Faith as taught by the Church of Rome.

Anyone who would not accept The Faith as taught was condemned to death for the crime of Heresy.

For the Holy Church of Rome politics and religion became interchangeable tools of rigid population control through its puppet kings throughout Europe. The Church controlled and restricted all knowledge and scientific thought. Very few kings or noblemen could read or write or even could write their own names. So throughout Europe began the Dark Ages of ignorance, fear, and grinding poverty and actual fear of knowledge. The Dark Ages that lasted for centuries until the Renaissance Period of the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. The Family of Jesus taught a Christianity that was similar to the beliefs of their Visigoth hosts who followed a form known as Arian Christianity. This had not been very much altered from that originally taught by Jesus.

In the space available it is only possible to offer you a hint or a suggestion of why any deviation from the Faith as taught by the Holy Roman Church, had to be ruthlessly stamped out. Clearly it felt its power to control peoples was threatened by the original teachings of Jesus, who the church portrayed as the humble carpenter of Nazareth. Researchers have been puzzled by the obvious contradiction that the church would ask us to accept, of a Jesus who was simultaneously, a humble village carpenter, and also a direct descendant of King David of the tribe of Judah.

Of course that would make him royalty to the Jewish people.

When the researchers delved into this puzzle, they discovered that, like Buddha before him, Jesus came from a prosperous, influential family. He had powerful and influential connections. His friends had high hopes of restoring the Jewish Crown to its rightful wearer; Jesus, by taking it from the Roman backed usurper on the throne, King Herod.

Far from spending the first thirty years of his life in a humble village, Jesus travelled extensively and studied many religions deeply. Recorded in the Temple archives in many lands are details of his visits. To travel then, as now, requires financial backing especially if accompanied by an entourage, so clearly the resources were made available. An English legend tells of when Jesus as a very young man accompanied his Uncle Joseph of Arimathia to Glastonbury in the west of England. Not so much to teach, but, instead to learn from those he met there. After such extensive travels Jesus would have returned home to commence his short ministry.

Jesus would have been an extremely learned Rabbi with a very wide knowledge and experience of the religions and belief systems of the known world. Most of those religions differed in many respects. Most shared the similar belief in the reincarnation of the individual into physical life after death of their previous physical body. For this reason it is almost certain Reincarnation and its purpose would have formed a basic part of Jesus' teaching. If so, this since has been deleted by others for their own motives.

Jesus always insisted that, like us all, he was a flesh and blood Human Being. Or if we turn this round to taste its full significance, "We are flesh and blood Human Beings... JUST LIKE JESUS".

Also he said that anything he could do we all can do, if only each of us individually will learn to banish Self- Doubt, and to learn to love and trust our individual selves. The only way it is possible to achieve this is by learning a method of entering self, known as Meditation. In Meditation alone you enter your Still

We hope this brief explanation helps you to understand why always the people who want to control the thinking of the masses, the spread of this powerful message has to be stamped out, or at least heavily diluted. Jesus came to divide and convert Herd (conditioned) thinking into individual thinking and he showed Herd Followers how to take charge of their own thinking, to become real people in their own right simply by realising why they exist in a physical body.

With this realisation dawned the understanding, even for the most abject sufferer, that the suffering was temporary. No priest or conqueror has permanent power over the lives of the conquered. That always you are in charge of your own destiny and your own future. Death of your body would release you from the suffering of "Now", but still you would be in charge of you. If God gave you Freewill whom else could be in charge of you? Release from your body would give you freedom to assess your last life. The freedom to plan your next life and its challenges, whilst always taking into account that in that next life you will have no memory of what you previously planned.

All that you would be reborn with would be your spiritual evolvement gained through those many lives. Also you would be reborn with the freewill tendency to Self-Doubt, also learned by you through those many lives. The choice is not between good or evil, it is between Self- Harmony or Self-Doubt. Evil is a by- product of Self-Doubt and good is a by-product of Self-Harmony. All who were touched by, and understood the message were released from the shackles of fear. In familiar everyday terms, wherever this Message took root the light of knowledge, tolerance, culture and grace shone out like a beacon. Where ever the teachings enshrined by the Holy Roman Church were enforced, (of only one physical life per person regardless of what station in life), of blind unquestioning obedience to the Priesthood and the current Rulers.

A final judgement day when the Creator (who gave us all Freewill to make mistakes), then contradicts that action by judging the mistakes we made in life. Wherever that teaching touched became blighted with fear, ignorance, intolerance, cruelty, and persecution, corruption and grinding poverty. This was known as the 'Dark Ages' that gripped and paralysed most of Europe. At the same time a beacon as described shone out into the darkness from south of that line one-day to be marked by the Midi Canal across France.

Ten centuries after the time of Jesus Christ's life on Earth, long after his family and the Merovingian Dynasty of kings started by the family were word of mouth legends passed down the generations. Long after the Visigoths were just a memory; the Pyrenean Foothills were peopled by a mixture of races some that had descended from the Bogomils, from an area known today as Bosnia Herzegovina.

With them they brought their religious beliefs that blended comfortably with the " Original Message" that had travelled down those many generations. These people became known as The Cathars.

They were a tolerant, industrious, prosperous people who had no interest in conquering anyone or forcing their religious beliefs into unwilling ears. All beliefs were welcomed to the area, including the priests of the Holy Roman Church. The priests complained to the Pope in Rome that no one was compelled to believe anything, and that their Roman Catholic Churches were standing empty.

Art and music thrived, also influenced by Moorish culture from nearby Spain. Many people chose to learn Latin and Greek and to study Philosophy and the Sciences. The Cathars belief system was based in Gnostic, Dualistic roots similar to those of the Essenes. Long ago the Essenes played their part in the spiritual tuition of Jesus. In such an atmosphere of religious freedom there was no one clearly defined Cathar Belief but instead, many variations of a similar theme. But all agreed that physical existence is only a stepping-stone to our real existence, and that Reincarnation is our means of preparing ourselves for that step.

Some believed 'Rex Mundi' created and ruled the Earth and that physical matter was evil. Others believed physical matter was irrelevant to Man's real goal. Yet other Cathars believed the true role of the individual human is to spiritualise the physical matter of his or her body. But all Cathar teachers encouraged and taught Meditation as the way to discover your true self and your Creator.

After driving three to four kilometres from Couiza on the River Aude, up a twisting turning ever-climbing narrow mountain road, the visitor finally reaches Rennes le Chateau, a tiny village perched on a mountaintop. Rennes le Chateau overlooks a panorama of dramatic and mysterious countryside. Strangely shaped foothills and valleys that march away higher and higher to the sunlit snow of the not so distant Pyrenees Mountains. Though now simply another farming village with a population of less than one hundred, Rennes le Chateau was once a capital city of the Visigoth Empire that controlled most of France.

When the Visigoths were driven into the foothills, Rennes le Chateau became the northeast bastion of their empire that still straddled both sides of the Pyrenees. At that time thirty thousand people lived in and around the Citadel. Rennes le Chateau has a many-layered history and legends abound. Of Visigoth plunder including the treasure of Solomon's Temple concealed around Rennes when the Visigoths retreated to this area. Le Eglise de la Madeleine the tiny chapel of the village has legends attached to it that reach back even further into history.

Built on the foundations of very ancient sacred structures the chapel has a crypt that is sealed. In the crypt are said to be tombs of the local nobility. Legend says that below the crypt is another chamber. This chamber was part of the previous building. Legend also tells us that it contains the tombs of Merovingian royalty and also the tomb of Mary Magdalene. It is logical that Mary would have accompanied the Family in their escape from Roman persecution.

The results of fairly recent excavations into the crypt entrance; monitored by local Roman Catholic priests, have never been revealed, though an observer mentioned that the crypt stone work was covered and decorated with beautiful gold-leaf. After the excavations were completed the crypt was resealed and the entrance steps were filled in again, so for the moment we are left only with legends.

By the twelfth century the original Message of Jesus, only slightly altered by time and interpretation, was spreading beyond the foothills into other parts of France, and also into other countries. The Church of Rome regarded this, the Cathar country, as a hotbed of Heresy that must be stamped out. Both men and women who were known as the Perfected Ones or Parfaits taught the Cathar Beliefs. Usually they were married and with adult sons and daughters and so usually they would not become Parfaits until they had entered their forties.

A Cathar Bishop would preside over a ceremony during which they would take a vow of chastity, and they would receive "The Consolamentum". This involved a vow of chastity because the Cathars believed procreation of the flesh was not a service to the principle of love, but to Rex Mundi who they regarded as the evil ruler of the physical world. Apart from Parfaits, believers only took the vow when on their deathbed. Although Catharism condemned procreation they were not so naive as to attempt to abolish sexuality. As far as the ordinary believers were concerned sexuality was tolerated. This suggests that the Cathars practised both Birth Control and abortion.

When Rome subsequently charged the heretics with unnatural sexual practices this was later taken to mean Sodomy, but the Cathars were extremely strict in their prohibition of Sodomy. Also we know Rome's position on Birth control and abortion today and can imagine the vindictive zeal and energy with which that same position would have been enforced during the Dark Ages.

The Cathars lived lives of devotion and simplicity. They did not use churches, preferring to conduct their ceremonies and rituals outside, or in houses or any convenient building. Generally they were vegetarian, abhorring taking life for food, but permitted fish as part of their diet. The Parfaits, dressed in simple dark blue, green, or brown robes, travelled the countryside in pairs, teaching the Cathar beliefs and the method of Meditation that for the individual seeker, converted belief into the "Knowing". Many Cathar noblemen were drawn to the belief and became Parfaits; who later provided refuges and resources to many Cathars resisting and fleeing the persecution of the Inquisition-led Crusade.

Half a century before the crusade, Saint Bernard travelled to the Languedoc to preach against the heretics. But when he arrived he was less appalled by the heretics than by the corruption of his own church that had priests who ignored their congregations. The priests had concentrated their efforts on becoming rich land-owners whilst their churches had stood empty for thirty years. Bernard was clearly impressed by the Cathar "Heretics" and he declared, " No sermons are more Christian than theirs, and their morals are pure".

By twelve hundred AD Rome was looking for a legitimate reason to clamp down on the heretics. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Cathar Belief would soon replace Roman Catholic Faith in the entire south of France. Catharism was quickly spreading to more and more areas as individuals were drawn by its tolerance, freedom of thought, and also its lack of ritual, dogma and tithes paid to Rome.

In January 1200 AD anticlerical rebels murdered Pierre de Castelnau, one of the Papal Legates to the Languedoc. Though the murderers had no Cathar affiliations whatever, Rome did not hesitate to use this as the excuse she needed.

At once Pope Innocent 11 ordered a crusade. Always there had been persecution of heretics throughout the previous centuries, but this time Rome was in earnest. Determined to destroy the heresy once and for all. A massive army was mustered under the command of the Abbot of Citeaux, and the military operation commanded by Simon de Montefort.

Rome was well aware of the northern baron's envy in regard to the rich lands and cities to the south. The Pope exploited this envy and used the armies of the northern lords as his storm troops. The Holy Roman Church gave all on the crusade forgiveness of sins past and future and the right of ownership of all plunder. In 1209 an army of some 30.000 knights and foot soldiers from Northern Europe descended like a whirlwind on the Languedoc. In the war that followed the whole territory was ravaged. Crops were destroyed, towns and cities were razed, and a whole population was put to the sword. This was extermination on a vast and terrible scale.

In the town of Beziers alone, at least 15.000 men women and children were slaughtered wholesale, many whilst in the sanctuary of the RC churches. An officer, who asked the representative of the Pope how he might distinguish heretics from true believers, was told, "Kill them all. God will recognise his own". This typified the fanatical zeal and bloodlust with which the atrocities were perpetrated. After Beziers the crusade swept through the whole of the Languedoc. One after the other, Perpignan, Narbonne, Carcassonne and Toulouse fell, and where the victors passed they left a trail of blood, death and carnage in their wake

This war, which lasted for nearly forty years, is now known as the Albigensian Crusade. By the time it was over the Languedoc had been utterly transformed, plunged back into the barbarity that characterised the rest of Europe, all this vicious cruelty to crush an idea.

By 1243 all major Cathar towns and bastions had fallen to the crusaders, except a handful of remote and isolated strongholds.

Chief among these was the majestic mountain citadel of Montsegur towering high and steeply above the surrounding valleys. The Lord of Montsegur was Ramon de Pereille, a staunch Cathar who drew together the remnants of Cathar resistance for one final stand against the onslaught. Technically their creed forbade them to bear arms, though many Parfaits ignored this. Also because of the backing of wealthy sympathetic landowners, they were able to employ large numbers of mercenaries, at considerable expense.

During the siege the attackers numbered more than ten thousand, and with this vast force they tried to surround the entire mountain to starve out the defenders, but they still lacked sufficient manpower to make the ring secure. The energies we described earlier had their effect on the crusaders, many of whom by now were sickened by the endless slaughter of innocents. There were many gaps left in the ring through which the Cathars were able to slip to and from, keeping the fortress supplied with food etc. For two years the invaders besieged Montsegur. It withstood repeated assaults and maintained tenacious resistance until the attackers were able to erect a rock-hurling machine, after hoisting it up the sheer mountainside. With this direct attack at the ramparts of the fortress, the defenders capitulated.

Catharism, at least ostensibly, ceased to exist in the south of France, although it took a further 100 years of terror tactics by the Holy Roman Inquisition unequalled by the Nazi Gestapo to finally stamp it out.

A series of mysteries surrounds the events and terms negotiated between the two 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 offered to the children of the mercenary soldiers, and that some women Parfaits, spared these children a cruel ordeal by jumping with them from the ramparts, to their deaths on the rocks below.

The garrison had been warned that if anyone escaped, all including the hostages would die. Here we have another mystery, because despite this warning four Parfaits were concealed in the castle by and with the full knowledge of the garrison. On the 16th March, under cover of darkness, the four Parfaits, led by a guide, lowered themselves with ropes down the western face of the mountain, entailing the descent of sheer drops of 500 Feet at a time. It is not known what they were carrying. The treasure had been removed earlier in the year so why wasn't whatever they carried removed at the same time? It must have something essential for the Solstice Ceremony that could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church Inquisitors.

Whatever it was also affected 21 non-Cathars so deeply that they went to a horrible death they could easily have avoided. Could it have been documents or books appertaining to the Cathar beliefs? Or maybe something that proved beyond doubt that the Enshrined Word that the Holy Roman Church, taught and believed for over a thousand years, was based mainly on later fabrications. Distortions or misinterpretations of the Truth as Jesus originally taught it?

Very briefly here we must look at two items of history set firmly in The Middle Ages. The first, even in modern times has always been considered to be the product of the imaginations of medieval writers of lyrical, mystical romances. Romances in which heroic knights were sent to seek The Holy Grail that itself is tended by the Family of The Holy Grail. The Grail may be a drinking vessel, a special stone, or a bowl of some sort, but always its special powers are derived from its legendary contact with the blood of Jesus.

The second item has a far more factual basis, and that is the existence of The Knights Templar with their white robes and red crosses. In the medieval romances the heroic knights described were unmistakably Knights Templars who also were sent seeking something very special. The order derived its name from The Knights of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The order became a huge powerful and influential international organisation with its own fleets of fighting and merchant ships and dockyards. Its own hospitals, castles and lands donated by new entrants. It became the greatest moneylender in Europe, lending to Kings and thus controlling the freedom of action of those kings.

The Templars were the forerunners of scientific research and were the first to use the magnetic compass. The Templars owned the three ships, with their white sails and large red crosses that Christopher Columbus used to discover the West Indies. The Templars had deep knowledge and understanding of the Occult, of Metaphysics, and of the Psychic world. Their avowed aim was to draw together the Islamic and Christian worlds.

The Templars built some of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world, on sites with special energies detected by Psychics. Today, in those soaring structures, amid the Gothic arches you can see carved stone symbols that have more to do with secret occult knowledge than they have to do with Christianity as it is taught today. The Templars were responsible to the Pope and no one else. Neither kings nor the Holy Inquisition could touch them, so their power and riches were bitterly envied by the rulers of Europe.

During the Albigensian Crusade the Templars took no part in the massacres and frequently gave fleeing Cathars sanctuary in their castles, and many Cathars were admitted into the Order, where no crusader would dare touch them. The Templars were drawn to the Cathars and their Dualistic, Gnostic beliefs, and later their many enemies used this to accuse the Templars of Heresy.

Though the Order became huge and powerful, its beginnings were very small, with secret aims hidden behind its publicly declared altruistic aims. One of its founders was a nobleman of a Cathar family; the Blancheforts, whose chateau ruins rest on a pinnacle of rock only three miles from Couiza (where we are writing this now). The Order was limited to a total of nine knights who were to be sent to the Holy Land to defend the roads leading to Jerusalem, to keep them safe for pilgrims. How only nine knights could possibly defend all the roads remains a mystery, but this was their declared aim for which they received the blessing of the Pope. In fact they didn't defend any roads because they had been sent by their founders to excavate the huge stables. (Large enough to house a Thousand horses) under the ruins of the Temple of Solomon.

It has been suggested that what they were looking for would have been Temple records showing the birth and death dates and lineage of kings of the Jews. When long ago the Temple was sacked and destroyed by Rome, the Temple priests probably would have left any treasure that the pillaging Roman soldiers would have been expecting to find. Instead the priests would have safely concealed anything so important as records and other irreplaceable temple items, to be recovered in the future. The Templars found what ever it was they were looking for, and returned with it to France to their Cathar influenced Founders.

What if the legend is true? That Jesus' family fled to Visigoth France married and merged their blood with Visigoth nobility. What if their descendants in turn married into the nobility of the Franks and founded a Merovingian dynasty of red-haired Healer Kings that ruled most of France for many generations? What the Templars found under the Temple ruins would be undeniable proof of this special bloodline. Any descendants of this bloodline would have more right to sit on the Papal throne as the spiritual leader of Christianity than the elected Pope. Here we have a similarity between the Holy Grail of Medieval fiction with its powers rooted by contact with the blood of Christ.

Also a family that tends it, and depends on it's existence for their existence. The similarity is to a real life document or book containing powerful proof that the family's bloodline should be the true spiritual Monarchy of the Christianised world.

A king on the throne of France, descended from the family of Jesus would also probably be acceptable to the Islamic and Muslim religions because Jesus had contact with them during his visits, and is mentioned in the Koran 55 times. This would fit in with Templar aims to bring all the great religions together under one spiritual leader. If at the time of the siege these proofs were held in Montsegur, this would explain the fanatical determination of the Holy Roman Church to get hold of them. It would also explain the determination of the Cathars, whatever the cost, to make sure they didn't get hold of them. Once again the area of Rennes le Chateau would have been a nearby and convenient place to hide this priceless document or book.

There is no space here to follow the history of the Templars to their cruel end. Philippe 1V accused the Templar Order, of Heresy. Secretly Philippe arranged for a simultaneous arrest of all Templars and confiscation of all their gold, finances, lands and possessions and properties throughout France.

The Templars were pre-warned so that though Philippe arrested many Templar Knights, many got away and the Templar Fleet left harbour the night before, carrying Templar treasure and records to an unknown destination.

So much has happened to the many generations of people who have lived and died in this area but we lack the space to write about them here. For example, the whole Foothill area from the Mountains to Carcassonne and Narbonne was once part of Spain, ruled by the invading Moors. Even today many villages have Spanish names and The Francais spoken here has a distinct Spanish influence. Each year many thousands of visitors are drawn to this rural wine producing area. Here, unhindered, they are free to explore it's mysteriously beautiful terrain, its many abbeys, chateaux and fortress ruins towering high above the surrounding land on steep pinnacles and almost inaccessible rocky ridges. Also to learn about the area's much layered history of battles between Light and Darkness.

We have aimed to offer you a hint of the flavour of this area rather than for strict historical accuracy. We hope that without engulfing you in historical dates, names and places, we have been able to help you to understand our love for this part of the Languedoc that we think of as "Home", and some of it's dramatic, and traumatic history.

If you should feel drawn to learn more about the history of the Languedoc and it's peoples, we recommend a book available in English, researched and written by Michael Baigent. Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln.

Entitled:

The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail. : Corgi Books 0-552-12138X

This is considered by many people to be one of the definitive textbooks about the Languedoc, the Cathars, and the ancient and modern history of mysterious Rennes le Chateau that looms high above our home in Couiza on the River Aude. A visit to the Aude Valley is a once in a lifetime experience to be treasured. For those people who believe as the Cathars did in Reincarnation, often a visit may feel more like a homecoming:

A return to the land of the Cathars in this present life to complete unfinished business. If you feel this way don't let your mind deny the feeling. Come to the Languedoc and find out for yourself.

For those people who simply want an enjoyable vacation, it is all here waiting for you. The country people in France never do anything by halves. They work hard and play hard. They love and enjoy life, and gladly share their enjoyments with you the visitor. Their enjoyments include delicious and unusual foods. Much of their national product; beautiful wine, is produced from grapes lovingly grown in this lovely area.

In springtime the hillsides of the Aude valley are a glorious carnival of unusual, often rare wildflowers, of colours that range through the spectrum. The summer heat has yet to arrive, or has gone, and so spring and autumn are ideal for people who love to freely roam, exploring this rugged mysterious terrain.

The summer season brings heat, but also it brings a vast range of exciting and colourful activities. These are organised for the benefit of all, local people and visitors alike. Each town, village and commune has its share of fetes, firework displays, celebrations, open markets, and for the young at heart, horse-riding, water sports, even pop festivals are organised that cater for the tastes of all age groups. For visitors the turbulent history of this area is brought to life in medieval tournaments and re-enacted battles between mounted knights in shining armour. For those whose interest is in prehistory there is a museum and exhibition of dinosaurs at nearby Esparaza. A visit to the museum includes the offer to be taken to the site where the dinosaur fossils are excavated. The cave paintings by prehistoric men of the Ariège are only a couple of hour's drive from Couiza. A one-hour drive will take you to Montsegur. Carcassonne offers a living, thriving, fortified city, complete with portcullis and massive drawbridge only forty minutes away.

In the opposite direction just a couple of hours drive is Perpignan and the Mediterranean Sea or independent Andorra high up amid the awesome Pyrenees Mountains.

Travel is simple and easy, whether by air, road or rail, and the rustiness of your Francais here is never made into a problem. Hotels here are clean and comfortable, with reasonable rates. Also they are friendly and helpful. You must come and see for yourself. When you do come you will discover a new way of living your life, but more important than that, you will discover a new and different YOU.

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