

POPES. SO MANY POPES.

There are so many popes in the history books, but i want to talk about the bad boys club of the pope world.

Let's start easy. Pope Benedict the IX. He was just a little guy. Seriously. He was born around 1022/23, which is literally a thousand years ago so have fun with that, and was given the role of Pope in 1032. That would make him about 11 or 12 years old.

Young pope!!!! Just a little guy in charge of how everyone should think, feel, eat and pray. How cute.

Now apparently, it was rumored that his father, who was an influential Count, secured him the position. John the XIX, who was the current pope, was our little Benny's uncle. And when John eventually kicked the bucket, Benny's father bribed the electing committee to put his son in the hot seat.

So things are good for our young pope for about a year. Then in 1033, about a year into Benny's papacy, an opposing faction entered St. Peter's Basilica with the idea of killing themselves a pope. But they couldn't just run in there with their swords out without drawing suspicion. So what did they do?

Bring a rope. They brought a rope to murder a pope. Fitting.

When the time came to execute their plan, shit hit the fan because of the solar eclipse that was going on. Now I will say, science was kinda rocky in the 1030's, and astronomy wasn't really being taught. The naysayers were fucking SHOOK. They are out here trying to kill their direct line to god, who is 13/14 by the way, and the sun turns black. Seems like fate ? or god ? or maybe science ? who really knows. (it's science.)

Now people are always going to talk. There were rumors going around that Benedict kept magic books in his home, spoke with demons at night, and used his dark powers to seduce women.

Over the years, his scandalous life started to catch up with him and in September of 1044, growing hate for him made him flee the city. A few months later, another powerful family installed their local bishop, Sylvester III, as pope. Our boy Benedict was not happy with this, because he showed up two months later and excommunicated Sylvester III. So Benny is the pope again. Double pope! And then, two months later, he was no longer pope. Again. Double not-pope.

So Benedict handed the papacy to his godfather who became Pope Gregory VI, after giving Benny a lot of money. Some people think that Benedict stepped away from the papacy because of how unpopular he was. Others have speculated he wanted to get married, a thing popes can't do.

Benedict retreated to his family property, near Tusculum. Not really sure what he did here.. Maybe whittled or something. Idk. Maybe he really missed his big hat.

Well, don't worry, because in November of 1047, he returned to Rome and made himself pope. Again. TRIPLE POPE! Less than a year later, Henry III had him ejected from the throne.

Benedict went back home to Tusculum, where he insisted the entire time that he was the rightful pope. He died about a decade later.

Benedict's legacy is that he was the first pope to sell the position to the highest bidder. Which doesn't sound all that bad in capitalist 2022, but it was bad pope behavior back in the day.

St. Peter Damian, a contemporary Cardinal, judged Benedict IX as 'a demon from hell in the disguise of a priest' not least because he, according

to both allies and enemies, hosted orgies at the official Lateran Palace. To make matters worse, these orgies involved other men and animals as well.

And that is Pope Benedict IX.

Let's continue our grand tour of naughty popes with Pope Alexander VI. His Italian name was Rodrigo Borgia. He served from 1492 until 1503.

Alexander was a member of the powerful Spanish Borgia family, and would become known for his corruption, and whether or not he was truly morally bankrupt. He's also listed on a Wikipedia article titled "List of Sexually Active Popes."

Alexander studied law at Bologna, and on February 22, 1456, he was created a cardinal by his uncle, now Pope Calixtus III. As vice chancellor of the Roman Catholic Church, Alexander amassed enormous wealth and, despite a severe rebuke from Pope Pius II, lived as a Renaissance prince. He hired Michelangelo to draw plans for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica. He patronized the arts. Big art guy.

Now when Alexander was a cardinal, he did some shady fucking shit. He lined his pockets by committing simony, (straight up selling church offices). He was also into some pretty freaky stuff. Author William Manchester notes that Pope Pious II once attended one of the cardinal's parties, and noticed that "none of the allurements of love was lacking" and that despite all the beautiful women of Sienna being in attendance, none of their male counterparts were there. Pope Pious said that this was done "in order that lust be unrestrained." Party Pope! Well, party cardinal at this point.

Alexander's lust would remain unrestrained well beyond his cardinal years, and while some of his seedier actions are still subject to speculation, the fact that he fathered four children with a married Roman noblewoman is pretty cut and dry. Manchester says that Alexander's "enjoyment of the flesh was enhanced when the woman beneath him was married, particularly if he had presided at her wedding. Breaking any commandment excited him, but he was partial to the 7th." (Thou shall not commit adultery.)

Now, when Alexander actually became Pope, he was not shy about how much he loved women. And their bodies. Manchester says that guests at papal parties were said to have been greeted by living statues, glittering men and women frozen in X-rated poses. PORNO POPE PALACE.

But the most insane part of this story is the Banquet of the Chestnuts. This was documented by Johannes Bruchard, who was admittedly not a fan of the Borgia family. Some historians, and even his contemporaries have dismissed this as outright slander, but Bruchard claims to have witnessed this, so we're doing it anyway.

The Banquet of the Chestnuts was allegedly arranged by the Pope's illegitimate son, Cesare Borgia, who Alexander had named a Cardinal because...well, nepotism. The Banquet of Chestnuts was rumored to contain decadent food and wine, invigorating music and dance, and an unending orgy with Rome's most exclusive courtesans (old-time prostitutes) known as the Cortigiana. Bruchard says that among the guests, both Pope Alexander and his illegitimate daughter were in attendance. After dinner, the guests enjoyed the company of 50 courtesans, who danced their clothes off. Literally. Burchard said that their garments fell away with each passing hour until they were completely nude.

Once their clothes were off, the games with chestnuts began. Burchard detailed how eager clergymen would throw chestnuts on the floor for the naked courtesans to acquire. They would crawl on their arms and knees and pick up the nestnuts in their mouths. Then the sexual contest would begin where clergymen would have to endure in sexual intercourse. Whoever lasted the longest was considered the winner. As guests began to pair off with their courtesans, "servants kept score of each man's orgasms, for the pope greatly admired virility and measured a man's machismo by his ejaculative capacity. After everyone was exhausted, his Holiness distributed prizes - cloaks, boots, caps and fine silken tunics."

Alexander's life remained thoroughly saucy, even into his later years. He would go on to pick up another married noblewoman, and was believed to

have fathered, in total, seven to nine children. Even at the age of 62, “Alexander still possessed the power of drawing women to him as a magnet draws iron.”

Alexander’s papacy ended in 1503 because he died. His death was likely caused by malaria or the plague, though some hold the belief that he was poisoned, and considering his habit of sleeping with married women, it doesn’t seem unreasonable.

We can now check off “Pervy Pope” on our “weird things we know about” list.

Alright. This is our last stop on the icky pope train.

We’re going back to the year 891. It starts with a guy named Formosus, who became pope this year. Yay! Congrats.

Now, this guy was kinda slimy. Not only was he the Pope at the Vatican, but he was also still a Bishop in Porto, Italy. Holding two such positions was illegal, so already a bit of a naughty pope. Lucky for him, no one really gave a fuck.

Around 892, Formosus was being pressured by the emperor of Rome, Guido of the Spoleto family, to crown his son, Lambert, as co-ruler. Formosus was not having it, but when Guido died a few years later, his son presumably expected to be emperor and enjoyed his time in the sun. Formosus did some shady shit though, and appointed someone else, named Arnulf, as king of the Franks. Lambert didn’t like that at all, and the Spoleto family sought to exact their revenge. But before they could, Pope Formosus died of natural causes in April of 896.

The end.

Not really. Lol.

Pope Boniface VI succeeded Formosus and he died 15 days into his papacy.

Next pope.

After Boniface passed, the Spoleto family used their influence to elect Stephen VI to the papacy, and it turns out Stephen was, allegedly, just as guilty as Formosus when it came to the whole 'ruling over two dioceses at once' thing, because he had held two overlapping Bishop positions in his past.

Now Stephen could get into trouble for that, he could also prevent any charges being thrown his way if he gained the favor of the powerful Spoleto family. Remember that the Spoleto family were not huge fans of Pope Formosus and were planning revenge on him before he spoiled their fun by dying.

So, by one account, Pope Steven VI and Lambert of the Spoletos conspired to bring disgrace to the deceased Formosus and have all of his acts annulled. What they decided to do, was put him on trial for that whole messy bishop thing that nobody seemed to care about when he was alive.

Let's put a dead guy on trial. How do you do that??? Well. They dug up the dead pope's decaying body, dressed him in priestly attire, and placed him on the venerable seat of Roman pontiffs.

The way that this whole trial played out is kind of insane, but maybe everyone was too distracted by the literal rotting corpse to care. Keep in mind, Formosus had been dead for 9 months at this point. The panel of judges was heavily biased, consisting of bishops who were either in Stephen's favor, or too weak to oppose him.

During the trial, Stephen would work himself up into fits of rage, screaming at the lifeless corpse and mocking its silence. Meanwhile, a teenage

deacon was tasked with responding on the corpse's behalf, which is probably the most stressful job ever. In the end, to no one's surprise, Formosus was found guilty of perjury, and breaking canon law. The corpse was stripped of its fancy clothes, three of its fingers were cut off, and according to once source, it was dumped into a common grave. Then it was said that Stephen ordered the corpse to be dug up again, and thrown into the Tiber River, but it was later fished out of the river and re-buried. Again.

Following this whole ordeal, the public began to think that Pope Stephen was fuckin nuts. Even the Spoletos distanced themselves from him. Pope Stephen was eventually captured by a mob, thrown in prison, and strangled.

And that is our tour of nasty, nasty popes.

The end.