THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LANGUEDOCIAN CATHARISM

Richard Abels and Ellen Harrison

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.' 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.'

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

---

3 See especially P. Alphandéry, Les idées morales chez les hétérodoxes latins au début du xiiie siècle (Bibliothèque de l'Ecole 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. Turevber, G. Coulton, C. Douais, A. Dondaine, and Y. Dossat) or Cathar theology (among others, C. Thouzeli and R. Manseli), 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 Ketzerturn im Mittelalter* in 1962. 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. 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. 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 Ketzerturn 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). 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 weedwoman the salvation motif was of foremost importance; for the upper-class adherent it played a much inferior role.

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

---

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 Ketzerium 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.


11 Koch, ibid., p. 63.


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

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, it 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, did achieve positions of authority and respect within the Church, such establishments were in short supply during the early thirteenth century. 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. L. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters* [Munich, 1890; rpt. New York, 1960], 233, 35, 320). This virulent condemnation of pregnancy alienated a number of women. Airmersens, 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 heretic dixerunt ipsi testi, coram omnibus, quia erat pregans adolescentula, quod demonium portabat in ventre et alii eepuerunt ridere. Inde ... ipsa testis noluit diligere [hereticos] postquam dixerunt sibi heretice quod pregans erat de demonio’ (ms. 609 of the Bibliothèque Municipale de Toulouse, fol. 239v). See also the testimony of Na Pagana of Maurens (ms. 609, fol. 117v).


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. Furthermore, since anyone who had received the consolamentum could confer it upon others, a woman could theoretically perform the sacrament. 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.

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 carnis hominum et mulierum Sathanas dominus istius mundi fecerat differentiam, ...’
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. 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. 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, 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.

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

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.
1258, 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.

The great inquest of 1245-46 was designed to reach all males over fourteen years and all females over twelve. In actuality, we can be fairly certain that this goal was not fully realized. Only 31.8% of witnesses deposing were female. 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’. Similarly, illness did not seem to excuse women from testifying before Bernard and Jean. 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. 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.

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 Guillema 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.
unwillingness to incriminate oneself, and fear of reprisal from implicated neighbors\textsuperscript{34} 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'.\textsuperscript{35}

This inquest, moreover, was the third to be conducted in the region.\textsuperscript{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.'\textsuperscript{37}

Citizens of several Lauragais communities had formed conspiracies of silence at the time of the first inquests of 1241/42.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{40} It

\textsuperscript{34} Ms. 609, fols. 2v, 8v, 161v, 166v, 234r-v.

\textsuperscript{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).

\textsuperscript{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.

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

\textsuperscript{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.

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

\textsuperscript{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 Auriauc; although the conspiracy was exposed by two witnesses, 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.' 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, unrepeatable ordeal.

Two other collections enable us to extend our study into the 1250's. Ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, Toulouse 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. Although it provides invaluable information on the everyday workings of the tribunal, 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: 'feci dictum de non revelando heresim, negavit scierent coram nobis veritatem, et eandem celavit alii 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 credebat et dicebatur ab alios quod negotium inquisitionis esset extinctum, et tota terra esset liberata, et non fieret de cetero inquisito' (ms. 609, fol. 140v).
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 Albis, 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 Ambart, baiilius de Vauro, cepit eam pro facto heresia; 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 ministers\(^{50}\) 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 notice\(^{54}\) 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 heretics. The inquisitorial registers label the former heretic 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. 109r) 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 men\textsuperscript{56}), 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\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 $Z < -1.65$ 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.

\textsuperscript{56} Guiraud, Histoire 1.227-28.
\textsuperscript{57} Sacchoni, Summa, trans. Wakefield and Evans, Heresies, p. 331.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 335; A. Dondaine, ed., \textit{Un traité néo-manichéen du \textit{xiii}e siècle: le Liber de duobus principis, 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 duob 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 filiis.’
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

60 Raymundus Jaule (Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande, 1238: fol. 39v); Petrus Alric and Arnaldus de Villa Picata (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 heretcated a dying matron, Tayseiras de Auca, around 1225 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Collection de Langueoc [Doat], vol. 22, fol. 777r-v). Guillema den Ponci 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 Joitgar (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 Dominicaus, H28), fols. 1-2r (confession of Saurina Rigauda), and fol. 7 (fragmentary confession of an unknown perfecta).
not proper that you should speak at such a gathering.'

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.

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. To put it another way, of the 318 *perfectae* named in the manuscript, only eleven are definitely known to have preached. Significantly, the converted heretic Arnaldo 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 Poncious Hugo. This was over the span of twenty-three years as a *perfecta*. 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. 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, while Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande boasted ten at that time. Similar establishments were reported in Le-Mas-Saintes-

---


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 Merti, Saint-Martin-de-la-Lande 1234 (fol. 35v); (4) four unknown *perfectae* with two *perfecti*, Laurac, 1242 (fol. 72v); (5) Raymund Borda, Laurac, 1238 (fol. 76v); (6) Tholosna et tres sociae, Gaja-la-Selve, 1240 (fols. 123v and 196r); (7) Domina Belenguéira de Seugueilla, Avignonet, 1233 (fol. 137v); (8) Blanca et sociae, Castelnaudary, c. 1205 (fol. 184v); (9) Domina Bruna and Rixenda, Laurac, 1235 (fols. 192v-193r); (10) Wilhelma Sicharda and Arnalda, Odars, 1241 (fol. 204r); (11) Wilhelma 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, Laurac, Vitrac, Villeneuve-la-Comptal, and Cabaret. 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.

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 prioresse (priorissa de Linars). Significantly, the prioresse 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.

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. However, Koch, adhering to his hypothesis of class dichotomy, may have overstressed the importance of these Cathar monasteries. There were other types of foundations. The Inquisitor James Capelli asserted that Cathar deacons maintained hospices for the perfected from the donations of believers. 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 Raymundus 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. 54-57.
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 credentes⁸⁵ 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).
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 Lespinaisse, 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 do.\(^{95}\)

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

\(^{95}\) Doat, vol. 23, fol. 5r-v: '... comedendo, orando, jejunando, panem benedicendo de mensa in mense, 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 perciipient observari.'
\(^{97}\) Testimony of Raymund Jotgllar (MS. 609, fol. 41r): 'sed dicti heretici noluerunt ipsum testim heretricare donec bene set instructa secundum mores hereticorum et facissent primo tres quadragensas.'
\(^{98}\) 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. A number of these young girls stayed perfectae for only a few years, eventually leaving the ministry and marrying. 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. 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.’ 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. We thus conclude with Guiraud 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, 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 Conions was forcibly made a perfect 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); Willema d’En Bernardus Raymundi (fol. 114v), Audiardis Ebranda (fol. 184r).
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

---

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.\textsuperscript{108} This was far from an isolated case;\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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-

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Number of Individual Perfects Sighted by Witnesses in ms. 609}
\begin{tabular}{lllll}
\hline
Years & New & Remaining from previous period & Lost from previous period & Total \\
\hline
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 \\
\hline
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 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{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.

\textsuperscript{108} ms. 609, fol. 16v.
\textsuperscript{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).
\textsuperscript{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. 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.

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 Montségur and to Lombardy, 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. 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.
113 Testimony of Raymunda Jotglar (ms. 609, fol. 41r).
114 ms. 124 of the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, testimony of Guillelmus Carriera (fol. 3v). The incident refers to the early 1250’s.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Perfecti</th>
<th>Perfectae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1223-28</td>
<td>5.3:1</td>
<td>3.0:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1229-34</td>
<td>8.5:1</td>
<td>2.8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1235-40</td>
<td>13.0:1</td>
<td>4.5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1241-46</td>
<td>6.8:1</td>
<td>5.3:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, 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

'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). 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 women) 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 Taissonieiras. Similarly, both Arnalda Trobada and Aurencha Aimerica traveled briefly with perfecti (the latter with her brother, Sicre); both were subsequently captured when they returned to the more normal pattern of segregated wandering. Despite the fact that perfecti-perfectae traveling arrangements were clearly safer for the female, they were extremely rare. 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. 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 fol. 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, 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 Riguda traveled within a limited radius; the former restricted her movements to the diocese of Pamiers, primarily alternating between Rava 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 (fol. 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 Meeer Vivent of Toulouse at Piacenza and Deacon Raymundus Mercerius at Pavia) received perfects fleeing the Midi: see the testimony of Guillelmus Furnarius (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, Villesiscle (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 inquisitors 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%). 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, Bibliotheque 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 Willelms 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 excusebat se et dicebat quod ipse W. erat amicus hereticorum et sustentator eorum ... sed dissimulabat aliqando ne diceretur quod ipse erat amicus vel credens hereticorum'; ms. 609, fol. 95v). In his own testimony (fol. 96v) Willemus 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 — $X^2 = 5.8567$, 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. 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 hereticants. 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;\textsuperscript{134} in another section, we encounter a woman who baked bread for the perfections.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 perfections 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 perfections),\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{138} no women fall into this class. It is true that occasionally females appear as such in ms. 609,\textsuperscript{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 Villesiis.\textsuperscript{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 sentenced\textsuperscript{141} were charged with harboring perfections in their homes as opposed to only 26\% of the men.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{134} Douais, Documents 2.32.
\textsuperscript{135} ibid. 2.27, 81.
\textsuperscript{136} 3 of 36 women and 10 of 116 men.
\textsuperscript{137} Douais, Documents 2.33, 43, 67.
\textsuperscript{138} 55 of 116 men.
\textsuperscript{139} e.g., Raymunda, wife of Petrus de la Peira (ms. 609, fol. 183r).
\textsuperscript{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 Villesiis, 36.7\% of female believers and 37.1\% of male believers harbored perfections in their homes.
\textsuperscript{141} 18 of 36. An additional seven were condemned in absentia.
\textsuperscript{142} 30 of 116. Again this excludes the thirty-eight men condemned in absentia.
among Cathar believers. 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.

In many cases, adherence was both shallow and confused. One dying woman received both extreme unction and the conolamentum. 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. A noblewoman confessed that she never believed firmly that the heretics were ‘good men’, but vacillated between belief and disbelieve. 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. 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. 22v, 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. 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.’

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, 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. 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. One need only consider the lords of Villelè, 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. 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. As Molinier observed, heresy was a family heritage for many believers.

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 Villesiscle, where twenty-one of

150 ms. 609, fol. 157v: ‘credebat quod hereticorum fuerunt boni homines; opera tamen eorum credes 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:

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

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

---

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:

Arnald, 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 'convenenenza' 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 Raymondci predicti de Bello Videre ... adoravit hereticos... Item comedid de pane benedicto hereticorum. Item vidit et interfuit et consensit quando Petrus Sancii fuit factus hereticus seu receptus ad ordinem et sectam hereticorum per Petrum Auteri in domo ipsius et viri sui. Item dictum Petrum Sancii hereticorum tenuit et recipit ... et ipsa servivit sibi multiosciens et in multis. Item commendavit vitam et sectam hereticorum aliquibus personis, inducendo ad amorem et credenciam eorum. Item receptit aliqua donaria pro hereticis et reddidit eis. Item fecit pactum seu convenienciam 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

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


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, 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. 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. 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.

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

155 Forty-four men, or 33.1%, and twenty-five women, or 26%.
156 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.

*Columbia University.*