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THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LANGUEDOCIAN CATHARISM

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THE prominence of women in Languedocian Catharism has often been assumed, though never proved. Writers who have treated feminine participation in this heresy as an unusual phenomenon requiring special explanations have implicitly assumed a disproportionate number of female Cathars. This, in fact, has become somewhat of an historical commonplace. Thus a recent popular historian, Mme Oldenbourg, has asserted without hesitation that 'among the *perfecti*, then, there were fewer women than men—but not markedly fewer... Among the ordinary *credentes*, on the other hand, there seems to have been a greater number of women than men.'¹ Even so competent a scholar as Professor Walter Wakefield felt no need to document a similar statement in his 1974 work, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France*: 'It was often remarked by medieval observers that women were particularly susceptible to heretical teaching. This was surely true in Languedoc.'²

Although a number of historians had made similar observations in passing,³ no coherent theory was developed upon this point until the publication of Gottfried

¹ Zoé Oldenbourg, *Massacre at Montségur*, trans. P. Green (New York, 1961), p. 61.

² W. L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100-1250* (Berkeley, 1974), p. 74.

³ See especially P. Alphanbéry, *Les idées morales chez les hétérodoxes latins au début du XIII^e siècle* (Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études. Sciences religieuses 16; Paris, 1903), p. 71 and passim; Arno Borst, *Die Katharer* (Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica 12; Stuttgart, 1953), pp. 181-82; M. Dmitrevsky, 'Notes sur le catharisme et l'Inquisition dans le Midi de la France', *Annales du Midi* 36 (1924) 294-311. Of the above, only Dmitrevsky treats the *Frauenfrage* in detail. One should also be aware of the brief but judicious account of female participation that appears in J. Guiraud, *Histoire de l'Inquisition au moyen âge* (Paris, 1935), 1.226-28. It is also significant that the *Frauenfrage* seems to have been virtually ignored by historians of the heresy until the question was taken up first by H. Grundmann and later by the East German historians, G. Koch and E. Werner. While this is quite understandable for those whose primary interest is either the institutional history of the Inquisition (e.g., A. S. Turberville, G. Coulton, C. Douais, A. Dondaine, and Y. Dossat) or Cathar theology (among others, C. Thouzellier and R. Manselli), it is a rather curious omission from the works of social historians such as J. B. Russell and A. P. Evans.

Koch's *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter* in 1962.⁴ The East German historian based his theoretical system upon Engels' statement that, since religion was the dominant mode of expression in the Middle Ages and the Church the greatest power, socio-economic discontents were inevitably expressed in religious terms.⁵ The initial exegesis upon this text had been conducted by Karl Kautsky, who had attempted to analyze the growth of Catharism in the context of the class struggle.⁶ Koch followed Kautsky's lead; for him the heresy represented a perfect example of the process whereby separate classes sought expression of their differing interests and grievances through religious dissent.

Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter found its focus in the specific problem of feminine discontent and its religious expression. The twelfth-century European phenomenon of increased female piety and participation in religious life had already been noted by Herbert Grundmann. While acknowledging the importance of social causation, Grundmann insisted that simple religious enthusiasm which imbued all social levels was the root cause of those movements he had studied (largely limited to the beguines of northern France and the Low Countries).⁷ Gottfried Koch began by explicitly rejecting that explanation as insufficient. As a Marxist, he considered women, despite their economic differences, as a single aggrieved 'class':

This especially oppressed social situation for women was in our opinion the true underlying reason why women sought refuge in the heresy; thus they expressed their opposition to the existing class situation. For them the Cathar teaching of the rejection of the evil world signified their exploitation and oppression. At the same time, it offered the way to salvation and knowledge from this situation. Thus for the poor weaver woman the salvation motif was of foremost importance; for the upper-class adherent it played a much inferior role.⁸

According to Koch, women of the minor landholding nobility figured very prominently in the heresy, at least in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. He attributed this to a socio-economic crisis faced by the old patrician families. Since Languedoc did not observe primogeniture, the division of land among all heirs, male and female, progressively impoverished the landowning class. The southern French practice of *pariage*—the administration of estates in common by multiple heirs who divided the profits—did not solve the problem. Therefore, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, females were excluded from the inheritance of

⁴ G. Koch, *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter* (Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 9; Berlin, 1962).

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 14; Friedrich Engels, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg* (Berlin, 1951), p. 57.

⁶ K. Kautsky, *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1947), 1.201; Koch, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷ H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Historische Studien 267; Berlin, 1935, rpt. with additions, Darmstadt, 1970), pp. 396 ff.

⁸ Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 20.

land (except in default of male heirs). Daughters and widows received only a sum of money in dower, often insufficient to assure their independence. Because of poverty, the minor nobility turned to heretical convents to place their unmarried daughters and widowed female relations.⁹

Koch also identified female members of the artisan class, especially weavers, as playing an increasingly important role as the thirteenth century progressed. He attributed their participation to such socio-economic concerns as the power struggle in municipal government, the relatively unprotected position of the artisan class, and the general exploitation of women in a patriarchal society.¹⁰ These lower-class women, who could not gain admission into the convents of the gentry, remained in loose and scattered organizations in the separate towns. Many women simply wandered from place to place, earning a living by their hands.¹¹

Koch's conclusions have been controversial. Despite a measure of popular acceptance,¹² the analyses and basic assumptions of *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter* have been vigorously challenged. Jeffrey Burton Russell has dismissed the dichotomy between upper- and lower-class *perfectae* as unproven.¹³ This objection is not without merit. Although Koch did cite a number of examples of *perfectae* from upper-class backgrounds living in heretical hospices, and did discover cases of female involvement in Catharism among the guild families of the Languedocian towns, his source material precluded any statistical analysis of the class origins and activities of heretical women. The impressionistic approach which he understandably adopted simply does not provide sufficient evidence to support his conclusions.

Although the most complete theoretical framework was developed by Marxists,¹⁴ certain historians of other philosophical persuasions have felt a similar need to explain the abnormal attraction that Languedocian Catharism is assumed to have held for women. Arno Borst, J. R. Strayer, and Walter Wakefield,¹⁵ among others,

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 23-28. See also R. Aubenas, 'La famille dans l'ancienne Provence', *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* 8 (1936) 523-41. Both Marxist and non-Marxist historians have taken the unusual inheritance pattern of the Midi as a starting point in their discussions of the spread of heresy.

¹⁰ J. Mundy, *Liberty and Political Power in Toulouse 1050-1230* (New York, 1954), pp. 78 ff., cited by Koch, *ibid.*, p. 23. Mundy, however, does not mention women in his argument.

¹¹ Koch, *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹² e.g., S. Harksen, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1961), p. 38; C. Ennesch, *Les Cathares dans la cité* (Paris, 1969), pp. 83-84; J. L. Nelson, 'Society, Theodicy and the Origins of Heresy: Towards a Reassessment of the Medieval Evidence' in *Studies in Church History* 9 (Cambridge, 1972), p. 74; and B. Bolton, 'Mulieres sanctae' in *Studies in Church History* 10 (Oxford, 1973), p. 86.

¹³ J. B. Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1965), p. 232.

¹⁴ In addition to Koch, *Frauenfrage*, see E. Werner, 'Die Stellung der Katharer zur Frau', *Studi medievali*, 3rd Ser., 2 (1961) 300.

¹⁵ Borst, *Katharer*, pp. 181 ff.; J. R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusade* (New York, 1971), p. 32; Wakefield, *Heresy*, p. 72; also Oldenbourg, *Massacre*, pp. 40, 60-62 and Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 52.

have contended that women preferred Catharism because the elevated role of the *perfecta* was superior to any offered in contemporary Catholicism. The argument runs thus: women, alienated by the virulent misogyny of medieval Catholicism, were drawn to the more sympathetic attitudes of the Cathar heresy. Although it is true that the sect condemned females in their biological role at least as severely as did the Church,¹⁶ nevertheless it also enabled them to transcend their sexuality.

The Church offered monasticism, in which women could pursue a pious life of chastity and asceticism; the Cathars allowed women to be among the 'perfected'. The difference is instructive. Although those who managed to gain entry into the convents of Languedoc, especially the Fontevrist houses near Toulouse,¹⁷ did achieve positions of authority and respect within the Church, such establishments were in short supply during the early thirteenth century.¹⁸ Moreover, the role allowed these religious was severely circumscribed by their sex: they were barred from performing sacerdotal functions and, consequently, from rising in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Catharism, on the other hand, allowed women its sole sacrament of ordination, the *consolamentum*, on the same basis as male members of the sect. Once the postulant had been baptized in the Spirit through the imposition of hands, her soul, which had been imprisoned in matter, was reunited with the Holy Spirit, and she became a wholly new creature. Since sexual differences were, logically enough,

¹⁶ Thus Borst speaks of a theoretical Cathar 'radical hatred of women' (*radikaler Frauenhass*), asserting 'For them, woman was to be avoided like evil itself' (*ibid.*, pp. 181-82). This attitude arose from the Cathar condemnation of procreation. According to Guiraud, a *perfecta* once advised a pregnant believer 'to ask God to free her from the demon which she carried inside her' (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Collection de Languedoc [Doat], vol. 25, fol. 14, cited in *Histoire* 1.95). A witness before the Inquisitor Bernard Gui stated that if a pregnant woman were to die, the *consolamentum* could not be performed, and she could not be saved (J. I. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters* [Munich, 1890; rpt. New York, 1960], 2.33, 35, 320). This virulent condemnation of pregnancy alienated a number of women. Airmerssens, the wife of Willelmus Vicarius de Cambiac, for example, left the heresy after *perfectae* publicly berated her for carrying a demon in her womb, much to the amusement of her neighbors: 'Et dicte heretice dixerunt ipsi testi, coram omnibus, quia erat pregnans adolescentula, quod demonium portabat in ventre et alii ceperunt ridere. Inde ... ipsa testis noluit diligere [hereticos] postquam dixerunt sibi heretice quod pregnans erat de demonio' (ms. 609 of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Toulouse, fol. 239v). See also the testimony of Na Pagana of Maurens (ms. 609, fol. 117v).

¹⁷ Most notably Lespinasse (founded in 1114). See E. Delaruelle, 'L'idéal de pauvreté à Toulouse au XII^e siècle', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 2 (1966) 68.

¹⁸ E. W. McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1954), chap. 2. McDonnell argues that the decrease in monastic opportunities open to women within the Catholic Church was of major significance for the rise of non-normative movements such as the Beguines of northern Europe. See also Bolton, 'Mulieres sanctae'. The relative paucity of monasteries for women in Languedoc (and especially in the Lauragais) is reflected in R. P. Dom J.-M. Besse's *Abbayes et prieurés de l'ancienne France 4: Provinces ecclésiastiques d'Alby, de Narbonne et de Toulouse* (Paris, 1911).

considered to be based upon matter, they had no part in the life of the spirit; thus a *perfecta's* physical femininity was no bar to her exalted religious status.¹⁹ Furthermore, since anyone who had received the *consolamentum* could confer it upon others, a woman could theoretically perform the sacrament.²⁰ In this respect, a *perfecta* was the equal of a *perfectus*.

The status of a *perfecta* was thus in theory higher than that of a nun. Those authors who have claimed this as the basis for Catharism's feminine appeal have assumed the equivalence of theory and practice. This paper will contend, however, that the *perfectae* rarely, if ever, performed the functions that were theoretically theirs, and that their role in practice differed little from that of their Catholic counterparts.

A third theory of attraction has been expressed by both popular and professional historians. Mme Oldenbourg has remarked:

The importance of the part played by women in the Cathar communities has frequently been emphasized. There is nothing surprising about it, however. To begin with, it is a generally accepted fact that on the appearance of any new religion some great preacher will infallibly turn up and unleash a wave of mass enthusiasm—to which women are more prone by nature than men.²¹

Obviously this has less to do with historical analysis than with a rather special view of the feminine psyche. As such, we feel that we can pass it by without extended comment.

Although, as we have seen, theories have been developed to explain the unusual popularity that Catharism is assumed to have enjoyed among women, no attempt has yet been made to quantify the degree of that attraction. If a statistical analysis reveals only a level of feminine participation in the heresy proportionate to the female share of the general population (assumed here to have been approximately 50%), separate theories to account for the Cathar *Frauenfrage* may in fact be unnecessary.

We shall attempt to draw such a statistical portrait, using data culled from the available inquisitorial sources. The followers of the heresy fell into two discrete groups. The first, the perfects, received the *consolamentum* as a vocation, electing its prescribed ascetic regimen and functioning as heretical ministers. The mass of believers (*credentes*), on the other hand, while often receiving this sacrament on

¹⁹ Döllinger, *Beiträge* 2.209: '... dicebat tamen de mulieribus, quod animae hominum et mulierum inter se differentiam non habebant, sed in carnibus hominum et mulierum Sathanas dominus istius mundi fecerat differentiam, ...'

²⁰ Raynier Sacchoni, *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*, trans. W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York, 1969), p. 331.

²¹ Oldenbourg, *Massacre*, p. 60. See also Dmitrevsky, 'Notes', 294-303 and Ennesch, *Les Cathares*, p. 84.

their deathbeds, had lifestyles essentially similar to those of their Catholic neighbors.²² We shall treat the perfects in section II, the believers in section III. Concerning the *perfectae* we sought to determine (1) their percentage of the whole perfect class and (2) their relative activity as measured by the ratio of their public appearances to those of their male counterparts. We dealt with female believers in a similar fashion, deriving their relative numerical position from the proportion of women to men admitting heretical involvement in depositions given before the Inquisition, as well as from the female-male ratio found in the various books of sentences. In order to determine how active the body of female believers was, relative to males of the sect, we compared how frequently they were reported by witnesses as having participated in heretical assemblies and other such heterodox activities. It is our hope that such data might cast a new light upon the old question of female participation in Catharism.

I

The most important source material for our analysis of Cathar membership in thirteenth-century Languedoc is ms. 609 of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Toulouse.²³ This is a collection of depositions received by the Inquisitors Bernard de Caux and Jean de Saint-Pierre in 1245 and 1246 (with a few dated to 1247 and two given before 'Magister S.' and Raymond Resplandi in 1253), comprising 254 folios. These depositions, representing the testimony of 5604 witnesses,²⁴ are arranged by parish, the vast majority of which lie in the Lauragais. Fortunately for our purposes, the Lauragais, the region between Toulouse and Carcassonne, was a notorious stronghold of Cathar adherence throughout the thirteenth century.²⁵

The extant manuscript can be dated to approximately 1260. An annotation made after the transcription but before the fourteenth century explains that the manuscript is a copy of two registers of Bernard de Caux, executed by order of Guillaume Bernard and Renaud de Chartres. Since Guillaume Bernard served as inquisitor in Toulouse from 1257 to 1263, and the last act in the manuscript is dated 28 October

²² Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975), pp. 255-56 and 539-42.

²³ A photocopy and a transcription of this ms., prepared under the direction of the late Austin P. Evans and now housed in Professor John H. Mundy's office in Columbia University, have been made available to us. We also wish to thank Professor Mundy for suggesting the topic as worthy of investigation and for providing both help and encouragement.

²⁴ Our total differs slightly from those obtained by Yves Dossat (5, 471: *Les crises de l'Inquisition toulousaine au XIII^e siècle, 1233-1273* [Bordeaux, 1959], p. 232) and Msgr. C. Douais (5, 600: *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'Inquisition dans le Languedoc*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1900], I.153).

²⁵ E. Griffé, 'Le Catharisme dans le diocèse de Carcassonne et le Lauragais au XII^e siècle', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 3 (1968) 215-32; Guiraud, *Histoire* I.266-70.

1258,²⁶ one can date ms. 609 to the period 1258-63. Moreover, we are dealing here, as Yves Dossat has shown, with a reasonably faithful rescript of the two original registers, which reproduces them in content, if not in format and presentation. Thus we can accord it the same value that we would have attributed to the originals.²⁷

The great inquest of 1245-46 was designed to reach all males over fourteen years and all females over twelve.²⁸ In actuality, we can be fairly certain that this goal was not fully realized. Only 31.8% of witnesses deposing were female.²⁹ This discrepancy is mystifying, since the inquisitors apparently made every effort to reach the majority of the citizens of the Lauragais. For example, William Arnald, Bernard de Caux's predecessor as inquisitor of Toulouse, sent his colleague, Stephan de Saint-Thibéry, to Montesquieu to hear the confessions of the 'pregnant women and the infirm'.³⁰ Similarly, illness did not seem to excuse women from testifying before Bernard and Jean.³¹ It is thus difficult to account for the lower number of female witnesses in ms. 609. Whatever the reason may have been, and the manuscript simply does not provide enough evidence for any constructive speculation, the deficiency sheds some doubt upon Dossat's claim that this register is a more or less complete record of heretical activity in the Lauragais during the first half of the thirteenth century.³² We must accept this as a possible source of bias in our data and find a means of minimizing the resultant error in our statistical analysis.³³

The questions and responses in ms. 609 are stereotyped notarial phrases, which somewhat limits their usefulness. The inquisitors were only interested in the witness' participation in or observation of overt heretical acts; consequently we learn little of the dogma or ritual of the heresy. Fortunately, these limitations offer no serious handicap to our enterprise.

A more pertinent problem in the use of the register is the questionable reliability of the testimony given. Although such factors as hostility toward the Inquisition,

²⁶ Ms. 609 of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Toulouse (henceforth cited as ms. 609), fol. 127r-v (deposition of Poncius Garriga de Exilio).

²⁷ Dossat, *Crises*, pp. 56-70.

²⁸ A. Tardif, 'Documents pour l'histoire du *Processus per Inquisitionem* et de l'*Inquisitio heretice pravitatis*', *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger* 7 (1883) 671; see also Dossat, *ibid.*, pp. 233-34.

²⁹ Assuming a 50% female general population, the difference between the population and the sample proportion is significant at the .001 level, the test statistic *Z* equalling -34.129. It is thus unlikely that the small percentage of women in ms. 609 is due purely to chance.

³⁰ Deposition of Domina Blanca (ms. 609, fol. 108v).

³¹ A female leper (see the testimony of Guillelma de Cucmers, ms. 609, fol. 143r) and a woman in the advanced stages of pregnancy (in the testimony of Na Marquesia de Monte Esquivo, ms. 609, fol. 108v) appeared before the inquisitors. See Dossat, *Crises*, p. 234.

³² Dossat, *ibid.*, p. 244.

³³ See below, pp. 225-26.

unwillingness to incriminate oneself, and fear of reprisal from implicated neighbors³⁴ may have tended to limit the cooperation of the witnesses, other considerations seem to have counterbalanced these tendencies. It was to the witness' advantage to come forward voluntarily and testify fully during the period of grace (usually the first week following the initiation of proceedings). By doing so, he or she could hope for more lenient treatment. Furthermore, failure to come forward was itself a punishable offense: one count against a woman sentenced to life imprisonment on 29 September 1247 was that 'she did not come before the other inquisitors during the period of grace for the purpose of making her confession of heresy'.³⁵

This inquest, moreover, was the third to be conducted in the region.³⁶ Fear of exposure through testimony previously given by others before the inquisitors may have diminished the impulse to conceal. Since the penalty for perjury could be severe, a witness might well have hesitated to run the risk. Esclarmonde Bret, for example, was sentenced to life imprisonment on 13 May 1246 because she 'saw and adored heretics and denied the truth to the other inquisitors, and afterwards denied the truth in our presence while under oath.'³⁷

Citizens of several Lauragais communities had formed conspiracies of silence at the time of the first inquests of 1241/42.³⁸ A number of these, however, crumbled in the face of repeated inquisitorial inquiries, their existence being freely revealed and disavowed by witnesses in ms. 609.³⁹ Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande and Les Cassès, two towns in which such conspiracies occurred, show substantial levels of cooperation with the 1245/46 inquest, indicating the failure of the pacts.⁴⁰ It

³⁴ Ms. 609, fols. 2v, 8v, 161v, 166v, 234r-v.

³⁵ Douais, *Documents* 2.61: 'non venit tempore gratie coram aliis inquisitoribus pro confessione de heresia facienda'; and 2.22: 'Bernardus de Rocovilla ... negavit tempore gratie inquisitoribus veritatem' (life sentence).

³⁶ The Inquisitors William Arnald and Stephan de Saint-Thibéry, following the instructions of Archbishop Jean de Bernin, made a circuit of the Lauragais from October 1241 to 28 May 1242, when they were assassinated at Avignonet. Brother Ferrarius and his collaborators, the inquisitors at Carcassonne, also took depositions in the diocese of Toulouse during the period 1243-44.

³⁷ Douais, *Documents* 2.12: 'vidit hereticos, adoravit ... et negavit veritatem aliis inquisitoribus, et postmodum coram nobis contra proprium juramentum.'

³⁸ Auriac (ms. 609, fols. 88v and 94r), Barelles (ms. 609, fols. 49r, 49v, and 50r), Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande (ms. 609, fols. 33r, 33v, and 38r), Les Cassès (ms. 609, fol. 222v), Montferrand (ms. 609, fol. 144v), among others.

³⁹ e.g., ms. 609, fol. 49r (Auriac): 'Et dolet et penitet, quia non dixit veritatem, quando super hoc fuit requisita.'

⁴⁰ At Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande (ms. 609, fols. 30r-41r, 186r-189r) thirty-six individuals of a total 253 admitted involvement in heresy. Almost half (seven) of Les Cassès' sixteen witnesses (ms. 609, fols. 222r-227r) confessed to having been *credentes*. Moreover, even in towns in which the pacts appear to have been maintained by the majority of believers, the testimonies of those who did confess fully were quite productive. Thus while only two of Barelles' twenty-eight witnesses admitted

should be noted, however, that the compact may have held firm at Auriac; although the conspiracy was exposed by two witnesses,⁴¹ only 3.4% of the town's deponents (10 of 297) admitted to ever having been personally involved in heresy. On the whole, however, such attempts to frustrate the effectiveness of the inquests seem to have failed.

This is not at all surprising; the inquisitors were well aware of the problem posed by such recalcitrance, and, through a judicious mixture of mercy and threats, they seem to have dealt adequately with it. While those who betrayed the pacts could expect lenient treatment, the obdurate, if caught in their lie, could anticipate only the harshest penalties. Thus Peter Babou was sentenced to life imprisonment on 28 May 1246 because he, among his other offenses, 'had conspired to conceal heresy, and denied the truth from the other inquisitors against his own sworn oath.'⁴² In essence, pressure to give true testimony gradually built up as exposure grew more probable, penalties more certain, and the Inquisition itself was perceived more as an entrenched institution than a single, unrepeated ordeal.⁴³

Two other collections enable us to extend our study into the 1250's. Ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, Toulouse⁴⁴ is a fragment of a register for the period 1254 through 1256. It contains the confessions of six former perfects, four males and two females. Although the manuscript is only five double leaves, and the confessions are incomplete, it provides information of the utmost importance, allowing us to draw comparisons between the lifestyles of *perfecti* and *perfectae*.

The *Registre du notaire ou greffier de l'Inquisition de Carcassonne* (Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque Municipale et Universitaire ms. 160) covers the period 1250-58.⁴⁵ Although it provides invaluable information on the everyday workings of the tribunal,⁴⁶ its narrow scope limits its usefulness for our purposes. Much smaller

involvement, others were implicated on seventy-one occasions and perfects were mentioned on an additional thirty-nine occasions.

⁴¹ Ms. 609, fols. 88v and 94r.

⁴² Douais, *Documents* 2.22-23: 'fecit conductum de non revelando heresim, negavit scienter coram nobis veritatem, et eandem celavit aliis inquisitoribus contra proprium juramentum.'

⁴³ When asked why he had taken part in the murder of the inquisitors at Avignonet, Bertrandus de Quiders replied that he believed, along with others, that such an action would free the land of the Inquisition: 'Requisitus quare voluit interesse neci dictorum Inquisitorum, respondit quod credebatur et dicebatur ab aliis quod negotium inquisitionis esset extinctum, et tota terra esset liberata, et non fieret de cetero inquisitio' (ms. 609, fol. 140v).

⁴⁴ The late Mr. Evans' photocopy and transcription, housed in Professor John H. Mundy's office. Cf. C. Molinier, *L'Inquisition dans le Midi de la France au XIII^e et au XIV^e siècle* (Toulouse, 1880), pp. 237-57; Y. Dossat, 'Reconstitution d'un registre d'Inquisition', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 3 (1968) 277-80.

⁴⁵ Douais, *Documents* 2.115-301.

⁴⁶ Dossat, *Crises*, p. 45.

than ms. 609, it includes only forty-two witnesses. The same sorts of caveats apply to its use.

A second type of inquisitorial source has been utilized in this work: registers of sentences. Unlike the collections of depositions, these state only the sentences of condemned heretics, along with stereotyped descriptions of their offenses. The kinds of information we can derive from them are somewhat limited. Few, if any, *credentes* are implicated, and fewer *perfecti* and *perfectae* are mentioned, although occasionally the condemned person's offense will be described in such terms as 'he adored Peter Auterius, the heretic'. Since the categories of information differ for these two types of registers, we shall use caution in our comparisons.⁴⁷

Some serious problems arise in the use of the registers of sentences. Can we assume, for example, that those tried at any one tribunal at any one time formed a representative sample of the Cathar community?⁴⁸ For that matter, is it even certain that the unfortunates convicted were necessarily Cathars? To answer the latter affirmatively would be to consider the accusations justified, and the accuracy and trustworthiness of inquisitorial condemnations are arguable.⁴⁹ Given these partially insoluble problems, it would surely be impossible to obtain exact data, but fortunately that is not necessary. If we speak of proportions rather than of exact figures, if we take as our unit of measurement the total number of sentences rendered by an inquisitor for several towns over an extended period of time rather than the condemnations of each *sermo generalis*, then our results will probably still be valid. An anomalous case of an innocent person condemned, or even of an entire *sermo* atypically composed of only *perfecti* or *perfectae*, would not totally vitiate our final results. Given a large enough sample (assumed to be random), we can assume

⁴⁷ We have examined the following: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale ms. lat. 9992, *The Register of Sentences of Bernard de Caux and Jean de St. Pierre at Toulouse, 1245-48*, ed. Douais, *Documents* 2.1-89; Bibliothèque Nationale ms. lat. 11847, *Register of the Inquisition at Albi, 1299-1300*, ed. Georgene Webber Davis (New York, 1948), which is of little use to our present inquiry, since this particular inquisition was directed against the leading citizens of the town for political reasons and, as a result, no women were accused and no information concerning them was sought; and Bibliothèque Nationale ms. lat. 11848, *The Book of Sentences of Bernard Gui, 1307-1321*, ed. P. van Limborch (Amsterdam, 1692). Of these, the last is both the largest (containing 932 sentences) and the most useful.

⁴⁸ Bernard Gui's *Book of Sentences* probably does present a representative sample, since Peter Auterius, the architect of the fourteenth-century revival, was himself apprehended and induced to confess before his execution. His confession, in all probability, implicated the majority of those involved.

⁴⁹ Although the leniency of Bernard de Caux and Jean de Saint-Pierre seems to have compared favorably with that of their secular contemporaries. Thus the testimony of Na Nomais of Scopont (ms. 609, fol. 246r): 'dixit quod numquam vidit hereticos nisi captos, nec adoravit, nec aliquid dedit nec misit, nec eorum predicationem audivit. Dixit tamen quod Bertrandus Amblart, baillivus de Vauro, cepit eam pro facto heresis; et dum ipsa testis capta, dixit, coacta et invita propter timorem, quod adoravit duos hereticos, quod non fuit verum. Sed propter timorem dixit sicut dictum est.'

that such anomalies would balance each other and thus would not substantially alter the overall proportion of men to women. Granting that our figures will only be approximations, nevertheless we believe that they can serve to indicate the extent of female participation in Languedocian Catharism.

II

Of the 719 heretical ministers⁵⁰ named in ms. 609, 318, or slightly less than 45%, were women. Although the difference in representation between the sexes is statistically significant at the .05 level,⁵¹ this figure of 45% is still high—certainly a larger percentage of female religious than one would expect to find in medieval Catholic society. Without straying too far afield, one may remark that the number of nuns in any given period would hardly have equaled the total number of priests, monks, friars, and clerks.

Despite their large numbers, however, *perfectae* were observed by witnesses far less often than *perfecti*. Thus while women formed, as we have said, 45% of all active perfects in ms. 609, they were mentioned in testimonies less than a third as many times as males. To be exact, they constitute only 22.9% of all sightings of perfects.⁵² This figure, it must be understood, does not represent the total number of individuals, since a single *perfectus* or *perfecta* might have been sighted dozens of times. Rather, it furnishes a guide to the relative activity (or at least, visibility) of male and female perfects.

As previously stated,⁵³ our data group may possibly be biased since only 31.8% of the witnesses in ms. 609 were women. Indeed, a difference of proportions test shows that women tended to notice⁵⁴ and, consequently, to testify against female heretics more often than male witnesses did.⁵⁵ When men looked at the Cathar

⁵⁰ The term minister refers only to those who received the *consolamentum* during their lifetime, as opposed to deathbed hereticants. The inquisitorial registers label the former *heretici* or *hereticae* and the latter *hereticati* or *hereticatae*. (This second group will be discussed with the Cathar believers in section III below.) In this paper, the terms minister, perfect, and heretic are used interchangeably.

⁵¹ Our null hypothesis is that half of the perfect class was female.

⁵² *Perfectae* were observed by witnesses 1435 times out of 6259 sightings of perfects. This figure excludes observations of 'hereticos stantes'. Although the phrase indicates male gender, it is probable that it was used as a general expression for all heretics regardless of sex. On one occasion in ms. 609 (fol. 109v) a pair of perfects, one female and one male, are referred to as 'heretici'. If we do include 'hereticos stantes', the level of female activity drops to 19.26%.

⁵³ See above, p. 221.

⁵⁴ The description of the 'sociabilité féminine' rendered by Le Roy Ladurie suggests that such bias is a very real possibility. For Montaillou at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Le Roy Ladurie has convincingly demonstrated that females did indeed come into more frequent contact with others of their own sex than they did with males (see *Montaillou*, pp. 377-89). Le Roy Ladurie's work gives a useful account of the position and role of women in the medieval Midi.

⁵⁵ Having numbered separately all male and female depositions, we drew two independent random

ministry, they appear to have thought that females constituted about a fifth of all perfects. Female witnesses, on the other hand, seem to have been convinced that no less than a third were of their own sex. Although the bias of each sex is evident, this does not invalidate our conclusion, for even when we consider only the testimony given by women, they saw twice as many male perfects as they did female ones. Given the proportions of the random samples used in the test, even if ms. 609 had included an equal number of male and female witnesses, the ratio between sightings of *perfecti* and *perfectae* would still have been about three to one.

Clearly, then, *perfectae* were far less active than their male counterparts. A partial explanation may lie in the nature of their respective activities. While the *perfecti*, especially the bishops and deacons (positions filled only by men⁵⁶), traveled extensively, preaching and administering the *consolamentum*, female perfects, as we shall see, by and large, did not.

Even though, as the Inquisitor Raynier Sacchoni maintained, the *consolamentum* could be administered 'not only by their prelates, but by those under them, even, in case of need, by Cathar women',⁵⁷ the office normally belonged to the male hierarchy:

It is the duty of the bishop always to take the first place in everything they do, namely, in the imposition of the hand [i.e., the *consolamentum*]. ... In the absence of the bishop, the elder son presides, and in the absence of the bishop and the elder son, the younger son does so. Moreover, these two sons, together or separately, go about visiting all the Cathar men and women who are in the bishop's charge. ... the deacons preside and perform all functions, each among his charges, in the absence of the bishop and the sons.⁵⁸

samples, the first consisting of 200 females and the second of 200 males, assuring randomness through a random numbers chart (The RAND Corp., *A Million Random Digits* [Glencoe, Ill., 1955], pp. 1-3; rpt. in H. Blalock, Jr., *Social Statistics* [New York, 1972], pp. 554-57). We then formulated the null hypothesis that the two samples would report the same proportion of *perfecti* and *perfectae*. If we use a one-tailed test (having previously predicted male bias) and a .05 significance level, any value of the test statistic $Z \leq -1.65$ will indicate that the results are so improbable under the given assumptions that the null hypothesis may be rejected.

21.9% of perfects mentioned in the male sample were women (69 of 315), while for the sample of female witnesses the percentage was 33% (52 of 157). We thus obtain $Z = -2.25$. Since the probability of obtaining a result as small as this if the null hypothesis is true is only .012, we may reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level. Thus it seems that witnesses did testify more against perfects of their own sex.

⁵⁶ Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.227-28.

⁵⁷ Sacchoni, *Summa*, trans. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, p. 331.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 335; A. Dondaine, ed., *Un traité néo-manichéen du XIII^e siècle: le Liber de duobus principiis, suivi d'un fragment de rituel cathare* (Rome, 1931), pp. 68-69: 'Officium episcopi est tenere semper prioratum in omnibus quae faciunt, scilicet in impositione manus.... Idem servat filius maior absente episcopo; similiter facit filius minor absente episcopo et filio maiore. Praeterea isti duo filii simul vel separatim discurrunt visitando Catharos et Catharas omnes qui sunt sub episcopo. ... in omnibus servant et faciunt diacones unusquisque in suis subditis absentibus episcopi et filii.'

Only in the absence of all of the above would a *perfecta* have had the opportunity to perform the Cathar sacrament. Since the diocese of Toulouse had around fifty deacons in its heyday,⁵⁹ such occasions must have been rare. It is true that the advent of the Albigensian Crusade (1209) and the establishment of the Inquisition in the 1230's and 40's forced a partial shift of the sacramental burden downward (ms. 609 yields several examples of ordinary *perfecti* consoling believers⁶⁰), but this trend appears to have excluded women. Although witnesses testified to over 150 observed heretications, not once does a woman perform the sacrament.⁶¹ On one occasion, in fact, a woman living in a heretical convent at Laurac sought heretication from a visiting *perfectus* rather than from the *perfectae* who had trained her.⁶² The detailed confessions of three *perfectae* in the collection Doat⁶³ and ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne⁶⁴ confirm this observation. Thus we may safely conclude that the activities of female Cathars did not ordinarily include sacerdotal functions.

Instances of *perfectae* known to have preached or debated publicly are extremely rare, and are understandably largely limited to upper-class women in the pre-Crusade period. Esclarmonde de Foix, the widowed sister of Count Raymond-Roger of Foix, is the most celebrated example. This *perfecta*, an elderly lady with six children, has become something of a legend. One overly romantic historian, in fact, declared her to be 'the visible inspiration of Cathar mysticism and the heart of the resistance',⁶⁵ a rather strong characterization of someone about whom we know so little. Esclarmonde did, however, take a prominent role in the public debate at Pamiers in 1207. According to William de Puylaurens, her presence so disturbed the Cistercian envoy that he dismissed her, saying, 'Go to your distaff, madam. It is

⁵⁹ Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.212-24.

⁶⁰ Raymundus Jaule (Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande, 1238: fol. 39v); Petrus Alric and Arnaldus de Villa Picta (Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande, 1229: fol. 39v); Petrus Boerius and Bernardus Colum (Renneville, 1244: fol. 51r); Petrus Raymundus de Villa Nova (Issel, 1235: fol. 127r); Bernardus Natalis (Issel, 1237: fol. 126v); Raymundus Regaut (Fanjeaux, between 1229 and 1240: fols. 150r, 159v, 162v, 166r); among others.

⁶¹ Professor Walter Wakefield has kindly brought to our attention two examples from the collection Doat of female perfects performing the *consolamentum*. The perfect Marquesia and her companions hereticated a dying matron, Taysseiras de Auca, around 1225 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Collection de Languedoc [Doat], vol. 22, fol. 77r-v). Guillelma den Poncii Durant and her companions received a dying woman into the heresy at Toulouse, sometime around 1230 (Doat, vol. 23, fol. 300). For a third possible instance, see Doat, vol. 23, fol. 23r.

⁶² Testimony of Raymunda Jotglar (ms. 609, fol. 41r).

⁶³ Doat, vol. 23, fols. 1r-49v; ms. 609, fols. 202r-204v; confessions of Arnalda de la Mota.

⁶⁴ ms. 124 (formerly in the *fonds des Dominicains*, H28), fols. 1-2r (confession of Saurina Rigauda), and fol. 7 (fragmentary confession of an unknown *perfecta*).

⁶⁵ Napoléon Peyrat, *Esclarmonde de Foix, princesse cathare* (Toulouse, 1956), p. 147 (cited by Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 50). See also J. M. Vidal, 'Esclarmonde de Foix dans l'histoire et le roman', *Revue de Gascogne* 52 [N.S. 11] (1911) 53-79.

not proper that you should speak at such a gathering.⁶⁶ Perhaps the Cistercian's insult may have been prompted by the lady's effectiveness, for according to the *Chanson de la croisade*, Bishop Foulques of Toulouse held Esclarmonde responsible for numerous conversions at Pamiers.⁶⁷

However, a member of a comital family such as Esclarmonde was in a more favorable position than the majority of *perfectae*. One should therefore be careful of generalizing from her example. In ms. 609, despite 1435 observations of *perfectae* by witnesses, women were reported preaching on only twelve occasions.⁶⁸ To put it another way, of the 318 *perfectae* named in the manuscript, only eleven are definitely known to have preached.⁶⁹ Significantly, the converted heretic Arnalda de la Mota, who gave detailed confessions to both Ferrarius and Bernard de Caux, mentioned having preached only during her three-week stay at Massac with Poncius Hugo. This was over the span of twenty-three years as a *perfecta*.⁷⁰ In direct contrast, it is most unusual to find a *perfectus* who did not preach regularly.

An obvious question now arises: if the *perfecta* was neither a priest nor a preacher, then exactly what role did she play? Gottfried Koch has suggested that Cathar women commonly lived in heretical hospices bearing an analogous relationship to Catholic convents.⁷¹ A careful analysis of ms. 609, while generally supporting the monastic thesis, reveals a far more complex situation than Koch would have it.

Before the advent of the Inquisition, many *perfectae* lived publicly in houses set aside for them. According to witnesses in ms. 609, there were six such houses for men and women in Montesquieu around 1209,⁷² while Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande boasted ten at that time.⁷³ Similar establishments were reported in Le-Mas-Saintes-

⁶⁶ William of Puylaurens, *Chronica*, ed. J. Beyssier (Paris, 1904), p. 435: "Ite domina," inquit, "filiate colum vestram, non interest vestra loqui in hujusmodi concione."

⁶⁷ *Chanson de la croisade albigeoise*, ed. E. Martin-Chabot (Paris, 1957), 2.48-49.

⁶⁸ (1) Fabrisa *et socia* at Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande, 1240 (fol. 41r); (2) Willelma de Campo Longo, at Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande, 1233 (fol. 35v); (3) Domina Bruna, sister of Willelmus de Insula, *et socia*, with the deacon Bertrandus Marti, Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande 1234 (fol. 35v); (4) four unknown *perfectae* with two *perfecti*, Laurac, 1242 (fol. 72v); (5) Raymunda Borda, Laurac, 1238 (fol. 76v); (6) Tholosana *et tres sociae*, Gaja-la-Selve, 1240 (fols. 123v and 196r); (7) Domina Belengueira de Segueruilla, Avignonet, 1233 (fol. 137v); (8) Blancha *et sociae*, Castelnaudary, c. 1205 (fol. 184v); (9) Domina Bruna and Rixenda, Laurac, 1235 (fols. 192v-193r); (10) Willelma Sicharda and Arnalda, Odars, 1241 (fol. 204r); (11) Willelma de Deime, Lanta, 1231 (fol. 201r); (12) unknown *perfecta*, Cambiac, 1227 (fol. 239v).

⁶⁹ See above, n. 68.

⁷⁰ Doat, vol. 23, fol. 10r. See also *ibid.*, fols. 1r-49v and ms. 609, fols. 202r-203v.

⁷¹ Koch, *Frauenfrage*, pp. 49-70.

⁷² Testimony of Arnaldus Picoc, fol. 103r (*mansiones tam hereticorum quam hereticarum*).

⁷³ Testimony of Bernardus Mir (fol. 30r).

Puelles,⁷⁴ Laurac,⁷⁵ Vitrac,⁷⁶ Villeneuve-la-Comptal,⁷⁷ and Cabaret.⁷⁸ Koch, relying largely on the collection Doat and conveniently translating the terms *domus* and *mansiones* as *Frauenkonvente*, dotted the whole Lauragais with convents for heretical women. Thus he asserts that the small *castrum* of Mirepoix contained numerous *Frauenkonvente* at the beginning of the thirteenth century.⁷⁹

The resemblance of the larger houses to Catholic convents also struck contemporaries. In describing the *domus hereticarum de Linars*, Arnalda de la Mota used terms usually reserved for orthodox monasteries. Thus when her mother fell ill, she and her sister agreed that they should all go to Linars, 'where *hereticae* lived under the habit of nuns' ('ubi stabant hereticae sub habitu monialium'), to seek entry into the heretical convent there. This establishment, according to Arnalda, consisted of sixteen *perfectae* ruled by a prioress (*priorissa de Linars*). Significantly, the prioress did not hereticate them herself, but simply allowed them to remain at the hospice until Bernard de la Mota, the deacon assigned to the area, could send *perfecti* to fetch the would-be heretics to him at Lavaur. There, in the house of a *credens*, they finally received the *consolamentum*.⁸⁰

Certainly the higher nobility founded and endowed houses for the *perfectae* of their families. Koch has described several communities limited to noblewomen, most notably the count of Foix's foundations at Dun, Pamiers, and Mirepoix. As in the orthodox *Eigenklöster*, the superiors of these convents were generally drawn from the family of the founder. Thus Raymond-Roger of Foix appointed his wife Philippa abbess of Dun and his sister Esclarmonde abbess of Pamiers.⁸¹ However, Koch, adhering to his hypothesis of class dichotomy, may have overstressed the importance of these Cathar monasteries.⁸² There were other types of foundations. The Inquisitor James Capelli asserted that Cathar deacons maintained hospices for the perfected from the donations of believers.⁸³ Corroborating evidence may be found in a deposition from Montesquieu, in which a witness specifically stated that

⁷⁴ Testimony of Bernardus del Mas, jr. (fol. 16v).

⁷⁵ Testimony of Raymunda Jotglar (fol. 41r); there were at least two houses for women at Laurac in 1240, but they dissolved around 1242, when their *perfectae* fled to Montségur.

⁷⁶ Testimony of Willemus Raymundi (fols. 66v-67r).

⁷⁷ Testimony of Bernarda Veziana (fol. 143v), who stayed as a youth in a heretical hospice with her aunt, Bernarda Recorda.

⁷⁸ Testimony of Maurina, widow of B. Bosquet, *miles* (fol. 180v); when she was a child of seven she stayed with her aunt, Carcassona Martina, in a *domus hereticarum*.

⁷⁹ Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 55, citing the testimony of P. G. Darvinha in Doat, vol. 24, fols. 240r-241v: 'In Mirepoix waren die Frauenkonvente seit dem Anfang des Jh. nicht weniger zahlreich.' The original says simply that there were around fifty houses in which *perfecti* and *perfectae* lived. Here, as elsewhere, Koch fails to distinguish between true *Frauenkonvente* and private homes.

⁸⁰ Doat, vol. 23, fol. 7v.

⁸¹ Koch, *Frauenfrage*, pp. 51-53; Peter des Vaux de Cernay, *Historia Albigensis*, part II, pp. 198-200.

⁸² Koch, *Frauenfrage*, pp. 54-57.

⁸³ James Capelli, *Summa contra hereticos*, trans. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, pp. 303-304.

the heretics were purchasing houses in that town to serve as heretical hospices.⁸⁴ Likewise, certain wealthy *credentes*⁸⁵ gave or loaned their homes for the use of perfects living in or traveling through their *castra*, a practice which had its orthodox parallel in the private hospitals and hospices of Toulouse.⁸⁶

It is quite possible that large-scale establishments were not even the dominant form of the *domus hereticarum*. Although we cannot meaningfully quantify upon this point,⁸⁷ ms. 609 suggests that a large number of *perfectae* lived with their assigned *sociae* (most usually one other woman) in either their own homes or those of their relations. References to such arrangements, especially among upper-class women, are commonplace in the testimonies.⁸⁸ At Le-Mas-Saintes-Puelles, for example, Na Garsen, mother of the town's six lords, and her heretic daughter lived together publicly in their own home for a number of years before the Crusade began, and then from about 1220 through 1225.⁸⁹ Raymundus de Peirelha, the seignior of Montségur, allowed both his perfected mother and mother-in-law to live in his house for some thirty years.⁹⁰ In another instance, interesting also for the light it sheds on local Cathar-Catholic relations, a Catholic sister, Dulcia de Bosqueto, left her cloister to be a *perfecta* in the home of her son, the knight Guillabertus de Bosqueto.⁹¹ Among other examples of this sort are the cases of Adelasia de Cuc, lady of Villeneuve-la-Comptal, and Ava de Varanha, *domina castri de Vasega*.⁹²

Koch's failure to distinguish between monasteries proper and individual homes⁹³ resulted in an overly simplified analysis of the situation. Although further work is needed upon this topic, it would seem that the orthodox parallel to these modest

⁸⁴ ms. 609, fol. 103v.

⁸⁵ e.g., Braida, the perfected aunt of Petrus de Mazerolis, lord of Gaja-la-Selve, lived in a house provided by the Roquevilles (ms. 609, fol. 124r).

⁸⁶ For which see John H. Mundy, 'Charity and Social Work in Toulouse, 1100-1215', *Traditio* 22 (1966) 203-87.

⁸⁷ In the vast majority of cases, no place of permanent or extended residence is given for the *perfectae* sighted. They are simply said to have been seen in a believer's house. For those *perfectae* about whom we have information concerning residence, less than twenty were in convents, while thirty-seven were living in their own or their relations' homes.

⁸⁸ e.g., fols. 16v, 29v, 44r, 61r, 65r, 118r, 124r, 143v, 171v, 180r, 213r, 231v, 232r.

⁸⁹ ms. 609, fols. 16v and 29v.

⁹⁰ ms. 609, fols. 59r and 180r.

⁹¹ ms. 609, 213r. We have found two other examples of Catholic nuns adhering to heresy: Agnes de Bello Podio, sister of Brie (cant. Saverdun), who was hereticated upon her deathbed (ms. 609, fol. 177r); and Joanna de Turre, nun of Lespinasse, sentenced to perpetual incarceration by Bernard de Caux (Douais, *Documents* 2.31).

⁹² ms. 609, fols. 143v and 58r-61r, *passim*.

⁹³ For a discussion of the implications of the term *domus* and the crucial role of the household in the social structure of the medieval Midi, see Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, pp. 51-87, and especially pp. 53-59 for the importance of the *domus* in the propagation and maintenance of heresy in Montaillou.

establishments should be sought not in the larger monasteries for women or men but instead in the contemporary *reclusania* and Humiliati and the later Beguines. Although the settlements of these groups sometimes developed into monasteries or cohesively blocked settlements, as Dayton Phillips has shown for the Beguines of Strassburg,⁹⁴ the majority lived in individual houses. Cathar monasticism in the early thirteenth century thus seems to have reflected all the strains evident in contemporary Catholic monasticism.

Within the Cathar 'convent', whether private home or not, all *perfectae* followed the regimen required of those who had received the *consolamentum*: rigorous fasts three times a year, permanent abstention from meat, milk, and all other products of procreation, chastity, poverty, and the mortification of the flesh. Specified sequences of prayer—usually seven repetitions of the Lord's Prayer—were followed. Two converted *perfectae* described their former duties in remarkably similar terms:

... eating [according to the prescribed diet], praying, fasting, blessing bread from meal to meal, confessing [the *apparellamentum*], adoring heretics [*hereticos adorando*], and doing all other things which *perfecti* and *perfectae* are accustomed to do⁹⁵

and:

... praying, fasting, adoring heretics, hearing their [Isarn de Castres' and his *socius*'] preaching, and doing other things which heretics do and understand must be observed.⁹⁶

Although *perfectae* and orthodox religious women differed in significant respects, notably ordination, on the whole their observances seem to have been similar.

Cathar hospices not only housed *perfectae* but apparently served as seminaries for novices. Although our knowledge of their training is slight, we do know that an extended probationary period was required, so that they could 'be instructed in the mores of the heretics and undergo three fasts, each lasting forty days.'⁹⁷ Before the Albigensian Crusade, girls were known to have received the *consolamentum* at as early an age as nine years,⁹⁸ sometimes at the insistence of their parents and in spite

⁹⁴ D. Phillips, *Beguines in Medieval Strasburg: A Study of the Social Aspect of Beguine Life* (Ann Arbor, 1941).

⁹⁵ Doat, vol. 23, fol. 5r-v: '... comedendo, orando, jejunando, panem benedicendo de mensa in mensem, apparellando, hereticos adorando et omnia alia faciendo, quae heretici et hereticae facere consueverunt.'

⁹⁶ Ms. 609, fol. 184r: '... orando, ieiunando, hereticos adorando, predicationes eorum audiendo, et alia faciendo, quae heretici faciunt et percipiunt observari.'

⁹⁷ Testimony of Raymunda Jotglar (ms. 609, fol. 41r): 'sed dicti heretici noluerunt ipsam testem hereticare donec bene esset instructa secundum mores hereticorum et fecisset primo tres quadragenas.'

⁹⁸ Ms. 609, fol. 20v: testimony of Na Comdors; fol. 161v: testimony of Covinens de Fanjeaux; fol. 144r: testimony of Saura Boneta.

of their own manifest reluctance.⁹⁹ A number of these young girls stayed *perfectae* for only a few years, eventually leaving the ministry and marrying.¹⁰⁰ The extreme youth and, in many instances, the gentle birth of the catechumens suggest that Cathar convents occasionally functioned as seminaries for the daughters of the rural nobility.¹⁰¹ This at least was the interpretation placed upon it by Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's successor as Master General of the Order of Preachers. In discussing the foundation of Prouille, he described its prospective nuns as 'certain noblewomen, whose parents, beset by poverty, sent them to the heretics for their maintenance and instruction.'¹⁰² Once again the model of Catholic practice suggests itself.

Although Cathar houses were led by women, these 'abbesses' were not solely responsible for the spiritual welfare of the monastic community. The convents were visited at regular intervals by the deacons of the district, who, it appears, performed a role similar to Catholic chaplains, preaching and hearing confessions. Thus the well-known Cathar house ruled by Blanche of Laurac was visited by the deacon Isarn de Castres. During his stay there, he heard the confessions of the *perfectae* (the *apparellamentum*), presided over the various rituals and liturgies, and preached sermons attended by the pious *credentes* of the town.¹⁰³ We thus conclude with Guiraud¹⁰⁴ that even the 'most perfected of *perfectae*' were still subordinate to the male hierarchy and that no parity can be established between the superiors of Cathar houses and the deacons.

Data drawn from ms. 609 indicate shifts in both the total number of *perfectae* and the level of their activity (measured by the number of sightings) between 1200 and 1246. Although extreme caution must be used in analyzing dating figures,¹⁰⁵ we

⁹⁹ Arnalda de Fremiac, for example, was forced by her uncle to become a perfect. She remained one for six years (ms. 609, fol. 160v). Similarly, Na Comdors was forcibly made a *perfecta* when she was only nine. After nine months she left the house in which she had been placed (fol. 20v).

¹⁰⁰ e.g., Segura, wife of Willelmus Vitalis (ms. 609, fol. 20v); Willelma d'En Bernardus Raymundi (fol. 114v); Audiardis Ebrarda (fol. 184r).

¹⁰¹ Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.150; H. C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1887; rpt. 1955), 1.250.

¹⁰² 'De principio ordinis Praedicatorum', 1.21 (cited by Guiraud, *ibid.*, p. 150): 'ad susceptionem autem quarumdam mulierum nobilium, quas parentes earum ratione paupertatis erudiendas et nutriendas tradebant haereticis, quoddam instituit monasterium situm inter Fanum Jovis et Montem Regalem, et nomen loci eiusdam Prulianum' (*Acta sanctorum*, 4 August, col. 548).

¹⁰³ Guiraud, *ibid.*, p. 228; Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Guiraud, *ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁵ The variations in the figures for the number of perfected and the number of times they were sighted over time can be partially explained by the manner in which this information was compiled. It would seem reasonable that witnesses would report more fully concerning recent events. This in itself may explain why the number of reported sightings increases as we approach 1240. Moreover, although the decline in numbers after 1240 may represent, as we argue, an actual weakening of the heresy, it may also reflect the reluctance of the witnesses to talk about involvement in the sect after the earlier periods of grace and after their previous confessions.

Furthermore, witnesses had a tendency to date by approximation. Thus the years most frequently

believe such variations reflect stresses upon, and the resultant changes in, the lifestyle of the *perfecta*. Of the 177 individual perfects sighted in the Lauragais before 1217, ninety-one, or 51.4%, were female. These women were seen by witnesses 174 times, thus yielding a 2:1 ratio between the number of sightings and the size of the sample population. This proportion, which we believe measures the average activity level of the *perfectae*, should be contrasted with that of the male Cathars: 10:3 for this same period. Between these early years and the half-decade spanning Simon de Montfort's unsuccessful siege of Toulouse (1217) and the death of Raymond VI (1222), the average activity levels for both sexes remain relatively unchanged, although the number of perfects declined sharply (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

We can draw only the most general conclusions from the data for the early thirteenth century. Even granting the limited number of witnesses old enough to testify about events occurring before 1222, even granting that a great number of remote incidents would have been forgotten, it would still appear that during this period the individual *perfecta* was less visible than her male counterpart. This may be due to the relative seclusion of *perfectae*. Although many ordinary *perfecti* may have practised the contemplative life (there are numerous references to *domus hereticorum* in the manuscript), their movement, on the whole, was not as restricted as that of the *perfectae*. As well as the bishops and deacons, whose duties forced them to travel, the majority of known *perfecti* preferred the wandering life to settled, communal living. A greater percentage of *perfectae* were cloistered, whether in convents or alone with their *socia* in their own homes. It is thus not surprising that they came into contact with *credentes* less often than did male perfects.

With the establishment of the Inquisition in the 1230's and 1240's, settled monastic life became more difficult.¹⁰⁶ It was obviously no longer safe to live publicly in the towns, and consequently *perfectae* sought safer refuges. With the increasing efficacy of the Inquisition and the resulting threat to property, many *perfectae* came under family pressure to abandon heresy. Bernarda Roberta, a *perfecta*, was begged by her daughter to convert. She refused; three days later she was captured and burnt.¹⁰⁷ Two *perfectae* of the noble family of del Mas were

mentioned were 5, 10, 12, 20, and 30 years ago. The situation is not quite as serious for more recent events, although there are still some problems. In Le-Mas-Saintes-Puelles, for example, Willelmus de Canast, Bru, and Raymundus de Na Amielh (fols. 8r and 6v) confessed to having attended the same assembly (the members of the congregation, the perfects present, and the place at which it was held were identical in both confessions); the former, however, claimed that it occurred eight years ago, while the latter placed it some ten years prior to his confession.

Although such problems prevent exact calculations, nevertheless they do not invalidate the value of our conclusions for a comparative study of male and female Cathars.

¹⁰⁶ We generally follow the argument advanced by Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.146 and Koch, *Frauenfrage*, pp. 64-78.

¹⁰⁷ ms. 609, fol. 94r.

removed bodily from their home at Montségur by their relatives, two of whom are known to have once been ardent *credentes*.¹⁰⁸ This was far from an isolated case;¹⁰⁹ increasingly, believers found it prudent to sever contact with their perfected female relations. After having been sheltered by her son for five years, Dulcia de Gozensc and her *socia* were expelled from his house. They crept back at night and were captured there in the morning.¹¹⁰ Willelma Sabateira, who escaped prison around 1242, fled to her relatives for aid. All refused to take her in; two of her brothers-in-

Table 1
Number of Individual Perfects Sighted by Witnesses in ms. 609

Years	No. perfects			Total
	New	Remaining from previous period	Lost from previous period	
Males				
Before 1217	86	0	0	86
1217-22	21	36	50	57
1223-28	56	37	20	93
1229-34	53	62	31	115
1235-40	70	69	46	139
1241-46	55	65	74	120
Females				
Before 1217	91	0	0	91
1217-22	21	22	69	43
1223-28	44	23	20	67
1229-34	42	24	43	66
1235-40	55	23	43	78
1241-46	40	24	55	64

Note. These figures are only approximate. To measure the duration of the ministries of the individual perfects, we have relied upon the earliest and latest sightings by witnesses.

¹⁰⁸ ms. 609, fol. 16v.

¹⁰⁹ In addition to the examples given in the text, see the testimonies of Johannes Ugole de Sancto Martino, fol. 33r (concerning his mother-in-law Willelma Fabrissa) and of Willelmus Graile des Cassers, fol. 226r (about his sister Rixendis).

¹¹⁰ ms. 609, fol. 37v.

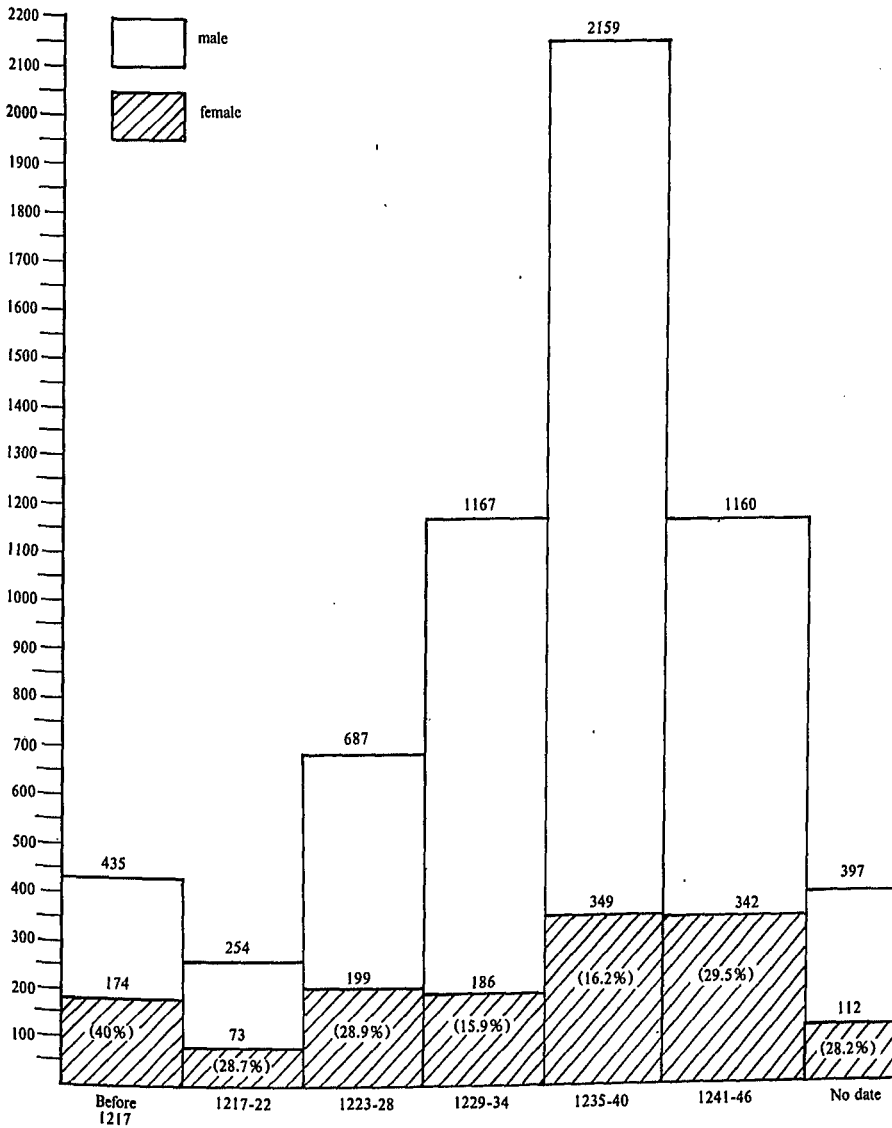


Figure 1. Activity of the Perfects:
Number of Individual Sightings by Year in ms. 609

law and several neighbors finally returned her to the custody of the bishop of Toulouse. Faced with no alternative but death, she chose conversion.¹¹¹ Even such notorious defenders of heresy as the Niort brothers judiciously abandoned both their beliefs and their perfected relatives when their property was placed in direct jeopardy and opposition to the Inquisition seemed hopeless.¹¹²

When the *perfectae* were forced to abandon their settled communal lifestyle, and when their pleas for aid were rebuffed by their frightened relatives, they sought refuge elsewhere. We know of *perfectae* who fled to Montségur¹¹³ and to Lombardy,¹¹⁴ but apparently most chose to remain in the Lauragais, tailoring their lives to the new circumstances. From the mid-1230's on, female Cathars increasingly took to the forests; testimony about heretics encountered in *cabana in nemore* or *barta*, once primarily referring to men, now came to include more and more women. Many preferred the imagined safety of the road to seclusion and, relying upon the hospitality of the devout, traveled from town to town, never lingering too long in any one locality.¹¹⁵ These tendencies are illustrated by the career of Arnalda de la Mota, one of the few *perfectae* for whom we can construct a more or less complete *iter*. Between her childhood heretication in 1209 and 1233 she resided in turn in a number of heretical hospices (1209-12), with her parents in Montauban (c. 1218-23), and with believers in Lavaur, Toulouse, and Lanta. During this phase of her career her sojourns in some twenty-nine residences lasted an average of 31.4 weeks. In marked contrast, she visited forty-three places in the Haute-Garonne between 1234 and her capture in the woods near Sancta Fide in 1243, including huts in the forests, farms, and the homes of believers in Lanta and Odars. These stays averaged only seven weeks; the median was twenty-one days.

Both the female attempt to adopt the peripatetic life and its eventual failure are reflected in our statistics for the period 1223-46. A table of average activity levels for the perfects divided by half decade reveals a steady increase in female activity:

¹¹¹ ms. 609, fols. 58v-59r, 60v.

¹¹² W. L. Wakefield, 'The Family of Niort in the Albigensian Crusade and before the Inquisition', *Names* 18 (1970) 97-117, 286-303.

¹¹³ Testimony of Raymunda Jotglar (ms. 609, fol. 41r).

¹¹⁴ ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, testimony of Guillelmus Carrera (fol. 3v). The incident refers to the early 1250's.

¹¹⁵ The female retreat to the countryside leads us to the fringes of the town-countryside discussion. Unfortunately, the narrow focus of the present effort prevents us from dealing with its full economic and social implications. The interested reader should consult C. Violante, 'Hérésies urbaines et hérésies rurales en Italie du 11^e au 13^e siècle' in *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle 11^e-18^e siècles*, ed. J. Le Goff (Paris, 1968), pp. 171-95. Cf. P. Wolff, 'Villes et campagnes dans l'hérésie cathare', *ibid.*, pp. 203-207.

Table 2
Average Activity Levels of the Perfects as Measured by the Ratio
of the Number of Sightings to the Number of Individuals Named in MS. 609

Years	Sex	
	<i>Perfecti</i>	<i>Perfectae</i>
1223-28	5.3:1	3.0:1
1229-34	8.5:1	2.8:1
1235-40	13.0:1	4.5:1
1241-46	6.8:1	5.3:1

We believe that this rise reflects the increased mobility of the *perfectae* and is partially due to the breakdown of the monastic system. From the time of the Crusade, women had been forced from their communes. Even with the resurgence of heresy in the late 1220's and early 1230's under the benign eyes of the rural seigniors and the attendant reestablishment of Cathar hospices in the Lauragais,¹¹⁶ a number of *perfectae* such as Arnalda de la Mota and Willelma de Campo Longo chose to remain on the road, alternating between the homes of believers and the woods, where *credentes* from the neighboring towns would supply them with necessities.

Choice, however, was removed toward the end of the 1230's. The inquests made it too dangerous to remain in an area for any length of time. Consequently, the *perfectae* were forced to become more mobile and, as a result, more visible. The ratio between the number of sightings of *perfectae* and their population increased a little less than 20% between 1235 and 1246; this is to be contrasted with the accompanying decline in the *perfecti*'s activity by 48%. While male Cathars now had to temper the fervor of their ministry with discretion, replacing at this time their characteristic black robes with a cord worn underneath their clothes, and thus became less visible to the inhabitants of the Lauragais, females were forced from their seclusion. Our statistics for 1241-46 would suggest in fact that the lifestyles of the ordinary male and female perfect may have grown quite similar.

Significantly, in spite of women's increased mobility, their numbers still declined dramatically in the 1240's. As Table 1 shows, the population of *perfectae* in the Lauragais thrived in the later 1230's. This period of prosperity was brought to an end, however, with the inquest of the Inquisitor William Arnald in 1241. The success of the inquest is reflected both in the hostility it evoked (resulting in the

¹¹⁶ E. Griffe, *Le languedoc cathare au temps de la croisade, 1209-1229* (Paris, 1973), pp. 200-203.

'massacre of Avignonet') and the effect it had upon the perfected: their numbers plummeted. While there had been 139 *perfecti* between 1235 and 1240, we can identify 120 individuals for the period 1241-46, a drop of approximately 13.7%. The female population was hurt even more; their numbers fell from seventy-eight *perfectae* to sixty-four, a net loss of 18%.

Thus, even though their own way of life had been destroyed, the *perfectae* apparently could not successfully emulate the masculine model of wandering ministers and preachers (with a few exceptions, most notably Willelma de Campo Longo, who both traveled and preached in the 1240's).¹¹⁷ The reason seems clear: while the appearance of men traveling might have excited little attention or suspicion (and we must remember that the perfects of this period had discarded their distinctive robes), it would have been otherwise with women. Certainly, some women (nobles as well as Koch's weaver women¹¹⁸) had chosen the peripatetic life before it became necessary, but as more women were forced on the road and the number of *credentes* willing to serve as armed guards (*ductores*) declined, the danger of capture increased. There can be little doubt that women were more vulnerable to capture than men. In the post-Meaux period (1229-46) thirty-nine *perfectae* are known to have been captured; of these, ten, we are told, recanted and nineteen were burnt. In spite of their superior numbers, less than twenty *perfecti* are reported in ms. 609 as having been captured; of these, one is known to have recanted and thirteen to have been burnt. Furthermore, as Table 1 shows, only 31% of *perfectae* sighted during the period 1235-40 managed to survive into the 1240's as compared to 47% of *perfecti*.

A few *perfectae* attempted to ease the situation by traveling with male companions. Ramunda Davezac, for example, appears to have had a *socius*, the perfect Ramundus Taissonneiras.¹¹⁹ Similarly, both Arnalda Trobada¹²⁰ and Aurencha Aimerica traveled briefly with *perfecti* (the latter with her brother, Sicre¹²¹); both were subsequently captured when they returned to the more normal pattern of segregated wandering.¹²² Despite the fact that *perfecti-perfectae* traveling arrangements were clearly safer for the female, they were extremely rare.¹²³ Cathar taboos against the mingling of the sexes (especially the prohibition against males

¹¹⁷ ms. 609, fols. 35v, 38v, 72r, 174r, 186v, 188r.

¹¹⁸ e.g., Adelasia de Cuc (fols. 143v, 134r, 66r, 79v); Adelasia de Monte Ferrando (fol. 80r).

¹¹⁹ ms. 609, fol. 76r.

¹²⁰ ms. 609, fol. 197r.

¹²¹ ms. 609, fol. 223r.

¹²² ms. 609, fols. 41r (for Arnalda Trobada), 225r (for Aurencha Aimerica).

¹²³ Guiraud notes that the Cathars of Ax in 1321 traveled with women, to whom they pretended to be married, in order to divert suspicion. The ruse failed because of their reluctance to touch one another physically (Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.95; Döllinger, *Beiträge* 2.149).

and females touching) probably accounts for this; such arrangements must have been excessively awkward.

The onset of the Inquisition and the resulting attack upon the property of the heretics and their supporters thus seem to have caused greater disruption and disorientation among the *perfectae* than the *perfecti*. The downward trend in their numbers that we noted for the 1240's continued during the 1250's. Ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne names 111 separate perfects for the period 1240-56, the vast majority of whom appear in the late 1240's and early 1250's. Of these, twenty-eight, or 25.2%, were female. This is to be compared to 34.4%, the female percentage of perfects in ms. 609 for 1241-46.

There are no references to Cathar convents in the Midi in ms. 124.¹²⁴ On the whole, in fact, the lifestyle of the male and female perfects deposing are rather similar, both being peripatetic. The differences, however, are instructive. Saurina Rigauda, whose confession is given in fols. 1r-2r, testified to having lived for short periods of time (ranging from two days to one month) in the homes of ten believers during her two-year sojourn as a *perfecta* (1251-53). Although the length of her stays was generally greater, the other female deponent, an unknown *perfecta* whose fragmentary confession survives in fol. 7,¹²⁵ also preferred living in towns. Only once do we find her dwelling in a *cabana in nemore*. The remainder of her time was spent in either her own home (one year) or those of various *credentes*. Both she and Saurina Rigauda traveled within a limited radius; the former restricted her movements to the diocese of Pamiers, primarily alternating between Ravat and Verdun, while the latter never strayed far from the Bram-Fanjeaux region (Aude).

Of the twenty places in which Sichard de Ambricio dwelled during the two years described in his testimony (c. 1249-51; fol. 6), only seven were the homes of *credentes*. For the most part, he seems to have avoided the *castra* in favor of the forests (e.g., *nemus de Laramiera in territorio de Toellis*) and fields (e.g., *locus vocatus Lagairuda in Ambricio*). The travels of Guillelmus Carriera (fols. 3r-4v) follow a similar pattern. Neither man spent much time in any one locality; there is no evidence of prolonged residences such as we find in the testimony of 'the unknown *perfecta*'.

Interestingly, there are some indications that *perfectae* may have preached more during this period. Although only males preach in the testimony of Saurina Rigauda, 'the unknown *perfecta*' confessed to having done so herself twice during the late 1240's. Moreover, a year before her heretication, around 1245, she was present at a Cathar meeting at which both male and female ministers addressed the

¹²⁴ But two Cathar hospices in Lombardy owned by Languedocian *perfecti* (Bishop Mecer Vivent of Toulouse at Piacenza and Deacon Raymundus Mercerus at Pavia) received perfects fleeing the Midi: see the testimony of Guillelmus Furnerius (ms. 124, fol. 8).

¹²⁵ The beginning of this testimony is lost; consequently, we never learn the woman's name.

congregation ('audierunt predicationem et monitiones dictorum hereticorum et hereticarum'). In fact, half of the eight *perfectae* named in her confession are said to have preached. We should be careful, however, of overstating the case. In all, only four of the manuscript's twenty-eight *perfectae* played such a role. A woman such as Arsendis Borrela, who preached on at least three separate occasions, was still exceptional in the late 1240's and 1250's. Despite the tenuous nature of our evidence, one might justifiably argue, nevertheless, that the roles played by male and female heretics drew closer in the period of inquisitorial pressure.

The decreasing numerical importance of women in the perfect class is further displayed in the *Registre du notaire ou greffier de l'Inquisition de Carcassonne*, which covers the years 1250 to 1257. Its witnesses reported 133 sightings of heretical ministers, of which fifteen, or only 11.3%, involved *perfectae*. Only four of the twenty-six perfects named in the depositions were female; none of these women were described as having preached or performed the *consolamentum*.

By the time of Bernard Gui, *perfectae* no longer played any significant role in Catharism. The leadership of the early fourteenth-century revival was exclusively male, consisting of Peter Auterius, his brother, and his son. In fact, of the twenty-six perfects known from the register to have been active in Languedoc, only one was female, and she is mentioned far less frequently than her male counterparts. This *perfecta*, Auda Borrela de Limoso (who assumed the name Jacoba¹²⁶), spent most of her life in Lombardy, where she received the *consolamentum*. She returned to Languedoc in the company of a *perfectus*, Philipus de Talayraco de Constanciano,¹²⁷ and is known to have stayed and preached¹²⁸ in the homes of believers in Toulouse. Her sojourn, however, was brief; she soon fell ill (sometime around 1307), and, fearing capture by the Inquisition, placed herself in the *endura*.¹²⁹ Auda Borrela is the last *perfecta* named in our sources.

III

Ms. 609 is an invaluable source for analyzing female lay participation in Catharism during the first half of the thirteenth century. We must, however, be aware of certain problems arising from its use. For example, the number of witnesses admitting to personal belief in the heresy provides only a very rough guide to its popularity in the Lauragais. Only 466 witnesses out of a total 5604, or 8.3%,

¹²⁶ P. van Limborch, *Historia inquisitionis, cui subjungitur Liber sententiarum inquisitionis Tholosanae* (Amsterdam, 1692), 2.76 (fol. 33).

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 70 (fol. 30b).

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 76 (fol. 33). The *endura* was suicide by starvation to prevent the possible defilement of the *consolamentum*.

confessed to ever having held heretical beliefs. This figure, while not intrinsically implausible, does seem rather low for the 'hotbed of heresy'. In fact, if we compare the number of those implicated to those admitting involvement in a sample town, Villesisclé (ms. 609, fols. 180v-183v), we find that although witnesses implicated sixty-five persons (thirty-five males and thirty females), only two individuals, a man and a woman, were willing to confess to their own involvement. A similar situation prevailed at Auriac: ten admissions, representing five males and five females, compared to 129 individuals implicated by others (seventy-six males, fifty-three females). Such discrepancies most probably are to be attributed to those who either chanced lying to the inquisitors¹³⁰ or failed to appear before them, either because of flight or concealment.

Although the total undoubtedly underestimates the strength of the heresy in the Midi, we can still obtain a fairly accurate overall portrait of the relative involvement of male and female believers from their confessions. On this point, we find that, of the 466 self-declared former adherents of Catharism, only 125, or 26.8%, were women. This figure is significantly lower than the proportion of women in the total sample of witnesses: 31.8% (1,783 out of 5,604). Moreover, a smaller percentage of the female deponents (7%) confessed to belief than did male (9%).¹³¹ In regard to this, it should also be noted that the modest level of female participation indicated by ms. 609 is confirmed by the 'Sentences of Bernard de Caux' (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale ms. lat. 9992, fols. 151-162), in which only 43 of the 197 individuals sentenced, or 22%, were female. Thus our sources would suggest that, if female involvement in lay Cathar society was in any way disproportionate to their numbers in the Lauragais, it was disproportionately low.

There is also no indication that female believers during this period (1200-46) were any more active in the Cathar faith than their male counterparts. Although, as we have seen, in ms. 609 women constituted about 27% of those admitting belief, they were implicated on only 21% of those occasions when *credentes* were mentioned by witnesses (2,177 out of 10,323). While this may seem to argue for a *less* active body of female believers, one must take into account the possible bias of our data group. If female witnesses tended to come into contact with *credentes* of

¹³⁰ Because of the previous inquests in the area and the harsh penalties imposed upon those who lied, such behavior was perhaps less common than one might expect. Nevertheless, there are clear examples. Thus Willelma, wife of Bernardus Unaud de Lanta, testified that Willelmus Oliverii denied the accusation of two perfects that he had participated in the capture of heretics, maintaining that he was their friend and supporter, although he did deny being such whenever he was asked ('et dictus W. Oliverii excusabat se et dicebat quod ipse W. erat amicus hereticorum et sustentator eorum ... sed dissimulabat aliquando ne diceretur quod ipse erat amicus vel credens hereticorum'; ms. 609, fol. 95v). In his own testimony (fol. 96v) Willelmus Oliverii denied any complicity.

¹³¹ The chi-square test indicates that this tendency of men to admit involvement in the heresy is significantly greater than women's, $\chi^2 = 5.8567$, with one degree of freedom, $p < .05$.

their own sex more often than males did, then ms. 609, with its superior number of male deponents, would underestimate the true level of female activity. In fact, when we compare two random samples of depositions, one given exclusively by males and the other by females, we find that, although both sexes implicated more men than women, women testified against female believers twice as often as men did. Thus in the female sample there are 252 statements implicating others in various heretical activities (such as adoring or harboring perfects). Of these, ninety-two, or 36.5%, refer to other women. In contrast, an equal number of male deponents made 540 such statements, of which only ninety-eight, or 18.1%, were directed against women.¹³² If we combine the two samples, the level of female activity rises to about 24%. These results would suggest at least two conclusions: first, that the register does indeed underestimate the amount of female participation in heretical activities; second, that the average female *credens* may still have been less active than the male.

The roles of male and female believers grew increasingly divergent between 1200 and 1246. Before the establishment of the Inquisition, the heresy actually required little from its followers. There were few financial demands besides the legacies expected from deathbed heretics.¹³³ Instead of tithes, it asked only charity for its ministers in the form of food and lodging. Believers were also expected to perform the conventional gesture of respect—genuflecting three times before the perfected and asking their blessing—a ritual which they themselves referred to as the *melioramentum* and which the inquisitors termed *adoratio*. Pious *credentes*, although unwilling to take upon themselves the restricted life of the perfected, could hope to receive the *consolamentum* upon their deathbeds. In the meantime, they attended heretical assemblies and listened to the preaching of the ‘good men’.

During this early period, male and female adherents engaged in similar activities. Both adored heretics and heard their preaching; both participated in the Cathar rituals of the *apparellamentum* (self-correction), the symbolic repast (partaking of bread blessed by the perfects), and the *consolamentum*. Moreover, although assemblies were occasionally segregated by sex, more usually males and females attended together. In fact, the main difference between the roles played by each sex was in the incidental services performed for the perfects. For example, in the ‘Sentences of Bernard de Caux’ we discover one man who built a *cabana* for some

¹³² The random samples of witnesses consisted of 200 females and 200 males. When we test the difference between the two proportions obtained in our samples, we find it to be significant at the .001 level, $Z = 4.1178$.

¹³³ This varied according to the individual’s social status, ranging from the 500 shillings Melgueil (250 shillings of Toulouse) bestowed by Rotgerius de Turre, *miles* (ms. 609, fol. 71v) to the 4 shillings of Toulouse given by W. Guasberti (fol. 122r). Such gifts could also be rendered in kind, as with the *sextarium frumenti* left the heretics by Petrus Ysarnus de Lanta (fol. 78r), or could be borrowed from others (fol. 54r).

heretics;¹³⁴ in another section, we encounter a woman who baked bread for the perfects.¹³⁵ Interestingly, however, the most important such service, the receiving and holding of contributions, appears to have been shared proportionately by men and women. Thus in the 'Sentences', 8.3% of the women and 8.6% of the men against whom we have detailed charges served the heretics in this capacity.¹³⁶ The diminutive size of the sample, however, prevents us from pressing this argument.

During the 1230's and 1240's, the social and political climate grew increasingly unfavorable for Catharism. In this environment sex-determined roles developed among the *credentes*. As travel grew more hazardous, the perfects were forced to rely more upon those believers willing to serve as guides and armed guards (*ductores*). Likewise, the *nuncii hereticorum*, laymen who traveled with the heretics, arranging safe lodgings for them and announcing their presence to the local faithful, became essential. All these functions, as well as others that entailed mobility and possible violence (most notably the rescue of captured perfects),¹³⁷ were generally filled by men. This is dramatically revealed in the 'Sentences'. While almost half of the males about whom we have detailed information (a category that excludes those sentenced *in absentia*) were accused of being *ductores*,¹³⁸ no women fall into this class. It is true that occasionally females appear as such in ms. 609,¹³⁹ but these references are most rare and are insignificant compared to the numbers of male *ductores* mentioned. On the other hand, the average female *credens* was as likely to be a 'receiver of heretics' (*receptator*) as the male. Such at least was the case for those implicated in ms. 609 by witnesses from Auriac and Villesisclé.¹⁴⁰ There is even some indication that this understates the likelihood of women acting in such a capacity; in the 'Sentences of Bernard de Caux' 50% of the women sentenced¹⁴¹ were charged with harboring perfects in their homes as opposed to only 26% of the men.¹⁴²

To complete our sketch of the female *credentes* in the first half of the thirteenth century we must address ourselves to two further questions: how well informed were these women about Cathar doctrines, and what influence did family ties have upon their adherence to the heresy? As was the case with contemporary Catholics, the levels of theological understanding and the intensity of commitment varied widely

¹³⁴ Douais, *Documents* 2.32.

¹³⁵ *ibid.* 2.27, 81.

¹³⁶ 3 of 36 women and 10 of 116 men.

¹³⁷ Douais, *Documents* 2.33, 43, 67.

¹³⁸ 55 of 116 men.

¹³⁹ e.g., Raymunda, wife of Petrus de la Peira (ms. 609, fol. 183r).

¹⁴⁰ In Auriac, 24% of all female believers were *receptatores* (13 of 53), while 25% of the male believers were so implicated (19 of 76). Similarly, in Villesisclé, 36.7% of female believers and 37.1% of male believers harbored perfects in their homes.

¹⁴¹ 18 of 36. An additional seven were condemned *in absentia*.

¹⁴² 30 of 116. Again this excludes the thirty-eight men condemned *in absentia*.

among Cathar believers.¹⁴³ Before the establishment of the Inquisition, Catharism seems to have had its full share of perfunctory adherents. In ms. 609, some 346 of the 466 witnesses who confessed to having had faith in the heresy were questioned by the inquisitors about the teachings of the perfects. Apparently, the Friars Bernard and Jean were most interested in five major 'errors': the creation of the visible world by the devil; the impossibility of the resurrection of the flesh; and the inefficacy of baptism, the eucharist, and marriage. The results of this interrogation reveal an equal degree of theological ignorance among believers of both sexes. Thus only 53% of those questioned claimed acquaintance with one of the heresy's basic tenets, the evil god's creation of the material world. Furthermore, only 196, or 57%, were aware that Catharism disapproved of the Church's sacraments, while a full quarter professed their complete ignorance of all Cathar doctrine. A few claimed, ironically, that any knowledge they had of the sect's theological teachings came from the Catholic clergy's diatribes against the heresy.¹⁴⁴

In many cases, adherence was both shallow and confused. One dying woman received both extreme unction and the *consolamentum*.¹⁴⁵ Another abandoned her belief in Catharism after being advised by a perfect that the candle she intended to burn in church to the Virgin Mary would serve a far more useful function in her home.¹⁴⁶ A noblewoman confessed that she never believed *firmly* that the heretics were 'good men', but vacillated between belief and disbelief.¹⁴⁷ One man, Poncius Estiou of Baziège, remained a strong supporter of the heretics until he heard their preaching; horrified by their 'errors', he returned to the Church.¹⁴⁸ All this hints at the possibility that Catharism's appeal in the Midi owed more to the lifestyle adopted by its ministers than to its dogma. This was well understood by Jordan of Saxony, who, writing of the origins of the Dominicans, had the bishop of Osma lecture his companions: 'See the heretics! It is by the appearance of sanctity, and by the spectacle of an evangelical poverty and austerity that they win over the

¹⁴³ For some discussion of orthodox religiosity in southern France during the first decades of the fourteenth century see Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, pp. 465-522.

¹⁴⁴ e.g., the testimony of Willelmus de Castilho, *miles* (ms. 609, fol. 110r). See also Arnaudus de Cletenx dels Cassers (ms. 609, fol. 222v).

¹⁴⁵ ms. 609, fol. 75v.

¹⁴⁶ ms. 609, fol. 108r.

¹⁴⁷ ms. 609, fol. 22r, the testimony of Domina Flors, wife of Gualhardus de Manso: 'dixit quod non credidit firmiter hereticos esse bonos homines, sed quotiens credebat ipsos esse bonos et quotiens discredebat.' See also the testimony of Domina Helis (ms. 609, fol. 108r). Cf. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 535: 'Nous n'oublierons pas non plus qu'entre les tenants du Catharisme et les croyants des dogmes romains, la frontière est floue, aisément franchie, dans les deux sens, par les mêmes personnes, qui n'hésitent point à *pêcher sur les deux rives*. Beaucoup dépend à ce propos du réseau changeant des relations professionnelles ou amicales, qu'entretient chaque individu avec autrui.'

¹⁴⁸ ms. 609, fol. 58v.

simple.¹⁴⁹ One deponent even explained his heretical affiliations in such terms: 'he never believed that the heretics were "good men"; he believed, however, that their works were good, even if their faith was bad.'¹⁵⁰

When we can identify the family connections of female adherents in ms. 609, they are usually rife with heresy. This phenomenon, first noted by Molinier and discussed in more detail by Dmitrevsky,¹⁵¹ is perhaps most clearly seen in an exception. When the younger Willelmus del Mas accompanied his mother to a heretical meeting at Laurac, he deliberately refrained from adoring the perfects present. Annoyed by this, the heretics berated him soundly for his coolness, complaining quite accurately that he alone of his family refused to support the heresy.¹⁵² What was true of the del Mas was equally true of those families related to them through marriage; it is the rare Roqueville, de Quiders, or de Segreville who did not at some time participate in the religion. The extent to which heresy was rampant among the noble families of the Lauragais is, in fact, quite remarkable.¹⁵³ One need only consider the lords of Villèle, of Fanjeaux, and of Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande to see how common the situation of the del Mas was in the early thirteenth century. Even those who remained personally orthodox, moreover, were drawn into heresy by their family ties. Thus Willelmus Garsias, a knight of Fanjeaux, attempted to justify his support of the heretics by declaring that his filial duty demanded it.¹⁵⁴ The historian William de Puylaurens relates a similar anecdote: when Bishop Foulques asked the Catholic knight Pons d'Adhémar de Rodelle why he tolerated heresy in his lands, the knight responded that he could not expel them, since he, like so many other Catholic nobles, had been raised among them, was related to them, and saw them living pure and honest lives.¹⁵⁵ As Molinier observed, heresy was a family heritage for many believers.¹⁵⁶

We can roughly quantify from ms. 609 the degree to which family ties were related to individual religious preferences. In Auriac, for example, of the fifty-three female *credentes* implicated, thirty-eight, or 72%, had one or more relatives also engaged in heresy. In fact, twenty-six of them appear at the assemblies accompanied by their husbands. A similar situation is found in Villesisclé, where twenty-one of

¹⁴⁹ *Acta sanctorum*, 4 August, col. 544: 'En haeretici dum speciem praeferunt pietatis, dum euangelicae parsimoniae et austeritatis mentiuntur exempla, persuadent simplicibus vias suas'; cf. Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.349-50.

¹⁵⁰ ms. 609, fol. 157v: 'credebat quod heretici numquam fuerunt boni homines; opera tamen eorum credebat esse bona et fidem malam.'

¹⁵¹ Molinier, *L'Inquisition* (see above, n. 44), p. 90; Dmitrevsky, 'Notes', 303-11.

¹⁵² ms. 609, fol. 17v; also cited by Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.285.

¹⁵³ Guiraud, *Histoire* 1, chaps. 10 and 11.

¹⁵⁴ ms. 609, fol. 164v.

¹⁵⁵ William of Puylaurens, *Chronique 1203-1275*, ed. J. Duvernoy (*Sources d'histoire médiévale* 8; Paris, 1976), pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁶ Molinier, *L'Inquisition*, p. 90.

the thirty women partaking in heretical activities, some 70%, were related by either blood or marriage to other believers.

We believe that the explanation of our findings on the quality of faith and the influence of family ties upon the *credentes* should be sought in the status that Catharism had in the pre-Inquisition Midi. By the mid-thirteenth century, Catharism had been an established church in Languedoc for at least three generations. It is more than possible that the Cathars of the 1240's had been born into the religion, and had followed it simply as the faith of their parents, without ever having made a conscious choice. The perfects' diatribes against procreation and marriage have perhaps disguised the essentially social nature of the heresy from some historians.¹⁵⁷ Ironically, the strength of the sect lay largely in the family bonds that united its congregation.

With the coming of the Inquisition, *credentes* could no longer accept indifferently the traditional faith of their families. Difficult choices were demanded of many. As we have seen, the *perfectae*, no longer sheltered by their kin, disappeared as a class under this pressure. Many witnesses denied their former beliefs, and in many cases sacrificed their relatives to their own safety. The shallow, perfunctory members of the sect fell away, as Catharism became more and more a hunted 'heresy' instead of an alternative church. The *credentes* who remained firm displayed, unsurprisingly, a higher level of commitment.

Female believers showed a higher level of involvement in heresy as our period progressed. The Inquisition at Carcassonne recorded the depositions of forty-two witnesses, covering 1250-57, with the following results:

	women	men	total	% women
witnesses:	14	28	42	31.9
witnesses admitting involvement:	5	11	16	31.2
<i>credentes</i> implicated:	58	92	150	38.7
perfects implicated:	15	118	133	11.0
total number of individual perfects:	4	22	26	15.4
deathbed heretications:	5	3	8	62.5

Similar results, moreover, are obtained from an analysis of the contemporary MS. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, wherein four former

¹⁵⁷ Guiraud, *Histoire* 1.99; E. Vacandard, *The Inquisition: A Critical and Historical Study of the Coercive Power of the Church*, trans. B. L. Conway (New York, 1908), pp. 90-94; A. S. Turberville, *Medieval Heresy and the Inquisition* (London, 1920), pp. 22-32. But cf. Oldenbourg, *Massacre*, pp. 66-67.

perfecti and two former *perfectae* testified against believers 1,119 times. On about 30% of these occasions women were implicated. Females may have been even more active than this percentage would indicate, for once again we must account for a biased sample group. While male perfects appear to have encountered three times as many male believers as female ones, the *perfectae* of ms. 124 implicated men and women equally.

Clearly then, the role of women within the heresy had changed somewhat between the 1240's and the 1250's. In both the Carcassonne register and ms. 609, women formed only about 30% of the sample group. But while women had been implicated at a lesser rate than their proportion of the sample would warrant in ms. 609, in the Carcassonne register they were implicated at a greater rate. It would seem from this that female believers participated more fully in the sect after the introduction of the Inquisition.

How should we explain this? As we have already seen, the number of the *perfectae* declined markedly during the 1250's.¹⁵⁸ A parallel increase in the proportion of women receiving the *consolamentum* on their deathbeds may also be observed. In ms. 609, thirty-four of the 134 reported deathbed heretications were of women, representing about 25%. In the Carcassonne register, on the other hand, 62.5% were of women. This change may be due partially to the decline of the *perfectae* class during this period. As Gottfried Koch noted, pious women who would formerly have become perfects found that position unavailable and were consequently compelled to wait until the end of their lives to receive the *consolamentum*.¹⁵⁹ This situation, moreover, was peculiar to women, for men were still being hereticated during their lifetimes.

The *Liber sententiarum* of Bernard Gui, covering the period 1307-23, reveals that this trend also characterized the Peter Auterius revival. Female *credentes* appear to have played a numerical role more nearly proportionate to their percentage of the general population. Thus of the sentences of Cathars in this register, 42.2% refer to women. Eliminating duplications as best we can, we find that some 515 individual Cathars were sentenced in all, of whom 230, or 45%, were female.¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, it seems that female believers played an active role in the heresy at this time. One sentence itemizes the 'offenses' of a female believer sentenced to prison:

Arnalda, the wife of the aforesaid Raymundus de Bello Videre ... adored the heretics....
Moreover, she ate from the blessed bread of the heretics. She looked on, took part in,

¹⁵⁸ See above, pp. 239-40.

¹⁵⁹ Koch, *Frauenfrage*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ See also the figures given by S. R. Maitland, *Facts and Documents Illustrative of the History, Doctrine, and Rites of the Ancient Albigensians and Waldensians* (London, 1832), pp. 216-19.

and consented when Petrus Sancius was made a heretic and received into the order and sect of the heretics by Petrus Auterius in the home of the witness and her husband. Furthermore, she took in and received the said Petrus Sancius, the heretic ... and she herself served him many times and in many things. Furthermore, she commended the life and sect of the heretics to various persons, inducing them to love and believe in them. She received gifts for the heretics and delivered them. Furthermore, she made a pact or a 'convenenza' that she wished to be received into their sect and order at the end of her life.¹⁶¹

A statistical breakdown of the offenses of all those sentenced to imprisonment reveals that the relative activities of male and female believers had actually changed little from the time of Bernard de Caux. Thus of those men sentenced *ad murum* about whom we have detailed charges, sixty-nine of the 133, about 52%, had served the heretics as *receptatores*, while a little over 38% had been *ductores*. Furthermore, all seven *nuncii* represented in the sample were male. In contrast, among women, while half of the ninety-six had harbored heretics within their homes, none had served as *ductores*. In at least one respect, however, the roles did appear to change: females now were less fully involved in the financial aspects of Catharism. Thus while 10.5% of the male believers received and held funds intended for the perfects, only 7.3% of the women were so engaged. Moreover, the evidence indicates that while men were more likely to give charity in the form of cash (9.8% of male believers did so compared to 8.3% of the female), women were far more likely to provide the heretics with food and clothing (39.8% of the men did so compared to 55% of the women). In other respects, such as participation in the Cathar rituals and the adoring of heretics, the two sexes differed little.

Impressed by their high level of activity, certain historians have described female *credentes* as especially ardent in their attachment; one went so far as to declare that the *nuncii hereticorum*, 'who consecrated themselves absolutely to the service of the heretical ministers', appeared lukewarm in their devotion compared to these women.¹⁶² The data gathered from the *Liber* (see Table 3) belies this. Although women constituted 42.3% of those sentenced to perpetual imprisonment and

¹⁶¹ Limborch, *Historia* 2.49: 'Arnalda uxor Raymundi predicti de Bello Videre ... adoravit hereticos.... Item comedit de pane benedicto hereticorum. Item vidit et interfuit et consenciit quando Petrus Sancii fuit factus hereticus seu receptus ad ordinem et sectam hereticorum per Petrum Auterii in domo ipsius et viri sui. Item dictum Petrum Sancii hereticum tenuit et recepit ... et ipsa servivit sibi multociens et in multis. Item commendavit vitam et sectam hereticorum aliquibus personis, inducendo ad amorem et credenciam eorum. Item recepit aliqua donaria pro hereticis et reddidit eis. Item fecit pactum seu convenenciam hereticis quod vellet recipi in fine suo ad sectam et ordinem ipsorum.'

¹⁶² Molinier, *L'Inquisition*, p. 118: 'Les hommes, ceux-là mêmes que les inquisiteurs appellent dans leur langage *nuncii hereticorum*, et qui se sont consacrés absolument au service des prêtres hérétiques, sont froids auprès d'elles' [women believers]. See also Borst, *Katharer*, p. 182; Alphandéry, *Les idées morales*, p. 71; Oldenbourg, *Massacre*, p. 60.

Table 3
Analysis of the *Liber sententiarum* of Bernard Gui,
Inquisitor for the Toulousain, 1307-21

	Female	Male	% Female
Cathar <i>credentes</i> sentenced <i>ad murum strictum</i>	11	12	47.8
Cathar <i>credentes</i> sentenced <i>ad murum largum</i>	94	131	41.8
Cathar <i>credentes</i> sentenced to crosses	73	98	42.7
Cathar perfects burnt	0	4	0
Relapsed converts released to the secular arm	8	21	27.6
Cathars condemned posthumously	33	24	57.9
Cathars released from wearing crosses	69	77	47.3
Cathars released from prison	45	91	33.1
Total number of Cathars	341	468	42.2
Non-Cathars sentenced	35	88	28.5
Total number of non-Cathars and Cathars	376	556	40.3
<i>Perfecti/ae</i>	1	25	4.0
Deathbed heretications	58	27	68.2

Note. Our figures should be compared with those compiled by the Rev. S. R. Maitland, *Facts and Documents Illustrative of the History, Doctrine, and Rites of the Ancient Albigensians and Waldensians* (London, 1832), pp. 216-19.

42.7% of those ordered to wear crosses (a less severe punishment), they were far less well represented among those sentenced to death. Thus all four perfects burnt were male, and only 27.6% of those who relapsed into heresy and thus exposed themselves to the death penalty were women. Moreover, in spite of historians' claims to the contrary,¹⁶³ there is no evidence that women proselytized more than men. Indeed, the percentage of males condemned to imprisonment who are said to have 'commended the life and sect of the heretics' is approximately equal to that of females similarly sentenced and accused.¹⁶⁴ This would seem to cast doubts upon their supposed superior fervor.

As in the register of Carcassonne, we find here that more women than men received the *consolamentum* upon their deathbeds. There are two sources of

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Fifteen men, representing 11.3% of those males sentenced concerning whom we have detailed charges, as compared to eleven women, or 11.5% of the females sentenced.

evidence for this statement: first, the actual references to such ceremonies in passing in the sentences; and second, the posthumous condemnations for this act. Women formed 68.2% of the former (fifty-eight of eighty-five) and 57.9% of the latter group (thirty-three of fifty-seven), figures comparable to the 62.5% obtained from the Carcassonne register. This is not to say that there was anything peculiarly feminine about the desire for eventual heretication, for a slightly greater percentage of men sentenced to imprisonment had contracted to receive the *consolamentum* upon their deathbed (the so-called 'convenenza') than did women.¹⁶⁵ It is therefore likely that the explanation previously advanced for this phenomenon, namely, that a far greater number of male believers were siphoned off into the perfect-class, also pertains here.

IV

We have found that women formed at most a percentage of the Cathar community proportionate to their share of the general population. While there is some evidence that they formed a greater percentage of the Cathar ministry than that of the contemporary Catholic Church, it also seems that women were not nearly as well represented among the sect's lay believers. Furthermore, in most cases where information is available, female Cathars (both perfects and *credentes*) were related by blood or marriage to others involved in the heresy; in fact, it would appear that whole families rather than individuals participated in the sect. These observations lead us to a tentative rejection of the *Frauenfrage* as applied specifically to Languedocian Catharism. The question of the separate motivation of women in entering heresy should be abandoned, and instead the problem should be formulated not in narrow sexual terms but placed in a wider societal context. In order to understand why the women of southern France became Cathars, historians must examine why a segment of Languedocian society was predisposed toward heresy.¹⁶⁶

As well as examining the numerical proportion of female participation in the sect, we have also examined the role Catharism offered women. Our sources indicate that Catharism, like contemporary Catholicism, allowed pious women a single institutional outlet for their religious enthusiasm—the monastic life. The *perfectae*, although capable in theory of exercising a sacerdotal function, were in practice denied sacramental power. Instead, during the first half of the thirteenth century they were largely confined to hospices, which bore more than a passing resemblance to Catholic convents. When the breakdown of the socio-political system that had

¹⁶⁵ Forty-four men, or 33.1%, and twenty-five women, or 26%.

¹⁶⁶ More studies of the scope of Le Roy Ladurie's recent *Montaillou* must be done before the historian can feel confident in explaining the growth and endurance of heresy in the French Midi.

protected the Cathar Church had been completed by Crusade and Inquisition, that monastic existence, which required a secure, stationary life, became impossible. Although in theory Catharism could have provided an alternative role for women, that of wandering priest and preacher, in reality it did not. Thus when the hospices disappeared, the active role of religious women in the heresy went with it. Within a generation, the *perfectae* were all but extinct.

Catharism in pre-Crusade Languedoc was evidently an alternative established Church. The attitude of the female believers must be seen in this context. By 1240 Catharism had been already established in the Midi for three generations. Many of those who were condemned by the Inquisition had been born into Catharism, and consequently their attitude toward it did not differ in essence from that of Catholic laymen toward their faith. Thus their belief contained an element of customary adherence, marked by ignorance of theology, confusion, and, sometimes, indifference.

It was not until the Inquisition had forced the Cathar religion into the role of an underground cult that this changed. Now that the possibility of being a casual adherent of Catharism had evaporated, those women who chose either to remain in the faith or enter it for the first time, of necessity felt and exhibited a higher level of commitment. This, coupled with the decline of the *perfectae*-class, produced a body of female believers who were more actively involved in the religion.

Our essay is intended only as a preliminary investigation of a complex problem. The tentative conclusions and results, however, that we have been able to draw, as well as the statistical approach that we have advocated, will, we hope, prove helpful to future scholars.

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