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THE MERCENARY COMPANIES, THE PAPACY, AND THE CRUSADES, 1356-1378

By NORMAN HOUSLEY

During the second half of the fourteenth century most of France and many parts of Italy faced a social problem of massive proportions in the activities of the *routiers*, unemployed and rampaging mercenary soldiers.* The popes of the period, Innocent VI, Urban V, and Gregory XI, took a leading role in attempts to deal with this daunting problem, and the purpose of this article is to examine one of the chief instruments which they employed, the crusade. The place of the mercenary companies in the crusading movement was paradoxical. On several occasions from 1357 onwards the popes issued crusading indulgences to those who fought against the *routiers* on the grounds that they presented a serious threat to the well-being of the Christian community, the *populus christianus*. But the popes also hoped to use the companies in the service of Christian Holy War by persuading them to travel to the eastern Mediterranean, to Hungary or to Granada, to fight the Muslims. Both approaches sprang from long-established papal policy towards those considered as Christendom's internal foes. When the *curia* tried to bring about the destruction of the *routiers* by offering spiritual rewards to their opponents it placed the mercenaries in the roll-call of Christian rebels and excommunicates combatted by means of the crusade, alongside the emperor Frederick II, Peter II of Aragon, the Visconti, and others. And when it attempted to send the companies beyond the frontiers of Christendom, it was adopting a strategy which dated back at least as far as the First Crusade. So both aspects of papal policy towards the *routiers* were highly traditional.¹ They were also unsuccessful, which raises important questions about the way the later Avignon popes thought about and exercised their power. In the mid-thirteenth century the popes successfully resisted the ambitions of the Staufens and destroyed their might; a century later they proved unable to contain the companies. Was this because the Avignon papacy was out-of-date in its policies, because it failed to appreciate and adjust to the profound changes which had occurred in society and government? In broader terms, does traditionalism in this instance betoken the ideological bankruptcy which some scholars have seen as a leading charac-

* I should like to thank Jonathan Riley-Smith and Lesley Ling for their helpful comments on a first draft of this article.

¹ See my study, *The Italian Crusades. The Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343* (Oxford 1982).

teristic of the papacy in the fourteenth century?² In order to answer these questions I shall first examine the nature of the threat which was posed by the companies, then look in detail at the two aspects of the policy adopted by the *curia* in response to it.

There were several reasons for the emergence of the companies as a serious issue in France and Italy.³ Common to both countries was the crucial development in medieval warfare which replaced the service of feudal tenants and communal militias by the hiring of paid troops. This process spanned several centuries in western Europe, and it was only after 1300 that a new refinement caused the mercenaries to become a problem for the authorities which hired them and for the population at large. For they were increasingly grouped together in autonomous companies, *societates*, and led by captains of considerable ability and renown: Seguin of Badefol, Bertrand Du Guesclin, and Arnaud of Cervole ('the Archpriest') in France, Albert Sterz, Fra Moriale, and John Hawkwood in Italy.⁴ Most of the companies were small, numbering hundreds rather than thousands of fighters, but even these were disciplined and well-organised, often possessing their own treasurers, secretaries, and counsellors; in 1365, for example, the people of Albi and the neighbouring towns were enraged to find a monk acting as treasurer to a company whose stronghold they stormed.⁵ Good leadership, tight control, and the unquestioned fighting skill of their members made the companies formidable armies. This was clearly evidenced at the battle of Brignais in April 1362, when the followers of Seguin of Badefol defeated a strong royal army led by the Count of Tancarville and John of Bourbon, Count of La Marche; it was a crushing defeat comparable to Crécy or Poitiers.⁶

² See, e.g., J. Muldoon, 'The Avignon Papacy and the Frontiers of Christendom: The Evidence of Vatican Register 62,' *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 17 (1979) 125–95, esp. 191–92; W. Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (2nd ed.; London 1974) 283–84.

³ For the next two paragraphs, see K. Fowler, *The Age of Plantagenet and Valois* (2nd ed.; London 1980) 93–181, esp. 169ff.; C. T. Allmand, *Society at War. The Experience of England and France during the Hundred Years War* (Edinburgh 1973) 87ff.; M. H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages* (London 1965) 82–100; E. De Fréville, 'Des Grandes Compagnies au quatorzième siècle,' *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* (hereafter cited as *BEC*) 3 (1841–42) 258–81 and 5 (1843–44) 232–53; M. Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters* (London 1974) 25–50; D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, 'Some Condottieri of the Trecento and their Relations with Political Authority,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 32 (1946) 219–41; C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence. The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto 1961) 3–58.

⁴ A. Chérest, *L'Archiprêtre. Épisodes de la Guerre de cent ans au XIV^e siècle* (Paris 1879); S. Luce, *Histoire de Bertrand Du Guesclin et de son époque* (Paris 1876); J. Temple-Leader and G. Marcotti, *Sir John Hawkwood* (London 1889).

⁵ Pope Urban V, *Lettres secrètes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (edd. P. Lecacheux and G. Mollat; Paris 1902–55) no. 1522.

⁶ R. Delachenal, *Histoire de Charles V* (Paris 1909–31) II 318–20.

The companies were cosmopolitan in character and felt few feudal or national loyalties. Edward III's orders that all English and Gascon *routiers* should withdraw from France after the Treaty of Brétigny met with little or no response, as did Urban V's plea of 1364 to the *Societas Anglicorum*, stationed at Pisa, that it should bear in mind its country's honour.⁷ Similarly, few *routier* captains had qualms about changing sides in response to bribery, John Hawkwood being a possible exception.⁸ But although the companies fed off, and contributed to, political and social dislocation, there was a logic in their behaviour. They existed to fight for profit. For this reason they preferred to take part in large-scale conflicts between powers possessing, or claiming to possess, the attributes of sovereignty: this gave them long-term employment with regular wages, and plunder and ransom money legitimised by the laws of war. In the absence of such a war they lived off the land. This entailed a certain amount of haphazard robbery, killing, and burning, but the usual mode of operation was to extort protection money in the form of ransoms, the sale of safe-conducts, and the levying of subsidies. The systematic use of 'frightfulness' was inherent in this procedure as a means of inducing surrender to demands, just as in the Anglo-French conflict, where many of the mercenaries received their schooling, the destruction of the property of French civilians was used as a way of undermining confidence in the power and legitimacy of the Valois kings.

For political reasons the companies became a serious problem in Italy and France at roughly the same time. In Italy the several companies formed during the first decades of the century only enjoyed a short-lived existence: warfare was not continuous enough to provide sustained employment and the authorities were able to keep fairly firm control over the many German, Catalan, and Hungarian soldiers in the peninsula.⁹ But in 1353 the new pope, Innocent VI, began a vigorous attempt to recoup lands and revenues in the Papal State which had been seized by local *signori* and communes. Innocent's legate, Gil Albornoz, soon found that his commission amounted to the piecemeal reconquest and re-organisation of the papal lands in central Italy. For this he needed large numbers of seasoned troops, far more than the pope's allies in Italy were able or willing to supply, and he was compelled to hire the companies. Between 1353 and 1360 Albornoz confined his campaigns to the provinces of the Papal State, but renewed conflict with Visconti Milan broke out on the issue of Bologna, and from 1360 to the death of Gregory XI the Church and the Visconti were locked in combat, with only short and uneasy intervals of truce and

⁷ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 898; Keen, *Laws of War* 93; Allmand, *Society at War* 92–93.

⁸ Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters* 39.

⁹ *Ibid.* 25–33.

peace.¹⁰ Several other wars were fought in conjunction with, or alongside, this major conflict, providing constant employment for the companies, as well as circumstances of civil disorder suited to their terrorising activities.

The situation was rather less complicated in France and the problem itself less chronic. A struggle with as many political ramifications, and as many theatres of conflict, as the Anglo-French war, was bound to have a deleterious effect on public order, but it was some time before the depredations of unemployed mercenaries attracted papal attention. The first important papal bull against the companies in France, *Ad reprimendas insolentias*, was issued in 1356, and there were troubles (including the first threat to Avignon itself) during the truce of 1357–59, but it was the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, and the subsequent release of mercenaries from both armies, which brought about the critical phase in the issue of the *routiers*.¹¹ This phase ended when the war was resumed at the end of the 1360s. Thereafter, although the problem of the *routiers* continued to vex the *curia*, it was of secondary importance. Most papal action against the companies in France and Provence thus dates from a single decade, significantly the period when central power in the French kingdom was at a low ebb.

The papacy was affected by the problem of the mercenary companies on several levels. As heads of Christendom the popes felt it to be their responsibility to defend Christians when their secular rulers failed to do so; Urban V wrote that his measures sprang from ‘the duty of our pastoral office and the warmth of our fatherly love.’¹² As rulers of the Church they felt called upon to protect churchmen and Church property against attack. As Frenchmen they experienced ties of sympathy for the suffering of their countrymen. But action was called for most urgently by the vulnerability of the Papal State, the Comtat Venaissin, and the papal court at Avignon. The sprawling papal lands in central Italy were repeatedly crossed and raided by the companies, and the frequent changes of allegiance made it difficult to know if a company was fighting for the pope, against him, or was neutral and simply taking the chance to ravage helpless lands. The Comtat Venaissin and Avignon were also at a disadvantage geographically, situated on the Rhône at the juncture of roads to Burgundy, Provence, Italy, Gascony, and Spain.¹³ Avignon was threatened by the companies on numerous occasions, most seriously in 1357, 1360–61, 1363, 1365, 1366, and 1375. Between 1358 and 1364 expensive attempts were made

¹⁰ P. Partner, *The Lands of St. Peter. The Papal State in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance* (London 1972) 339–65.

¹¹ H. Denifle, *La Désolation des églises, monastères et hôpitaux en France pendant la Guerre de cent ans* II (Paris 1899) 179ff., 376ff.

¹² Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1747.

¹³ Y. Renouard, *The Avignon Papacy 1305–1403* (tr. D. Bethell; London 1970) 34–35.

to improve the fortifications of the city, but the *curia* remained vulnerable through its supply lines, and there were rich pickings to be had from the continual flow of prelates, bankers, and couriers to and from Avignon. The terms of the bull *Ad romane curie statum securum* indicate how severely papal business was disrupted by the *routiers*. They were robbing and kidnapping people travelling to Avignon, and destroying the countryside around the city, 'robbing and burning in the neighbourhood of the *curia* and very often almost in front of our eyes.'¹⁴ In such circumstances the advantages of residence at Avignon dissolved away, and it was the general insecurity of the Comtat Venaissin, coupled with the restoration of a certain degree of order in the Papal State and the temporary peace brought about in Provence by the companies' participation in the Spanish war, which persuaded Urban V to return to Rome in 1367.¹⁵

As spiritual head of Christendom, temporal ruler of parts of France and Italy, and a particularly vulnerable private individual, the pope was placed at the centre of attempts to deal with the problems caused by the mercenary companies. What precedents had he to guide him in the formulation of policy? Some of the most important ones dated from the mid-twelfth century, the culmination of the complex peace movement known as the Peace and Truce of God.¹⁶ In this period both Church and lay authorities reacted with vigour against the widespread menace of brigandage. Thus in 1139 the Archbishop of Auch promised indulgences to all who enforced the Peace of God by fighting against the brigands; those who died 'in true penitence in this, the service of God,' were guaranteed 'an indulgence of all their sins and the fruit of an eternal reward.'¹⁷ Some years later Louis VII and Frederick Barbarossa reached an agreement by which archbishops and bishops in dioceses west of the Rhine were to use both excommunication and interdict against lords who employed *routiers*, and were to supply troops against these lords to compel them to compensate their victims.¹⁸ And in 1179 Canon 27 of the Third Lateran Council laid down penalties for heretics and *routiers* alike. The leaders and employers of *routiers* were placed under anathema, cut off from the society of Christians,

¹⁴ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 489–90. For defensive measures, see R. Michel, 'La Défense d'Avignon sous Urbain V et Grégoire XI,' *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'histoire publiés par l'École française de Rome* 30 (1910) 129–54 and his 'Les Défenseurs des châteaux et des villes fortes dans le Comtat-Venaissin au xiv^e siècle,' *BEC* 76 (1915) 315–30.

¹⁵ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 498–99.

¹⁶ See H. E. J. Cowdrey, 'The Peace and the Truce of God in the Eleventh Century,' *Past and Present* 46 (1970) 42–67. For the twelfth century, see now the authoritative and brilliant study of E.-D. Hehl, *Kirche und Krieg im 12. Jahrhundert. Studien zu kanonischem Recht und politischer Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart 1980).

¹⁷ *Gallia christiana* I (Paris 1715) Instrumenta 162.

¹⁸ H. Géraud, 'Les Routiers au douzième siècle,' *BEC* 3 (1841–42), 125–47, esp. 127–30.

and denied Church burial. Their possessions were to be seized by the faithful, they themselves enslaved. The same indulgence as that promulgated in 1139 was promised to anybody who died while defending the *populus christianus* against the *routiers*. Two years of enjoined penance were remitted to all who took up arms against the heretics and the mercenaries, and all who participated in this 'just labour' were taken under Church protection.¹⁹

Starting with *Ad reprimendas insolentias*, very similar spiritual and temporal sanctions were directed by the *curia* against the *routiers* of the fourteenth century. *Miserabilis nonnullorum* (May 1364) ordered the mercenaries to disband their companies, to leave the places they had occupied, and to repair the damage they had done, all within a month, under penalty of excommunication. Clerics and laymen were forbidden to join, employ, or favour the companies. The *routiers*, their fautors, and anybody supplying them with food would be anathematised to the extent that only papal absolution could release them.²⁰ *Clamat ad nos* (April 1365) aggravated these sentences. All towns, villages, and individuals found guilty of negotiating with the mercenaries were threatened with the withdrawal of their privileges, liberties, and fiefs; *routiers* and their descendants were to be ineligible for public office into the third generation; their vassals were released from their oaths of loyalty.²¹ In February 1368 it was decreed that if a *routier* had been buried in a church or cemetery, this was to be placed under interdict until the corpse had been exhumed and removed.²²

All that was left was the crusade. In this respect the measures taken in 1139 and 1179 were circumspect: a full indulgence ('*indulgentia peccatorum et fructus mercedis aeternae*') was granted only to those who died fighting the *routiers*. There is no questioning the importance of these measures, especially the Third Lateran Council decree, as steps towards the use of the crusade against the internal enemies of the Christian Republic; similarly, their limitation of the indulgence was, as we shall see, adopted by the *curia* when it was reluctant to preach a full-scale crusade against the companies. But of equal importance were other developments since 1179: the granting of full crusade indulgences and privileges to people who fought against heretics and their fautors, and the long series of crusading expeditions launched against Christian rebels and excommunicates in Italy.²³ The latter were especially important as precedents

¹⁹ Mansi 22.231–33. See also Hehl, *Kirche und Krieg* 45, 245–46.

²⁰ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 446–47.

²¹ *Ibid.* 450–51. See also Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 1747–51, 2995.

²² Denifle, *La Désolation* II 504.

²³ J. S. C. Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* (London 1977) 25–28; N. J. Housley, 'Politics and Heresy in Italy: Anti-heretical Crusades, Orders and Confraternities, 1200–1500,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (1982) 193–208, and *Italian Crusades*.

because the crusade against the *routiers* originated in Italy as an offspring of the Church's struggle against Ghibelline rulers.

At the end of 1355 Francesco Ordelaïfi, lord of Cesena and Forlì, presented the gravest remaining obstacle to the reduction of the province of Romagna by Alborno. Like the Ghibelline lords of the 1320s, Francesco and his chief allies, the Manfredi of Faenza, combined political resistance with heterodox religious beliefs, and in the winter of 1355–6 Innocent VI had a crusade preached against them as rebels and heretics.²⁴ In the course of 1356 the Manfredi went over to the papal side while the crusaders achieved notable successes. Bernabò Visconti was alarmed at the prospect of complete victory for the Church in Romagna and secretly hired Conrad of Landau's Great Company to fight against Alborno. The company arrived in Bolognese territory on 18 June 1357 and, after an unsuccessful attempt to enter Tuscany, camped near Forlì on 6 July. Alborno had already bought off Landau's threat a year earlier. This time he decided on resistance, declared the mercenaries to be guilty of *fautoria heresiae* (in that they were protecting Francesco Ordelaïfi), and, in July, preached a crusade against them. To bolster recruitment the period of service required of each crusader was reduced, a procedure which appears to have paid off. Particularly interesting measures were taken at Florence, where the crusade was preached by the Bishop of Narni. It was announced that the crusade indulgence could be earned by contributing one-twelfth of the pay of a man-at-arms for six months. This was an extremely low rate of payment for a plenary indulgence, and money flooded in. The commune arranged with the bishop that all its citizens would receive the indulgence in return for a fixed contingent of soldiers to be supplied by the city, and on 26 July the bishop proclaimed that all Florentines who confessed within three months would be granted full remission of sins. This was not such an extraordinary measure as it at first appears since, as Matteo Villani remarked, the pope had already issued a general plenary indulgence twice in the past decade (in 1348 and 1350). But it was still successful, for Florence sent a substantial force of soldiers costing 100,000 florins. With the aid of this contingent Alborno fought a battle with Landau's army near Forlì on 26–27 July. The Great Company remained strong, however, and in August it was again bought off, to the disgust of Matteo Villani and the Florentine government.²⁵

²⁴ Matteo Villani, *Cronica* (ed. F. Gherardi Dragomanni; Florence 1846) I 478–79; A. Theiner, *Codex diplomaticus domini temporalis Sanctae Sedis* II (Rome 1862) no. 324; J. Glénisson and G. Mollat, *L'Administration des états de l'église au XIV^e siècle. Correspondance des légats et vicaires-généraux Gil Alborno et Androin de la Roche (1353–1367)* (Paris 1964) nos. 275, 279.

²⁵ Matteo Villani, *Cronica* II 56, 65–66, 69–70, 72–74, 76–77. See also Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II nos. 327, 329; Glénisson and Mollat, *L'Administration* nos. 335–36. For the policy

The crusade against the mercenary companies had now entered into the labyrinth of Italian politics and it stayed there, largely because of the petitions of Guelf authorities threatened by marauding *routiers*. As so often, it was pressure on Avignon which produced action, but with difficulty, for the *curia* displayed its customary unwillingness to declare crusades too readily and tended to restrict the terms of the indulgence granted. In July 1360, for example, Innocent VI granted to the Romans that all who died in a just war against the enemies of the Church and the Roman republic would receive the plenary indulgence, provided that they had first amended their sins against others.²⁶ The concession lasted two years, and at the end of 1364 the Romans petitioned for more indulgences against the companies. Urban V asked for patience: he had hitherto rejected their request, acting 'for the best and not without reasonable causes and much deliberation.'²⁷ On 16 January 1365 he issued the fresh indulgence. It was couched in the context of the decrees of John XXII, confirmed by Clement VI, against people who occupied or disturbed the lands of the Church. Urban's own measures were intended to defend 'the most holy city' and its surrounding lands by arousing the Romans and the other inhabitants of the Papal State to protect themselves and their goods. A plenary indulgence was therefore granted over a period of three years to all the contrite and confessed who died of wounds received while fighting the *routiers*.²⁸ Indulgences were issued at the same time to people in the Kingdom of Naples who resisted the attacks of the companies.²⁹

Urban V knew that this limited indulgence would disappoint his petitioners, but he regarded even it as an exceptional measure. On 20 January 1365 he wrote to Albornoz that the people of Rome, the *Regno*, and other Church lands had often asked him to decree a full-scale crusade against the companies ravaging central and southern Italy. 'Because of certain reasonable considerations' the pope had declined to do this, but he was issuing the indulgence 'in articulo mortis' to keep Italy in line with France. The legate was to decide whether it was expedient to publicise this indulgence widely.³⁰ Even the rapidly deteriorating situation in Italy did not lead the pope to accede to the requests of his subjects. On 13 April 1366 he issued the long and impressive bull *Clamat ad nos* against the companies. The outrages of the mercenaries now affected 'almost all of Italy.' They had attacked Rome itself and the Roman church

of Florence at this time see P. Partner, 'Florence and the Papacy, 1300–1375,' in J. Hale et al. edd., *Europe in the Late Middle Ages* (London 1965) 99ff.

²⁶ Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 355.

²⁷ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1485.

²⁸ Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 400.

²⁹ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1509.

³⁰ *Ibid.* no. 1519.

was placed in the greatest danger. But the crusade indulgence was still restricted to those who died of wounds received while fighting the *routiers*, or while bringing food and other supplies to front-line troops.³¹

By the mid-1360s the activities of the mercenary companies had immeasurably complicated the difficulties faced by those charged with the execution of papal policy in Italy. For a time after the peace treaty signed by the Church and the Visconti in the summer of 1364 there were attempts to isolate the companies politically and to form a league of Guelf and Ghibelline authorities against them. Such a league was finally concluded in September 1366, but it aimed only to keep new companies out of Italy, not to deal with the four great bands already ravaging the peninsula.³² Powers like Florence were reluctant to abandon an approach based on bribery and conciliation in favour of one of forceful action which might not work (had not worked, for example, in 1357 against Conrad of Landau). To this extent bulls like *Clamat ad nos*, while they were certainly in tune with popular hostility towards the companies, were likely to fall on barren ground when it came to organising military resistance. Moreover, the peace between Guelfs and Ghibellines which formed the league's corner-stone did not last long. There was open war between Bernabò Visconti and the pope in 1368, and a crusade was preached against the tyrant in Italy, Germany, Bohemia, and elsewhere to enlist recruits for Charles IV's expedition to support the Church in Italy.³³

Urban V's attempt to make a separate issue of the companies had failed, and the problem once again became enmeshed with the broader struggle against the Ghibelline lords of Lombardy. Towards the close of Urban's reign the situation was further complicated by the animosity of cities like Perugia and Florence, which had long been staunchly Guelf but were now alarmed by the growth of papal power and ambitions in central Italy. When the Visconti war ended, officially at least, in 1369, Perugia rebelled against its papal overlord, with the collusion and aid of Bernabò Visconti. The Perugians hired John Hawkwood's company and in February 1370 Anglie Grimoard, Cardinal Bishop of Albano and Urban V's vicar-general *in temporalibus*, was given a faculty to preach a crusade against Perugia and its mercenaries. Technically the bull was directed against the mercenaries, whose fautors the Perugians were: an interesting reversal of the situation in 1357. A plenary indulgence was offered in return for a year's service, or for the despatch of

³¹ Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 410, and see also no. 426.

³² G. Canestrini, 'Documenti per servire alla storia della milizia italiana dal XIII secolo al XVI,' *Archivio storico italiano* 15 (1851) xlvii-lv, 81-120, esp. 89-118; Bayley, *War and Society* 36ff.

³³ *Annales ecclesiastici* XXVI (ed. A. Theiner; Bar-le-Duc 1872) 150-51 anno 1368 no. 1.

soldiers to serve vicariously.³⁴ Legacies and the proceeds of theft and usury were to be collected for the war, and vows, except those of continence and chastity, were to be commuted to monetary payments for the defence of the lands of the Roman church.³⁵ There were few remnants of earlier papal policy towards the companies in the reign of Gregory XI. In 1371 he constructed a league against the *routiers* with the major Tuscan towns, and he was still trying to form such a league in 1378, but his energies were absorbed by the great conflict with the Visconti, for which crusade indulgences were again issued.³⁶ The *curia* was forced by military necessity to employ the very companies whose activities it fiercely denounced, so that one of the worst *routier* atrocities, the sack of Cesena of 1377, was committed by mercenaries nominally under the command of a papal legate.

The first issue of crusading indulgences against the companies in France occurred later than in Italy, during the seizure of Pont-Saint-Esprit at the end of 1360.³⁷ Pont-Saint-Esprit, about forty kilometres north of Avignon, was one of only four bridges over the Rhône and controlled provisions going to Avignon from the north. During the night of 28–29 December several companies joined forces in a surprise attack which seized the town and captured the seneschal of Beaucaire, John Souvain. Very soon the papal court felt the consequences of this action: its supplies were cut off and reiterated demands that the mercenaries evacuate the Comtat Venaissin brought no response except the boast that they would hold on even if attacked by ‘the whole of Christendom.’ In the first days of January 1361 Innocent VI declared a crusade against the *routiers* and ordered its widespread preaching. From a letter to the people of Embrun it is clear that this was more than the offer of the crusade indulgence ‘in mortis articulo’:

Arise therefore, faithful of Christ and devoted sons of the Roman church and the apostolic see. . . . Put on those arms both health-giving and glorious . . . as the Lord inspires each of you, either fighting in your own persons, or sending others to forward the affair in your place, or contributing money according to your means, so that each receives his fair share of this benedic-

³⁴ Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 467. See also Partner, *Lands of St. Peter* 355–56; M. P. Fop, *Il comune di Perugia e la Chiesa durante il periodo avignonese con particolare riferimento all'Albornoz* (Perugia 1970) 85–96.

³⁵ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 3035, 3046, 3124.

³⁶ Pope Gregory XI, *Lettres secrètes et curiales relatives à la France* (edd. L. Mirot et al.; Paris 1935–57) nos. 2632, 2923, 3296, 3928; Gregory XI, *Lettres secrètes et curiales intéressantes les pays autres que la France* (ed. G. Mollat; Paris 1962–65) nos. 946, 987, 1615–16, 2108, 2191, 2820, 3736, 3816; Canestrini, ‘Documenti’ Ivi; Partner, *Lands of St. Peter* 359–65.

³⁷ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 386–98; C. de Vic and J. Vaissete, *Histoire générale de Languedoc* IX (ed. A. Molinier; Toulouse 1885) 718ff.; J. B. Henneman, *Royal Taxation in Fourteenth-Century France: The Captivity and Ransom of John II, 1356–1370* (Philadelphia 1976) 154–58.

tion and grace, and by carrying out God's business, each exchanges a short spell of earthly labour for heavenly rewards. . . .³⁸

A full-scale crusade was thus launched against the *routiers* holding Pont-Saint-Esprit, and its organisation was handled with energy. Appeals went out to King John, the Dauphin, the Duke of Burgundy, the governor of the Dauphiné, and others asking them to prevent other *routiers*' crossing their lands to join those already at the bridge. Letters were despatched to many French nobles and towns asking for troops to take part in the forthcoming campaign.³⁹ As in 1357, the immediate results were gratifying. The crusaders who assembled were placed under the command of the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia. The King of Aragon, Peter III, sent a large contingent and Arnoul of Audrehem, Marshal of France, was able to lay siege to the mercenaries' camp.⁴⁰ But, also as in 1357, things went wrong. According to Froissart, the Pope expected the crusaders to serve without wages. Disgruntled, some returned home, others went to fight in Italy, and some even deserted to the *routiers*. By mid-February it was clear that the siege was making little progress. Negotiations led to the mercenaries' being bought off, probably towards the end of March, and persuaded to take service under the Marquis of Montferrat against the Visconti.⁴¹

The episode at Pont-Saint-Esprit brought home with peculiar force the harm which could be done by the *routiers* at little cost to themselves; Avignon became crowded with refugees and famine combined with plague to kill an estimated 17,000 people in the city in 1361.⁴² The entire Midi was now terrorised by the companies, the process reaching its height in 1363–65.⁴³ As in Italy, attempts were made by the *curia* to forge, or encourage the forging of defensive leagues backed up by the issue of indulgences. The most impressive of these alliances was put together in November 1363 with contributions from the Pope, the Count of Valentinois, the Bishop of Valence, the seneschal of Provence, the governor of Dauphiné, and Amedeo of Savoy.⁴⁴ On 27 February

³⁸ *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum* II (edd. E. Martène and U. Durand; Paris 1717) 852–54. The earliest reference to the crusade occurs in a letter written on 8 January; those who took the cross were supposed to serve against the *routiers* for six months, as in Romagna in 1357. See Devic and Vaissete, *Histoire générale* IX 720–21.

³⁹ *Thes. novus* II 848–56, 858–64.

⁴⁰ De Vic and Vaissete, *Histoire générale* IX 721; *Thes. novus* II 867–69, 876; Denifle, *La Désolation* II 396–97.

⁴¹ Jean Froissart, *Chroniques* VI (ed. S. Luce; Paris 1876) 73–75. See also *Vitae paparum avenionensium* I (edd. S. Baluze and G. Mollat; Paris 1914) 323, 340; Matteo Villani, *Cronica* II 329–31, 337, 343.

⁴² G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon 1305–1378* (tr. J. Love; London 1963) 51.

⁴³ Henneman, *Royal Taxation* 161–205.

⁴⁴ M. Prou, *Étude sur les relations politiques du pape Urbain V avec les rois de France Jean II et Charles V* (Paris 1888) 32–35, 104–5, 106, 110.

1364 a similar league formed by the local authorities of Languedoc received the support of Urban V's bull *Cogit nos*. This was a response to appeals from seneschals and other royal officials, nobles and bourgeois in the southern seneschalsies, for spiritual weapons against the *routiers*. It included the grant of a plenary indulgence to all who died fighting the companies, covering two years. Letters went out in February and May to archbishops and bishops throughout France ordering them to publicise the indulgence in the usual way.⁴⁵ In July 1364 the Bishop of Saint-Flour received a special letter granting his diocese the indulgences of *Cogit nos* in connection with the activities of Seguin of Badefol. Once again, the initiative for the grant was a local one: the bishop, nobles, and commoners of Saint-Flour had informed Urban V of their intention of taking up arms against Seguin and his followers, who were pillaging the diocese, 'all just cause laid behind them.' But on this occasion too the company was bought off, this time for 40,000 florins, even before the bull arrived.⁴⁶

Seguin of Badefol and his company were amongst the worst of the *routiers* and they continued to inspire the grant of limited indulgences. In November 1364 the captain occupied the town of Anse, an important centre of communications on the Saône, and a reissue of *Cogit nos* guaranteed the indulgence to any local people who died in action against his troops.⁴⁷ When the two years' period of the indulgence expired in 1366 it was renewed, a process repeated in 1368.⁴⁸ But in France, as in Italy, the restriction of the crusade indulgence to people who died was regarded as an unnecessary obstacle to the full harnessing of popular resentment of the *routiers*. Consequently a petition was presented to Urban V by Charles V, probably in 1368, to ask for full crusade indulgences. The French king argued that the *routiers* merited condemnation as schismatics. Since schism always led to heresy, and as the mercenaries were showing themselves to hold heretical beliefs by opposing the Church and displaying contempt for the papal keys, they should be subject to the full rigour of the crusade. Urban should grant the crusade indulgence to all who fought the *routiers*, to all who gave money of their own accord for the defence of the realm, and to all who supplied the king's forces. There should be no distinction between sex, dignity, and rank, and certainly no necessity to die in battle or of wounds received there.⁴⁹ These arguments had some effect. In letters to the archbishops of northern France in January 1369 Urban V prolonged the grant of the plenary indulgence to all who died in battle and granted unspecified

⁴⁵ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 445–48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 420–21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 425–26; Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1514.

⁴⁸ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 446, 504.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 505.

partial indulgences to all who sent soldiers, combined their resources with others to send soldiers, made a purely financial contribution, or gave counsel and aid. The bull was to be publicised in all cathedral and parish churches, and because of the poor state of communications (Urban V was now in Rome), the Archbishop of Reims was to ensure that the other prelates knew about it.⁵⁰ But the new concession was hardly necessary; in the early months of 1369 Charles V was preparing to reopen hostilities with England, a conflict which furnished the companies with legitimate employment once more.

The continuity of papal policy can be clearly seen in the arguments used to justify the issue of crusade indulgences against the mercenary companies. Fully in line with earlier crusades against rebellious and excommunicated Christians, the justification was defensive rather than coercive or punitive.⁵¹ This was made very clear by the striking opening of *Cogit nos*:

The wickedness of our age, in which the sons of iniquity have multiplied and, fired by the flames of their own greed, are dishonestly attempting to gorge themselves on the labour of others, and for that reason rage the more cruelly against the innocent peoples, compels us to draw on the resources of the apostolic power to counter their evil stratagems and to strive with ever greater energy and effectiveness to organise the defence of these peoples, especially of those whom these wicked men have so far attacked, and are now attacking.⁵²

The central theme of the bulls was thus the harm which the *routiers* were doing to innocent Christians, their appalling crimes which placed them beyond the pale of Christian society. A Metz chronicler exclaimed that the *routiers* were 'evil people, without faith, without law, worse than the Saracens,' and in 1365 Urban V wrote that 'these deeds are indeed those of pagans, not of people redeemed by Christ's blood.'⁵³ They were represented as 'the enemies of Christ and the faith, in fact of the whole human race.'⁵⁴ The crusade was a measure intended to fend off their attacks;⁵⁵ in particular, Christians subject to the violence and threats of the *routiers* were to be aroused against them by the offer of indulgences, viewed as an incitement to self-defence: 'we are inviting the faithful of Christ to defend themselves more manfully against these people

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 506–7.

⁵¹ Housley, *Italian Crusades* ch. 2 *passim*.

⁵² Denifle, *La Désolation* II 445.

⁵³ *Les Chroniques de la ville de Metz* (ed. J. F. Huguenin; Metz 1838) 105; Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 410. Cf. Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1500: 'regnum Francie non solum hostiliters sed more infidelium paganorum destruere moluntur.'

⁵⁴ *Vitae pap. aven.* I 354. There are many similar examples, e.g. Denifle, *La Désolation* II 399: 'Dei et reipublice inimicorum.'

⁵⁵ See, e.g., the opening phrases of Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 400.

. . . and to rise up more audaciously and powerfully against them, with the spiritual gifts of indulgences and remissions.'⁵⁶

This leading theme of defence against unprovoked and vicious attack was supplemented at various times by three other arguments, all familiar from earlier crusades. First, the *routiers* were accused of standing in the way of the crusading expedition to the East which was being planned in the early 1360s by King John of France and King Peter of Cyprus.⁵⁷ Secondly, when the mercenaries posed a threat to the security of the papal court, as in 1361, the danger to Christ's vicar was depicted as an assault on the Christian faith itself: in just the same way that a century earlier, in 1264, Manfred of Sicily's attempt to capture Urban IV had been represented as a threat to Christianity.⁵⁸ Thirdly, the charge of *fautoria heresiae*, of aiding heresy, was used against the *routiers* on at least one occasion, when Conrad of Landau's Great Company came to the support of Francesco Ordelaffi in Romagna in 1357.⁵⁹ Interestingly, the charge of heresy itself does not appear to have been used. Charles V clearly believed that it could be used, and he was correct in his assertion that some mercenaries expressed contempt for the spiritual power of the pope. In June 1364, for example, the Bishop of Lombez was told to look into the heretical utterances of various members of the companies operating in his area, who had spoken 'evil words . . . against the holy Roman church and the power of the Roman pontiff,' and in the following month the Bishop of Carcassonne and the Dominican inquisitor at Carcassonne were ordered to investigate similar statements by seven captive *routiers* who had denied the apostolic succession.⁶⁰ But the *curia* was obviously unwilling to act on the basis of such isolated cases, knowing that it was on safer ground in concentrating on the brutality and inhumanity of the *routiers*.

We come now to the heart of our inquiry into the wisdom of papal policy towards the *routiers*. With a few exceptions, the grant of crusade indulgences for fighting the companies did not serve its purpose. In 1357, 1361, 1364, and 1365, and on many other less well-documented occasions, the issue of indulgences was followed by negotiations, the bribery of the *routiers*, and a peace settlement which both sides knew would be purely temporary. Why this repeated failure? There was no lack of popular enthusiasm for resistance, especially when sanctioned by the pope and rewarded by the remission of sins.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* no. 467. See also Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1446, emphasising the need for local defensive measures against the companies.

⁵⁷ See below, pp. 271–72.

⁵⁸ *Thes. novus* II 848ff.; Pope Urban IV, *Registres* (ed. J. Guiraud; Paris 1899–1958) no. 859.

⁵⁹ Matteo Villani, *Cronica* II 69–80.

⁶⁰ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 995, 1079. See also Denifle, *La Désolation* II 382, 438–41.

Just as in the twelfth century the indignation of the common people had been channelled into an anti-*routier* confraternity, the Brotherhood of the Peace of Mary,⁶¹ so two centuries later there was widespread popular fury which could be tapped by the granting of indulgences. When crusade indulgences were issued, the concession usually came in response to a petition and was well-rewarded. Matteo Villani related that the Florentines rushed to purchase indulgences in 1357, and that 2,200 took the field as crusaders, 200 on horse and 2,000 on foot.⁶² Again, the root cause of failure was not lack of money, for the campaigns against the *routiers* were financed by substantial clerical taxation. Quite apart from the regular subsidies demanded from the unfortunate clergy in the Midi, there was a levy of 100,000 florins on the English church in 1362, a one-year tenth imposed on the German and Bohemian churches in 1366, and a three-year tenth on other German and French dioceses from November 1367.⁶³ Not all of these taxes could be collected, but supplemented by the sale of indulgences they brought in large amounts.⁶⁴

It would thus be false to conclude that offering crusade indulgences to try to destroy the *routiers* was the product of out-of-date thinking by popes and cardinals isolated from popular feeling; rather it was a response to the widespread disgust aroused by the horrors which the mercenaries perpetrated. But the issue of the companies could not be settled by such means because it was rooted in the malaise of contemporary government. In France and in Italy the political cohesion and authority were lacking which could have harnessed the religious zeal of the people, and this, combined with the strength and powers of resistance of the companies, made a military solution impossible.

The problem can be seen at its clearest in France. Like any other war, a crusade needed at least competent leadership; this was usually supplied by a secular prince or lord, trained in qualities of command and initiative. But the issue of crusade indulgences against the *routiers* in France was necessary precisely because the French crown was going through a political and moral crisis and was unable to protect its subjects. Consequently those who responded to the offer of indulgences found little or no co-ordination of their

⁶¹ Géraud, 'Les Routiers au douzième siècle' 139ff.

⁶² *Cronica* II 72–73.

⁶³ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 390, 396–97, 398–99, 409; Prou, *Étude* 106; Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 784, 847, 1544, 2442–43, 2445, 2507, 2583; Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II nos. 424, 437; E. Hennig, *Die päpstlichen Zehnten aus Deutschland im Zeitalter des avignonischen Papsttums und während des Grossen Schismas* (Halle 1909) 52–55; W. E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England 1327–1534* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962) 95–103.

⁶⁴ The papacy was certainly experiencing financial difficulties at this time (see, e.g., Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1485); but if money could be found to buy the *routiers* off, surely it was also available to mount expeditions against them.

efforts: royal power was lacking, the local authorities unreliable, papal direction weak when it came to military matters. This led to a tragic incident at Sauveterre in the spring of 1364, when numbers of people in Languedoc responded to Urban V's bull *Cogit nos* by rushing into action against the *routiers* without leadership or order, and were easily cut down. Urban wrote to Arnoul of Audrehem, Charles V's lieutenant in Languedoc, telling him to ensure that this did not recur by providing the disciplined leadership required.⁶⁵ In the following November the pope wrote to the Archbishop of Toulouse and his suffragans to establish the ruling that only people who fought 'under a leader deputed for the occasion by the lords or officials of the area' would receive the indulgence, not those who went into action 'without leadership or discipline.'⁶⁶ Moreover, although the public authorities were often associated with requests for the grant of indulgences, they were not always helpful. In January 1365 the pope wrote on behalf of the people of Albi who had stormed a *routier* stronghold at Peyrole, killing a monk and his mother. Royal officials were now threatening the people of the district with a fine, and Urban asked for its remission, since they had acted 'for the king's honour and the defence of their homeland,' they had been aroused to fury by the atrocities committed by the *routiers*, and also because the imposition of a fine would deter popular action in future.⁶⁷

Even if local action had been better co-ordinated and led, it is doubtful if it could have succeeded against the military strength of the larger companies. These were not gangs of half-starved brigands or unwarlike heretics. War was their *métier* and the French crown at its strongest was wary of attempting a military solution, for as a leading scholar of later medieval warfare put it, 'the administrative, financial and military problems of mounting a royal expedition in sufficient force to mop up the companies . . . were virtually insurmountable.'⁶⁸ Ultimately the only way to deal with the *routiers* in France was to recruit them into a royal standing army, regularly paid and disciplined in times of peace and war.⁶⁹ But such a solution called for heavy and protracted national taxation and was not successfully applied until the reign of Charles VII.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 989.

⁶⁶ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 448–49.

⁶⁷ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1522. See also de Vic and Vaissete, *Histoire générale* IX 773 and cf. Keen, *Laws of War* 102. Bishops too could prove a hindrance to local defence schemes. See Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 996.

⁶⁸ Keen, *Laws of War* 95.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Allmand, *Society at War* 45–57.

⁷⁰ For the importance of the problem of brigandage in the development of French royal taxation, see Henneman, *Royal Taxation* 2–3, 258, 297–98, and *passim*.

The situation in Italy was to some extent similar: here too the companies were formidable fighting machines against which *ad hoc* crusading armies stood little chance. Moreover, common action against the *routiers* called for a degree of political unity which was attainable only for brief and inadequate periods. The temptation to hire the companies and so secure an advantage over one's enemies was too great. Matteo Villani commented that 'although both the tyrants and the popular governments of Italy hated the Great Company, so great was the division into factions and the rivalry between republics and tyrants that each preferred to spend money on hiring the companies rather than fighting them.'⁷¹ In September 1364, for example, Urban V wrote to his nuncios that the papal legates were concluding a league with Joanna of Naples and other Italian powers against the companies, but that some states were hindering the project by continuing to employ them.⁷² Two years later the Pope believed that Bernabò Visconti, though formally at peace with the Church, was behind the invasion of the Papal State by the company led by Ambrogio Visconti, his natural son.⁷³ And when the Romans wrote to Urban V at the end of 1364 asking for aid against the companies entrenched in the city's territories, they claimed that Albornoz was conniving in the mercenaries' activity, for only Roman lands were being attacked. The pope hastened to assure the Romans that Tuscany and the Duchy of Spoleto had been raided and that attacks were rumoured to be forthcoming on the eastern provinces. Indeed, one of the reasons why he could not send money was that other areas needed his help more than 'the very well-fortified city' of Rome.⁷⁴ If even the Romans entertained such fears, there was little chance of lasting trust between the Church and its Ghibelline enemies, no matter how serious the common danger from the companies.

The strength and cohesion of the companies, so daunting when their destruction or expulsion was being considered, nevertheless suggested an alternative way of dealing with them. If the *routiers* could be persuaded or compelled to go on crusade against the Muslim foes of Christianity, then their military abilities would be put to good use and Christian countries relieved of their brutality. The most striking precedent for such an approach was of course Urban II's plan for reducing unlawful violence in eleventh-century Europe by persuading knights to serve as *milites Christi* overseas.⁷⁵ All the reports of the

⁷¹ *Cronica* II 66. See also L. Green, *Chronicle into History: An Essay on the Interpretation of History in Florentine Fourteenth-Century Chronicles* (Cambridge 1972) 73–75.

⁷² Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1249; see also no. 1298.

⁷³ *Ibid.* nos. 2308–9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* no. 1485. See also nos. 1402–3, 1741–42.

⁷⁵ C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (tr. M. M. Baldwin and W. Goffart; Princeton 1977) 336ff.

pope's sermon at Clermont refer to this idea and the famous passage in Fulcher of Chartres' account is particularly relevant to the situation nearly three centuries later: 'Let those who for long have been robbers now be soldiers of Christ. Let those who formerly used to do battle with brothers and relatives now fight lawfully against barbarians. Let those who for long were hirelings for a few pieces of silver now earn eternal rewards.'⁷⁶ The fact that the *routiers* of the fourteenth century preferred committing acts of violence against innocent Christians to serving their Redeemer against his enemies was constantly played on by the popes; often they used phrases and rhetorical devices strikingly similar to those attributed to Urban II. 'What grief for holy mother Church,' Urban V wrote in 1366, 'to find that her chosen sons, who should act as her defenders and prize-fighters against all the barbarian nations, are her most cruel, almost heathenish tormentors.'⁷⁷ Other influential voices expressed much the same ideas. In 1374, for example, Saint Catherine of Siena implored John Hawkwood to abandon the employ of the Devil for that of Christ, by leading soldiers to the Holy Land.⁷⁸

The early crusades were at least partially successful in 'exporting' the brutality of Christian knighthood,⁷⁹ leading to a series of decrees by which service in the Holy Land was envisaged as a suitable punishment for criminals. The terms laid down by the popes for the reconciliation of *routiers* imitated these measures by including clauses relating to the crusade. In 1366, for instance, penitent *routiers* were to go on crusade should an expedition be mounted within a year of their absolution, and they were to fight the Muslims for the same period of time which they had spent in the companies; this condition was renewed in 1372.⁸⁰ But probably more potent as an influence on papal policy than the early expeditions to Syria was the history of the Catalan Company, all the more important as this was the first large-scale mercenary company in the West. When the Sicilian war ended in 1302 the Catalan and Aragonese mercenaries serving Frederick II of Sicily were in the same position that their French and English equivalents were to face after the signing of the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360. Instead of seeking employment in Italy they took service under the emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus and fought for the Greeks against the Turks in Asia Minor. The company's leader, Roger de Flor, was

⁷⁶ *Historia hierosolymitana* (ed. H. Hagenmeyer; Heidelberg 1913) 136.

⁷⁷ Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II no. 410.

⁷⁸ *Le lettere di S. Caterina da Siena* (ed. N. Tommaseo; Florence 1860) II 362–65, esp. 363.

⁷⁹ R. Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France* (tr. L. Butler and R. J. Adam; London 1960) 202; A. L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta 1087–1216* (The Oxford History of England 3; 2nd ed.; Oxford 1955) 149.

⁸⁰ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 507–8, 843–45; Gregory XI, *Lettres secrètes . . . France* no. 687. Cf. P. A. Throop, *Criticism of the Crusade: a Study of Public Opinion and Crusade Propaganda* (Amsterdam 1940) 96–100.

murdered in 1305, and its history then took a different course. The Catalans plundered Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly, then fought for Duke Gautier of Athens, and finally defeated and killed Gautier in pitched battle, taking over the Athenian duchy.⁸¹ Certainly the Catalan Company was not an ideal precedent for later mercenaries; the Frankish Duchy of Athens had been a member, albeit an outlying and relatively unimportant one, of the Guelph network of powers, and papal policy towards its destroyer was intermittently hostile. But the potential value of the Catalans as crusaders, emphasised by the company's own propaganda, was clearly appreciated at Avignon and elsewhere in the West. When the company was still in northern Greece Charles of Valois made an unsuccessful attempt to recruit its members for his planned crusade against Constantinople, and at the Council of Vienne there was a papal proposal that the Catalans should be employed in a crusade which would proceed to the Holy Land via Constantinople and Armenia. A generation later Clement VI hoped that his crusading efforts would receive Catalan support in exchange for the lifting of the Church sanctions placed on the duchy.⁸²

The precedents of the early crusades and the Catalan Company would not have been enough in themselves to lead to crusade negotiations with the companies in the 1360s. It was also important that a crusading expedition was being planned in which they could reasonably be expected to take part. For on Good Friday 1363 Urban V gave the cross to John II of France, Peter of Cyprus, and many members of the French and Cypriot nobility. Preaching was decreed and taxes levied for the crusade, which was to set sail on 1 March 1365 to fight the Turks in Asia Minor and, by shattering their power, regain the Holy Places.⁸³ This was the most ambitious crusading project since the 1330s, and Urban V was prepared to make substantial and damaging changes in his policies to help it along; the most important of these was a peace settlement with Bernabò Visconti, reached in the summer of 1364 through the mediation of Philip of Mézières and Peter Thomas.⁸⁴ But the pope also hoped that the expedition would benefit his policies in the West by drawing off the companies. On 25 May 1363 he addressed an impressive letter to the captains and members of the companies operating in France and the regions bordering on France. They were exhorted to participate in the crusade. By using their martial skill in the Lord's war for the recovery of the Holy Land they would be

⁸¹ K. M. Setton, 'The Catalans in Greece 1311–1380,' in his *A History of the Crusades* III, *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Madison 1975) 167–71.

⁸² K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)* I. *The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia 1976) 446ff., esp. 446, 455–56; R. I. Burns, 'The Catalan Company and the European Powers, 1305–1311,' *Speculum* 29 (1954) 751–71.

⁸³ Setton, *Papacy and the Levant* 245.

⁸⁴ N. Jorga, *Philippe de Mézières 1327–1405* (Paris 1896) 208–29.

able to do penance for the sins 'which you have frequently committed in wars between Christians, against God and churches, clerical persons, and the innocent.' An Augustinian friar was sent out to absolve from their sins all who took the cross.⁸⁵

Urban V knew that if the *routiers* did not co-operate, the crusade would never set sail: the French nobility could not be expected to fight overseas while their patrimonies were being devastated by the companies. The full extent of the obstacle presented by the *routiers* became clear in the second half of 1363 and the first months of 1364, the period which Denifle described as the worst phase of mercenary destruction in southern France.⁸⁶ At the end of August 1363, for example, King John asked Juan Fernández de Heredia, Hospitaller castellan of Amposta, to come to the royal court to advise him on the preparations for the crusade. The pope excused Heredia from this request on the grounds that, as captain of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, he was needed at the *curia* to combat the *routiers* stationed nearby, especially since further mercenaries were expected from Spain and Catalonia. The arrival of these *routiers* would, he wrote, prove detrimental to the crusade.⁸⁷ In terms of finance too the mercenary problem stood in the way of the projected expedition. In March 1364 the French king asked for a subsidy from the Church to deal with the *routiers*. The pope replied that he could not levy this at the same time as the six-year tenth needed to pay for the crusade, 'since it would be impossible for the clergy to bear two burdens of this kind simultaneously.' If the king preferred to raise the subsidy first, then the tenth would have to wait.⁸⁸ The decision reached was communicated to the French clergy in July: neither the tenth imposed for the crusade nor any other tax would be collected for a year, so that those clerics not impoverished by war could offer a subsidy to the king.⁸⁹ In reality the crusade to the East had foundered, at least in its original form as a joint Franco-Cypriot enterprise. This was partly due to the death of King John in April 1364, but largely because of the refusal of the *routiers* to co-operate. In February 1364, as we have seen, Urban went on to issue crusade indulgences against them. As Maurice Prou wrote, 'from the moment when the companies refused to go overseas, the crusade ceased to interest France. . . . For the King of France, the proper crusade to take on was the one against the members of the companies.'⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 487, and see also no. 488.

⁸⁶ *La Désolation* II 441–42.

⁸⁷ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 596.

⁸⁸ Prou, *Étude* 111.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 115–16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 37–38.

Things looked more hopeful in 1364 in Italy. The conclusion of the conflict between the Church and the Visconti drastically curtailed the employment prospects of the companies, and their thoughts turned to the crusade overseas. In April there occurred a series of negotiations with the English Company of Albert Sterz. Robert Wodhavos came to Avignon as the company's envoy to inform the pope that its members wanted to go on crusade and were ready to do so provided that they received a 'suitable financial subsidy' from the Italian states. Urban V had no illusions that the scheme would free Italy completely, but he believed that if some companies left the peninsula the others would be weakened enough to make their expulsion possible. The potential benefits for the souls of the *routiers*, the peace of Italy, and the good of the general passage were too great to be ignored, and both legates in Italy, Albornoze and Androin de la Roche, were told to negotiate with the English. Venice and Genoa were asked to supply shipping and Queen Joanna was requested to help William de la Pole, lord of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, who wanted to go on crusade from the southern port of Otranto. The mercenaries were granted the full indulgences and privileges of crusaders, and were permitted to take the cross from any Italian bishop, as they were so far from their own ordinaries.⁹¹

Talks were conducted by the legates both with the mercenaries and with their employers to try to raise the money needed, but they were hampered by quite natural suspicions about the *routiers*' real intentions. In June Androin de la Roche was told to keep a close eye on the movements of the companies in Tuscany. At present they were ravaging the province and moving closer to the lands of the Church. If they were clearly not preparing to leave for the crusade then he was to forge a league of *signori* and communes against them. By September such a league was in the process of formation and plans for sending the companies off on crusade were temporarily shelved.⁹²

Despite the failure of these plans in 1363 and 1364, the following year saw the most determined efforts yet made to dispose of the *routiers* by peaceful means. In March 1365 the conflict between the Valois kings and Charles of Navarre ended, and in April the civil war in Brittany also drew to a close. The resultant release of mercenaries aggravated an already serious problem.⁹³ The new negotiations were conducted at the very highest level. In May the emperor Charles IV visited Avignon and discussed the problem of the companies with Urban V. He outlined a proposal which Urban communicated to Charles V of France on 9 June; it was intended, the pope wrote, to bring about 'the

⁹¹ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 886–92, 898–99; *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters IV* (edd. W. H. Bliss and J. A. Twemlow; London 1902) 8.

⁹² Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 1032, 1037, 1249.

⁹³ Prou, *Étude* 46–47.

peace and tranquillity of the entire Christian people, and especially your kingdom, the subjugation of the infidels, the triumph of the Catholic faith, and the recovery of the Holy Land.' The companies should depart to fight the Turks in the East (exactly where was not specified), of their own free will or under compulsion. If they went by a land-route, it would be necessary to secure the agreement of the King of Hungary to their crossing his territory: the Marshal of France would go to Hungary and discuss this with King Louis. Charles IV undertook to supply the *routiers* with food while they were crossing the empire. If this land-route proved impossible to organise, the mercenaries would have to take ship from Venice and other Italian ports. This would be more difficult to arrange, but Charles IV guaranteed a half of the crown revenues of the Bohemian kingdom over a three-year period to cover the expenses entailed.⁹⁴

On the basis of Charles IV's plan diplomatic bargaining started again in France and Italy. This time the leading part in Italy was taken by Androin de la Roche. Since the capital of his legatine jurisdiction, Bologna, was more accessible to the major Italian powers than any city in the southern provinces of the Papal State, he was told to preside over an assembly there. Albornoz was to send envoys to represent the lands controlled by his officials. The Bologna conference was to form a league to persuade the *routiers* to take either the *iter Ungarie* or the sea-route, according to the decision of the King of Hungary. If the companies declined to go on crusade then the members of the league would co-operate in their destruction. It was essential to keep the four companies from joining forces, in particular to keep the English Company and that of Hannekin Bongarten apart.⁹⁵ But the negotiations got nowhere, and by April 1366 the organisation of military defence against the companies in Italy was seen as the only way of dealing with them.

Talks in France got rather further, though not in the direction hoped for by Charles IV and Urban V, for in the course of a year the emperor's original proposal went through a curious transformation. Even before Charles IV arrived at Avignon Bertrand Du Guesclin had been chosen as the captain of the mercenaries who were to set off on crusade to the East, and in May he travelled to the court of the Prince of Wales to bring the Gascon authorities into the negotiations.⁹⁶ But it was Arnaud of Cervole who assumed the captaincy before the end of May. There now commenced a rather bizarre episode. Arnaud brought together a large force, perhaps 20,000 men, and they received

⁹⁴ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1822.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* no. 1826; Theiner, *Codex dipl.* II nos. 403–4; Canestrini, 'Documenti' 85–86.

⁹⁶ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1762. At the end of March a faculty was issued by Urban V for the absolution of penitent *routiers*. *Ibid.* no. 1664.

absolution for past misdeeds at Mâcon before setting out for the German frontier in Lorraine. Technically this was a crusading expedition, travelling to the Balkans to fight the Turks. Thus on 20 June Urban V wrote to Charles V that all who were following Arnaud would enjoy the crusade indulgence; he was to be assigned the proceeds of a tenth levied for a period to be settled by the king; and when such details were finalised a papal legate would be appointed to accompany the crusade.⁹⁷ On 19 July a two-year tenth was levied on the French church to pay the expenses of the *routiers* travelling 'to Turkish parts or to those of other infidels overseas, to fight them on behalf of the Catholic faith.'⁹⁸ But Arnaud's crusade proved a bitter disappointment. He was unable or unwilling to restrain the excesses of his soldiers, who behaved no differently from an ordinary unemployed mercenary company. In June the city of Metz was forced to ransom itself for 18,000 florins, and at the beginning of July demands were also made of Strasbourg. Not surprisingly, the German states across the Rhine objected to the idea of allowing this army to cross their lands, and Charles IV complained that Arnaud had given him no time to make the necessary preparations for its reception. Instead the emperor raised a large army to bar the route, and Arnaud withdrew through Franche-Comté to Burgundy, protesting that a legitimate crusade had been frustrated by German opposition.⁹⁹

With the failure of the crusade to the East the crusade in Spain presented itself as an alternative. For several years the French court had seen unique possibilities in the dispute for the Castilian throne between Peter I and his exiled half-brother Henry of Trastámara, who was allied with Peter III of Aragon. If the companies could be hired in support of Henry, then a French client-state would be established in Spain and the *routiers* would be transferred at least temporarily to Spanish soil, where their formidable strength would be whittled away in battles with the Castilian armies. In 1362 Henry gathered a force of mercenaries at Pamiers to invade Castile, but the army dispersed once it had been paid. Two years later Charles V negotiated with Peter of Aragon for a joint campaign against Navarre and Gascony, but Peter stipulated that the Aragonese war with Castile must first be ended. Charles agreed and it was settled that the companies would be used first against Castile and then against Navarre. The forces needed were available in the summer of 1365 in the form of Arnaud of Cervole's army, but it was necessary to persuade Urban V, who was still on good terms with Peter of Castile, to give the expedition his

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* no. 1849, and see also nos. 1839–42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* nos. 1884–85. See also no. 1944.

⁹⁹ Chérest, *L'Archiprêtre* 304–24; Denifle, *La Désolation* II 480–84; Delachenal, *Charles V* III 231.

backing and help to finance it with the proceeds of the clerical tenth. Charles V was able to do this by presenting the project as a crusade against Granada which was passing through Castile *en route*; it is doubtful whether the pope was deceived, but any solution must have appeared preferable to the companies' resettlement in Provence. Crusading indulgences were issued for the expedition, which would be financed initially by a grant of 100,000 florins each from Urban V, Charles V, and Peter III of Aragon. Bertrand Du Guesclin replaced Arnaud of Cervole as leader of the companies, with Arnoul of Audrehem as his second in command.¹⁰⁰ But the respectability of the enterprise and its leaders did not prevent the *routiers* from exacting ransoms as they made their way to Spain, 30,000 florins from the seneschal of Provence, 5,000 florins from the pope for the Comtat Venaissin, 10,000 francs from Montpellier.¹⁰¹ The companies were also receiving the proceeds of the tenth levied in July, borrowed by the pope as the collection of the tenth itself was delayed.¹⁰² Bertrand Du Guesclin did particularly well, collecting 32,000 francs on 26 January 1366 in exchange for leading the companies 'to the lands of the infidels.'¹⁰³

In December 1365 the companies at last entered Spain. Their martial skills again proved formidable: by June 1366 Peter of Castile had lost Burgos, Toledo, and Seville, and Henry of Trastámara was crowned king. The idea was maintained that the ultimate objective of the expedition was warfare against the Moors of Granada. In February 1366 Peter of Aragon promised the English captain, Hugh Calveley, that he would lend him twenty galleys for a crusade against the enemies of the faith once Castile had been won.¹⁰⁴ Bertrand Du Guesclin may even have harboured ambitions of carving out a principality for himself in Granada, in the manner of the Catalans in Greece. He claimed descent from Aquin, King of Bougie, and in March 1366, in a curious ceremony at Burgos, Henry of Trastámara bestowed the crown of Granada on the mercenary leader.¹⁰⁵ But although some of the mercenaries stayed to fight the Moors, the majority were soon back in France, their victories, from the point of view of Charles V and Urban V, all too bloodless. The summer of 1366 was a particularly bad time for those authorities faced with the *routier* problem, for in August the military solution was again proved hopeless when a force raised by the seneschals of Toulouse and Carcassonne and the Viscount of Narbonne

¹⁰⁰ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 1917; P. E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford 1955) 26–28, 33ff.

¹⁰¹ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 486–88; Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 2041.

¹⁰² Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 2039, and see also no. 2040.

¹⁰³ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 775ff.

¹⁰⁴ Russell, *English Intervention* 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 49; Delachenal, *Charles V* III 281. Cf. Prou, *Étude* 57–58, 62.

was resoundingly defeated by the mercenaries at Montauban.¹⁰⁶ Another crusading enterprise held out some hope of peace, for in 1366 Amedeo of Savoy was recruiting for his campaign in aid of his cousin, the emperor John V Palaeologus. The reissue of sanctions against the *routiers* in May was probably intended to spur them into taking service under Amedeo. Many did so, and Arnaud of Cervole, who had planned to lead reinforcements to Castile but was prevented by the decisive victories of spring 1366, was leading his men to join Amedeo when he was murdered near Mâcon on 25 May.¹⁰⁷ More effective as a means of emptying France of *routiers* than Amedeo's brief crusade was the renewal of the Spanish war in February 1367 and the massacre of the mercenaries at the battle of Nájera in April.¹⁰⁸

During the last years of the Avignonese papacy it was the eastern Mediterranean lands which appeared to offer the best hopes of relieving the West of the companies. In the winter of 1369–70 the Greek emperor, now reconciled with the Catholic Church, was permitted to recruit troops from amongst the companies for the defence of his lands against the Turks. Joanna of Naples was asked to help this scheme of recruitment by providing those who took service under the emperor with supplies and shipping.¹⁰⁹ And in 1375 Gregory XI was encouraged by news of religious disturbances in the Muslim East to hope that if the Anglo-French peace talks at Bruges were fruitfully concluded a passage to the East would have a very good chance of success through the participation of the companies.¹¹⁰ Writing to Philip of Burgundy in May the Pope claimed to have heard that innumerable men-at-arms on both sides were prepared to go on crusade; this would be beneficial both for France and for the Christian East.¹¹¹

Nothing came of Gregory's hopes that the sins of those who had committed 'many terrible crimes' in France would be purged by combat in God's war, and it has often been stated that this whole aspect of papal policy was naïve, based on a grotesque misreading of *routier* mentality. This was Denifle's view: the companies would not go on crusade of their own accord and they were far too strong to be compelled to go.¹¹² Mollat too believed that 'it must have been either extreme ingenuousness or idealism that led [Urban V] to wish

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 62.

¹⁰⁷ Setton, *Papacy and the Levant* 232, 285–307.

¹⁰⁸ Russell, *English Intervention* 83–107.

¹⁰⁹ O. Halecki, *Un Empereur de Byzance à Rome. Vingt ans de travail pour l'union des églises et pour la défense de l'empire d'orient 1355–1375* (Warsaw 1930) 215–17, 382–83; Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* nos. 3040–41.

¹¹⁰ Gregory XI, *Lettres secrètes* . . . France nos. 1852–65, 1896–1907.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* no. 1898.

¹¹² *La Désolation* II 479.

to send the Companies to conquer the Holy Land.¹¹³ More recently, Peter Partner wrote that 'the idea of persuading the English mercenaries to join the crusade, seriously entertained by the pope, was a chimera.'¹¹⁴ Seen as a straightforward choice between fighting on a crusade front, such as Hungary or Granada, and fighting in France or Italy, this is doubtless true; Froissart refers to the lack of enthusiasm aroused in the *routiers* by the prospect of Hungary as a theatre of war.¹¹⁵ And of course promising to go on crusade, receiving Church or lay subsidies for the journey, and then declining to go, was a procedure fully in line with the normal activities of the companies. It was a sign of naïveté in Saint Catherine that she could write to John Hawkwood rebuking him for his duplicity in this respect: 'I wonder much at it, that you asserted that you were willing to go and die for Christ in this holy passage, or so we heard, and that you now want to make war here.'¹¹⁶

I would suggest, however, that papal policy was not based upon unrealistic premises. For to juxtapose profitable warfare and looting in France and Italy with unprofitable service in Christ's cause on crusade is to adopt an oversimplified view of the issue. It does not take account either of the complicated thinking of the *routiers* or of the nature of crusading in the fourteenth century. Two points need to be made. First, participating in a crusade did possess an intrinsic religious and cultural appeal for the mercenaries. While bearing the Church's sanctions against them without any obvious signs of spiritual anguish, the *routiers* did use every opportunity which arose to secure absolution. Papal absolution was one of the demands of the companies at Pont-Saint-Esprit in 1361, and one of the conditions laid down by Seguin of Bedefol in 1365 for evacuating the town of Anse was absolution for his past misdeeds.¹¹⁷ Again in 1365, the *routiers* assembling for the Spanish war demanded absolution when stationed at Villeneuve, and in 1366 Robert Knolles remitted the ransom due to him from the town of Auxerre as part of his deal with Urban V leading to his absolution.¹¹⁸ In May 1366 the pope took the trouble to make it clear that the absolutions he had recently granted were invalid if the pardoned *routiers* went on to commit fresh crimes.¹¹⁹ Bad Catholics the *routiers* may have been, but they were not proto-Lutherans. The certainty of salvation

¹¹³ *Popes at Avignon* 57, and cf. 144.

¹¹⁴ *Lands of St. Peter* 353.

¹¹⁵ *Chroniques* VI 183–84.

¹¹⁶ *Le lettere* II 364.

¹¹⁷ De Vic and Vaissete, *Histoire générale* IX 732; Delachenal, *Charles V* III 236.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* II 35, and cf. III 244.

¹¹⁹ Denifle, *La Désolation* II 492. See also *ibid.* 183–85 for other examples of the procurement of absolution as a condition of ransom.

bestowed by participation in a crusade, provided that certain conditions were fulfilled, was not something they took lightly. Moreover, fighting on crusade was an aspect of the chivalric way of life to which the mercenaries aspired; in this respect, as in many others, they were no different from the sort of knight lauded by Froissart or Chaucer. The *routier* Bascot of Mauléon, for example, fought for the Teutonic knights in Prussia as well as at the battles of Brignais, Poitiers, and Auray, and in the Spanish campaigns. Bascot, as M. H. Keen remarked, 'is a useful reminder of the difficulty of applying any touchstone in order to distinguish the gold from the base metal in chivalry.'¹²⁰

The second point is that a crusade could offer material profits as well as spiritual rewards and social prestige. Certainly Urban V held out as an attraction in 1363 the fact that a crusader could earn both heavenly and earthly booty.¹²¹ Peter of Cyprus and Amadeo of Savoy offered wages for enlisting in their armies, and there was the chance of plunder, quite spectacular plunder in the case of Peter's expedition. This was also legitimate booty, won in a just war and for that reason less problematic than booty acquired in France after 1360.¹²² Viewed in terms of profit, a crusade was not always as rewarding as was that to Alexandria in 1365, but it could be an attractive alternative to peace-time plundering in the West. The contrast between France and Italy is instructive: peace in France in the 1360s made the *routiers* more receptive to the idea of a crusade than they would have been had regular paid employment been available. In Italy on the other hand the more-or-less continual warfare made a crusade rather less attractive.

The concept of a *routier* crusade was not in itself a nonsensical one. What was lacking was not enthusiasm for Holy War or foreign adventures amongst the mercenaries, but a permanent crusading front which would ensure them paid employment and booty. The crusades in the East were over too quickly, and were too distant: Arnaud of Cervole's expedition of 1365 might have been more successful had the Turks been closer at hand. Campaigns on the Baltic were too seasonal and yielded little plunder, those in Spain too subject to political manœuvring between the Christian kingdoms and the Moors. There were other problems too, such as financing the *routiers* and controlling them,¹²³

¹²⁰ M. H. Keen, 'Chivalry, Nobility and the Man-at-Arms,' in C. T. Allmand, ed., *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool 1976) 45. The whole article is important for an understanding of the *routiers* and their ambitions. For an interesting discussion of the problem of chivalry and the *routiers*, using literary evidence, see T. Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (London 1980).

¹²¹ Urban V, *Lettres secrètes* no. 487.

¹²² Keen, *Laws of War* 82ff.

¹²³ The difficulties faced by Peter of Cyprus at Alexandria are particularly instructive. See Jorga, *Philippe de Mézières* 297ff.

but these were not insuperable. In the hands of capable leaders like Bertrand Du Guesclin and Louis of Anjou foreign campaigning did prove the best way of ridding France of the companies. Above all, there is a difference between practical difficulties and anachronistic thinking. When examined in detail, neither aspect of papal policy towards the *routiers* was deficient in realism; traditionalism in this instance did not equal sterility. That the popes and their counsellors failed is a measure not of the inadequacy of the men but of the sheer magnitude and intractability of what they had to deal with.

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