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The burning at Mont-Aimé: Thibaut of Champagne's preparations for the Barons' Crusade of 1239

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Abstract

A little more than a month before he planned to go on crusade to the Holy Land, Thibaut IV of Champagne (1201–1253) presided over one of the largest burnings of heretics ever to take place in northern France, in which some 180 people were executed. Historians have traditionally portrayed the burning at Mont-Aimé as a particularly egregious example of inquisitorial zeal on the part of northern French ecclesiastical authorities, especially the Dominican friar Robert le Bougre, in the wake of Pope Gregory IX's introduction of the first papal inquisitorial tribunals into the region in the 1230s. This study argues that Thibaut's status as a crusader gave him his own interests in punishing heretics at that time and that the burning helped satisfy the material and devotional demands that planning for a crusade imposed upon powerful magnates who took the cross.

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In the months prior to his departure on the Barons' Crusade, Thibaut IV, count of Champagne, king of Navarre since 1234, and perhaps best known today as an accomplished poet, readied himself for the journey overseas in ways that were similar to the preparations of other magnates who had taken the cross. He tried to settle relations with his neighbors, confirming an exchange of villages, for example, with a nearby bishop.¹ He completed a number of agreements with local religious houses,

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¹ *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*, ed. A. Teulet et al., 5 vols (Paris, 1863–1909), nos. 2824, 2826, 2830.

many of which involved the exchange of forest rights.² In accordance with a policy pursued by numerous magnates in northern France in the middle decades of the thirteenth century, he exchanged rights in farther-flung areas for those closer to the core of his principality.³ To avoid compromising his long-term goal of territorial consolidation, he resorted to some familiar financial expedients. He called on the clergy of Champagne to support the burdens of the land, perhaps a reference to a monetary aid.⁴ And in time-honoured fashion, he extorted money from the Jewish communities under his lordship. These measures were all in accord with the steps other crusaders were taking to prepare for the expedition.

In addition to these common pre-crusade activities, Thibaut took part in one event that was more dramatic than the usual scramble for money. On 13 May 1239, at his stronghold of Mont-Aimé, he oversaw the burning of about 180 men and women convicted as heretics by an inquisitorial tribunal. As the highest-ranking secular authority in Champagne it was Thibaut's task to execute unrepentant heretics. To date, however, there has been no separate study of the burning, no study of Thibaut's role in it, and very little work addressing specifically the role of secular authorities in prosecuting heretics in northern France besides the fine, but now dated, study of J. Havet from 1880.⁵ In seeking to explain the mass execution at Mont-Aimé, historians have instead emphasised the part played by the region's ecclesiastical authorities. This emphasis is perhaps due to the fact that the burning has mostly received attention in studies of the introduction of papally sponsored inquisitorial proceedings into northern France and the Low Countries in the 1230s. Following in the wake of the publication of P. Fredericq's *Corpus documentorum Inquisitionis Haereticae Pravitatis Neerlandicae* (1889–1906), which gathered together much of the relevant primary source material, a number of studies on the subject appeared that focused on the legal aspects of these proceedings, their basis in canon law, and especially their personnel.⁶ In particular, the character, motives, and actions of the first papally delegated Dominican inquisitor to investigate heresy in these regions, Robert le Bougre, came in for a great deal of discussion, most of it negative. He appears as the very model of the terrible inquisitor, a fanatic who launched a reign of terror that culminated in the burning at Mont-Aimé. The more recent study by L. Kolmer addresses

² Among these houses were the monastery of Châtices, the Cistercian abbey of Notre-Dame of Jouy, and the house of God of Meaux: *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*, nos. 2813–2817.

³ J. Richard, *Saint Louis. Roi d'une France féodale, soutien de la Terre sainte* (Paris, 1983), 62–74.

⁴ *Les registres de Grégoire IX. Recueil des bulles de ce pape publiées ou analysées d'après les manuscrits originaux du Vatican*, ed. L. Auvray, 4 vols (Paris, 1896–1955), no. 4891.

⁵ J. Havet, 'L'hérésie et le bras séculier au moyen âge jusqu'au treizième siècle', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 41 (1880), 488–517, 570–607.

⁶ P. Fredericq, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae*, 5 vols (Ghent and the Hague, 1889–1906); J. Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre. Premier Inquisiteur Général en France* (Gand, 1892); É. Chenon, *L'hérésie à la Charité-sur-Loire et les débuts de l'Inquisition monastique dans la France du nord au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1917); C.H. Haskins, 'Robert le Bougre and the beginnings of the Inquisition in northern France', in: C.H. Haskins, *Studies in medieval culture* (Oxford, 1929), 193–244.

similar themes.⁷ The sole voice of dissent has been that raised by G. Despy, who attempted to rehabilitate Robert's reputation by blaming the violence unleashed against heretics on the friar's watch on Pope Gregory IX and King Louis IX of France (who wanted to prevent the spread of heresy northwards from Languedoc) and on local bishops, whose jurisdictional rivalries with inquisitors provoked an inflationary spiral of anti-heretic violence.⁸ The burning has received only brief treatment in studies of heresy in northern France and in general surveys of medieval inquisitorial proceedings.⁹ Despite these different emphases, the literature overall has agreed in giving Thibaut a minimal role in the burning at Mont-Aimé, most often portraying him as simply carrying out the bidding of the ecclesiastics.

My aim in this study is to show that Thibaut's status as a crusader gave him his own interests in punishing heretics at this time and that these interests were not necessarily shared by the ecclesiastical authorities with whom he was cooperating. This is not to say that Thibaut alone was responsible for organising the burning, or that he involved himself in it solely because he planned to depart for Jerusalem five weeks later. Evidence does not survive to support such claims. Rather I will argue that the burning was a highly appropriate event for him to include in his preparations for the Holy Land crusade because it satisfied the material and devotional demands that planning for a crusade imposed upon powerful magnates who took the cross. It also met a need that weighed heavily on Thibaut as his departure date loomed. In the spring of 1239 he found himself in the unusual position of having to defend his decision to go on crusade to the Holy Land, the most traditional of crusade destinations.

Thibaut had actually taken the cross for the expedition almost four years earlier. In 1235 Pope Gregory IX preached a crusade in aid of the Holy Land and Thibaut, along with a number of other prominent northern French magnates, responded to the call. Just over a year later, however, the count was surprised to receive a new appeal from the pope, this time for the Latin empire of Constantinople. Beleaguered since its establishment in 1204, the empire faced annihilation in 1235 when local rivals besieged its capital. The pope employed all the means at his disposal to convince prominent Holy Land crusaders to commute their vows and campaign instead in Latin Greece. As arguably the most powerful and wealthy of the crusaders, Thibaut

⁷ L. Kolmer, 'Ad Terrorem Multorum. Die Anfänge der Inquisition in Frankreich', *Die Anfänge der Inquisition im Mittelalter: mit einem Ausblick auf das 20. Jahrhundert und einem Beitrag über religiöse Intoleranz im nichtchristlichen Bereich*, ed. P. Segl (Köln, 1993), 77–102.

⁸ G. Despy, 'Les débuts de l'Inquisition dans les anciens Pays-Bas au XIII^e siècle', *Problèmes d'histoire du Christianisme*, 10 (1980), 71–104.

⁹ M. Grisart, 'Les Cathares dans le nord de la France', *Revue du Nord*, 49 (1967), 512; Y. Dossat, 'L'hérésie en Champagne aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles', *Mémoires de la société d'agriculture, commerce, sciences et arts du département de la Marne*, 84 (1969), 68–70; L. Tanon, *Histoire des tribunaux de l'Inquisition en France* (Paris, 1893), 113–116; J. Guiraud, *Histoire de l'Inquisition au moyen âge*, 2 vols (Paris, 1935–1938), I, 212–216.

became a prime target of this diversion effort.¹⁰ In an impassioned appeal the pope warned him that if Latin Constantinople were to fall, aid to the Holy Land would be impeded, the Eastern Church would slide further into schism, and heresy would thrive. Gregory also took the opportunity to heap lavish praise on Thibaut's martial qualities.¹¹ When neither the argument nor the flattery convinced the count to change course, however, the pope adopted a firmer approach. In addition to withholding the funding that a magnate of Thibaut's stature might have expected to receive to offset his expenses for the expedition, Gregory revived a whole host of outstanding issues between himself and the count that had long lain dormant.¹² These ranged from alleged encroachments upon ecclesiastical liberties, to suspect fundraising schemes for the crusade, to unpaid debts to Roman merchants whose interests the pope was eager to protect. Excommunication and interdict were threatened if Thibaut did not rectify his behaviour.¹³

To these sources of discord in papal-comital relations was added another potential cause of strain. Parts of Champagne had fallen under suspicion of heresy. Gregory IX believed that the seedbed of heresy in northern France was the town of La Charité-sur-Loire, in the Nivernais.¹⁴ The townspeople there had first attracted the attention of ecclesiastical authorities in 1198, when the archbishop of Sens and the bishop of Auxerre had conducted an investigation.¹⁵ This was followed by further proceedings in 1208 carried out by a new bishop of Auxerre together with the bishop of Troyes; but they too were unable to eliminate unorthodox beliefs and practices from the town. By the time Gregory IX came to deal with the problem La Charité appeared to him to 'languish like a deserted land'.¹⁶ In 1231 he dispatched yet another team of episcopal investigators, the archbishop of Bourges and still another bishop of Auxerre.¹⁷ When their inquiry failed to produce results, the pope began to suspect that local secular authorities were harbouring the heretics. Guy, count of Nevers,

¹⁰ Although Thibaut succeeded to the throne of the kingdom of Navarre in 1234, his prominence and wealth derived mainly from his rule over the county of Champagne, a large, politically and economically significant agglomeration of territories in northern France. As count of Champagne he administered directly the counties of Bar-sur-Aube, Bassigny, Meaux, and Troyes, as well as several smaller lordships in the Yonne valley and in the regions of Soissons, Châlons-sur-Marne, and Reims. Powerful lords who owed him direct homage included the counts of Joigny, Roucy, Porcien, Rethel, and Grandpré. The great Champagne fairs of Bar-sur-Aube, Lagny, Provins, and Troyes provided him with substantial revenues. For a concise summary of Thibaut's major holdings in the late 1230s, see Richard, *Saint Louis*, 64.

¹¹ *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, ed. E. Martène and U. Durand, 5 vols (Paris, 1717), I, cols. 998–999.

¹² It was not until December 1238 that the pope released to the count the revenues raised from the redemption of crusade vows in Champagne. This money was still being collected as Thibaut travelled to Marseille en route to Acre in July 1239: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 5993a, f. 275r.

¹³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 5993a, f. 42–43 (abuse of ecclesiastical liberties); *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 4601 (suspect fundraising practices); *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, ed. S. Simonsohn, 8 vols (Toronto, 1988–1991), I, nos. 152, 128, and *Registres de Grégoire IX*, nos. 1639, 4718 (disputes with Roman merchants).

¹⁴ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 1253.

¹⁵ Chenon, *L'hérésie à la Charité-sur-Loire*, 7–12.

¹⁶ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 1145.

¹⁷ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 637.

and his *bailli*, Colin of Auxerre, came under particular scrutiny in this regard. Gregory decided to try a different method. Sometime in 1232 or early 1233 the Dominican brothers Robert le Bougre, William, and the prior of the Dominicans of Besançon began to investigate heretics, first in that diocese and then in La Charité.¹⁸ They reported to the pope that heretical beliefs had spread from La Charité into the surrounding regions, including Champagne, Flanders, and other counties bordering the kingdom of France. In April 1233 Robert received a papal commission to ‘extirpate the heretical depravity’ from wherever in the aforementioned regions it had spread. The investigation of heresy in Champagne that was to culminate in the burning at Mont-Aimé was underway.

Robert’s appointment was part of a new approach Gregory IX was taking to heterodox belief in the early 1230s. In the imperial lands, and then in France, Dominican inquisitors answering directly to the pope were supplanting the bishops, who had hitherto been responsible for investigating heresy in their dioceses.¹⁹ Canon three of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, for example, had instructed bishops to visit parishes suspected of heresy one or two times a year.²⁰ In the bull *Ille humani generis* of April 1233, Gregory IX diplomatically informed the bishops of France that the Dominicans would now be taking the lead in investigating heresy:

Considering the fact that you are so borne down by the whirlwind of your various duties that you are scarcely able to breath amid the pressure of your overwhelming cares, we for this reason think it best that your burdens be divided among others and we have therefore dispatched the...Friars Preacher against the heretics in the kingdom of France and adjacent provinces.²¹

The friars proceeded in their inquiries according to the legislation Gregory IX promulgated against heretics in February 1231.²² This consisted of two letters that were issued in tandem and later copied together into the papal registers. One was the papal bull *Excommunicamus* and the other was a statute issued by the senator of Rome, Annibale. Together they became known as the Statutes of the Holy See. They set down that heretics, once the Church had condemned them, were to be handed over to secular judgment, which would punish them by the *animadversio debita*. That this phrase referred to the death penalty is suggested by another clause in the legislation, which condemned heretics who recanted their errors and wished

¹⁸ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 1253.

¹⁹ Kolmer, ‘Ad Terrorem Multorum’, 91–92.

²⁰ *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo et al. (Basel, 1962), 209–211. For the role of the bishops, see Y. Dossat, ‘La repression de l’hérésie par les évêques’, *Le credo, la morale et l’Inquisition* (Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 6, Toulouse, 1971), 226.

²¹ The best edition of this letter is Y. Dossat, *Les crises de l’Inquisition Toulousaine au XIII^e siècle (1233–1273)* (Bordeaux, 1959), *pièces justificatives*, no. 1. I follow here the English translation of A.C. Shannon, *The popes and heresy in the thirteenth century* (Villanova, 1949), 61–62.

²² *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 539.

to perform penance to life imprisonment.²³ In addition, the property of the condemned heretic was to be confiscated by the relevant secular authority.²⁴ Receivers, defenders, and supporters of heretics were to be barred from holding public office, making a will, or bringing a suit against anyone. After a year they were to be declared heretics themselves. In effect, Gregory had gathered together in one place a number of previous papal pronouncements on heresy in order to give the proceedings of the Dominican inquisitors a clear basis in canon law.

Armed with the Statutes of the Holy See, Robert le Bougre embarked on a campaign against unorthodox belief that took him through Burgundy, Flanders, and Champagne.²⁵ It was rumoured that he enjoyed an advantage other investigators lacked. The chroniclers Philip Mouskes, Matthew Paris, and Alberic of Trois-Fontaines report that he had once been a heretic himself, living in a Cathar community in Milan for ten, perhaps twenty, years.²⁶ His nickname, *le bougre*, was a term employed to describe heretics in northern France at that time.²⁷

It was, in fact, Cathars who appear to have been the main targets of Robert's investigations in the region. At the burning of Mont-Aimé, for example, Alberic of Trois-Fontaines describes a typical Cathar ceremony taking place.²⁸ The *consolamentum* was the ritual of absolution by which the ordinary Cathar believer was admitted to the rank of adept, or *perfectus*. Given the austerities demanded of *perfecti*, the *consolamentum* was typically received only at death.²⁹ At Mont-Aimé there was only one adept to perform the rite, a certain archbishop *de Moranis*.³⁰ Just before the pyre was lit, according to Alberic, the archbishop proclaimed to his followers: 'You will all be saved, absolved by my hands; I alone am damned, because I do not have a superior who will absolve me'.³¹ Even Alberic, hostile as he was to Cathar beliefs and practices, seems to have recognized the poignant implications of the ritual.

Through 1233 and the early part of 1234 Robert identified and condemned heretics at a rapid pace. His proceedings soon began to attract criticism from those who had to answer his accusations. Robert Accurri, the son of a Florentine merchant, had fallen under the friar's suspicion on account of some business dealings he had had with merchants who were later condemned as heretics. In November 1234 he brought

²³ See H. Maisonneuve, *Études sur les origines de l'Inquisition*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1960), 245–249, for papal acceptance of death by burning as the appropriate punishment for heretics.

²⁴ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 540.

²⁵ The chronology of Robert's proceedings has been established by Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre*, 31–32; Haskins, 'Robert le Bougre', 212–223; and Despy, 'L'Inquisition dans les anciens Pays-Bas', 76–77.

²⁶ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Albrici monachi Triumfontium chronicon*, ed. P. Scheffer-Boichorst, *Monumenta Germaniae historica, scriptores*, ed. G.-H. Pertz et al., 32 vols (Hannover and Leipzig, 1826–1934), XXIII, 940.

²⁷ Dossat, 'L'hérésie en Champagne', 62.

²⁸ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 944–945.

²⁹ For the *consolamentum*, see M. Lambert, *Medieval heresy. Popular movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1992), 106–111.

³⁰ As Dossat ('L'hérésie en Champagne', 72) has pointed out, there were no archbishops in the Cathar Church, so Alberic is either mistaken here or his text has been altered.

³¹ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 945.

his case to the papal curia in person, had the bishop of Florence confirm his orthodoxy, and was able to win from the pope a letter ordering Robert to cease his pursuit.³² Peter Vogrin, of Clermont diocese, brought a similar appeal against the friar. Peter reported that despite having twice cleared himself of heresy before episcopal investigators at La Charité, Robert had compelled him to answer charges for a third time. When Peter sent his nephew, a cleric, to appeal to Rome, Robert excommunicated the nephew and suspended him from his benefice until he ceased defending his uncle. The curia appointed three churchmen to consider the case.³³

If the novel procedures Robert employed alarmed those accused of heresy, they also troubled the bishops in whose dioceses he was operating. By finding heretics where they had not, he cast their efforts to prosecute heresy in a bad light. And by questioning those whom episcopal proceedings had exonerated, he showed a disregard for their jurisdiction. It was perhaps this latter issue that most rankled the ecclesiastical hierarchy.³⁴ Should Robert, as a Dominican carrying out a papal commission, answer to the pope alone? Or should he also be mindful of the pastoral function that pertained to the episcopal office? This was the subtext of a complaint the archbishop of Sens lodged against Robert at the curia in early 1234. The archbishop accused Robert of exercising his office in regions not infamous for heresy. The pope defended his own right to take action against heterodox belief by appointing papal inquisitors, but at the same time acknowledged the archbishop's claims in that arena. Henceforward Robert would be able to prosecute heretics in Sens only if the archbishop assigned him to the task. The pope ordered the prior of the Dominicans of *Francia* to suspend Robert's proceedings in the meantime.³⁵

Neither the appeals of suspected heretics nor the protestations of the bishops could put a stop to Robert's investigation, however. After an eighteen-month suspension he received a new commission from the pope to 'rise up against the manifest deceits [of the heretics], like a knight strenuous for the fray, to loose the reins of the inquisition...in every direction throughout the kingdom of France'.³⁶ Gregory noted that, contrary to the claims of the bishops, heretics had swarmed through the kingdom in Robert's absence. He ordered the archbishop of Sens and the prelates of his province to lend their aid and favour to the friar's endeavors. Now firmly in charge, Robert embarked on a campaign against heretical beliefs and practices that surprised contemporaries by its ferocity. He began at Châlons-sur-Marne, in northern Champagne, in early 1236, where he was present at the burning of a certain number of accused heretics.³⁷ From there he travelled northwest, into the Low Countries, stopping first at Péronne. According to Philip Mouskes, five persons were executed in a burning

³² *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 2221.

³³ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, no. 2825.

³⁴ Haskins, 'Robert le Bougre', 215.

³⁵ *Registres de Grégoire IX*, nos. 1763–1764.

³⁶ *Bullarium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. T. Ripoll, 7 vols (Rome, 1729–1739), I, nos. 137–139.

³⁷ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 936; Despy, 'L'Inquisition dans les anciens Pays-Bas', 95.

outside the town walls.³⁸ He made his way next into the ecclesiastical lordship of Cambrai, which was under imperial suzerainty. Louis IX gave him an escort of royal sergeants for the journey ‘so that no harm would come to him’. At Elincourt he assisted at the burning of four more persons before establishing his tribunal in the episcopal see proper on 17 February 1236. Of the forty people he detained in Cambrai for heresy, twenty were released to the secular arm and twenty were imprisoned or assigned lesser penances.³⁹ Heading further north, Robert crossed back into French territory and conducted an inquiry at Douai. On 2 March 1236 ten persons were burnt as heretics outside the Oliveti gate, on the *via leprosororum* in the direction of Lambres. Present were the archbishop of Reims, the bishops of Arras, Cambrai, and Tournai, as well as Joanna, countess of Flanders and Hainault.⁴⁰ Some weeks later Robert brought his campaign in the Low Countries to a close in Lille. Twenty persons, according to Philip Mouskes, were executed there as unrepentant heretics.⁴¹ All in all, Robert had condemned about sixty persons to the *animadversio debita* over a two or three-month span. He cannot be placed at another burning until Mont-Aimé in May 1239.

It has been seen that Robert’s operations enjoyed the support of important secular lords in northern France, including the countess of Flanders and the king himself. Another secular lord who took an interest in his activities was Thibaut of Champagne. The count’s registers, in fact, contain Robert’s only surviving piece of correspondence. On 21 February 1234 Robert and a certain brother Jacob, styling themselves ‘judges delegated by the pope against heretics in the kingdom of France’, informed the count that the chapter of St Quiriace of Provins was disputing his claim to the person and property of a suspected heretic known as Gila ‘the abbess’, whom Thibaut had earlier detained on the brothers’ recommendation. They ordered Thibaut, by the authority the pope invested in them, ‘to hand her over without any contradiction to the chapter’s custody and remove any guards he may have placed over her home and possessions’, if the chapter’s claim proved to be true.⁴² At issue was who exercised lordship over Gila. Innocent III’s letter of 1199 on heresy, *Vergentis in senium*, had established that the goods of a convicted heretic belonged to the heretic’s lord.⁴³ Over the course of the thirteenth century this principle ensconced itself in the major

³⁸ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskes*, ed. [F.] de Reiffenberg, 2 vols (Brussels, 1836–8), II, 608–609.

³⁹ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 609; Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 937; *Extraits de la chronique attribuée à Baudouin d’Avesnes*, in: *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. M. Bouquet et al., 24 vols (Paris, 1737–1904), XXI, 166.

⁴⁰ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 611; Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 937; *Notae S. Amati Duacenses*, in: *Monumenta Germaniae historica, scriptores*, XXIV, 30.

⁴¹ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 611.

⁴² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 5993a, f. 412. The letter is published in Haskins, ‘Robert le Bougre’, 215–216 n. 3.

⁴³ Maisonneuve, *Origines de l’Inquisition*, 156–157.

collections of French customary law.⁴⁴ Thibaut and the chapter eventually agreed to submit their claims to the binding arbitration of two experts in the law, a common procedure for settling legal questions in northern France at the time.⁴⁵ The result of their inquiry is not known, but we find Gila again at Mont-Aimé, where she apparently avoided execution by agreeing to name names.⁴⁶

The dispute over Gila shows that Thibaut involved himself in the Dominican campaign against heresy from its earliest stages. He allowed Dominican inquisitors to operate in Provins, one of the more important towns in Champagne, and his administration collaborated in their proceedings. Robert's letter stresses this cooperation: 'since on our recommendation you detained the said abbess in prison', it begins.⁴⁷ Thibaut's support for Robert should not be taken for granted. Just a few years earlier secular rulers in the German lands had opposed the operations of Conrad of Marburg, one of the first papal inquisitors to investigate heresy there. In 1233, not long after bringing charges of heresy against the powerful Henry III, count of Sayn, Conrad was murdered under mysterious circumstances.⁴⁸ Robert was more circumspect than his German colleague, to be sure, but Conrad's experience suggests nonetheless that secular rulers could decisively affect the outcome of heresy investigations, especially those conducted by members of the first generation of papally sponsored inquisitors.

The final outcome of Robert's investigation, of course, was the burning at Mont-Aimé. Here too, it needs to be stressed, Thibaut played a crucial role. As the ranking secular authority of the region, it was his task to punish those whom Robert and his assistants identified as unrepentant heretics. It was forbidden to churchmen to inflict the penalty that the crime of willfully persisting in heterodox belief was thought to merit. Canon law, customary law, and northern French tradition insisted upon this cooperation of the spiritual and secular arms. For previous instances of collaboration in northern France Thibaut could look back to William of Alsace, count of Flanders, who had burned heretics released to the secular arm in 1183 by William, archbishop of Reims, and Robert of Dreux, who had done the same for one of William's successors in 1205.⁴⁹ Philip Mouskes's statement that Thibaut attended the burning at Mont-Aimé because he was 'lord of Champagne' confirms that he acted there in the

⁴⁴ For example title XC 'On punishing heretics and unbelievers' from the *Etablissements de Saint Louis*: 'If someone is suspected of heresy, the judge should arrest him and send him to the bishop; and if he is convicted, he should be burned; and all his personal property goes to the baron'. See *The Etablissements de Saint Louis. Thirteenth-Century law texts from Tours, Orléans, and Paris*, ed. and trans. F.R.P. Akehurst (Philadelphia, 1996), 59.

⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 5993a, f. 436; Haskins, 'Robert le Bougre', 216.

⁴⁶ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 945.

⁴⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 5993a, f. 412.

⁴⁸ A. Patschovsky, 'Zur Ketzerverfolgung Konrads von Marburg', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 37 (1981), 641–651.

⁴⁹ *Ex chronico anonymi Laudunensis canonici*, in: *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, XVIII, 713. For secular-ecclesiastical cooperation in northern France at this time see Havet, 'L'hérésie et le bras séculier au moyen âge', 12; Maisonneuve, *Origines de l'Inquisition*, 166; Dossat, 'L'hérésie en Champagne', 64–65.

capacity of the secular authority responsible for carrying out the *animadversio debita*. The burning could not have taken place without him.

It follows that Thibaut had a say in where, when, and in what manner the final punishment of the heretics should be carried out. His input, for example, is evident in the choice of site for the burning. Located in the territory of the commune of Bergères-les-Vertus, Mont-Aimé stands some 500 ft (240 m) high and dominates the plain between Reims and Troyes. Blanche of Navarre, Thibaut's mother and regent during his minority, fortified the site in 1210. During the late 1220s and the early 1230s, when Thibaut fought a series of wars against his vassals, his most powerful neighbours, and the French crown, Mont-Aimé proved to be one of his most strategically important strongholds.⁵⁰ An eyewitness to the burning, the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon, mentions specifically that it took place at 'the castle of the count of Champagne'.⁵¹ Mont-Aimé provided secure internment for the suspects because its high altitude made escape difficult. In addition, it furnished accommodation for the crowd that gathered to watch the burning. Present that day were the archbishop of Reims, and the bishops of Soissons, Tournai, Arras, Thérouanne, Noyon, Laon, Senlis, Beauvais, Châlons-sur-Marne, Cambrai, Orléans, Troyes, Meaux, Langres, and Verdun. All in all, sixteen prelates attended, with eleven of the twelve dioceses of the province of Reims represented, as well as three of the eight dioceses of the province of Sens. Some of them had been there since the week before, helping Robert in his inquiries. Among the secular dignitaries were the count of Champagne himself, his court, and other (unfortunately unnamed) barons of Champagne. There were persons of lesser rank in the audience as well. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, for his part, numbered the crowd at 700,000.⁵² The burning was a public event, and the fact that it was carried out at Thibaut's own stronghold suggests that he wanted it that way. Thus, some five weeks before he was expected to go on crusade, Thibaut chose to support inquisitorial proceedings in a highly public fashion. If his ultimate reasons for doing so must remain obscure, it can be shown that his upcoming departure for Jerusalem provided him with a number of reasons to have wished to be involved in punishing heretics at that time and in that fashion.

In the first place, Thibaut had a claim on the property of those persons under his lordship condemned to die at Mont-Aimé. This claim gave him a financial incentive to participate in the burning. Although it is impossible to quantify with any precision the amount of revenue that such confiscations could bring to the comital treasury, the dispute over the heretic Gila, in which we saw Thibaut engaging with St Quiriace, suggests that it may have been considerable. Both parties to the quarrel apparently felt that the home and possessions of one person such as 'the abbess' were worth fighting over. On a larger scale, the many quarrels between royal officials and

⁵⁰ Grisart, 'Les Cathares dans le nord de la France', 512; Dossat, 'L'hérésie en Champagne', 68–70; O. François, *Le Mont-Aimé: étude historique et archéologique sur le Mont-Aimé*, 2nd ed., revised and expanded by G. Chérest (Châlons-sur-Marne, 1976), 15.

⁵¹ Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, in: *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. J. Quétif and J. Échard, 2 vols (Paris, 1719), I, 190.

⁵² Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 944–945.

churches that confiscations generated in southern France in the 1230s, which led to an exchange of letters between Louis IX and Gregory IX, suggest a similar conclusion.⁵³ If there were profits to be made from inquisitorial proceedings, it is easy to see that Thibaut would have had an interest in tapping into them as he prepared for his crusade. Support for inquisitorial proceedings, like assessing monetary aids or taxing the profits of lending at interest, helped meet the financial demands of crusading. By overseeing the burning at Mont-Aimé, Thibaut stood to profit from the confiscation of the property of not one but as many as 180 persons under his lordship.

The burning also helped the count meet the penitential demands of crusading. For Thibaut and his contemporaries the burning of persons they deemed offensive to God could be a pious act likely to win divine favour. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines described the mass execution at Mont-Aimé as a burnt sacrifice, ‘a holocaust pleasing to the Lord’.⁵⁴ Philip Mouskes declared that the burnings of heretics at Cambrai, Douai and Lille in 1236 aroused ‘great joy without end’.⁵⁵ The punishment of heretics was, furthermore, a pious act of particular relevance to crusading, in that it fulfilled the same purpose of defending Christian lands and peoples from the threats of non-believers. By striking against heretics in their own lands, crusaders could affirm their commitment to battling infidels in the Holy Land. Above all, though, the burning satisfied a devotional need peculiar to crusaders of Thibaut’s rank.

In order to attain the spiritual reward crusading offered, the remission of sins, crusaders tried to depart in a penitent state. To ensure this status they needed to account for their conduct before God. For crusaders of all ranks, this involved admitting one’s faults and, where possible, making amends for them. For powerful crusaders, there was an additional obligation. As the ruler of a kingdom, a duchy, or a county, they had to answer not only for their personal conduct, but for the welfare of their people as well. The departure preparations of Louis IX provide a well-known and contemporary example of a secular ruler acting on this responsibility towards his subjects. Prior to going on crusade in 1248 the king made reparations for wrongs committed by royal administrators, intensified his campaign against usurious Jewish money-lending, and stepped up his support for inquisitorial proceedings in southern France. Although the whole kingdom felt the impact of Louis’s reforms, the impulse behind them was that of the individual crusader.⁵⁶

In this way the spiritual fitness of powerful crusaders was bound up with the welfare of those they ruled. Because heresy endangered the welfare of the people of Champagne, it threatened Thibaut’s status as a penitent. The burning at Mont-Aimé provided him with an opportunity to eliminate this menace and fulfill a responsibility towards the people he ruled; more importantly, it gave him a chance to show them that he had done so. He presided at Mont-Aimé in his capacity as

⁵³ See, for example, *Registres de Grégoire IX*, nos. 1909, 1914, 1916–1919, 4184–4192. For discussion of these cases see Shannon, *Popes and heresy*, 100–105.

⁵⁴ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 944.

⁵⁵ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 613.

⁵⁶ Richard, *Saint Louis*, 193–196; W.C. Jordan, *Louis IX and the challenge of the crusade. A study in rulership* (Princeton, 1979).

‘lord of Champagne’, to recall Philip Mouskes’s expression. Gathered to watch the event were representatives of all strata of Champenois society (spiritual and temporal, rich and poor) and of all its geographical regions (clergy from every diocese). The conflagration, moreover, had the effect of demonstrating that Champagne was entirely rid of heretics. The large numbers condemned and the mass nature of their execution served to convey an impression of completeness to the watching crowd. The site of the burning suggested this as well. People knew Mont-Aimé in the thirteenth century as the ancient seedbed of heresy in Champagne. Tradition had it that the Manichean Fortunat, chased from North Africa by St Augustine of Hippo, had fled to Mont-Aimé and met a warrior chief named Widomar who had his camp there. Fortunat converted the chief to Manicheism and from then on the mountain was a meeting place for heretics.⁵⁷ In the twelfth century, the cathedral chapter of Liège described Mont-Aimé as the home of a heretical sect that had spread its teachings throughout Champagne.⁵⁸ Many believed the sect’s destruction was foretold by a battle of dogs that raged in 1230. ‘And so, as the story runs’, explained Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, ‘that dogs once came from all directions and tore themselves to pieces in a battle at this same place, as a sort of prophecy of what was to be, so these Bougri, worse than dogs, were there exterminated in one day to the triumph of Holy Church’.⁵⁹ By striking at the home of the first heretics in Champagne, the burning signalled the destruction of all their progeny. Ultimately, though, even those among the crowd who were ignorant of Mont-Aimé’s history could grasp the meaning of the event. They saw the heretics physically, not symbolically, removed from Champagne. By eliminating this threat to their welfare the burning removed an obstacle to the successful prosecution of Thibaut’s crusade vow.

The burning also demonstrated how seriously Thibaut took his responsibilities as a secular ruler to the pope. By May 1239 Thibaut’s relations with the curia were poor. His fundraising schemes for the crusade had come under scrutiny, his alleged violations of ecclesiastical liberties had drawn a threat of excommunication, and his refusal to agree terms with Roman merchants who enjoyed papal protection had drawn a threat of interdict on Troyes and Provins. Most importantly, he had rejected Gregory’s invitation to campaign in Latin Greece. Given the resources Thibaut commanded, this represented a blow to the diversion attempt. What was more, the pope had promoted the Constantinople crusade to him as, among other things, an expedition to stop the spread of heresy in the Latin Empire of Constantinople.⁶⁰ These circumstances may have combined to increase the pressure on the count to

⁵⁷ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 936; *Annales Erphordenses Fratrum Praedicatorum*, in: *Monumenta Erphesfurtensia saec. XII. XIII. XIV.*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (Hannover and Leipzig, 1899), 96.

⁵⁸ *Epistola ecclesiae Leodiensis ad Lucum papam II*, in: *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicum, moralium amplissima collectio*, ed. E. Martène and U. Durand, 9 vols (Paris, 1724–1733), I, 776–778.

⁵⁹ Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, 945. The story also appears in Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, 190, and John of St Victoire, *Memoriali historiarum*, in: *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, I, 190.

⁶⁰ *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, I, cols. 998–999. Gregory did not claim that the Byzantine Greeks were heretics themselves; rather they were schismatics, whose withdrawal from the Roman Church, in which the one Catholic faith resided, had created an environment in which heretical beliefs could flourish.

take action against heretics in his own lands. The burning was a timely, dramatic, and public affirmation of his willingness to do so.

It was also a show of support for the pope's new approach to heterodox beliefs and practices.⁶¹ Contemporaries were struck by the novelty of the fact that Robert le Bougre and his fellow mendicants acted on papal authority alone. Many chroniclers who discuss his proceedings mention it.⁶² And Robert himself had emphasised in his letter of 1234 that he was operating under the aegis of the pope. This was why, after all, he initially encountered opposition from bishops in northern France: they feared losing to a papally delegated judge a function that typically pertained to their office. Thibaut, by contrast, had thrown himself behind the fledgling tribunals from the start and had presided over one of the most striking demonstrations of their efficacy to date: the burning at Mont-Aimé. After such a display it would be difficult for the pope to question the sincerity of his faith and the zeal with which he defended it as the departure date for the Holy Land expedition loomed. And so the same magnate who rejected the papal invitation to crusade against heretics in Greece welcomed the papal initiative against heretics in his own lands.

For some time historians have portrayed the burning at Mont-Aimé as a particularly egregious example of inquisitorial zeal on the part of northern French ecclesiastical authorities, especially the Dominican friar Robert le Bougre, in the wake of Pope Gregory IX's introduction of the first papal inquisitorial tribunals into the region in the 1230s. Certainly it was the churchmen who condemned the heretics to die; but it was the count of Champagne, strictly speaking, who executed the death sentence. He bears a greater share of the responsibility for the unprecedented violence that took place there than historians have previously acknowledged. If appreciating Thibaut's crucial role in the burning helps us to understand better the origins of an act of violence, it is important for two other reasons as well. In the first place, it enables us to recognize the important part secular authorities played in inquisitorial proceedings, especially during the early years of the papal tribunals. If they chose to exert it, their influence over the outcome of these proceedings could be very great. Secondly, it allows us to see how taking the cross provided secular lords like Thibaut with powerful incentives to engage in violence against heretics before they departed on crusade. The burning satisfied two practical needs of his, and of prominent crusaders in general, that were otherwise not easily reconciled: spiritual purification and capital accumulation.

⁶¹ R. Kieckhefer emphasises that inquisitorial proceedings lacked institutional maturity in the 1230s: R. Kieckhefer, 'The office of Inquisition and medieval heresy: the transition from personal to institutional jurisdiction', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 46 (1995), 36–61.

⁶² See, for example, *Notae S. Amati Duacenses*, 30; *Extraits de la chronique attribuée à Baudouin d'Avesnes*, 166; *Ex epitome Andreae Silvii prioris Marchianensis de gestis et successione regum francorum*, in: *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, XVIII, 559.

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