

THE LOMBRIVES



Formed by an underground river, like all the other caves of the area, Lombrives in the Pyrenees had been prehistoric men's dwelling. Later the tribe of Pyrenean Iberians, the Bedrykes, had accessed it. Their presence links girl Pyrene's legend to that huge underground palace; she was king Bebryx's daughter-in-law, victim of her unfortunate love for Hercules, the Tyrian. She gave her name to the Pyrenees.

The rocky halls show a multitude of calcareous concretions, stalactites and stalagmites. Mysterious symbols and engravings from all centuries cover their walls. There, as the imposing heart of the cavern, lays the 'cathedral of the Cathars'.



*I*n 1244, after Monségur's fall, the cavern of Lombrives became the dwelling of the Cathar bishop, Amiel Aicard. This Perfect One had received the order to depart from the besieged fortress during the night of its surrender in March 1244 and transfer to Lombrives the 'sacred treasure of the Cathars'. Almost a century later, the cavern became the last Tabor of Pyrenean Catharism.

*I*t was the upper part of this cave that saw the slow death of 510 Cathars, immured alive in 1328 on inquisitor Jacques Fournier's order. He became the pope Benedict XII.

What could the Cathars do? The area was heavily surrounded and they realised, that they could not exit into any kind of safety. Surfacing would have meant walking into the hands of their captors. Then, the Inquisition would torture them, before burning them alive, perhaps at a public square. They submitted themselves peacefully to their destiny.



Conveyed by Napoleon Peyrat: ...One day they had nothing left, no food, no wood, or fire or even a wan light, that visible reflection of life. They came together as families, in separate niches, husband beside the wife, the virgin beside her failing mother, a little baby on her dry breast. ...The faithful deacon gave the dying the kiss of peace, then lay down to sleep, himself. All rested in a slumber, and only the drops of water that fell slowly from the roof of the vault disturbed the sepulchral

silence for centuries... While the Inquisition damned their memory and even their loved ones no longer dared to speak their names, the rock wept over them.

The mountain, a tender mother welcoming them in their bosom, wove for them a white shroud with her tears, buried their remains, in the gradual folds of a chalky veil, and on their bones that no worm would ever profane, she sculpted a triumphant mausoleum of stalagmites, marvellously decorated with urns and candelabras.





The underground network of Lombrives is one of the most extensive in Europe with seven distinct levels.

More on Montségur in: http://www.dhaxem.com/data/handt/The_Great_Esclarmonde_of_the_Cathars.pdf



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