

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 1209, in what is now southern France, a war over heresy began. This war quickly mutated into a struggle over political control of the region, something its originator, Pope Innocent III, never intended. At the time the war began, this region was neither culturally nor linguistically French. Long after 1218 the region became known as “Languedoc,” for its people said “oc” to answer in the affirmative as opposed to those of the north who spoke Languedoïl, oil being the Old French “oui.” In recent years historians, literature specialists, social scientists, and indeed people of the region itself have begun to refer to this territory as Occitania, another made-up name but one that is easy on the English tongue.¹

The heresy, whose adherents were called “Cathars” or “Albigensians” by their detractors, had co-existed alongside orthodox Christianity for over half a century in Occitania.² Although the exact nature and origins of Catharism continue to be debated, the Cathars postulated a dual godhead, one of light and one of darkness. Heaven, the spiritual realm, and the human soul belonged to the god of light, while everything physical, including the bodies in which souls were trapped, belonged to the god of

¹ Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusades. With a New Epilogue by Carol Lansing* (1971) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 1–14; Fredric L. Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 3–4, and Winnie Lem, “Identity and History: Class and Regional Consciousness in Rural Languedoc,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8.2 (June 1995), 198–220, prefer the term “Occitania”; James Given, *State and Society in Medieval Europe. Gwynedd and Languedoc under Outside Rule* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 20, uses “Languedoc” and “Languedocian.”

² On the origins of the heresy, the terms “Cathar” and “Albigensian,” and descriptions of the heresy see Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated. Records of Western Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 127–32, 164–7, 171–3, 214–17, 231–5, 302–23; PVCE, 6, 10–15; R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Disent* (1977) (reprint Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1994), 168–96; Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 19–44; Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars. Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 2000), 1–2, 7–12, 21–33.

darkness.³ Cathars believed that by undergoing a rigorous purification ceremony known as the *consolamentum*, after death their souls escaped the physical world to reunite with God. Without the ritual, souls were reincarnated in another human body or even an animal and had to undergo another lifetime of the evils of the physical world. The Cathar hierarchy consisted of bishops and holy men known as “perfects” or “goodmen,” who had undergone the *consolamentum* and could administer it to others.⁴ Perfects formed the core “priestly” class of the Cathar church. Except for fish, perfects could not eat anything derived from coition lest they dine on a reincarnated soul, which meant that for practical purposes they were vegetarian. They practiced celibacy as well, since they did not wish to create another physical vessel to trap a soul. Perfects lived simple lives and depended mostly on the alms of *credentes*, rank and file followers who believed in the tenets of Catharism but did not undergo the *consolamentum* until their deathbed.⁵ Since the Cathars used the New Testament as a source for their religion and lived among Christians, telling the difference between a Christian and a Cathar who wished to remain concealed was an immense problem.

As great a challenge was the perfects’ reputation for being more simple, humble, poor, and caring than the existing church. A heresy so attractive that nobles were seduced by it and therefore protected its followers did not sit well with Rome. Popes had sent churchmen to Occitania to preach away Catharism from the mid-twelfth century on. But even as great a religious figure as Bernard of Clairvaux experienced only momentary success at halting the spread of the heresy, let alone destroying it.⁶ At the Third Lateran Council of 1179, Canon 27 thundered against the Albigensians, anathematizing not only them but also those who

³ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 230–5, 302–6; PVCE, 10–15 # 10–19; PVC 1, 9–20; Lambert, *The Cathars*, 20–32; Barber, *The Cathars*, 6–12.

⁴ Some do not agree that the heresy was as organized or sophisticated as many scholars portray it. The most recent arguments against this can be found in Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels. The Great Inquisition of 1245–1246* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 96, 130; “On Cathars, Albigenses, and Good Men of Languedoc,” *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001), 181–95, and “Heresy, Good Men, and Nomenclature,” *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages. Essays on the Work of R. I. Moore*, ed. Michael Frassetto (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2006), 227–39.

⁵ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 465–83; Walter L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France 1100–1250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 30–43; Lambert, *The Cathars*, 73–81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40; Beverly Mayne Kienzle, “Tending the Lord’s Vineyard: Cistercians, Rhetoric and Heresy, 1143–1229. Part I: Bernard of Clairvaux, the 1143 Sermons and the 1145 Preaching Mission,” *Heresis* 25 (1995), 29–61 and Cistercians, *Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145–1229. Preaching in the Lord’s Vineyard* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001), chapters 3 and 4.

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supported, harbored, or even traded with them.⁷ Within two years of this pronouncement a papal legate led a small military force to briefly besiege and capture the town of Lavaur, compelling it back into the fold.⁸ This one small and temporary religious success via a military solution showed the possibilities of that option, but no subsequent martial expeditions followed. Clerics and popes could fulminate about the situation in Occitania, but without further pretext support for violent solutions was simply not there. So the situation remained for the next couple of decades.

With the accession of Pope Innocent III the situation in the south began to change. Innocent is universally seen as the greatest crusading pope of them all, since he sponsored the Fourth and Fifth Crusades and presided over intensified crusading activity from the Iberian peninsula to the Baltic. Determined to win back Christian land abroad and keep people Christian at home, the pope enlisted as many crusaders and expended as much treasure as he could to meet what were deemed by many at the time to be praiseworthy goals. In the years leading up to 1208, Innocent corresponded with Bernard, Archbishop of Auch, a southern prelate, and Raimon VI, Count of Toulouse, urging action against heresy and threatening the count if he did nothing.⁹ In 1204 and 1205 the pope exhorted the King of France, Philip Augustus, or his son Prince Louis to act against the heretics, but the king was too involved with taking and holding on to his Angevin adversary's continental possessions to be bothered with events in the south.¹⁰ In 1207 the pope went so far as to offer an indulgence, a remission of sin, to those who would follow Philip south to exterminate heresy, just like the ones offered to crusaders to the Levant. Still the French king expressed no interest in taking up the cross.¹¹ In 1208, the pope's legate in the south, Peter of Castelnau, was mysteriously murdered after a heated meeting with Raimon VI, a murder for which the count was blamed by

⁷ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. I. Nicaea I – Lateran V*, ed. Norman Tanner, Giuseppe Alberigo et al. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 224.

⁸ Robert of Auxerre, *Chronicon*, MGH SS 26, ed. O. Holder-Egger, 1882, 245; WPE, chapter 11, 11–12; WP, 28–30; Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade*, 132–3; Michel Roquebert, *L'Épopée* 1, 91–2; Elie Griffe, *Les Débuts de l'aventure Cathare en Languedoc (1140–1190)* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1969), 126–8; Achille Luchaire, *Innocent III. La Croisade des Albigeois*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1906), 45–6.

⁹ To the Archbishop of Auch in 1198, PL 214 col. 71; to Raimon VI, Count of Toulouse in 1201, Potthast 1, 135 #1549; to Raimon VI in 1207, PL 215 cols. 1166–8 and partial translation in PVCE Appendix F, 304–5; Luchaire, *Innocent III*, 49–61. Essential discussion to this correspondence is in PVCE, Appendix G, 313–17.

¹⁰ In 1204 PL 215 cols. 361–2; in 1205, PL 215 cols. 526–8. ¹¹ PL 215 cols. 1246–8.

Innocent III and others.¹² The murder of a legate, a man not merely an agent of the pope but the pope's authority personified, was a dagger that struck at the heart of the church itself.¹³ Even though no Cathars were responsible for either plotting or carrying out the assassination, the pope used the murder of Peter of Castelnau not only to get back at Raimon VI, who was anathematized and dispossessed of his territories, but also to call on the Christian faithful to extirpate heresy from the Count of Toulouse's lands by force. In essence Innocent III had authorized the use of military force over a religious issue against a Christian land. He promised those who made the journey remission of their sins – an indulgence – a reward which had been around at least since the First Crusade.¹⁴ With this assassination and broad promise of an indulgence, finally the pope found a sympathetic audience anxious to avenge a wrong against the church, get rid of a religious cancer and win pardon for sin. The assassination and indulgence triggered earnest men to take the cross, move south against other earnest men and begin a terrible time of war, massacre, repression, and conquest. The underlying causes for military intervention, the heresy and noble support or acquiescence for it, had existed for over half a century, but it took the killing of Peter of Castelnau to initiate the conflict.

THE OCCITAN POLITICAL SITUATION ON THE EVE
 OF THE CRUSADE

As Joseph Strayer and others point out, "Occitania" was not a state but a loosely defined region in the early thirteenth century (see Figure 1, p. xvii).¹⁵ It was not French in any fashion and besides, no one in the thirteenth century thought about the kingdom or region they lived in the way many twenty-first-century people think about their nationality. Most of Occitania belonged in the *regnum Francorum*, the kingdom of the Franks, and had so ever since the Merovingian dynasty imposed hegemony over most of it in the sixth century.¹⁶ By the High Middle Ages, this meant

¹² For the complete letter and translation of Pope Innocent's reaction see PVCE, 31–8 # 55–65; PVC, 51–65. The other major accounts of the crusade mention Peter of Castelnau's murder and Raimon VI's possible complicity; SCW, 13 laisse 4; WTud, 12, 14, 16; WPE, chapter IX, 27; WP, 52–3.

¹³ Claire Dutton, "Aspects of the Institutional History of the Albigensian Crusades, 1198–1229" (Ph.D. dissertation, London University, 1993), 67–70.

¹⁴ PVCE, 36–7 #62–4, PVC 1, 60–4. ¹⁵ Strayer, *Albigensian Crusades*, 11.

¹⁶ Edward James, *The Origins of France from Clovis to the Capetians 500–1000* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982), 18–21. Some sub-regions of Occitania like Septimania, which included prominent towns such as Narbonne and Béziers, remained outside the *regnum Francorum* until the Carolingian period.

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that the French king, far away in the northern part of his realm, could theoretically draw on the people of Occitania's support, loyalty, and allegiance, from the highest nobility like the Count of Toulouse down to the most humble peasant. This theory tells very little of the actual circumstances, however. The King of France could no more effectively demand the loyalty of the nobles of Occitania than the Count of Toulouse could demand allegiance from those in the region farther down the social scale than he. Nobody controlled Occitania; rather it was a jumble of lordships within which noble families intermarried and formed both formal and informal alliances with each other and with nobles and kings from other regions. Thus trying to figure out a baron's ultimate loyalty could elude even the most diligent researcher then and now. (See Figure 2, p. xviii.)

The most prominent nobles in the central part of Occitania were the counts of Toulouse. The counts regularly married the children of royalty and their children occasionally made suitable mates for kings.¹⁷ Being the greatest nobles in the region did not necessarily bring wealth, security, and control to the counts. They did not rule over Occitania but were more a first among noble equals. Included within the cultural, linguistic, and regional borders of Occitania were Gascony and Aquitaine, modern southwestern and western central France, and Provence to the east. Like all of the land of the *regnum Francorum* the western territories ultimately belonged to the King of France, but much of eastern Occitania was under the overlordship of the kings and emperors of Germany. De facto control of the territories to the west of the Count of Toulouse's lands actually lay with the Duke of Aquitaine in the early thirteenth century. This control was complicated by the fact that from 1152 the dukes of Aquitaine were also kings of England. Yet the King of England still owed homage as duke to the King of France for his Occitan territories. During the second half of the twelfth century, the counts of Toulouse had constant troubles with their Angevin neighbors on the western borders, as each tried to extend his influence by military force using marriage or blood ties as a pretext. As

¹⁷ Hélène Débax, "Stratégies matrimoniales des Comtes de Toulouse (850–1270)," *Annales du Midi* 100, no. 182 (1988), 131–51, especially 144–8; "Les Comtesses de Toulouse: Notices Biographiques," *Annales du Midi*, 100 no. 182 (1988), 215–34, especially 229–32; Laurent Mace, *Les Comtes de Toulouse et leur entourage, XIIe – XIIIe siècles. Rivalités, alliances et Jeux de Pouvoir* (Toulouse: Privat, 2000), 58, 60–1; 94; 202–3. In 1154 Raimon V married Constance of France, sister of King Louis VII. Raimon VI married five times; one of his wives was Joan of England, daughter of King Henry II and sister of kings Richard I and John. Raimon VI later married Eleonor of Aragon, sister of King Pere II, in 1209; his son Raimon VII married Eleonor's younger sister Sanchia of Aragon in 1211. Raimon VI's daughter Constance married Sancho VII, King of Navarre, but this monarch rejected her in 1190. Raimon VII's daughter Jeanne married King Louis IX's brother, Alphonse of Poitiers.

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Richard Benjamin put it, this resulted in a “forty years war” between Angevin and Raimondine that lasted until near the end of the century. A marriage in 1196 between Raimon VI and Joan, sister of Richard I, helped matters immensely.¹⁸ As part of the settlement Richard gave the Agenais region of Aquitaine to Raimon VI as his sister’s dowry.¹⁹ Joan died just three years later in 1199, but the Count of Toulouse renewed his homage for the Agenais on behalf of his then infant son. Once the Occitan War began John, King of England, largely failed to defend his nephew’s (and vassal’s) interests or his own in Occitania until after 1212 and accomplished very little when he eventually tried.²⁰ Between his attempts to take back northern territories like Normandy lost to the French king after 1204, ongoing problems with the papacy, his allies’ loss to the French crown in 1214, and himself having to thwart a French invasion of England by Prince Louis in 1216, John had little time or resources to intervene in the south.

After 1196 Raimon VI’s most serious problems were further east with his near neighbor, the Viscount of Béziers, Carcassonne, and Albi. Their shared boundary turned out to be the biggest hotbed of Cathar heresy, perhaps symptomatic of the political problems of that border region.²¹ The title of viscount had begun as a bureaucratic one in the early Middle Ages, denoting a count’s agent or someone who administered part of a county, but by the High Middle Ages viscounts often operated independently of any higher authority, as was largely the case in Occitania.²² Through careful marriage strategies going back to the late eleventh century the Trencavels, the dynasty that held the office of Viscount of Béziers, had become great nobles in their own right.²³ In spite of the fierce rivalry between the Trencavels of Béziers and the Raimondines of Toulouse, the

¹⁸ Richard Benjamin, “A Forty Years War: Toulouse and the Plantagenets, 1156–96,” *Historical Research* 61 (1988): 270–84; John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd edn. (London: Arnold, 2001), 29–30, 48.

¹⁹ WPE, chapter V, 18; WP, 38; Claire Taylor, *Heresy in Medieval France. Dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000–1249* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 2005), 148.

²⁰ Claire Taylor, “Pope Innocent III, John of England and the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1216),” *Pope Innocent III and his World*, ed. John C. Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 1999), 206–9; and *Heresy in Medieval France*, 204–7. Taylor does a masterly job of portraying John as more active than most historians give him credit for, but from a military standpoint his role in the region was abysmal.

²¹ Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne*, 327–9.

²² Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble. Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8.

²³ For the Trencavels’ complicated rise to power see Fredric L. Cheyette, “The ‘Sale’ of Carcassonne to the Counts of Barcelona (1067–1070) and the Rise of the Trencavels,” *Speculum* 63 (1988), 826–64, and Elaine Graham-Leigh, *The Southern French Nobility and the Albigensian Crusade* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005).

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two dynasties had close ties. In 1209 the Count of Toulouse was the uncle of the Viscount of Béziers.²⁴

Who “owned” or had the power to dispose of the Trencavel lands provided the biggest political football of the Occitan War. Further to the east and south, the Viscount of Béziers owed allegiance for most of his territories to the Count of Barcelona, who in 1137 confused matters further by becoming the King of Aragon through marriage.²⁵ The King of Aragon was an Occitan noble in his own right, controlling various territories in Provence including the area around Montpellier.²⁶ To make sorting out land titles more difficult yet, in 1204 the King of Aragon, Pere II, sought papal protection and possible financial help for a crusade against the Muslims. To gain this he became a papal vassal by ceding his kingdom to the pope. This made determining who should receive overlordship of the Trencavel lands after his death in 1213 that much harder, since it was not clear whether Pere’s cession of 1204 included lands outside the kingdom of Aragon, i.e., in Occitania.²⁷ The early thirteenth century saw the strengthening of the King of Aragon’s role in a region which was technically part of the King of France’s realm, partially because the Aragonese monarch was far more active in Occitania and came from a land culturally more similar to Occitania than that of the French. Extending marriage ties into the region, Pere II’s sister married Raimon VI in 1209, a decade after the count’s Angevin wife died.²⁸ This made the Count of Toulouse the former or present brother-in-law to two different monarchs and uncle of his greatest regional rival. The kings of Aragon were often preoccupied by the *Reconquista* in Spain, no less so during the early years of the Occitan War. This preoccupation lasted until 1212, when, along with the King of Castile, Pere II helped engineer the decisive victory over the Almohads at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa.²⁹ Still, as early as the first summer of the

²⁴ Mace, *Les Comtes de Toulouse*, 30; Graham-Leigh, *Southern French Nobility*, 98–9.

²⁵ T. N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon. A Short History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 27, 31. The Count of Barcelona was betrothed to the heiress of Aragon in 1137, though the marriage did not take place until 1150.

²⁶ Graham-Leigh, *Southern French Nobility*, 102–3; V.-L. Bourrilly and Raoul Busquet, *La Provence au Moyen Âge. Histoire politique: l’église: les institutions (1112–1481)* (Marseille: Barlatier, 1924), 10–13.

²⁷ Anonymous, *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III*, trans. James F. Powell, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 228–31; PL 214, *Gesta Innocentii*, cols. CLIX–CLX; PL 215 cols. 550–1, # CCXXIX; Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 63–5; Damian J. Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon. The Limits of Papal Authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 43–60. Smith has an especially full account of Pere’s 1204 trip to Rome.

²⁸ Mace, *Les Comtes de Toulouse*, 61.

²⁹ A good current account of the battle is in Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon*, 111–15.

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war in 1209, Pere II increasingly involved himself in Occitania to keep and extend his rights as lord and to support his kinsmen and vassals. By 1213, free from worry about Muslims in Spain but growing increasingly concerned over Simon of Montfort's domination of Occitania, Pere II became diplomatically involved and eventually militarily intervened on the southern side. This intervention cost him his life and largely closed the door on Aragonese hopes for expansion in Occitania.

East of the Rhône in Burgundy and Provence, Occitania was itself a patchwork of claims, ties, and family ownership. This region did not play a large role in the war until 1216. Most of it technically belonged to the German emperors, who had old claims going back to the eleventh century but little actual control. Real imperial authority in the region, however, came close to reality in 1156 when the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa married the heiress to Burgundy, thus making him not merely feudal suzerain but an actual landholder there.³⁰ Ultimately of course Frederick's interests lay elsewhere and imperial control remained light throughout the twelfth century. Any sort of imperial oversight remained illusory during the Occitan War because the rival houses for the imperial throne – Hohenstaufen and Welf – fought for control of the empire and largely did not concern themselves with events in Occitania.³¹ The southernmost part of eastern Occitania south of the Durance river had been contested between the counts of Toulouse and the counts of Barcelona (later kings of Aragon) since the beginning of the twelfth century.³² After 1125 the rival houses divided the region between them, the counts of Toulouse controlling certain towns on the Rhône and territory north of the Durance river, calling themselves “Marquises of Provence,” while south of the Durance river the region was episodically controlled by relatives of the count-kings of Barcelona or the count-kings themselves.³³ Though occasionally the houses dueled for primacy in eastern Occitania, many of the prosperous towns in the region, especially along the Rhône, existed largely free from any external authority.

Who then had the ultimate allegiance of the nobles of Occitania? No one really. Allegiance and loyalty were contingent on marriage alliances, personal agreements and murky land titles. These last were particularly fluid, and the old saying, “possession is nine tenths of the law,” held true.

³⁰ Otto of Freising and his Continuator, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles C. Mierow (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953), 165, 186; Alfred Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany 1056–1273*, trans. Helga Braun and Richard Mortimer (Oxford University Press, 1988), 223.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 240–4. ³² Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne*, 17–18. ³³ *Ibid.*, 261–7.

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There were no black and white borders in Occitania or anywhere else in western Europe at the time. Essentially monarchs and nobles controlled zones of influence with hazy boundaries that changed rapidly as a result of marriage, death, or war. While inheritance remained the most important criterion in assessing who controlled what, physical possession carried as much or more weight. Unless a noble could militarily enforce his authority, a birth or marriage right over property meant little. Once a noble gained control over an area through warfare he had a claim to keep it. The fluidity of political control in this era is exactly what Simon of Montfort exploited for almost nine years. His right to southern lands through military conquest trumped rightful inheritance, marriage, personal ties, and legal custom.

To a great extent this principle of possession held true farther down the social pile. Much more humble nobles essentially commanded territories as if they owned them outright, even if technically they owed homage for them to someone else. Unless a suzerain actively enforced his rights, he did not control those who held property from him. The lords of Cabaret, for example, who held castles located high in the Black Mountains, were supposedly vassals of the Viscount of Béziers. In practice the lords listened to the viscounts only when they felt like it and could not be made to do anything they did not want to do, short of a military expedition to dislodge them from their mountain hide-outs.³⁴ This took more effort than the viscounts of Béziers were willing to expend, so the lords of Cabaret lived like kings of the mountain until the political dynamics of the region changed after the Occitan War began. Alliances and counter-alliances, spats, and endemic, localized warfare were ubiquitous in western Europe, and no noble questioned the fairness of the system. It was the bringing in of an outside agency, in this case the crusade, that upset the course of politics and warfare in Occitania and began the transformation of the region into one partially controlled from the outside.

There was one other zone of influence that could not be overlooked in Occitania by 1209: the growing economic, political, and military power of towns and cities, particularly of the greatest city of the region, Toulouse. In most of western Europe, including Occitania, urban centers thrived during the twelfth century as growing population created demand and overseas commerce expanded, both with the Islamic world and in support of the

³⁴ Malcolm Barber, "Catharism and the Occitan Nobility: The Lordships of Cabaret, Minerve and Termes," *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood III*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990), 1–19, especially 8–10.

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Crusades. Along with the increasing economic power of Occitan cities and towns came political and military muscle. As any tourist who has traveled into the hinterland of France knows, during the Middle Ages cities, towns, and even small villages were situated with defense in mind, using the geography of the land to enhance whatever defensive structures could be built. Travelers to the modern Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon regions of France, the main theaters of the Albigensian Crusade, will see small towns perched on the highest hills of open, rolling country, or, more spectacularly, on steep crags or tabletop plateaus high up in the mountains. In addition to natural defensive advantages, most towns and cities had extensive walls and defensive structures. That is why many a municipality in Occitania was called a *castrum*, meaning fortified place.³⁵ For the most part these *castra* could hold out against all but the most determined of enemies, which is why nobles in the south rarely bothered to besiege them prior to 1209.

The largest population centers had not only formidable fortifications but also the military and financial means to defend themselves for an extended period of time. Toulouse in particular was a large, productive city in 1209, with a population of 30,000–35,000, placing it first in the region in terms of population, wealth, and influence.³⁶ Along with many other cities elsewhere in Europe in the twelfth century, Toulouse had become an independent, politically autonomous commune with its own town government prior to 1209.³⁷ Though the counts of Toulouse still used the city's citadel, the Narbonnais Castle, as their residence in Toulouse, by the time of the Occitan War the counts had virtually no power over the city.³⁸ As the crusaders would find out to their chagrin in 1217, the

³⁵ Benoît Cursente, "Le castrum dans les Pays d'Oc aux XII^e et XIII^e Siècles," *Heresis* 11 (1988), 19–25, especially 20–1; PVCE, Appendix A part V, 283–5.

³⁶ Josiah Cox Russell, *Medieval Regions and their Cities* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles Publishers, 1972), 156; Philippe Wolff, *Les "Estimes" Toulousaines des XIV^e et XV^e Siècles* (Toulouse: Bibliothèque de l'Association Marc Bloch de Toulouse, 1956), 54–5; Jean-Noël Biraben, "La population de Toulouse au XIV^e et XV^e siècles," *Journal des Savants* (1964), 284–300. Using the same evidence as the other authors, Biraben suggests a higher population, somewhere between 45,000–50,000 inhabitants. All of the numbers are based on the tax estimates of 1335. It is impossible to be anything more than speculative on the population of 120 years before.

³⁷ John H. Mundy, *Society and Government at Toulouse in the Age of the Cathars* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), 234–5; Christopher K. Gardner, "Negotiating Lordship: Efforts of the Consulat of Toulouse to Retain Autonomy under Capetian Rule (ca. 1229–1315)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 68–107. Many of the primary documents for this process can be found in R. Limouzin-Lamothe, *La Commune de Toulouse et les sources de son histoire (1120–1249). Troisième partie: Le Cartulaire du consulat* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1932), 261–403.

³⁸ John H. Mundy, *Liberty and Political Power in Toulouse 1050–1230* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 43–58.