CHAPTER 10

Apostolico conspectui: Heretics and Inquisitors between Centre and Periphery

Relations between the centre and the periphery were governed, in a disordered and irregular way, by an intention to supervise the exercise of ecclesiastical justice. The Registra Avenionensia and the Registra Vaticana preserve the memory of a wide variety of related cases and questions of heterodoxy for which the pope decided to have men and documents transferred to Avignon, or to intervene locally through legates and officials that he nominated, placing the various levels of ordinary and delegated ecclesiastical justice in direct connection.1 Measures of various types point to a common goal of supervising and managing, if not also of reintroducing Roman centrality to the universal Church, through the exercise of justice. Evidence includes letters of summons calling defendants and witnesses before the pope (apostolico conspectui), requests for trial documents to be sent to Avignon, and interventions aimed at resolving locally originating conflicts, at supervising the activity of inquisitors, and at guaranteeing them freedom of action. The choice to manage specific cases from above was not irreversible though. The pope's subsequent interventions in the same judicial matter sometimes show a bouncing of roles and responsibilities between the centre and the periphery.

Centrally managing trials for heterodoxy required the collaboration of prepared, efficient, and trustworthy personnel at Avignon. Naturally, in addition to examining cases transferred to the curia, such officials had to see to extirpating the bad plant of heresy from the papal stronghold itself. Guillaume Lombard was Benedict XII’s principal collaborator in the repression of heterodoxy at Avignon. Though we do not know much about this official’s biography, he was a professor of civil law at the University of Toulouse and his profile as a jurist was particularly suited to the tasks to be performed. Benedict XII’s esteem for his collaborator dates back to the days immediately following his election as pope. He confirmed it on many occasions by allocating prebends

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in the diocese of Mirepoix. The subsequent phases of Lombard’s career took place in the curia. He was officially nominated to Avignon in 1335. On 17 June 1336, the pope empowered Lombard to prosecute individuals defamed for “heresy, schism, sorcery, charms, spells, or other crimes related to the faith” according to the laws and privileges of the inquisitorial office. Fournier believed that in the Roman curia, “where the rays of faith should have shone even more clearly,” many people attempted to lead the faithful into error. Lombard was also in charge of investigating the personnel of the curia itself. In 1337, for example, the pope entrusted him with an inquiry into the procurator Jean Christophe, who was accused of falsifying public records and of kidnapping, rape, and heresy. At other times, Lombard was called to substitute other judges who were temporarily prevented from performing their duties. In 1336, he stood in for the bishop of Rodez, who—having to absent himself from Avignon—was unable to bring to conclusion his then-current inquiries into a friar minor suspected “of schism, heresy and other horrendous crimes.” Principle moving force of papal justice, the Avignonese official led numerous trials against fortune-tellers, invokers of demons and women who have given themselves to the devil, Fraticelli, Beguins, forgers and other accused. Having earned the full trust of the pontiff and been named inquisitor general of Avignon, Guillaume Lombard became the main collaborator to report to whenever it was necessary to transfer a trial to the curia or to investigate cases of particular importance at the centralized level.

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2 Communes, 1: 41, no. 315; ibid., 1: 21, no. 151 (see the List of Abbreviations).
3 Ibid., 1: 8, no. 43a.
5 Bullaire, 229, no. 153.
7 BF, 6: 24, no. 44.
9 Pierre Delcasse and Jean de Sauves (Bullaire, 239–40, no. 161, cf. infra, 293). Two women in the diocese of Viviers, (Bullaire, no. 171, cf. infra, 293).
10 Andrea da Gagliano (Bullaire, 240–2, no. 162); Guglielmo da Castiglion della Pescaia (BF, 6: 24, no. 44; BF, 6: 53, no. 78); Raimond Amiel (Communes, vol. 2, no. 6512).
11 Célestin Douais, La procédure inquisitoriale en Languedoc au xivᵉ siècle d'après un procès inédit de l'année 1337 (Paris: Picard, 1900), 31–89.
12 Mollat-Vidal, 525–7, no. 1822.
13 BF, 6: 24, no. 45.