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**Mark Gregory Pegg**, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. x + 238pp. Notes, map, index and bibliography. \$35.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-691-00656-3.

Review by John H. Arnold, University of East Anglia.

What is a heretic? Heresy only exists where there is an orthodoxy to name it. The two are an inseparable binary, and "heresy" is forever both a boundary and a fluctuating category. Keeping this conundrum in mind when studying heresy--particularly when thinking about how the primary materials upon which the historian depends construct the object under study--can be a harder task than it might appear. Mark Pegg, in this exciting new monograph, manages to hold to the conceptual problems of the question throughout. His response to thinking about heresy is insightful, intriguing, occasionally problematic, but well worth reading, whether or not one is particularly interested in the field of medieval religion.

The heretics that concern Pegg are those commonly called Cathars, doubtless familiar to most readers, if not from the medieval sources then from their ubiquity as a modern-day heritage phenomenon in southern France. Espousing a belief in two gods (one good, who created the spirit, the other bad, who created corporeal existence), the elite of this sect--the "perfects" or "good men" or the "Friends of God"--appeared in Languedoc at some point in the twelfth century, preaching and ministering to their supporters. The heresy prompted Pope Innocent III to call a crusade against them in the early thirteenth century, and both heretics and believers suffered repression under the attention of the first medieval inquisitors. We have trod this path before of course, in a vast amount of French historiography and a smaller but solid corpus of English writing, and perhaps most famously in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*.<sup>[1]</sup> Although the jacket blurb to *The Corruption of Angels* invites (with a small touch of hubris) comparison with Ladurie's inspiring, albeit problematic work, the focus and approach here are rather different. Ladurie worked with a portion of the early fourteenth-century inquisitorial register of the inquisitor Jacques Fournier, analysing the rich evidence in a variety of categories influenced by the structural anthropology of the 1970s. Pegg has focused his attention on a much less well-known source, MS 609 in the Bibliothèque municipale in Toulouse, which records a part of the vast investigations carried out in the mid-thirteenth century by two inquisitors, Bernart de Caux and Jean de St Pierre. This lengthy manuscript source records the interrogations of between five and six thousand individuals summoned before these two inquisitors; even this is only a fraction of their total activity, as MS 609 contains but two books of what was originally ten volumes of documentation.

These records are somewhat different from the verdant *Montaillou* registers: briefer, more formulaic, much more focused (because of the way, as Pegg shows, that the earlier inquisitors conceived of their

witnesses ontologically) on actions than beliefs or ideas. It remains, nonetheless, an extraordinarily rich source; and although it has been used before by a number of scholars, in Pegg it has found its most sympathetic historian. Mark Pegg writes well, extremely well—in fact, I would suggest that in this book he has found a remarkable style and voice that allows him to talk with equal valency to both academic and non-academic audiences. His only competitors in this are, as far as I can see, Mary Douglas and Peter Brown: it's that kind of clear but clever, gripping but thoughtful prose. Although general readers might be put off by the copious end notes, if they brave the first pages of text they will find themselves hooked. His scene-setting account of the Albigensian Crusade, for example, is both concise and exciting, weaving slightly mischievous translations of the chronicle sources in and out of his own comments and narration. When turning to his main source itself, he even manages to make several pages worth of manuscript description interesting. For example, on the fact that the manuscript is only two out of ten books, he comments that "The missing registers ... possess a quality not unlike that of phantom limbs. They seem so real, so tangible, so annoying, simply because their presence, or rather lack of presence, can never be forgotten" (p. 25).

The main point of *The Corruption of Angels* is to get us to think differently about Catharism; in fact, to stop thinking of it as "Catharism" at all, for as Pegg rightly points out, nobody in medieval Languedoc ever used that word for the heresy. Inquisitors talked of "the heretics;" the deponents talked of "good men" and "good women" or the "Friends of God." For Pegg, this is more than simply a matter of semantics: it indicates the noxious presence of a historiographical "intellectualist bias" that assumes heresy to be essentially composed of ideas, philosophies, attitudes—and hence that the appearance of similar ideas allows the historian to link their proponents together, regardless of differences in time, place and culture. "Habits and behaviors, actions and practices, essentially anything that is not the stuff of thoughts, like so many bulls with so many rings in their noses, are assumed to follow ideas wherever they go ..." (p. 15). Thus, for Pegg, there is no a priori reason to connect the good men of Languedoc with dualist heretics in Italy (as most other scholars have assumed); very little support for seeing the Languedocian heretics as having connections with (and certainly not descending from) the Bogomil heretics of Bulgaria (as various scholars have argued); and absolutely no justification whatsoever for linking thirteenth century "good men" with second- and third-century Manichaeans (as a few scholars have suggested). Instead, we should look at the Friends of God in their own setting, understand how they were seen by the people of their own time and place, and pay attention to how the impact of inquisition may have altered these things by its very processes.

To get at these issues, Pegg has mined Toulouse 609 for a variety of details, confessions, lies, and above all else *stories*. We hear, for example, of the knight Bernart de Quiders, who pissed on the head of a monk. Bernart attempted to excuse himself by explaining that he had become upset by the swearing of some men who were playing dice and had urinated on their gaming table. "I think that part of the urine fell on the tonsure of Peire Raimon Crozat who was seated with the players, but I didn't see or do it on purpose" (p. 125). Some tales are post-medieval: Pegg tells us how John Locke, who was fascinated by this inquisition, galloped from Toulouse to Carcassonne in 1678 to see how long it would have taken someone to travel to the inquisitors in the thirteenth century (p. 42). And some are rather darker: a woman threatened by her husband and other men not to confess truthfully to the inquisitors. "Guilhem Sais, exasperated by Aimersent Viguier's stubbornness, gave up on words and proceeded to stuff her inside a wine tun. Aimersent Viguier's youthful son gripped her hand. 'Boy!' screamed the lord of Cambiac as he shoved Aimersent Viguier into the barrel, 'do you want to help this old bag destroy us

all?' Guilhem Sais, taking the lad's understandable confusion for defiance, proceeded to squeeze Viguier junior into the barrel as well" (p. 63). This is gripping stuff, well told.

But there are certain problems here also, where Pegg's command of rhetoric and enthusiasm for narrative overwhelms a care towards the evidence. The translation for the tale of Viguier is a little loose: the Latin (which Pegg thoughtfully provides in the end note) reads "et tunc dictus W. Saicius cepit ipsam testem et posuit in quadam tonella et filium [sic] ipsius testis similiter, quia manutenebat eam dicendo et 'Garcifer, vultis vos juvare vetulam istam que vult nos destruere omnes'" (pp. 179-80). The sense is there, and the direct address from the knight to the boy, but the exasperation, the screaming, the shoving, the boy's confusion are all imaginative embellishments. This perhaps may not be tremendously problematic; certainly, as a reader who is familiar with inquisitorial sources, I can see and appreciate how Pegg is self-consciously using a discourse of storytelling to enliven his material, and how that storytelling can be seen as *originating* in the material. But not every reader will be as familiar with the textuality of inquisitorial registers, what they do and do not say. Many readers may assume, for example, that the primary sources themselves are presented in the first person (as that is how Pegg invariably translates them); in fact, they are almost always in the third-person, and the deposition narrates a past-tense account of the confession given. Sometimes the first-person appears, but usually as part of reported speech.

There is an underlying assumption here about the nature of the evidence and the possibilities of reconstructing 'reality' via the material. In describing the inquisitors' production of the texts, Pegg argues, "the truthfulness of the testimonies ... derived from the ability of ink on parchment to resemble the original oral confessions. ... The scribes and notaries ... endeavoured to capture this orality, to snare this particular kind of confessed truth, not to replace it" (p. 62). This strikes me as problematic. One might argue that the registers *represent* (with all the complexities of power and language that implies) the oral confessions, but 'resemble' is pushing it. An example: Pegg recounts how the inquisitor ended the questioning of Alazais den Pata by asking "'[D]id you believe the heretics to be good men, or adore them, or give them anything, or send them anything, or receive them, or get the peace from the heretics, or from a book of theirs, or participate in the *apparellamentum* or the *consolamentum* of the heretics?' 'No,' was Alazais den Pata's deliciously dull answer after such a spiel" (p. 58). The list of questions is formulaic, as Pegg notes elsewhere. Once again he translates from the third to the first-person. But more importantly, this pattern of lengthy questions followed by a single negative is not at all unusual in the registers. In fact, it is standard: if the witness replied in the negative, the registers record the interaction in this form (a list of questions followed by a single denial). If some or all of the questions elicited positive responses, the narrative structure of the deposition is altered so that the questions become broken up. In both cases, the relationship between what we read in Latin on the page--this narrative of what has been confessed or denied--is several steps away from the pattern of what was actually *said* by witness, inquisitor and scribe. In other words--in my opinion--what we have before us is *writing* and not speech.

If I am right in thinking that it is Pegg's enthusiasm for narrative that leads him to ignore some of these complexities (because, let's face it, they don't make the evidence *sing* as colourfully and brightly), there is another similar problem with some of his arguments about Catharism--or rather why Catharism should not be thought of as Catharism. At the heart of his argument is a great, intelligent, and powerful idea: not to look at the heresy from the top down, with the bias of ideas, but to look at how the actual people

involved talk about their faith. The sensitive training of an anthropologist comes to the fore here: rather than reading the deponents' testimonies through the interpretations provided by previous historians, Pegg listens to what *they* have to say as his informants. This is a very useful change of perspective, and it does provide a challenge to a lot of past historiography. The perspective of the deponents (largely lay adherents to the faith) localizes and specifies the nature of the heresy: it becomes individual good men and good women, operating within local communities, in a fluid fashion, in a different kind of world from the binary demands of orthodoxy/heterodoxy imposed by the inquisitors. But Pegg wants to push this further, to argue that there was *no* "Catharism"--in the sense of a larger set of ideas, interconnected practices, or "sect" in contact with other Cathars across Europe - for *anybody* in medieval Languedoc. We are asked to accept a kind of extreme or absolute specificity about the heresy--its contours and patterns in mid-thirteenth-century Languedoc unconnected to any other time or place--and to brook no other alternatives or syntheses.

This is perhaps to have a "big idea" push itself too far. For example, an element in historians' sense of a larger existence for "Catharism" is evidence that there was contact between the Bogomil heretics in the East and the western dualists in the twelfth century (for some, but not all, historians this contact implies transmission). A key piece of evidence for this is the so-called "Council of St Felix de Caraman," which purports to record a foreign (possibly Bogomil) missionary coming to consecrate several dualist "bishops" in Languedoc at some point between 1167 and 1174. The document is problematic (the original does not survive, but only a seventeenth-century edition) and not entirely clear. Many arguments have been advanced for its meaning, its veracity, and whether or not it is a forgery. However, most people working on Cathars now accept the closely-argued conclusions of Bernard Hamilton: that the document is not forged, does represent contact with Bogomils, and implies the formation of a church-like structure in Languedocian dualism.<sup>[2]</sup> This is not least because other evidence--albeit still circumstantial and open to argument--continues to suggest a Bogomil influence on Catharism, and quite a lot of other depositional evidence attests to the existence of a church-like structure (the existence of bishops and deacons, attached to "diocesan" areas) for the heresy.<sup>[3]</sup> Now, the case is far from closed, and the nature of "contact" can be argued in a variety of ways; nothing I'm pointing to here absolutely invalidates Pegg's position. But there are two things that give me pause. One is that whilst Pegg dismisses Hamilton (and others), he does so through rhetoric rather than argument. That is, citing Hamilton's article, Pegg simply comments "I remain unconvinced" (p. 146). Fine. But perhaps one ought to tell us *why* and on what grounds? The second thing that bothers me here--I don't think Pegg *needs* to do away with "Catharism" in all its previously accepted forms--raze the historiographical terrain to the ground and start afresh--in order to present the intelligent, sensitive, and original insights he has about how the heresy appeared as a lived experience to the majority of its supporters. Ultimately, by shoving too far and too hard (and in somewhat harsh terms in certain end notes), the persuasiveness of *The Corruption of Angels* is at points in danger of being undermined by its own, shall we say, ebullience.

However, to conclude: these criticisms should not put one off the text. Pegg has written a highly entertaining, well-researched, original, thoughtful, and *fun* book. It is a wonderful and important addition to the field of medieval heresy studies, but also something that should be read by social historians of other periods, in its sensitive arguments about how we understand the relationship between ideas and lived experience. In a just world, it should also be bought in large numbers by a general audience. In its final pages, Pegg describes the "subtle carpentry of metaphor and matter" that constitute society and culture--an image that can also be applied, with great admiration, to his own text.

## NOTES

[1] E. Le Roy Ladurie, Montailou: *Cathars and Catholics in a Pyrenean Village, 1294-1324*, trans. B. Bray (London, 1978)

[2] B. Hamilton, 'The Cathar Council of S. Félix Reconsidered', in *Monastic Reform, Catharism and the Crusades (900-1300)*, ed. B. Hamilton (London, 1979).

[3] For a recent summary, see M. Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, 1998).

John H. Arnold  
University of East Anglia  
john.arnold@uea.ac.uk

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