

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 179.  
The Crusade Against the Cathars.  
The Royal Visit.

Hello again. Last week, in a major victory for the Franciscan friar Bernard Delicieux, we saw the hated prison in Carcassonne, The Wall, overrun by the King's representative John de Picquigny, who stormed the building and removed all the prisoners from the custody of the Dominicans into the custody of the French crown. This was, of course, a blow to both the Inquisition and the Dominican Order, but it was far from being a knockout punch. For Bernard Delicieux, it was a small victory in his one man war against the Inquisition. However, the Inquisition itself was still in full swing, and the closure of a single prison in one city was not really going to change things to any great extent.

The storming of The Wall did, however, have two outcomes. It's former prisoners, men and women who would likely have died before being able to tell their tales, were now able to relate, in full and graphic detail, the horrors to which they had been subjected during their detention, and Bernard Delicieux, taking a leaf out of the Dominicans' book, questioned each prisoner at length about just exactly what went on behind the prison walls, and he recorded all their answers in a document, which unfortunately no longer exists. In addition to providing evidence of the torture and other practices used by the Dominicans, the storming of the wall resulted in the excommunication of the man who had spearheaded the assault on the Dominican prison, Jean de Picquigny.

On September the 7th 1303, the chief inquisitor of Carcassonne, Geoffroy d'Ablis, took the momentous step of excommunicating the King's representative. Now, this excommunication is clearly a political as well as a religious move. The day before the excommunication, the King's man in Tuscany, Guillaume de Nogaret, had effectively taken Pope Boniface VIII prisoner inside the palace in which he was residing. Carcassonne was some distance away from Tuscany, so Geoffroy d'Ablis wouldn't have been aware of this fact when he made the decision to excommunicate King Philip's representative. But the political statement it made was clear. Philip the Fair may be willing to take on the Pope as a political rival, but the Dominicans weren't going to be intimidated by the French monarch.

King Philip's effective roughing up of the Pope on the 6th of September, and the Pope's subsequent death a few weeks later, left Jean de Picquigny with few avenues of appeal. He wanted to reverse Geoffroy d'Ablis' decision to excommunicate him, but the Pope was dead and there was no indication about who the next Pope would be, or when he would be elected. So Jean de Picquigny decided to appeal to the Dominicans themselves. In the autumn of 1303 he traveled to Paris, accompanied once again by Bernard Delicieux, who wanted to present the dossier of statements by the tortured prisoners to the king.

Unfortunately for Jean, the general chapter of the Dominican Order in Paris upheld his excommunication, but the journey north wasn't entirely wasted, because King Philip made a startling decision. He decided that he needed to view the situation in Languedoc for himself. As a result, he informed his subjects that he and Queen Joan would travel to Languedoc later in the year. The city of Toulouse could expect to receive both monarchs on Christmas Day 1303.

Now, to say that this is a big deal is an understatement. Monarchs tended not to make a habit of travelling to southern France, and in fact, this would be the only time that King

Philip would make the journey during his long reign. For Bernard Delicieux, of course, this presented an unrivalled opportunity to make the King fully aware of the depth of feeling by the people of southern France against the Inquisition. But, well, things didn't go exactly how Bernard would have wished.

December eventually rolled around, and after their long journey, the royal couple arrived in Toulouse on Christmas Day and settled into the dark, cold, uncomfortable and ancient Narbonnais castle where they would be staying. While the queen rested after her journey and attempted to make herself as comfortable as possible, King Philip left the Narbonnais Castle to take a tour of the town. Now Bernard Delicieux had recruited a huge number of angry, frightened, disenfranchised citizens from across southern France and had urged them to descend on Toulouse on Christmas Day to make their feelings known to the King. Consequently, men and women from across southern France who despised the Inquisitors poured into the city, certain that this may be their only opportunity to get the ear of their monarch. Consequently, instead of the adoring, cheering crowds that he was used to seeing during his tours of his realm, King Philip was confronted with an angry, yelling mob of desperate people, all of them being urged on by the Franciscan Bernard Delicieux.

King Philip was not impressed. In his book "The Friar of Carcassonne. The Revolt Against the Inquisition in the last days of the Cathars", Stephen O'Shea describes how the crowd surged around the King and his escorts, jostling the men employed to protect him, causing their horses to rear and become frightened. Instead of finding the passion and anger of the crowd moving, King Philip viewed their behavior as an affront to the dignity of the crown. Bernard Delicieux had made a serious error of judgment. King Philip the Fair was furious, and he hardened his heart against the people of the south.

However, the King was also adamant that the long, uncomfortable winter journey to the southern part of his realm wouldn't be for nothing, so he called a meeting in early January 1304, so that all sides to the conflict would have a chance to make their views heard. Now this meeting, which was to be held in the Great Hall at the Narbonnais Castle, was to be a spectacular failure, with every single speaker totally face-planting and utterly failing in their attempt to sway the King. As a piece of public theater, it must have been one of the must-see events of its age, particularly if you were aware of the politics behind the scenes.

What were the politics behind the scenes? Well, firstly, of course, the fact that King Philip, with the assistance of a former southern Frenchman, a man with a heretical family Guillaume de Nogaret, had just brought down the Pope. The fallout from this momentous event was still ricocheting across Europe. It had resulted in the excommunication of Guillaume de Nogaret by the Church, but also his rise within the King's court. Guillaume de Nogaret was well on his way to becoming Philip the Fair's most trusted and most powerful adviser. By the time this meeting was taking place, the cold, drafty hall in the Narbonnais Castle being packed to the rafters with supporters from different sides of the debate, a new Pope had been installed in Rome and was just getting used to wielding the reins of Papal power. The new Pope Benedict XI was a Dominican. Accordingly, the Dominican Order at this time was in a powerful position.

The final piece of politics, which should have been at the forefront of the minds of those speaking at the January meeting was Philip the Fair's recent troubles in the northern part of his realm, in Flanders. Philip the Fair was touchy about the events at Flanders. Very, very touchy. King Philip had annexed Flanders quite recently, in the year 1300, and in 1301, only two years ago, he had visited the region with Queen Joan. The visit had not

gone well. The whole of Flanders was a tinderbox of unrest. For decades, the increasingly powerful guildsmen of Flanders had regularly risen in revolt against the nobility in the region, and the visit by their new monarch who no one seemed to like just made things worse. In the spring of 1302 one of the factions which had been causing much of the unrest seized power in the city of Bruges. King Philip sent some men to Bruges to seize back the city, but they were defeated. King Philip, then called upon his greatest vassals, the cream of the French nobility, to ride to Bruges to teach the Flemish rebels a lesson. In July 1302, the French noblemen and their knights met the motley crew of Flemish rebels in the fields of Flanders, and were resoundingly defeated. Hundreds upon hundreds of French fighters were killed. Apparently 500 golden spurs were retrieved from the bodies of the French nobleman, giving the battle its name, "The Battle of the Golden Spurs". For King Philip, it had been the most humiliating event of his reign and had occurred only 18 months ago. It was not something he wished to be reminded about. Just thinking about the Battle of the Golden Spurs and the Flemish rebels made King Philip very, very angry.

Right, so what happened at the meeting in the Great Hall of the Narbonnais Castle in January 1304? Well, it went a little something like this. A number of speakers had been given leave to speak to the King and the gathered crowd inside the building. The first of these was the King's representative in Languedoc, Jean de Picquigny. Now, Jean knew the King and knew how to convince him of something, so his speech started how you would expect, with a summary of the injustices and corruption caused by the Inquisition in Carcassonne and Albi. Jean had moved on to the subject of his excommunication, which he described as unfair, as the matters which gave rise to it only arose because he was carrying out his duties as an officer of the French crown, and he had just started on the subject of the failings of some men in the Dominican Order and the unhappiness of the citizens of southern France, when the head inquisitor for Languedoc, a man called Brother Guillaume Pierre de Godin, requested that he be able to interject. Following a nod from the King, Brother Guillaume stood and began to read from a document he held in his hand. John de Picquigny probably started by looking puzzled, but his bewilderment quickly turned to horror. The head inquisitor had managed to get his hands on a draft letter penned by Jean, a letter Jean had written to the King but had never sent.

Now this letter was rather unusual. Jean was a diplomat, and in his correspondence and his verbal dealings with the King the language he used was always carefully crafted and considered. This letter, however, was entirely different. It was passionate, with the language used being violent and even kind of threatening. Worse still, it used the F word. That's right, "Flanders". It basically told the King in clear, undiplomatic language that unless he acted quickly and decisively against the Inquisition, then the whole of southern France would rise in rebellion, in a Flanders-type situation. You know those emails that you write sometimes, just to vent and get something off your chest, but then you delete them before sending them? Well, this letter may have been that type of document. Jean may have drafted it just as a form of mental release, intending to destroy it and never intending to actually send it. But somehow, instead, it had managed to make its way from his private chambers into the hands of the head of the Inquisition.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Jean de Picquigny was rendered absolutely speechless. Philip the Fair's face had turned to the familiar icy countenance it bore when he was really, really angry. Jean stumbled on, pointing out that the letter was only a draft and blaming an inexperienced scribe for totally mis-transcribing his words, then he continued with his prepared speech. But the mood in the hall had changed, and Jean knew

it. His words were now having no effect whatsoever. The only thing left in people's minds when he finally sat down was the draft letter.

The next person to speak was the wielder of the draft letter, Brother Guillaume. As expected, he launched into a detailed defense of the actions of both the Dominican Order and the Inquisition in Languedoc. But then came his face-plant moment. In a misstep that showed the head Inquisitor had underestimated the power of the King and overestimated the power of the Dominican Order, Brother Guillaume launched into a passionate defense of the Inquisitor Foulques de Sainte-Georges. Remember him? He was the man who repeatedly used rape as one of his interrogation techniques, with the result that he had fathered a number of illegitimate children in the city of Carcassonne. The Dominicans had moved him to Toulouse when his misdemeanors had been brought to their attention, so he had continued his methods of interrogation there. The King had intervened and had managed to get Foulques dismissed. Brother Guillaume launched into a tirade about how unfairly Foulques had been treated, and the icy look of fury returned to King Philip's face. The rest of the inquisitor's speech, like that of Jean de Picquigny, fell on deaf ears.

Right, so now we have two speakers and two failures so far. Next up was Bernard Delicieux. Bernard's speech was something to behold. Not only was it passionate and eloquent, it made a couple of very valid points. Earlier, in extolling the successes of the Inquisition, brother Guillaume had stated that in his estimation, due to the excellent work of the Dominican friars, only a handful of heretics remained in the cities of Carcassonne and Albi, perhaps as few as 40 or 50. Why then? Bernard inquired to his rapt audience, was the entire stability of Languedoc being placed at risk, and hundreds of innocent people interrogated and imprisoned, over just a handful of Cathars.

Having scored a home run with this point, Bernard then seemed to get a little carried away. It's understandable, I suppose. Speaking to an audience was one of Bernard's skills, and his audience here included not only the King of France and his most powerful advisers, but the hierarchy of the Inquisition. Time to let them all have it with both barrels. He stated that, were St Paul and St Peter alive today and living in Languedoc, it is likely that they would have been caught up in the Inquisition, and that those pillars of Christianity would, like the other innocents interrogated by the Friars, be unable to convince the Dominicans of their innocence, such were the unjust methods used by the inquisitors. So the saints themselves would have been tortured and imprisoned. As the audience gasped in shock, it was clear to everyone that Bernard had gone too far, and the Archbishop of Narbonne rose to interject.

But Bernard was on a roll, and there was no stopping him. If the Inquisition was blameless, continued Bernard, then why weren't they being showered with gifts and praise from the royal court? The very fact that they weren't being treated that way, and the very fact that this meeting was being held at all, indicated that the Inquisition was in error, and if the Inquisition was in error, then why wasn't the King doing something about it? This comment most likely caused further gasps, wincing, and awkward shuffling of feet. Jean de Picquigny, who had schooled Bernard in Paris about how to address the King in an appropriately diplomatic and respectful manner, may well have lowered his head into his hands in disbelief and despair. King Philip's icy countenance reached a new level of fury.

Still, Bernard wasn't done. With his voice rising, he seemed to lose all sense of propriety and went into full vent mode. He accused the Dominicans of unleashing a sickness across the land. And, of course, he stated that all sickness needed to be cured. Since no cure

seemed to be forthcoming, (and by now Bernard was almost yelling) it was a wonder that the people of southern France didn't rise up against the French crown and shout "Get out". This last phrase "get out", Bernard kind of let loose as a battle cry, in Occitan.

Then it was kind of game over. The King's right hand man, Guillaume de Nogaret strode over to Bernard to prevent him from speaking any further. The rest of the meeting continued without incident. Oh, except for the memorable moment when a speaker from Languedoc made the startling accusation that one of King Philip's closest Dominican advisers was actually a Flemish spy. In his book "The Friar of Carcassonne", Stephen O'Shea speculates that Bernard Delicieux may have convinced the speaker to make that allegation.

When the extraordinary meeting finally came to an end, it became clear that it had only really achieved one outcome. It had made Philip the Fair very, very angry.

The royal couple continued their tour of the south, but it's safe to say that it didn't go well. Cities never look their best in the cold, bleaker, winter months, and Carcassonne had tried its best to put on a display for the French monarch by brightening its streets and buildings with garlands and banners. However, before the King and Queen arrived in the city an angry petitioner had torn them all down, so the royal cavalcade was greeted by cold, bare streets littered with the remains of torn-up decorations. The Queen seemed to be making an effort to meet and greet her subjects. She even took the unusual step of asking to meet with the men who had been imprisoned inside The Wall. But King Philip, well, his attitude can be summed up in three words: icy, icy, icy.

The Royal Party traveled to Narbonne and then onto Beziers. At Beziers they were presented with two large, beautifully-worked silver vases, a gift from the people of the south. The vases were supposed to have been presented to the royal couple in Carcassonne, but they hadn't been finished in time, so better late than never. Queen Joan accepted her vase graciously and no doubt made some pleasant remarks about the exquisite workmanship. But King Philip refused to accept his, and then he made Queen Joan give hers back.

And on that note, we will leave the royal visit of the French monarchs to Languedoc in the early 14th century. Philip the Fair returned to Paris with nothing but an intense loathing for the citizens of Languedoc. And, well, the feeling was mutual. Join me next week when Bernard comes up with a truly bizarre plan to eject not only the Dominicans but the French crown from Languedoc, a plan involving the tiny, inconsequential kingdom of Majorca. Until next week, bye for now.

End