

History of the Crusades.
Episode 187.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Last Cathars.

Hello again. Now, before we get started, I must confess to having committed a major Papal error two episodes ago, in Episode 185. Astute listener Hugh, pointed out that in that episode I repeatedly referred to Pope John 22nd as Pope John 12th. What happened is that I missed a Roman numeral, an X to be exact, meaning that Pope John XXII became Pope John XII. Now, unfortunately, Pope John XII, who lived in the 10th century, was one of the worst Pope to have ever sat in the Papal seat. He has featured in E.R. Chamberlin's book "The Bad Popes", and I would go so far as to say that Pope John XII was not only a terrible Pope, but an absolutely awful example of a human. In fact, if you were to sit down with Pope John XXII and ask him which Pope he would prefer not to be mistaken for, he would probably say, "Call me anything you want, but whatever you do, don't call me Pope John XII". So Oops. Sorry listeners, sorry fans of the Papacy, and a huge, huge sorry to Pope John XXII. OK, now to this week's episode.

Last week, we examined the betrayal and execution of the last Cathar Perfect, Guillaume Belibaste. This week we will look at the demise of the Cathar faith in Languedoc.

Now, as we stated in last week's episode, it is possible that Arnaud Sicre informed Jacques Fournier of the extent of the Cathar heresy in Montailou, and of the fact that the priest of Montailou was a Cathar, when he met with him back in late 1319. Jacques Fournier, however, was unable to move immediately against the Cathars of Montailou. What he needed was proof of the extent of heresy within the village. What he needed was someone who would give evidence to the Church against both the priest of Montailou Pierre Clergue, and the villagers of Montailou. Finding such a person would be a challenge. Pierre Clergue's influence extended across the County of Foix, and the very fact that he and the other Cathars in Montailou had survived for so long without being betrayed was testament to the ability of the Clergue brothers to keep people from denouncing them.

The Bishop of Pamiers pondered the matter and eventually came up with the name of one person who may, under pressure, be convinced to spill the beans. That person was the widow Beatrice, who had lived in the castle at Montailou. Beatrice was no longer living in Montailou, and so was to some extent out of the reach of the influence of Pierre Clergue. Her children had all grown up and she was now a grandma. The more Jacques Fournier thought about it, the more he realized that Beatrice would be the perfect person to interrogate about the goings-on in Montailou. Having been chaterlaine of the castle there, she would have been privy to the heretical activities taking place in the village and would be able to provide intelligent, cogent evidence to the Inquisition. But if the Bishop of Pamiers needed Beatrice to provide the evidence required to unearth the Clergue brothers and the Cathars of Montailou, first he needed to gather some evidence on Beatrice herself, so that when she was brought in for interrogation he would have some leverage with which to question her.

A year or so earlier, a sorceress had been arrested by the Inquisition. Now, just as an aside, the sorceress herself may have been no more sinister than a herbal healer or the like. But this sorceress had given evidence that she had spent an evening at Beatrice's house. However, for the Inquisition, this was not enough. More dirt was needed, much

more. Unfortunately for Beatrice, she had a wide circle of close friends with whom she would often share her secrets and her innermost feelings. It was just a matter of arresting some of these people and questioning them until someone let slip some dirt on Beatrice.

The first of Beatrice's circle of friends to be interrogated was a man called Guillaume Roussel. All he was able to come up with was a recollection that around ten years ago Beatrice had spoken of the absurdity of the idea that Christ would allow himself to be eaten by priests in Church ceremonies. He did, however, provide an extensive list of other friends of Beatrice, who may know more.

By the middle of the year 1320 Beatrice was tipped off by one of her friends that the Inquisition had her in its sights and that she would probably be issued with a summons shortly. Beatrice reacted by sending a message of distress to her current lover, a man called Barthelemy, who was much younger than her, had once been one of her daughter's teachers, and who was actually a priest. They arranged to meet, and he advised her to tell the truth as she was, after all, an innocent person.

The dreaded summons arrived on the 23rd of July 1320, and it required Beatrice to appear before Jacques Fournier in Palmiers on Saturday, the 26th of July. At this first meeting, Fournier didn't require her to give evidence under oath, but asked her, in quite aggressive terms, whether she had made the comment about the body of Christ, whether she had let a sorceress into her house, and whether she had ever welcomed a Cathar Perfect into her house. She denied making the comment about the body of Christ, admitted letting the sorceress into her house and stated that the only Perfect she had ever met was Pierre Authie, but she had met him when he was a lawyer acting for her late husband in a business transaction, well before he became a Perfect. Jacques Fournier let Beatrice go and ordered her to reappear before him the following Tuesday, to give evidence on oath.

Beatrice went home and then kind of freaked out. It didn't help that her adult daughters came to her house and wept copiously over her predicament, or that her parish priest told her that Bishop Fournier was personally deeply disliked by the Countess of Foix, but that the Count of Foix and his wife were powerless to stop him. As a result of all of this stress and pressure, Beatrice decided to give the Inquisition the slip and escape quietly to Limoux, intending to stay with her sister before crossing the Pyrenees into Catalonia. To avoid implicating members of her family, the only person she told about this plan was her lover, Barthelemy. The next day, she packed a small bag of clothes and essentials and left her house. She met up with Barthelemy, and they spent some time together. Then he escorted her part of the way to Limoux.

By this time, it was Tuesday. Beatrice was meant to be in Pamiers, appearing before the Bishop, but instead she was scampering across the countryside in the opposite direction. Beatrice and Barthelemy were both arrested before she could make good her escape. They were both detained, and both were now required to give evidence to Jacques Fournier. Beatrice appeared before the Bishop on Thursday 7th of August, and towards the end of her testimony, she briefly mentioned Pierre Clergue, relating his attempts to seduce her at Montailou. Interestingly, Jack Fournier ceased her interrogation after the mention of the name he had been hoping she would drop, and ordered her to appear before him again the next day.

It turned out that this was the right move, because when Beatrice gave her evidence the next day, she seemed to shed all her previous reluctance to talk freely about Pierre

Clergue. She mentioned, in great detail, discussions she had held with Pierre about Catharism when he had told her of his belief in the Manichaeian doctrine of Dualism, and his views about the Catholic Church, which were not at all complimentary. She just went on, and on, and on. In his book, "The Yellow Cross", Rene Weis speculates that she may not have intended at all to throw Pierre Clergue to the wolves, so to speak, but in her panic-stricken state, when she noticed that she seemed to be pleasing Jacques Fournier by relaying this information, she just couldn't seem to stop. Everything came out: scandalous details of her affairs with Pierre Clergue; shocking things he had said; the depth of his Cathar beliefs. She ended up giving four full days of testimony revealing absolutely everything about Pierre Clergue that she could remember.

An arrest summons was issued by the Inquisition against Pierre Clergue after her first day of testimony, and he was arrested on the 12th or 13th of August. After her fourth day of evidence, Beatrice seemed to suffer some sort of mental breakdown, and by the following week she was bed-ridden, and ill enough for the Inquisition records to indicate that she was close to death. Jacques Fournier asked her to tell the truth, otherwise her very soul would be placed in peril. Beatrice then retracted all her allegations of heresy against Pierre Clergue, stating that she had been mistaken and that they were actually the views of another man in Montailou, a man whom she knew to be dead and out of the reach of the Inquisition. The allegations of promiscuity, however, she didn't retract, and for Jacques Fournier, this was still enough for him to pull Pierre Clergue in for questioning.

Now, historians over the centuries have been scratching their heads over Beatrice's breakdown, the sudden collapse in both her mental and physical health, and the retraction of her statements. She may have been tortured, but unlike many other Inquisitors, Jacques Fournier rarely resorted to torture, although he had of course done so during the trial of Bernard Delicieux. Some historians have speculated that maybe Pierre Clergue had managed to get word to her and had convinced her to retract her statement. She may also have been beside herself at the thought of Barthelemy's arrest and the fact that he would also be questioned. I guess we will never know.

Anyway, Jacques Fournier issued additional summonses against twelve residents of Montailou, ordering them to travel immediately to Pamiers to give evidence. As four of those villagers were former lovers of Pierre Clergue, and all of them could give evidence condemning Pierre as both a Cathar and a promiscuous pretend-priest, things weren't looking good for Pierre. Allies of the Clergue brothers swung into action, trying to convince witnesses not to provide any damning information to the Bishop, but over the following six months or so, the depositions against Pierre Clergue started mounting up. Pierre Clergue's brother, Bernard Clergue, was doing everything humanly possible to secure his brother's release.

Beatrice, who recovered from her illness, was still being held by the Inquisitors. In March of 1321 she was rolled out before a collected number of senior clergy in Pamiers, along with the head inquisitor of Carcassonne, John de Beaune, who watched her give evidence before Jacques Fournier. The head Inquisitor of Carcassonne was technically Fournier's boss, so it's likely that the Bishop of Pamiers wanted to display his star witness and demonstrate the raft of information she held about the priest of Montailou.

Around the same time, Bernard Clergue was spending an extraordinary amount of money in bribes, trying desperately to secure his brother's release. He gave the jaw-dropping some of 300 pounds to the ruler of Mirepoix, who happened to be on his way to the

Roman Curia at Avignon, and paid for a bunch of other people to plead with senior clerics on his brother's behalf. As a result, several cardinals wrote a total of four intercessionary letters on Pierre's behalf, which were sent to Jacques Fournier. But they had no impact whatsoever. Witness after witness was called to Pamiers, and the more money Bernard threw at the problem, the more the Bishop of Pamiers seemed to dig in his heels. Evidence was later given to the Inquisition that Bernard spent the eye-watering total of 700 pounds trying to secure his brother's freedom.

Unfortunately for Bernard, the net was closing around him as well. Unsurprisingly, a summons was issued ordering him to give evidence before the Bishop of Pamiers. He ignored the summons, and was arrested in May 1321. He was briefly taken to Pamiers, but then was moved to the prison at nearby Allemans, Jacques Fournier likely having concluded that it would be a good idea to keep the two Clergue brothers apart. At Allemans, Bernard managed to sweet-talk and bribe his way into the good books of his jailer and his wife. As a result, he was given free run of the prison. He wasn't allowed to leave the premises, of course, but he could go anywhere he wished inside the building.

Interestingly, Beatrice's lover, the priest Barthelemy, was also being held at Allemans, and Bernard decided that the two would become cell mates. He hoped to somehow convince Beatrice to retract her evidence, via Barthelemy. He offered to pay the couple 50 pounds if Barthelemy managed to convince Beatrice to change her story. But, unbeknownst to Bernard, the priest, Barthelemy was actually a plant. In return for receiving a lenient sentence, he had promised to report back to Jacques Fournier the actions taken by Bernard Clergue in prison. So, needless to say, Bernard's plan didn't work.

But Bernard persisted. He tried everything he could think of to help his brother, and he did, at one stage, managed to get word to Beatrice via a third party, but to no avail. By August 1321 things were starting to get serious. A Cathar villager from Montailou was burnt at the stake for heresy, along with his wife and another man from the village.

A couple of months later, while he was still incarcerated inside Allemans, Bernard received the devastating news that his brother Pierre had died. Now, unfortunately, no record survives of the cause of Pierre's death or his whereabouts when he died, or in fact, the testimony which he must have given to Jacques Fournier during his imprisonment. Rene Weis points to the fact that one of Jacques Fournier's manuscripts, Manuscript 4030 is missing a section, as the reason why Pierre Clergue's testimony and death shall forever remain a mystery. His place of burial is also not known.

Unsurprisingly, Bernard Clergue was shattered by his brother's death, and his own health began to fail. Apparently the panel of Inquisitors, one of whom was Jack Fournier, was moved to leniency by how sick he looked when he gave evidence before them in November 1321. He must have looked seriously ill, as they released him from prison, setting him free on the condition that he returned on the 13th of December 1321 to give evidence once again. Bernard returned to Allemans to bid farewell to his roomie, Barthelemy, then returned back home. Bernard would be repeatedly summoned to appear before Bishop Fournier from this time on until his sentencing nearly two and a half years later, in August 1324. Rene Weis points out that Jacques Fournier went out of his way to be scrupulously fair to Bernard and extended to him all sorts of privileges, including insisting that he engage a lawyer to prepare his defense.

In the end though, his use of lawyers didn't do him much good. On the 7th of August 1320 for Bernard formally decided not to defend the charges levelled against him, and submitted himself to the mercy of Bishop Fournier and the head Inquisitor at Carcassonne. He ended up being sentenced to imprisonment inside The Wall at Carcassonne and died shortly after being incarcerated.

Gradually, the inquisition worked its way through the remaining Cathars within its jurisdiction. Sentences ranged from being forced to wear the Yellow Cross at the minor end of the scale, to imprisonment and to death at the stake at the other end of the scale. Beatrice was sentenced to imprisonment, but on the 4th of July 1320 to her sentence was reduced to merely wearing the Yellow Cross. Her lover, Barthelemy was even more fortunate. He escaped a sentence of imprisonment, and received only minor penances.

As a footnote to the demise of the Cathars in Languedoc, one of the Inquisition's last acts against the Cathars occurred in 1329, when they ordered Pierre Clergue's bones to be dug up and burnt. Unfortunately, the reasons for this decision are not recorded. Bishop Fournier rose to the rank of cardinal, and was elected Pope at Avignon on the 20th of December 1334, taking the name Benedict XII. He spent seven years while he was Pope, building the massive Papal palace in Avignon, a building which attracts a fair amount of tourists today. Jacques Fournier died of gangrene in 1342 and was buried next to the Papal palace. His grave was opened up in the year 1765 because his tomb was in the way of a chapel dedicated to the Avignonese Guild of Master Tailors for men and women's clothes. His remains were re-interred in a more convenient spot, only to have his new tomb, and his remains, desecrated by rampaging revolutionaries during the French Revolution.

Now, Jacques Fournier may have died believing that he had extinguished the Cathar religion, and that the heretics would be lost to history and forgotten. Well, they wouldn't be forgotten, and one of the people to be congratulated for keeping their memory and their place in history alive is, ironically, Jacques Fournier himself. In an age where books were rare and treasured luxury items, and where most of the population was illiterate, the Cathars' story really only comes down to us because of the Catholic Church, and their chroniclers such as Peter the Monk, and via the meticulous records kept by the Inquisitors, particularly those of Geoffroy d'Ablis, Bernard Gui, and Jacques Fournier. Jacques Fournier's records in particular are important because, due to the fact he became Pope, the meticulous notes taken of his Inquisitorial activities accompanied him to Avignon and eventually made their way to the Vatican Library in Rome, thereby escaping the ravages of the French Revolution. They remain in the Vatican library today, so maybe the Cathars had the last laugh.

Join me next week for the final episode in this series, where we look at the legacy left by the Cathar heretics and where I make some major announcements about the future of the podcast. And also where I answer the burning question: Was Hitler a Cathar? Until next week, bye for now.

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