

The Family of Niort in the Albigenian Crusade and before the Inquisition

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Part II

ALTHOUGH THEY had not been brought down by prelates or inquisitors, the Niorts at last came to disaster through challenging the king. The occasion was the attempt by Raymond Trencavel in 1240 to recapture the viscounties of Béziers and Carcassonne by an attack on Carcassonne itself. As he rode up from the Spanish border at the head of a troop of exiles and Spanish mercenaries, the countryside rose to welcome him.¹⁰⁹ Gerald and William Bernard of Niort were prominent among the knights who joined Trencavel,¹¹⁰ and Gerald was a leader in the first assault on the city,¹¹¹ which, however, held until the approach of a relief force early in October scattered the besiegers.

When the royal army under John of Beaumont had taken Buc and hanged its defenders, then by siege forced La Roque-de-Fa to yield, Gerald of Niort rode down from Niort in November to negotiate with the French. At Duilhac, near Pierrepetruse, in the name of his mother,¹¹² brothers, nephews, and comrades he proposed a truce, to be guaranteed by handing over Niort and other strongholds, while he went to make peace in person with the king and to ask him also to arrange for the family's reconciliation with the church without imprisonment or exile. It was stipulated that if Louis IX was unwilling to receive him or failed to intercede effectively with the pope before Pentecost, the fortresses would be returned intact and there would be a truce of one month.¹¹³

Gerald's brothers are not mentioned by name in these documents, but on his journey northward, on December 13, he signed an agreement promising that if

¹⁰⁹ The best account of the revolt of 1240 is that of Auguste Molinier in Note 58 to *HGL*, VII, 448–61.

¹¹⁰ *HGL*, VII, pt. 2, cols. 363, 396; *RHF*, XXIV, 571, 574, 581, 606, 613.

¹¹¹ *HGL*, VIII, 1042–5, esp. col. 1043.

¹¹² This is the last mention of Esclarmonde in the documents.

¹¹³ *HGL*, VIII, 1047–8.

Bernard Oth and William escaped from the king's custody, they would be returned dead or alive within 15 days, under penalty of forfeiture of all the castles named in the truce agreement.¹¹⁴ Again, when Louis IX announced in January 1241 an extension of the truce until October, he mentioned Gerald's pledge to surrender Bernard Oth and William within 15 days after Easter.¹¹⁵ But neither then, nor in a passing reference in a later letter,¹¹⁶ did the king describe the circumstances of the capture of Bernard Oth. It is unlikely that the presence of him and William would have escaped comment if they had ridden to Carcassonne with their brother.¹¹⁷

Gerald of Niort continued to act for the family in ensuing negotiations with the king, who did not make the mistake of allowing them to be reestablished in places of power, but was characteristically lenient in other respects. At the outset, a grant of money was made to compensate for property in royal hands; in 1244, however, Gerald was authorized to have agents collect revenue from the possessions to which the Niorts were forbidden to return.¹¹⁸ In the meantime, Bernard Oth had been liberated from whatever restraints he had had to endure, but only after the loss of Laurac to Raymond VII.¹¹⁹ In a quarrel between the brothers and the king's people in 1244 over income from certain lands, Bernard Oth resumed his role as spokesman and won a favorable decision from the king,¹²⁰ and it was to him, William, and William Bernard that a further grant of the village of Paraza was made in September 1246.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ *HGL*, VIII, 1048.

¹¹⁵ *HGL*, VIII, 1048–9; *Layettes*, II, No. 2886².

¹¹⁶ Cf. *infra.*, p. 293.

¹¹⁷ The essay of Molinier, cited in n. 109, shows the extent of detailed information provided by royal inquests about participants in that uprising.

¹¹⁸ *HGL*, VIII, 1049. Lea (*Inquisition*, II, 29), substitutes William for Gerald throughout his narrative of these events.

¹¹⁹ Raymond VII had installed a *bailli* there by October 1241 (Doat, XXI, f. 159v) and after his defeat in 1242, Laurac had a French garrison until 1248 (*Layettes*, II, No. 3013; *HGL*, VIII, 1103–4). When knights of Laurac swore to keep the peace in 1243, the name "Bernard" led the list (*Layettes*, II, No. 3069), but it cannot be affirmed that this was Bernard Oth.

¹²⁰ The lands lay at Alzonne, Carlipa, Fraissenède, Saint-Martin-le-Viel, and Monestiès (*HGL*, VIII, 1049–50). Elsewhere, Miréval is also named as belonging to the Niorts (Doat, XXI, ff. 41–41v). Title to Saint-Martin and Carlipa was clouded, for they had once been transferred to the monastery of Villelongue by the Montforts (Molinier, "Catalogue," *BEC*, XXXIV [1873], 466, 495 [Nos. 65, 182, 183]) and the abbey, as will be seen in the next paragraph, disputed the Niorts' claims.

¹²¹ Doat, CLIII, ff. 229–30. There is another copy on f. 237, with blank spaces where the names of the village and William Bernard should appear. See also *HGL*, VI, 723. I am indebted to the kindness of the staff of the Bibliothèque nationale for selecting and photographing the letters cited from Doat, Vol. CLIII in these pages.

It is evidence of both Bernard Oth's tenacity and the king's magnanimity that other requests for favorable treatment were also entertained, although the most important, for permission to return to the lands in Sault, continued to be forbidden.

Louis IX enumerated these petitions in a letter to his seneschal, undated but in a collection with others of 1246–1248. Bernard Oth asked return of all lands which Gerald had surrendered. He also complained of injustices: Raymond of Niort (an individual to whom we will presently return) had wrongly been given a third share in the castrum of Niort and other property; the monastery of Villelongue had received revenue from 25 measures of Niort land, instead of the ten ordered by the king; John of Escrennes was withholding income from lands at Paraza; Pons of Villeneuve (who had recently been seneschal for Count Raymond VII) had captured one of Bernard Oth's men and demanded a ransom.¹²² The seneschal was ordered to do justice in these matters or report them fully. He was also asked to advise how the request for grant of a house in Raissac would affect the royal interest.¹²³ Another letter from the king indicates that action in respect of the lands disputed with Villelongue was carried through.¹²⁴

Yet, despite their fall, the family was spared serious prosecution for heresy, no doubt through the good offices of the king. Only Bernard Oth was mildly troubled. In November 1242, he appeared before the Dominican inquisitors, Ferrier and William Raymond, at a place not stated, to give a rambling account of heretics and their believers he had known; he was called back to give further details on December 23, 1245 at Limoux; and made one more short statement at Albi on July 11, 1246.¹²⁵ Since between and after these sessions he was able to negotiate with the king (October 1244 and September 1246), it is evident that no serious penalty followed, despite his disclosure of long and intimate association with the Cathars.

A decade and a half after their military defeat, the Niorts lost the last hope of restoring their position. Gerald died, perhaps in 1255, the year in which the king ordered the seneschal of Carcas-

¹²² This is a puzzling incident, for Pons of Villeneuve had been a comrade and fellow-defender of heretics with Bernard Oth in earlier years. The capture and ransom occurred after January 1243, perhaps in the skirmishing between the counts of Foix and Toulouse at Laurac at about that time (*HGL*, VI, 760–1). In November 1242, Bernard Oth had made some damaging statements about Pons in his first confession to inquisitors (cf. *infra*, pp. 298–300). It may be that he was being harassed on that account.

¹²³ Doat, CLIII, ff. 278 v–9.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 280–280 v.

¹²⁵ Doat, XXIV, ff. 83 v–98, 98–102, 102–102 v.

sonne to remove the garrison from Niort and destroy its fortifications,¹²⁶ certainly before November 1256, when Louis IX wrote that a review of the records showed that the agreement of 1241 had been only with Gerald, deceased, and the property which his brothers had occupied without royal leave was to be repossessed.¹²⁷ We do not know the response to subsequent petitions of Bernard Oth's wife and sister for restitution.¹²⁸ It is clear, however, that by 1250 the family sprung from William of Niort and Esclarmonde had lost their power and prestige. Their relative, Raymond of Niort, to whose career we now turn, was able to avoid a like fate during his lifetime, but was not without his troubles.

Raymond of Niort

It will be recalled that Raymond, called "of Roquefeuil," son of William and Esclarmonde of Niort, died about 1227.¹²⁹ The identity of another Raymond, the Raymond of Niort who lived until at least 1258 and managed to escape disastrous involvement with the Inquisition or punishment for disaffection from the crown, is a problem not recognized by those who have discussed the family but failed to note that there were two Raymonds, in some way related.

A review of the documentary evidence for the years 1220 to 1234 will show the dimensions of the problem. Raymond of Niort appears (1) in an act of 1220 which identifies him as a nephew of Viscount Arnold of Castelbon;¹³⁰ (2) in 1223, in a pact to defend Quillan;¹³¹ (3) with young Raymond Trencavel at Carcassonne in Febru-

¹²⁶ *HGL*, VIII, 1362. However, there was a castellan of the king at Niort in 1257 (*ibid.*, col. 1675), its garrison is listed in accounts of the seneschery in 1260 (*ibid.*, col. 1452), and a castellan is mentioned again in 1271 (*ibid.*, col. 1675).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, cols. 1050-1.

¹²⁸ *HGL*, VII, pt. 2, cols. 347, 363, 387, 396; *RHF*, XXIV, 564, 567, 577, 579, 585, 604, 614.

¹²⁹ Cf. Part I of this essay, *Names*, 18:2 (June, 1970), p. 101.

¹³⁰ Joaquin Miret y Sans, *Investigación histórica sobre el vizcondado de Castelló con datos inéditos de los condes de Urgell y los vizcondes de Ager* (Barcelona, 1900), pp. 160-1. Arnold was a violent enemy of the bishop of Urgel and 42 years after he died, he and his daughter, a countess of Foix, were condemned as heretics. Miret y Sans is not convinced of Arnold's unorthodoxy; Ventura Subirats ("El Catarismo en Cataluña," *BNABLB*, XXVIII [1960] 83-91) states the arguments for believing him to have been a heretic. See also Ch. Baudon du Mony, *Relations politiques des comtes de Foix avec la Catalogne, jusqu'au commencement du XIVe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1896), I, 146, 167 ff., 213 ff.

¹³¹ Guiraud, *Cartulaire*, I, CCLIX.

ary 1224.¹³² According to later testimony to inquisitors, (4) Raymond of Niort was seen to adore heretics at Tourreilles about 1225,¹³³ and (5) when he was ill at Lézignan, between 1225 and 1230, Good Men were brought to him.¹³⁴ (6) About 1228–1230, Bernard Oth took over *Roqua* (Roquefeuil?) from Raymond of Niort and found heretics there,¹³⁵ and (7) about 1234, he was entertained at Belvis by Raymond of Niort, who showed him heretics living there and declared that “there never was a time since he reached maturity that he did not keep Good Men about him.”¹³⁶ Raymond’s wife, Marquesia, was present and in the same year Bernard Oth encountered her again at Sauzils, where she introduced him to female heretics.¹³⁷ And finally (8), a witness told inquisitors in 1249 that when living in a castle [*rupem*] of Raymond of Niort with Blanche of Paracols, a heretic, grandmother of Raymond, she had repeatedly seen him adore the heretic. The time was about 1234.¹³⁸ Thus, two or more men of the same name coexisted until Raymond, son of William of Niort, died. The problem of their relationship is particularly clouded by the bit of evidence last cited, if, as has been asserted, we are to assume that Blanche of Paracols¹³⁹ is to be identified with Blanche of Laurac, grandmother of the Niort brothers with whom we have so far been concerned.¹⁴⁰ However, that identification must be rejected and the similarity of names of the women put down to confusing coincidence.¹⁴¹

¹³² *HGL*, VIII, 787–9.

¹³³ Douais, *Documents*, II, 147–8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.

¹³⁵ Doat, XXIV, ff. 94v–5.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 94–94v.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 95.

¹³⁸ Douais, *Documents*, II, 148.

¹³⁹ A William *de Paracolls* witnessed an act of the count of Barcelona in 1137 (*HGL*, V, 1022); a seigneur of Saint-Gervais-sur-Mare (Hérault) possessed a place called *Paracoll* in 1224 (*ibid.*, VIII, 812); and a *podium de Paracol* is mentioned in Doat, XXIV, f. 27v. Sabarthès, *Dictionnaire topographique*, p. 289, identifies it as a commune of Vinassan, Aude.

¹⁴⁰ Ventura Subirats, “El Catarismo en Cataluña,” *BNABLB*, XXVIII (1960), 86–7. Assuming that there was but one Raymond of Roquefeuil or of Niort, he suggested that he was the child of a second marriage of William of Niort.

¹⁴¹ It would be surprising, although not chronologically impossible, to find Blanche of Laurac, who was already a widowed grandmother in 1200, still alive in 1234. Moreover, the Blanche of Paracols just mentioned had some indefinable connection with Viscount Arnold of Castelbon (see the favorable mention of a “G. B. de Paracols” in an act of his given in Baudon de Mony, *Relations politiques des comtes de Foix*, I, 147–8); no evidence of a tie between the family of Laurac and either Paracols or Castelbon has been disclosed elsewhere. Also, we know of no child of Blanche of Laurac who could have been the mother of the second Raymond. And finally, the tone of the exchange between him and Bernard Oth in 1234 (item seven) does not bespeak intimacy. Why would Raymond so eagerly disclose to Bernard Oth his habitual association with heretics if at that moment the grandmother of them both was among his guests?

A genealogical hypothesis that does take account of the data can be tentatively advanced. It would propose that the marriage of an unnamed member of the Niort clan to the sister of Viscount Arnold of Castelbon produced a son named Raymond, whose name appears in the document of 1220 and perhaps in those of 1223 and 1224, and who entertained heretics about 1225 (items one to four, above). Having taken over Roquefeuil on the death of his cousin, Raymond, son of William of Niort, he died after illness at Lézignan and Bernard Oth repossessed that place (items five and six). However, this Raymond left a son and namesake who, coming of age about that time, inherited Belvis, where he entertained Bernard Oth and revealed his religious sympathies to that relative who was so important a defender of heretics (item seven).

Although the blood relationship between Raymond of Niort and the sons of William of Niort and Esclarmonde cannot now be positively established, it is certain that he was not on intimate terms with them after 1234. He is not mentioned in the letters of Gregory IX in 1233 nor was he investigated in 1234 nor condemned with the others in 1236. In the readjustment of property rights about 1246, Bernard Oth opposed Raymond's acquisition of a share in Niort. And while Bernard Oth was careful not to admit to inquisitors any connection of his living brothers with heresy, he spoke freely about Raymond in that respect, as though feeling no responsibility for him.¹⁴²

Nor was Raymond of Niort among the supporters of Trencavel in 1240. In avoiding involvement in that affair, he followed the example of the counts of Toulouse and Foix, to whose acts he was a witness in 1241.¹⁴³ Two years later, he performed other services in the aftermath of a little war between the two counts, for he was nominated in October 1243 as one of three persons to negotiate release of prisoners and himself stood as fidejussor for a man captured by the count of Foix.¹⁴⁴

The cautious course which he pursued did not mean that Raymond of Niort cut himself off from the heretics. That would have been difficult, for his wife, Marquesia, was in the fourth generation of a family ardently devoted to the Good Men. Her father, Peter Roger, one of the dispossessed seigneurs of Mirepoix,¹⁴⁵ shared

¹⁴² The reverse is also true, for Raymond talked openly to churchmen about the presence of heretics at Dourne: Doat, XXI, ff. 35v, 36v.

¹⁴³ *HGL*, VIII, 1062, 1065.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, cols. 1134–5, 1141. On that conflict, see *HGL*, VI, 760–1.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Roger's father of the same name, who had been hereticated just before death in 1204 (Doat, XXIV, ff. 43–43v, 64), was son of Willelma of Tonneins,

command of the heretical refuge at Montségur which was taken by siege in 1244.

Montségur, perched atop a needle of rock some miles south of Mirepoix, had, after 1232, been made into a strong redoubt, a refuge for heretics, and a place of pilgrimage for their believers. From there, Peter Roger led a band which assassinated inquisitors at Avignonet in 1242, and he defended it for months (1243–1244) against the eventually successful attack of the seneschal of Carcassonne.¹⁴⁶ Raymond and Marquesia followed the fortunes of her father with concern, without becoming directly involved in the fate of the fortress. She had visited the place in 1238,¹⁴⁷ and while it was under siege they sent messengers through the lines to her father.¹⁴⁸ We are not told, however, of any attempt of Raymond of Niort to send men or supplies to help in the defense.

After Montségur had fallen, its heretics had been burned, and prisoners from its garrison questioned intensively, Raymond of Niort, for all his caution, could not escape being troubled both by inquisitors and royal officials. The inquisitor, Ferrier, questioned Raymond within a few months after the fall of Montségur, but nothing about any resultant penalty is divulged.¹⁴⁹ The case was not reopened until 1249, when Bishop William Arnold of Carcassonne heard several depositions which have already been mentioned, linking a Raymond of Niort with heretics as early as 1225. When summoned himself on January 3, 1251, Raymond denied that he had seen or adored heretics. That statement, it soon appeared, per-

whose home at Fanjeaux had been a meeting place for Cathars at that time (on her, see Doat, XXIII, ff. 99, 162; cf. Guiraud, *Cartulaire*, I, CX–CXI, CCXLVI–CCXLVII). Another of her sons was William Assalit, vicar of Razès for the viscount of Béziers (*HGL*, VI, 154; VIII, 429–33, 468–9, 473), who was dispossessed by the Crusade (*HGL*, VII, pt. 2, cols. 354, 373; *RHF*, XXIV, 558, 582). His notoreity as a defender of heretics caused his crimes to be cited as late as 1258 (see n. 160).

¹⁴⁶ On these episodes, see Lea, *Inquisition*, II, 34–7, 42–4; Guiraud, *Inquisition*, II, 118–24, 134–9; and especially Niel, *Montségur*.

¹⁴⁷ Doat, XXII, ff. 222v–3.

¹⁴⁸ One messenger of 1243 was Estolt of Roqueville, one of three brothers most belligerent in defense of the Cathars (Doat, XXIV, ff. 128, 181); another messenger came about Christmas 1243 (*ibid.*, XXII, ff. 146v–7, 223–223v). Niel, *Montségur*, pp. 207–8, 213–4, weaves these incidents together with later acts of Raymond of Niort to form the theory that he was acting as liaison between the defenders of Montségur and Count Raymond VII, who, Niel supposes, was in Rome to intercede for them. There is not, however, any substantial proof that the count had a close connection with the garrison at Montségur or intimacy with Raymond of Niort.

¹⁴⁹ Raymond admitted to having appeared before Ferrier, whose last acts as inquisitor were late in 1244 (Douais, *Documents*, II, 146).

tained only to the time after September 7, 1249, when he had received absolution for past misdeeds from Pope Innocent IV. Producing the papal letter before the bishop, Raymond refused to speak of anything before that date,¹⁵⁰ thus apparently frustrating the inquiry, for although his wife was called to appear on March 2, 1250¹⁵¹ there is no record of her compliance or of any further action in the case.

Unpleasant attention from royal officials was not easy to escape, for in all the region controlled by the king, inhabitants of every class were dealt with sternly and rapaciously on the least suspicion of participation in revolt or leanings toward heresy.¹⁵² These activities were seconded not only by northern barons who had acquired lands during the Crusade but also by ecclesiastics, notably the archbishop of Narbonne, who pressed claims of his church to land with vigor. Raymond of Niort resisted these harassments and by timely appeals to Louis IX managed to preserve a substantial legacy for his widow and children.

There are in the Doat collection three letters of Louis IX pertaining to Raymond of Niort's affairs. None is dated; to judge from dated documents with which they were interspersed all were written after November 1246. The first is an order to John of Escrennes, seneschal of Carcassonne, to allow Raymond to repossess his property which had been sequestered at the time of the capture of Bernard Oth,¹⁵³ to recover animals seized by Olivier of Termes "after the peace,"¹⁵⁴ and to receive compensation for other damages, these matters to be so dealt with that Raymond would have no occasion for further appeal.¹⁵⁵ Having recently attended to the complaints of Bernard Oth, Louis may have hoped to avoid the importunities of the Niorts, but this was not to be. A second letter revealed Raymond's further petitions. The seneschal was now commanded to investigate Raymond's disputes over property with various French nobles, to look into the seizure by one of them of two farms (*mansi*) at Lézignan, as well as the appropriation of a mill at Sauzils¹⁵⁶ by a former seneschal. The king also ordered John of Escrennes to prevent the arch-

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 145-6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II, 147.

¹⁵² See the inquest of 1247-1248 in *HGL*, pt. 2, cols. 1-59; *RHF*, XXIV, 444-530, also the comments of Molinier, *HGL*, VII, pt. 1, pp. 462-74; also the case of Ermengarde of Le Moulin, *ibid.*, VIII, 1159.

¹⁵³ Cf. *supra*, pp. 286, 287.

¹⁵⁴ This may be a reference to the submission of Raymond VII in January 1243 or possibly to Olivier of Termes' own capitulation to the king in February 1247 (*HGL*, VIII, 1221).

¹⁵⁵ Doat, CLIII, ff. 254v-5.

¹⁵⁶ The text has "Sozins," but there is no doubt that Sauzils is meant, for it is repeatedly listed among Raymond's possessions.

bishop of Carcassonne from suing Raymond in his own court in disputes over land, to obtain annulment of any excommunication issued against Raymond in such affairs, and to do him justice in the matter of a fief at Quillan seized by a former archbishop (Peter Amiel).¹⁵⁷ Finally, in a third letter, the king gave instructions that trespass on Raymond's property in Gebetz and Galinagues by the church of Niort (which was in the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Narbonne) was to be handled in accordance with the law of the land.¹⁵⁸

It is not surprising, then, that Raymond should have tried to strengthen his position by obtaining papal absolution for former acts against the faith; in that way, at least, he forestalled prosecution by the bishop of Carcassonne. He also took the oath of fealty to the new count and countess of Toulouse on December 1, 1249.¹⁵⁹ The last mention of him as still alive is his petition for restoration of property in the inquest of 1258, which was opposed on the grounds of the heretical activities of his wife's family.¹⁶⁰

How much he had lost beyond recovery, despite the king's intervention, is not known. Of the properties seized by laymen he had regained the mill at Sauzils and passed it to his heir, but Lézignan is not referred to again and probably was kept by Peter of Voisins. As late as 1256 or 1257, Raymond's difficulties with the archbishop of Narbonne were commented on by Peter of Auteil, seneschal of Carcassonne, who reported that the prelate had forced "R. of Niort" and other knights to cede to certain ecclesiastics lands which they held by the king's grant.¹⁶¹ However, the fief at Quillan, once appropriated by Archbishop Peter Amiel, Gebetz, and Galinagues were included in the inheritance Raymond left to his son.

But the church was to have victory over Raymond at last in the person of a granddaughter and by acquisition of at least part of his property. He had one heir, Bertrand, who died not long after his father,¹⁶² leaving a widow, Lady Misse, two sons, Peter Roger and the infant Raymond, and a daughter, Blanche, who became a nun at Prouille. Among them a controversy began in 1266 over

¹⁵⁷ Doat, CLIII, ff. 280-1 v; also *HGL*, VIII, 1193-4, where the editor dates the letter April or May 1247. Cf. *HGL*, VI, 723, n. 2. See also Gerald S. Campbell, "The Attitude of the Monarchy toward the Use of Ecclesiastical Censures in the Reign of St. Louis," *Speculum*, XXXV (1960), 535-55, esp. p. 543.

¹⁵⁸ Doat, CLIII, ff. 292 v-3. Vaissete (*HGL*, VI, 723) writes of the king's promise to give the Bastide de Beauvoir to Raymond. Niel, *Montségur*, p. 214, says that Raymond conferred with Hugh of Arsy in 1243 for some undisclosed purpose.

¹⁵⁹ *HGL*, VIII, 1263.

¹⁶⁰ In opposition to his petition were cited the crimes of William Assalit and the career of Peter Roger of Mirepoix (see n. 145).

¹⁶¹ *HGL*, VIII, 1421.

¹⁶² Bertrand of Niort was a witness to an act of the count of Foix in September 1263 (*HGL*, VIII, 1513-4).

their inheritance; it lasted more than a decade and drew in other claimants. Blanche, described as prioress of Prouille, in 1266 claimed from Peter Roger, her brother, half of what had belonged to their grandfather at Gebetz, Gramazies, and Belcaire.¹⁶³ A decade later, these places had been adjudged to the brother, but in the interval other properties and other claimants had been drawn in. The result was that in 1277 Raymond of Niort's legacy was divided between Misse, on behalf of her son Raymond, Blanche and the prior of Prouille, and other persons, the origin of whose claims is not clear.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Raymond's old adversary, the church of Narbonne, also profited, for in 1278 the community at Prouille ceded to the archbishop of Narbonne title to Raymond's former fiefs at Gebetz and Galinagues.¹⁶⁵

The Niorts and Heresy

Political acts led to the downfall of the brothers of Niort after they had defied the Inquisition, from whose further prosecutions, however, the intervention of the king spared them. Raymond of Niort also avoided serious penalty for infidelity and won royal assistance against trespassers. Should allegations of heresy against them, then, be taken lightly? Did they, in fact, deserve the reputation for unswerving devotion to Catharism which churchmen of the time asserted and historians have repeated?

The evidence in the case of Raymond of Niort leaves little doubt that he supported the heretics until the danger was too great and then abandoned them so convincingly that he preserved a considerable inheritance for his son. For the family of William and Esclarmonde there is somewhat more information, including testimony in the investigation of 1234, a summary of the confession of the younger William in 1236, three depositions by Bernard Oth, and one other document in inquisitorial records. Letters of Gregory IX and the chronicle of William Pelhisson attest the reputation of the

¹⁶³ Guiraud, *Cartulaire*, II, 156 (No. 395). This act and those cited in the next two notes are known only through summaries, the originals having been lost.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7 (Nos. 397-9). To Misse went Belcaire, Belvis, and lands in Aliou. The mill at Sauzils, the tolls at Quillan, and title to Gebetz and Galinagues went to her and Prouille jointly. Lands at Sauzils, Artigues, Tourreilles, *Planvilla*, Leuc, and Preixan were confirmed to others, saving the rights of Peter Roger of Niort.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157 (No. 400).

family but give no specific evidence. A survey of these documents shows certain differences of attitude within the family.

Esclarmonde, mother of the family, was surely an unswerving adherent of the Cathars. So Archbishop Peter Amiel believed and said in 1234:

First, under the rigor of the oath, we say that she is a perfected and garbed heretic, but that at this time, out of fear of this investigation, she has been given permission to eat meat and tell lies and do whatever she wishes, so long as there is a heretic at her side to console her if it be necessary.¹⁶⁶

The archbishop perhaps misinterpreted Esclarmonde's status. She had shown little fear of him during their interview at Roquefeuil;¹⁶⁷ neither William of Solier, the convert nor the inquisitors in 1236 knew of her consolamentum;¹⁶⁸ and Bernard Oth spoke of her only as a believer.¹⁶⁹ Her alleged exemption from the most binding obligations of the perfected Cathar would have been most unusual, if not unique. We can safely assume that Esclarmonde did receive the consolamentum before she died, but whether or not she lived out her last years in the full discipline of the sect is moot, despite the archbishop's assertion.

Esclarmonde's religious fervor was not shared by her husband, whose attitude was revealed by his remark to Simon of Montfort that in matters of religion he found peace only outside his own home. He was buried in consecrated ground.¹⁷⁰ Nor were all of her children imbued with unorthodoxy. Uzalger had a career in a monastery and the daughter was not accused of a heretical past when her petition for return of property was examined.

The other brothers varied in the warmth of their enthusiasm for Catharism. Raymond died in heresy before persecution tested his faith. Gerald was belligerent toward prelates and inquisitors and left Good Men undisturbed in places he controlled.¹⁷¹ William Bernard was least inculcated of all by witnesses in 1234 and Bernard

¹⁶⁶ Doat, XXI, f. 34 v; Douais, *Documents*, I, lxi-lxii.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Part I of this essay, *Names* 18:2 (June, 1970), p. 110.

¹⁶⁸ Doat, XXI, f. 42; 166-167 v.

¹⁶⁹ She "adored" Guilabert of Castres (Doat, XXIV, f. 87 v), an act customarily performed by believers, and she did not join in a monthly ceremonial confession (*apparellamentum* or "service") with perfected heretics at Dourne in 1234 (*ibid.*, ff. 97-97 v).

¹⁷⁰ Doat, XXI, ff. 38-8 v.

¹⁷¹ There were heretics at Niort as late as 1240 (Doat, XXIII, f. 303 v). Domeng, a soldier employed by Gerald of Niort, is mentioned as a believer in 1239 and 1242 (Doat, XXIV, ff. 80-80 v, 179).

Oth made sure to comment on his failure to do reverence to a perfected heretic.¹⁷² His wife, however, was admittedly a believer, as was the wife of William, another brother whom Bernard Oth also defended with a tale of how he refused to listen to a heretic's preaching.¹⁷³ A deponent of 1234 claimed to know that William kept heretics in his company to console him if accident befell,¹⁷⁴ which William himself admitted to the inquisitors, adding that "he had very often tolerated heretics in his lands whom he could capture if he wished, but he said he did this on behalf of friends who cherished them."¹⁷⁵

Of all the children of Esclarmonde, Bernard Oth was most devoted to the faith of his mother and grandmother. The comparatively abundant evidence about him comes almost entirely from his own words, which disclose frequent attendance at heretical preaching and other religious ceremonies and cooperation with other believers to safeguard the Cathars from their enemies. Of the doctrinal teaching of the Cathars, however, there is nothing in his confessions beyond the ritual phrases used in various observances, something the notaries had heard over and over and wrote down in standardized phrases duplicated in a multitude of other depositions.¹⁷⁶

Bernard Oth's activities during the Crusade, at Castelnaudary, Laurac, Montréal, and Cabaret, and in 1230–1231 at Verfeil and Laurac, have already been recounted. Other events which he describes fall between 1231 and 1236 with one exception: the appeal to the pope at some time (probably 1238) after sentence was passed on him by William Arnold and the archdeacon of Carcassonne in 1236.¹⁷⁷ He says nothing of its outcome, nothing, indeed, that could be construed as a defense or a plea for leniency.

¹⁷² Doat, XXIV, f. 95v–6. The statement of Jean Duvernoy ("Bertrand Marty," *Cahiers d'études cathares*, XIXe année, 2d ser., No. 39 [1968], p. 10 and n. 10, citing Bibl. de Toulouse, MS 609, f. 160r) that a William Bernard of Laurac who received the consolamentum in 1227 was the brother of Bernard Oth cannot stand, because the man in question is said to have died soon thereafter (information I owe to the kindness of Professor John Mundy, who checked the passage in the MS). William Bernard of Niort was still alive in 1246 and, moreover, had no claim to the name "of Laurac."

¹⁷³ Doat, XXIV, ff. 95v–6. I assume a mistake in the text ("exivit inde et voluit audire praedicationem") and would change "voluit" to "noluit."

¹⁷⁴ Doat, XXI, ff. 47v–8.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 165–165v.

¹⁷⁶ Inattention to doctrine was characteristic of Ferrier's interrogations. He was obviously more interested in proof of guilty acts and associations.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Part I of this essay, *Names* 18:2 (June, 1970), p. 116, n. 102.

Bernard Oth saw heretics by prearrangement or chance in many places; Niort, Dourne, and Roquefeuil were refuges for them. At every encounter, the Good Men received his "adoration." There were frequent gatherings to hear their preaching and, although at first denying it, Bernard Oth eventually admitted that he had been present when believers were granted the consolamentum, an act thought especially damnable by inquisitors. Occasionally he made gifts of food, money, or useful articles to heretics; repeatedly he gave them escort to one of his residences or to the safe-keeping of another believer.

The Catharist hierarchy was well known to Bernard Oth. His closest ties were with the venerable Guilabert of Castres, bishop of the heretics of Toulouse, who was often a guest at Besplas and Dourne.¹⁷⁸ Gerald Abit, bishop of Carcassonne had been rescued from Cabaret;¹⁷⁹ Benedict of Termes, bishop of Razès after 1225, consoled Raymond of Roquefeuil in Bernard Oth's presence;¹⁸⁰ Bertrand Marty had preached to a group in which he was;¹⁸¹ Raymond Aguilher, later to be bishop of Razès was received at Dourne.¹⁸² Gerald of Gourdon, a deacon, was Bernard Oth's relative, and Raymond Bernard, deacon of Laurac, an old friend.¹⁸³ Raymond Mercier, deacon, had a gift of money.¹⁸⁴ The knight had heard Raymond Peter, deacon, preach at Montréal¹⁸⁵ and had seen Raymond Martin, deacon, perform a consolamentum at Laurac.¹⁸⁶

In time of need, the Cathars received more than shelter. In 1233 or 1234, two old acquaintances, Pons of Villeneuve and Isarn Bernard of Fanjeaux, came to Laurac with word that food supplies were perilously low in the heretical refuge at Montségur. A plan to collect grain was made and carried out by Pons of Villeneuve and Isarn Bernard in the diocese of Carcassonne, by Bernard Oth, Jor-

¹⁷⁸ Jean Duvernoy has collected references to Guilabert from Doat and MS 609 of the Bibl. de Toulouse in "Guilhabert de Castres," *Cahiers d'études cathares*, XVIIIe année, 2d ser., No. 4 (1967), 32-42.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Names* 18:2, p. 106. A "Guillaume Abit," apparently a mistake for Gerald, is mentioned in Guiraud, *Inquisition*, I, 205, 297; and Christine Thouzellier, "La Répression de l'hérésie et les débuts de l'Inquisition," in Fliche and Martin, *Histoire de l'Église*, (Paris, 1950), 293. ¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Names* 18:2, p. 104.

¹⁸¹ Doat, XXIV, f. 102v. Bertrand Marty succeeded Guilabert of Castres as bishop about 1237-1239, and was burned at Montségur in 1244: see Duvernoy, "Bertrand Marty," *Cahiers d'études cathares*, XIX année, 2d ser., No. 39 (1968), 19-35.

¹⁸² Raymond Aguilher had been escorted out of Castelnaudary with Guilabert of Castres in 1220/1221: Doat, XXIV, f. 85-85v; see also ff. 91, 93v, 98-98v.

¹⁸³ Doat, XXI, f. 42; XXIV, ff. 83v, 85, 119-119v. Gerald is not mentioned by Bernard Oth. See also next page. ¹⁸⁴ Doat, XXIV, ff. 90v, 101v-2.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 91v.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 98v-9, 100v-101.

dan of Lanta, Alaman of Roaix, and Raymond Inalt in the diocese of Toulouse.¹⁸⁷

Not always was Bernard Oth so generous. He withheld from the Cathars the legacy from his brother, Raymond, of 300 or 500 Melgorien sous, perhaps because at about that time he was contemplating peace with Louis VIII. In consequence, when Bernard Oth was wounded in 1230 and Guilbert of Castres was summoned, the heretic rebuked him severely and exacted from Bernard Oth the larger sum of 1,200 sous of the same coinage.¹⁸⁸ We do not know whether that sum included repayment of loans as well as the legacy from Raymond or was in part a fine for his offenses. Disgruntlement at this financial transaction may explain why he was so brusque with Gerald of Gourdon, who came also to Laurac at that time but remained only one day. As the convert, William of Solier, told it: "When G. of Gourdon returned and was asked by other heretics whether he received [*i. e.*, baptized] B. Oth, he said no; on the contrary he believed him to be so given over to the world that he did not have good hopes for him."¹⁸⁹

Bernard Oth's words which are the basis for most of the statements just made were no doubt reluctantly uttered and less than fully revelatory. More light could be thrown on the milieu in which he moved by detailed analysis of what the sources disclose about the more than 80 persons mentioned in his testimony. Even a cursory survey indicates that family ties, residence, and shared experience, as in the Crusade, deeply affected the persistence of Catharism. Only a few examples will be given here.

The majority of persons mentioned by Bernard Oth appear in his testimony only once or twice, as though casually encountered in places where he met heretics. He was repeatedly in company of a few, of whom some were men of wealth and position, such as Pons of Villeneuve, knight of Montréal, seneschal of Toulouse for Raymond VII from 1234 to 1241, and representative of the count at Narbonne during its civic strife.¹⁹⁰ Other intimates were Isarn Bernard, knight of Fanjeaux, a money lender and one of the seigneurs of Mirepoix before it was lost to the French, and Alaman of Roaix, a member of one of the richest families of Toulouse. Like Bernard Oth, they provided shelter for the Good Men, passed their guests from the protection of one to another, and helped to supply Montségur. Active in other ways were men of lesser estate, such as Bernard of Saint-Martin and William of l'Île, knights of Laurac, lifelong companions, and veterans of the Crusade, who escorted heretics from place to place and bullied into silence those who might betray them.

¹⁸⁷ Doat, XXIV, ff. 88–89. Ventura Subirats dates this incident during the siege of Montségur, 1243–1244 ("El Catarismo en Cataluña," *BNABLB*, XXVIII [1960], 105, n. 42). Guiraud gives the date 1235 and writes that Bernard Oth was at Montréal at the time (*Inquisition*, II, 108–9).

¹⁸⁸ Doat, XXIV, 100 v, 87 v. In a version of this incident given by the archdeacon of Narbonne in 1234, Bernard Oth had been consoled after promising the heretics 1,000 sous, but when he recovered, he gave them only ten: Doat, XXI, ff. 36 v.

¹⁸⁹ Doat, XXI, f. 42 v–3.

¹⁹⁰ There are very many references to the persons named in this paragraph in the volumes of *HGL*, Doat, and *Layettes*. I shall not enumerate them. Much more information would also be found in MS 609 of the Bibl. de Toulouse.

The fate of these men was less happy than that of the Niorts. Pons of Villeneuve probably was interrogated with his wife, Algaia, who, after admitting that she had formerly abjured heresy but relapsed, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1247. It is likely that Pons was allowed to go on crusade as his penance, for he was with a party of knights at Joppa in 1252.¹⁹¹ Isarn Bernard was twice questioned by inquisitors without apparent result, but in August 1244 he and his wife were sent to prison for life and their property was confiscated by the king's *bailli*.¹⁹² Alaman of Roaix, who had refused to go to the Holy Land in 1229 and scorned his condemnation for contumacy in 1237, finally surrendered or was apprehended in 1248 and promptly sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁹³ Bernard of Saint-Martin and William of l'Île were condemned as contumacious heretics in 1241, fled to Montségur, had a hand in the murder of inquisitors at Avignonet in 1242, and died in the flames after the fall of Montségur, together with the heretics they had served.¹⁹⁴

Clearly, Bernard Oth was an important figure in heretical society in the Lauragais and the region southward to the Pyrenees. Yet certain qualifications must be added to that statement. His was a male society. Apart from the members of his immediate family, only half a dozen women appear in his depositions. He protected female perfected heretics as readily as the Good Men, yet never admitted "adoring" them, other than his grandmother, or sharing with them the bread they blessed at meals. There was also a certain exclusiveness about him. Rarely are more than five or six persons reported in attendance with him in meetings with the heretics. An incident recounted by one witness before the Inquisition emphasizes this impression drawn from Bernard Oth's own words. Pons Faber of Villeneuve testified that in 1223 he went to Laurac to ask its seigneur to release a man who had been taken prisoner. When he tried to enter the great hall to speak to Bernard Oth, the door was shut in his face; nevertheless, he found an aperture, through which he peered to see two heretics preaching to Bernard Oth and six other men. Pons left before his spying was discovered.¹⁹⁵

It is significant also that in records of testimony from heretics and their believers, in the Doat collection, the statement of Pons Faber is the only one to mention Bernard Oth, apart from his own depositions. There are detailed narratives of long experience in heresy

¹⁹¹ Douais, *Documents*, II, 60-1; *HGL*, VIII, 1314-5; *Layettes*, III, No. 4032.

¹⁹² Doat, XXI, ff. 315-6; *HGL*, VII, pt. 2, cols. 273-4; *RHF*, XXIV, 679.

¹⁹³ Doat, XXI, ff. 143 v-5 and Douais, *Documents*, II, 69-72. Alaman's first wife, Lombarda, was condemned after her death (Doat, XXI, f. 184); his second wife, Jeanne, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1246 (Douais, *Documents*, II, 27).

¹⁹⁴ Doat, XXI, ff. 158-9 v; Pelhissou-Molinier, p. 49; Pelhissou-Douais, p. 112.

¹⁹⁵ Doat, XXIV, f. 119-119 v.

from residents of Laurac, Fanjeaux, Gaja, and Bram, who knew the Niort family well. Only once among the hundreds of names they reveal does Bernard Oth's appear.

Conclusion

Historians have long been aware of the major episodes in the history of the Niort family, but confusion of identities and statements with dubious support in the sources have blurred the record. Certain corrections in detail have been suggested here, and some remarks of a more general nature may be ventured.

We do not know when the seigneurs of Niort were first attracted to the heresy of the Cathars. The attitude of the elder William suggests that the partisanship was relatively recent and was appreciably influenced by his wife. During the Albigensian Crusade and for some years afterward, heretics found protection in places where the Niorts had influence. Nothing less could be expected of a leading family whose overlords and neighbors did the same, in a region where even Catholic clergy often lived on not unfriendly terms with the Cathars. To appreciate the motives for the Niorts' conduct, however, we must look beyond religion. Position and property were at stake from the moment that Simon of Montfort acquired lordship of Carcassonne and Béziers in 1209. The remoteness of Sault from the main theater of war allowed William of Niort to maneuver safely through the first dangerous years, but only a saintliness not to be expected of these mountain barons could controvert hatred for the invaders who murdered Esclarmonde's brother and sister, made her mother a fugitive, and burned by the hundreds men and women revered for holy life. When the southern cause brightened after the death of Montfort and Bernard Oth's acquisition of Laurac had extended the family possessions into an area much fought over and with a strong tradition of heresy, religion and material interests coincided, and the Niorts came actively into the war. In 1226, however, a choice had to be made, and they bargained for peace with Louis VIII, knowing that the price would be renunciation of at least the open practice of their religion.

The terms of peace in 1229 were dismaying, because the victors' power was brought uncomfortably close to Niort domains. Even so, they and the secular power alike were willing to settle for co-existence: a lieutenant of the king sold lands to a monastery whose

past was tainted with suspicion of heresy, whose abbot came from a family widely reputed to be heretical, and did so in the presence of the abbot's brother who was notorious for patronage of the Cathars; French seigneurs, a little later, were unwilling to risk war for the sake of seeing Bernard Oth burned.

Relationships were quite otherwise with the ecclesiastics who were the beneficiaries of the peace. The Niorts' harassment of the bishop of Toulouse, their raids on the lands of the archbishop of Narbonne, their support of the latter's rebellious bourg were evoked by more than religious antipathies. Basic emotions were touched by the prosecution of heretics. How could the venerated fugitives sheltered in the castra of Sault, including the ageing Esclarmonde be handed over for trial, as the church demanded? There was conflict of material interests also. Although the archbishop of Narbonne must in conscience push the prosecution of defenders of heresy, in view of the ancient claims of his church to property in Sault and the prospect that confiscations for heresy in his domain would come to him, he stood to gain rewards more tangible than satisfaction in duty done. It was an even more dangerous situation for the brothers of Niort than their father had faced: in 1209, the ancestral bases of power had been relatively inaccessible; now they were directly at stake. Even if they could have brought themselves to seek a settlement with the church, part of their possessions would have been jeopardized.

The hearings of 1234 showed that many Catholics, but not all, believed in the Niorts' complicity in heresy. Respect for their power probably slowed the prosecution, and Gerald's bluster prevented execution of the sentences of 1236. Yet it is apparent also that the family's allegiance to heresy was qualified. Three of Esclarmonde's sons followed their mother in professing to see their hope of salvation in dying in the hands of the Cathars, but the same cannot be said of all of them, and even the sons who were most devoted to the Good Men were not of the stuff that makes martyrs. They had protected heretics against the crusaders, then changed their stand in 1226. From 1230 to at least 1236, they were again active defenders. Evidence is sparse thereafter. Probably they behaved with more circumspection and, like other prominent persons also under condemnation about that time, kept out of reach of the inquisitors. There were heretics at Niort as late as 1240. We face

the puzzle, however, of why Bernard Oth and his brothers go unmentioned in testimony of other believers about those years. A conspiracy to protect them? Loss of pertinent documents is a more likely explanation.

The Niorts, after all, followed much the same course as that of more prominent contemporaries. While the counts of Toulouse and Foix had not permitted themselves comparable intimacy with the Cathars, they allowed their subordinates to protect them, and they sought to curb the Inquisition. Heresy was a secondary consideration for these princes; their protests against the inquisitors a tactic in their struggle to maintain and increase their authority, rather than an expression of adamant hostility. When pushed to the wall, they accepted the situation and made peace with king and church as well as they could.

The Niorts had not the material and diplomatic resources of the counts and suffered a greater defeat. The failure of Trencavel's revolt destroyed their ability to influence events, yet by opportune surrender at the cost of renouncing their faith, they salvaged more than did most of their contemporaries in like circumstances and avoided falling completely into the power of the reinvigorated Inquisition.

Their fortunes also suggest a larger conclusion about the fate of the Albigensian heresy: that the events of 1240 were decisive in its decline. Punitive campaigns of royal armies reached Pyrenean redoubts which had never been attacked by crusaders. Executions, imprisonment, flight, or, as in the case of the Niorts, confiscation of property and a kind of exile, broke the power of seigneurs against whom the inquisitors had faltered. Between 1230 and 1240, we see heretics and their believers meeting in the comparative safety of noble castra or travelling widely under armed guard. The events of 1240 lost them places of refuge and comfort as well as protection when they moved about to preach and teach. In the following decade their confessions reveal that a furtive existence was the rule: shelter in forest huts, short visits to houses in villages, narrow escapes from pursuers. It has been suggested that the victory of the church over heresy was historically inevitable. Had it not been for the political-military disaster of 1240, that success would surely have been far more laboriously achieved.