

History of the Crusades.
Episode 168.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Beginning of the Inquisition.

Hello again. Last week we saw the end of the Crusade against the Cathars, with a peace treaty formalised in Paris in 1229. So, after 20 years of Crusading, it was finally time for peace to return to Languedoc. What does this mean for the Cathars of southern France, and what does this mean for southern France itself? We're about to find out.

If anyone in Languedoc thought that post-Crusade Languedoc would be the same as pre-Crusade Languedoc, they were about to have another think coming. Pre-Crusade Languedoc was a free spirited, independent sort of place; difficult to govern; tolerant of those of other faiths, like Cathars, Waldensians and Jews; passionate; embracing of the troubadour culture; and generally vastly different in nature and culture to northern France. They had a history of strong local self-governance, with their feudal overlords often struggling to maintain their authority. A classic example of this was the city of Toulouse. Although the city of Toulouse was the administrative base of the Count of Toulouse, the city itself was governed by a council of citizens, with the council not averse to making decisions contrary to the will and interests of their Count.

Post-Crusade however, it was pretty clear that all of this was about to change. After the Crusade, in addition to the traditional governance by the nobility of southern France, two other bodies were vying for control of the region and its people: the Catholic Church and the French Crown. The Kingdom of France put in place a bureaucracy to control southern France and to tax southern France. Seneschals were appointed and installed in Carcassonne, Beaucaire, and in the Toulouse and Albi regions. The seneschals exercised royal authority and were assisted in applying military, fiscal and legal aspects of northern French rule by a complex web of bureaucrats. This web descended even to village level, with "bayles" appointed to collect royal revenues.

With the French monarchy making its presence felt in every city, town and village, the other victor of the war, the Catholic Church, also muscled in. The Church of course, had done well when the region had been ruled by Simon de Montfort. After Simon's death, however, its fortunes had waned, with the rebel leaders confiscating and diminishing Church lands. That all changed with the Paris peace treaty, which, in addition to restoring Church lands, required Count Raymond VII of Toulouse to make payments to the Church and to establish a university in the city of Toulouse, so that theology, law and the liberal arts could be taught within the city.

Now, while we're talking about the Church, there's one important factor to note, and that factor concerns a certain Dominic of Caleruega. The 13th century saw the establishment and rise of two great monastic orders, the Dominican Order and the Franciscan Order. We have already come across the founder of the Franciscan Order, and the future Saint Francis of Assisi, during the Middle Eastern Crusades, and now it's time to turn to Dominic and his Order. We've encountered Dominic briefly at the beginning of the Crusade against the Cathars and at the time of the death of Pope Innocent III, Dominic was living in the city of Toulouse, where he had established a small band of 16 followers, all of them living in a house within the city.

In 1217, the year following Pope Innocent's death, Dominic left Toulouse and journeyed to Rome. He returned from the holy city with ambitious and far-reaching plans for his followers. They would be dispersed across Europe, with most of them directed to head to cities with established universities, such as Paris and Bologna. There they were to make the study of theology their priority. Both Simon de Montfort and the Bishop of Toulouse Bishop Folquet were opposed to Dominic's plans, but he carried them out anyway. Dominic himself died four years later, but by his death his Dominican order had been firmly established, with Chapters in each of the main European university towns.

The system of governance established by Dominic for his order was unique. Decisions were made not by the abbots or senior clergy within the order, but by general consensus of the monks themselves. The Dominicans tended not to sequester themselves away in elaborate monasteries, but instead lived in modest accommodation within the cities, often in the poorer parts of the town where they could preach to the local Catholic population. Dominicans were, at their core, evangelistic preachers, who were only licensed to preach after intensive study of theology. Having had their origins in the city of Toulouse during the Crusade against the Cathars, the Dominicans were well versed in the dangers of heresy, and will be playing a major role in the push-back against the Cathars of southern France as we move forward.

With the Church and the French crown tightening their grip on the region, what did this mean for the Cathars? The Crusade, of course, had not been kind to the Cathars. The first Cathar Perfect had been burned as a heretic back in September 1209, under the personal direction of Simon de Montfort, and over the course of the conflict, the body-count had gradually stacked up: 140 burned alive at Minerve; 300 at Lavaur; and 60 at Les Casses being the primary executions, although many others had no doubt fallen victim to the Crusaders in smaller numbers that were not recorded. As an aside here, taking into account the massacres at Beziers and Marmande, there were statistically far more Catholic civilian deaths during the Crusade than Cathar deaths.

Statistics aside, it was the Cathar population of Languedoc that was the focus of the Crusade and it was the Cathars who were heavily affected. During the Crusade many Cathars either kept their heads down or were constantly on the move, hoping to evade persecution. Others fled to more tolerant environs, making the trek across the Pyrenees into the Kingdom of Aragon, or across to Lombardy in the east. Following the Paris peace accord, many Cathars who had lived in southern France returned from the years of self-imposed exile. However, if they are expecting to live in the tolerant, accepting society they had encountered before the Crusade, they were about to be disappointed. While it was true that, with many routiers being restored to their ancestral lands, old bonds were re-established between the returning Cathars and their former protectors, the new presence of bureaucrats from northern France and the revival of Church interests in the region meant that their faith could no longer be practiced openly.

The Cathar religion now became an underground movement, practiced in secrecy. Cathars were now forced to travel in groups, mostly at night to avoid detection. Code words and special signals were used to identify a practising Cathars to those of similar faith, and some acquired weaving skills or other professions to enable them to blend into the communities sheltering them.

In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption provides two interesting examples of the fortunes of practicing Cathars during the Crusade and beyond. The first

concerns a female Cathar Arnoud de la Motte. Arnoud had been born and raised in Montauban, but the coming of the Crusade in 1209 meant that her life from that time on was one of constant disruption and movement, fleeing before the approach of various Crusader armies. In 1209 she was living in a small village near the river Tarn, when word spread that the Crusaders were heading their way. The entire village erupted into a state of panic, and when the army was still 60 miles away, the villagers fled, setting their town alight as they left. Carrying what she could, Arnoud traveled from village to village, finally making it to Lavaur, along with a significant amount of similar displaced peoples. A year later, she fled to Rabastens, as news circulated that the Crusaders would shortly target the County of Toulouse. She spent nearly a year at Rabastens before leaving just in time, as in May 1211 Rabastens surrendered to the Crusaders. After wandering from village to village she eventually made her way back to her home town of Montauban, where she made the decision to renounce her religion. She was personally reconciled to the Catholic Church by the Bishop of Cahors, and lived quietly in Montauban for the next decade or so. However, in 1224, after the rebels retook the region, she heard a sermon by a visiting Cathar Perfect, and was persuaded to return to the Cathar faith. Arnoud, together with her mother and sister, then resumed her life on the move, traveling from village to village, mostly at night, staying with sympathetic locals, and evading Church authorities. Finally, after two years of constant travel, Arnoud and her mother and sister moved to the city of Toulouse, where they gained the protection of a well known Cathar nobleman, and settled in the city.

While the life of an ordinary Cathar was generally one of constant movement and disruption, the life of a prominent Cathar Perfect was even more unsettled. The Cathar Perfect Gilbert de Castres survived the Crusade against the Cathars by relying on an elaborate network of safe-houses and sympathetic local guides, who would escort groups of the Perfect through little used mountain tracks, passes and routes between towns and villages. At the beginning of the Crusade, Gilbert was based at Fanjeaux, preaching to locals and administering the consolamentum where required. In 1209 he was forced to flee to the relative safety of the Cathar stronghold at Montsegur. But instead of remaining safely in the castle, he used it as a base, travelling widely within the region, preaching and visiting local Cathars. He was caught up in the siege of Castelnaudary in 1220, but managed to flee through Amaury de Montfort's cordon of the town, and continued his preaching mission throughout the surrounding region. In 1223 he was appointed the Cathar Bishop of Toulouse, and with a now raised profile, he risked preaching to groups of Cathars, even in public places, despite the fact that Amaury and his Crusaders were still active in the region. Following the signing of the peace treaty, Gilbert the Cathar Bishop of Toulouse was heartened to see the return from exile of so many of his flock. But he mustn't get too excited, because while the Crusade against the Cathars eradicated more Catholics than Cathars from southern France, the Catholic Church is not yet done with the Cathar heretics.

Now, the word "Inquisition" will probably conjure up in your mind the image of an unfortunate individual being tortured in a dungeon before having his or her broken body dragged before a court to be tried, found guilty, and executed. But you'll need to put that aside for a moment, because when the Inquisition commenced in Languedoc in the 1230's, it was quite different to the horror show that it was eventually to become. An Inquisition was originally an inquiry or inquest undertaken by the Church to determine the facts of a particular situation, and it had been used by Bishops since 1184, when its use had been formally authorized by Pope Lucius III. In the year 1227, two years before the Paris peace treaty, Pope Gregory IX had replaced Pope Honorius.

Following the formalization of peace in Languedoc it became apparent to Pope Gregory and to the senior clergy within southern France that the Cathar heresy was not only still present in the region, but was possibly even enjoying a resurgence. As more and more Cathars returned from exile, and routiers were restored to their lands and protected their returning heretics, and as Cathar Perfect began once again to preach to small groups within towns and cities, it was clear that something had to be done. The city of Toulouse determined that groups of lay men, accompanied by a priest, were to search houses, farm buildings and even caves within the County of Toulouse, and report to the Bishop of Toulouse any sightings of heretics. Heretics were required to wear a cloth Cross, which was sewn into their clothes, and punishment for heretical beliefs or for supporting heretics ranged from penance and the requirement to undertake pilgrimages to flogging, fines, confiscation of property and imprisonment.

But by the time the year 1230 rolled around, it was pretty clear that the actions taken by the Bishop of Toulouse were ineffectual in stemming the growing tide of heresy. Reports began reaching Pope Gregory that not only was the Cathar faith enjoying a resurgence in southern France, heretics were springing up all over Europe, from the Rhineland to northern France. While it was true that some peasants were being labeled as heretics merely due to their refusal to pay Church tithes, it did seem that the Church was struggling to impose its will in pockets of territories across Europe. So Pope Gregory came up with a plan. He would codify existing legislation against heresy and also dictate exactly how those laws should be applied. He would do all this with a view to establishing a special tribunal, answerable not to a Bishop but to his own dedicated agents, to, and I quote, "make inquisition of heretical depravity" end quote.

Pope Gregory busied himself creating the legislative basis for his new system of inquiry, but crucial to its success would be his ability to find the appropriate men to staff the tribunal. Ideally, these men will have pledged their lives to the Church, be learned, and disciplined. Ideally, these men would be exactly like the monks from the new Dominican Order. It turned out that the Dominicans were a perfect fit for Pope Gregory's new plans. They had their origins within the city of Toulouse, so were well versed in both the Cathar heresy and in the unique characteristics of the people and society of Languedoc. The order itself was in the ascendancy, with its learned Chapters of monks springing up all over Europe. They had recently outgrown their headquarters in Toulouse, a set of three houses near the Narbonnais castle, one of which apparently is still standing today. They had transferred out of the three houses into large donated quarters near the city wall.

The members of the Order of Preachers founded by Dominic, while not necessarily learned in matters of the law, were knowledgeable about theology, were disciplined in matters of study, and their evangelical background made them amenable to the task of rooting out and questioning alleged heretics. Years before Pope Gregory had decided to formalize his enquiries against the faithless, members of the Dominican Order had taken it upon themselves to preach against heretics, and when heretics were discovered, to punish them for their transgressions. So when Pope Gregory decided to establish a permanent tribunal in the city of Toulouse to inquire into allegations of heresy, it seemed only natural to endow the Dominicans, and not the Bishops, with the authority to operate it.

Now, as we've already stated, ever since the peace of 1229, the Bishops of southern France had been doing their utmost to push back against the growing tide of heresy. Count Raymond VII himself had promised, as part of the peace treaty, to make diligent

inquiries with a view to arresting and punishing heretics, and the Papal Legate Romano had visited Languedoc on numerous occasions to see how Raymond was progressing in this regard. It was pretty clear to everyone that Raymond wasn't progressing very well. Neither were the Bishops. Different Bishops had different ideas of how the tasks should be carried out and some pursued the Cathars within their Bishoprics with energy and persistence, while others had the occasional burst of activity, followed by nothing. The new Bishop of Toulouse, Raymond de Fauga, who replaced Bishop Folquet as Bishop of Toulouse in 1231, started off with a burst of activity, rounding up a group of Cathars who had assembled in secrecy within a forest to worship together, all of whom were burned alive. But other than these brief glimpses of success, Cathars were still in Languedoc, and the Cathar Perfect was still preaching, sometimes even in public places.

So as we have already mentioned, it was the Dominican friars to whom Pope Gregory turned when looking for men to man his tribunals, not the Bishops, and not men of the law. In February 1231 Pope Gregory issued a general condemnation of heresy, in a papal bull entitled "Excommunicamus." Pope Gregory followed his Excommunicamus with the appointment of a number of Dominican friars across Europe, to both preach against and seek out heretics, and to punish them according to the law. These Inquisitors were based not only in Toulouse but across Europe.

And so, we have now laid the basis for the new policy of the Church in regards to the Cathars, which was not to launch a Crusade against them, but to instead to track them down one by one, submit them to intensive questioning, gather evidence against them and then convict and punish them. We will see how the Inquisition fares in its early years in next week's episode. Until next week, bye for now.

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