HAL open science

Follow the clerical exhortations while being against the clergy : the case of an illiterate knight Hugues de Berzé

Lorris Chevalier

▶ To cite this version:

Lorris Chevalier. Follow the clerical exhortations while being against the clergy : the case of an illiterate knight Hugues de Berzé. International Medieval Congress 2020 The Border of Religion, Jul 2020, Leeds, United Kingdom. hal-03356929

HAL Id: hal-03356929
https://hal.science/hal-03356929v1

Submitted on 28 Sep 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Lorris Chevalier

PhD student University of Burgundy, Dijon, France

Doctoral school LECLA, Research Laboratory CTPC, directed by Jean Marie Fritz

8 montée Bonafous, 69004 Lyon, France

forteressedeberze@outlook.fr

+ 33 (0)6 41 66 85 36

Thesis subject : *Between a crusader's repent and an illiterate's preach, what is the evolution of knighthood ethic in the 13th century according to Hugues de Berzé's poems.*

Biography : Curator in Berzé forteress in Soutern Burgundy, Lecturer through France, previous interventions in University of Princeton and University of Oxford.

conor.1.o'brien@kcl.ac.uk

International Medieval Congress 2020 (Leeds, UK, 6-9 July 2020)
The Borders of Religion

Follow the clerical exhortations while being against the clergy : the case of an illiterate knight Hugues de Berzé

Hugues de Berzé is a Burgundian lord, who crusaded during the fourth crusade. He follows the clerical exhortations of the crusade but also the compulsory annual confession after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. He devotes himself to the writing of a long poem through which he confesses his public sins.

Inviting the other lords to a life of deprivation and mortification of the senses by the crusade, Hugues de Berzé seeks that his companions fall within the normative framework of the economy of Salvation but puts himself on the sidelines of seigniorial courts. The crusader must abandon his wife, the love of banquets, draperies and ostentation. The cross received during a solemn ceremony prevents certain actions. Since the Cluniac literature in the 12th century, the lay lord especially the crusader knight becomes a model of Christian virtues moralization. As the famous Peraldus knight miniature shows the virtuous knight against the demons.

Hugues being illiterate (*ne clerc ne letré*) knows that his preaching will also be marginal and doomed to cleric's mockery. He is therefore also on the margins of the preachers since his preaching is sourced only on experiences in the absence of references.
By doing what the Church desires, such as preaching the crusade, Hugues happens to be mocked by

priests and on the border of being accused to being a heretic. He often explains in his poetry that he is being teased by priests for what he does.

We will first contextualize his preachings and realize that a Burgundian lay lord could face a lot of trouble for preaching in public.

Preaching being fashionable in its time, many false preachers plagued the streets of Paris. Thus, Hugues must make his place among the "miserable carrying in their wanderings relics and their phylacteries, exposed as a venal commodity the precious word of God before the laity"[1].

Preachers like Jacques de Vitry sometimes use an image of a knight or a trouvère, whom he calls a "cabaretier de Satan" to portrait of a false preacher which only tarnishes the credit of people like Hugues.

Regarding the "cabaretiers de satan" Jacques de Vitry adds that "some of them sought in preaching not the profit of souls or the glory of God but only their own glory". Hugues could be accused of immodesty for his preach and not be listend to.

In addition, Hugues is certainly badly considered because of his geographic origin. Burgundians have, indeed, the reputation of stupidity. Jacques de Vitry quotes "as for those who came from Burgundy, they gave them the reputation of clumsiness and fools"[2].

Following these criticisms, Hugues tries to present himself as a man, who, shaped by the will of the Church, strives with his humble means to transmit what he has received.

In addition to a simple quest for legitimacy in front of his audience, Hugues takes a risk through his preaching because he risks being excommunicated. Councils and synods often denounce and condemn strangers who preach in the streets or churches, who present relics or collect alms without authorization: Council of Poitiers 1100, c.11, in Mansi Concilia, XX, 1124; statutes of Paris around 1205, c. 61, 92 and western synod after 1220, c. 41[3]. The Lateran IV Council of 1215 also recalls this prohibition in Chapter 62[4].

Hugues insisted in his poetry on the Resurrection for two reasons, one preaching the other to justify his religious orthodoxy. The audience to whom he is addressing has forgotten God and is hiding from his Judgment. Hugues recalls that this amounts to misunderstanding the power of God which places everyone before death and by which everyone will be judged at the end of time. Also, a few years after the

---

[1] Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire Occidentale*, trad. Gaston Duchet-Suchaux, cerf, Paris, 1997, chp. X, p. 102.
[2] Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire Occidentale*, trad. Gaston Duchet-Suchaux, Cerf, Paris, 1997, chp. VII, p.86.
[3] O. Pontal, *Les statuts de Paris et le Synodal de l'Ouest*, Paris, 1971, coll « Les statuts synodaux français du XIIIe siècle », 1, pp. 75, 87, 165.
[4] R. Foreville, *Latran I, II, III et Latran IV*, Paris, 1965, coll. « Histoire des conciles œcuméniques », 6, p. 377-378.

Albigensian crusade, heretical preaching remained popular and hunted down by the Church. Hugues being a lay preacher without "academic" authority proves that he does believe in the Resurrection so as not to be confused as a heretic. Although the execution by fire of heretics did not officially appear until February 1231 in the bull Excommunicamus of Grégoire IX, clerics like Guillaume de Bourges who, in Liber contra hereticos, reserved a fate for them. The chapter titles are quite evocative of how heretics were considered by the clergy: "Heretics are liars and sons of the devil" "Heretics, who are false prophets and antichrists" or "Heretics who are fools and enemies of God ". Guillaume de Bourges adds "They say, in fact, out of desperation, that there is no resurrection. This is why they are delivered to the fire because the Lord says: any tree which does not bear good fruit will be destroyed and set on fire [Lk 3,9]. They are indeed the dust and the food of the devil after being burned, as it is written "the bread of the serpent is dust [Is 65,25]. This is why the Lord said, in the voice of Isaiah: You will tread the wicked when they have become ashes under the soles of your feet [Mal 4.3]. We see all of this accomplished, because today heretics are under the feet of the preachers of the gospel of peace. "Hugues had to be really carefull of the content of his preaching.

Is is interesting to remark that his accusations and mockery could have silenced him like it may have silenced a lot of good crusaders and preachers too scared of speaking that we don't have any record of them. Despite this, all mockeries and risks that Hugues faces makes him more humble and in a way gives him credit. He is continuing the crusade but on the preaching field, Hugues has to suffer to make himself humble. If he wasn't attacked by those critics I don't think he would have written his most famous work the Bible where he delivers a marvelous example of the knowledge of an illiterate knight.

I will conclude by saying

because of his illiteracy Hugues de Berzé must justify his preaching because in his time there existed an "intra-ecclesial controversy"[5] to know if the laity have the right to preach. Apart from his condition, Hugues is certainly of great experience, but in no way literate. His preaching then rests only on his own authority which he defends, his good faith which he proclaims and the Holy Scriptures which he mentions. In order to prevent heresies and to make the word of the priests sacred, the Church takes up a distinction between the exhortation allowed to the laity in a certain framework, and the praedicatio which becomes an ecclesiastical monopoly. Exceptions remained, for example In Lombardi the Humiliati were a group of lay Christians authorized by Innocent III to preach in favor of the fourth crusade. The exhortation to the crusade of Hugues de Berzé illustrates a plural Church crossed by deep conflicts more than an institution fully occupied in organizing a "society of persecution" for which the litterali would work to strengthen their social position by inventing a heretical enemy or heterodox who would justify their role as watchdog[6]

[5] Philippe Buc, « Vox clamantis in deserto ? Pierre le chantre et la prédication laïque, dans Revue Mabillon, n.s. t.4, 1993, p.9 et 10

[6] Robert I. More, *The formation of a persecuting Society*