

QUESTIONS ABOUT MURDER AND HISTORY

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO HISTORY

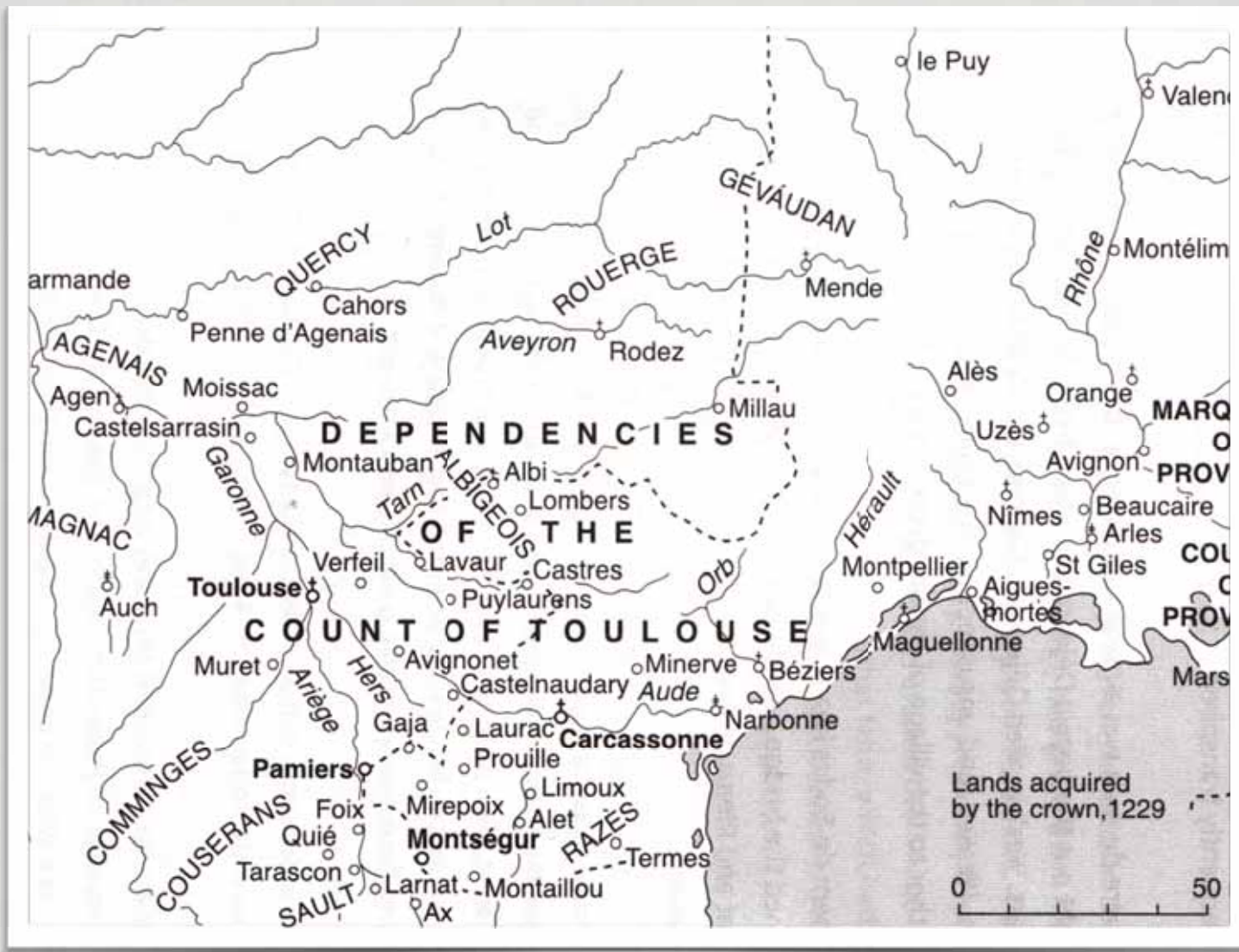
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SEMINAR „REVEALING THE SECRETS OF THE PAST“

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A TRUE STORY ...

- 1301: **Guilhem de Rodes** visits his brother **Raimond**, monk in a monastery in Pamiers (south of France).
- Frightening news: beguin **Guilhem Déjean** poses real threat to the brothers.
- Déjean has offered to help the Dominicans catch two heretics: **Pierre and Guilhem Autier**.
- He also claimed that the heretics had a spy within the monastery (Raimond de Rodes), linked to the heretics through his brother (Guilhem de Rodes).



Towns and villages in Languedoc (southwestern France) in the middle ages.

A TRUE STORY ...

- Guilhaem de Rodes first met the Autier brothers in 1298.
- They were **Cathars** (a Christian heresy) and planned to start a revival of Catharism in southern France.
- Guilhaem de Rodes returns to the Pyrenees to warn the Autiers about Déjean.
- He also warned **Guilhaem de Area**, a supporter of the Cathars, who sought out the beguin Déjean and offered to lead him to the Autiers.

A TRUE STORY ...

And this is what happened:

"Immediately they grabbed him [Déjean] and stuck him so that he had not the strength to cry out. They took him to the mountains around Larnat, and there they asked him if it was true that he wanted to capture the heretics. He admitted that it was; and instantly Philippe and Pierre threw him off a great cliff, into a crevasse."

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS STORY?

- The murder was recorded in the *registers of the inquisition* in 1308, when Guilhem de Rodes confessed what he knew about heresy and heretics.
- Guilhem was sentenced to prison, along with sixty other people.
- „History“: a *true story* of something that happened long ago, retold in the present.
- Is this short introduction now concluded?

A PROCESS FULL OF QUESTIONS

- Process of writing history is *full of questions*.
- In many ways, history both begins and ends with questions; it never really ends, but it is a *process*.
- Historiography*: process of writing history
- History*: the end product of that process („what historians write about the past“)

BACK TO OUR „TRUE STORY“ ...

- Guilhaem de Rodes appeared before an inquisitor called *Geoffroi d'Ablis* on four occasions in 1308.
- D'Ablis had come to investigate heresy in the Pyrenees on the authority of the Pope.
- Having heard the confessions, the inquisitor could impose a penance or punishment.
- Guilhaem's confession was recorded in the *inquisitorial registers* – some of these registers survived.

THE PAST – A FOREIGN COUNTRY

- We *understand and relate* sending letters, visiting relatives, journeys from our hometown.
- We *know* about fear of persecution and we know about murder.
- If I had translated the participants' names into your vernacular language then they might seem even *closer to us*.

THE PAST – A FOREIGN COUNTRY

- The names are **strange to us** in a different way.
- We know about religion, but we are probably **unfamiliar** with the concept of heresy and the inquisition.
- Guilhem de Rodes and his brother were able to read and write, but they are **quite unusual** in this (concept of „literacy“).

DECISIONS TO MAKE ...

- Déjeans murder was **not the only event** recorded in the inquisition registers.
- Historians cannot tell every story from the past, only some of them.
- There are **gaps** in the material that exists and there are areas for which **no evidence** survives.
- Historians **decide** which things can or should be said.

LARGER PICTURES ...

- History of inquisition and heresy*
(Catharism, „The Inquisition“)
- History of crime*
(murder of Thomas Beckett 1170, execution of William Wallace 1304, crimes of Richard III)
- History of Languedoc*
- „Small details“:*
geography, agriculture, architecture ...



St Dominic combats Cathar heretics (depicted on the right)

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INTERPRETING THE PAST

- Historians in other times would have interpreted this story differently.
- This has nothing to do with chance or cleverness, but with **was** interests us.
- As historians we are caught up in our bundles of interests, morals, ethics, philosophies ...

GETTING IT ,WRONG' ...

- The evidence of the records presents us with pictures and puzzles.
- Historians have to *fill in some blanks*, and sometimes they have to guess.
- Historians can misread, misremember, misinterpret, or misunderstand.
- But in a wider sense, *historians always get things „wrong“*. We do this because we cannot ever get it totally „right“.

... BUT TRYING TO GET IT RIGHT

- However, historians always *attempt to get it right*.
- A historian is bound by what the *evidence* will support, while an author of literature can invent people, places, and happenings.
- For every historian, what is at stake is what actually happened – and what it might mean.

HISTORY – AN ARGUMENT

- If the past came without gaps and problems, there would be *no task for the historian* to complete.
- If the evidence always spoke plainly, truthfully, and clearly, we would have *no opportunity to argue* with each other.
- Arguments are important: they create the possibility of changing things.

CONCLUSION

- „True stories“: history must agree with the evidence, but is at the same time an interpretation.
- Historians tell stories, in the sense that they are out to persuade you of something.
- History is about making sense of the chaotic, uncoordinated, complex past, finding or creating patterns and meanings and stories.