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Laurence W. Marvin, *The Occitan War: A Military and Political History of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, digitally printed 2009. xxvi + 328 pp. \$50.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0521123658.

Review by David Stewart Bachrach, University of New Hampshire

Throughout the medieval millennium, more surplus resources were devoted to war, the preparation for war, and war's aftermath than to any other matter. Yet, the study of warfare, despite, or, indeed, because of the popularity of this subject with the broader public, has been pushed to the margins by the scholarly community. A case in point is the Albigensian crusade against Cathars. This group established an entire alternate religion and hierarchy in southwestern France, with considerable support from both the rising merchant class and southern noble families. The Cathar views that the earth was a battleground between two equal divine forces, one good which governed all that was spiritual, and one evil which governed all that was physical, led to repeated efforts by the Catholic Church in southern France and, ultimately, by the papacy in Rome, to root out this heretical movement. The preaching and subsequent crusades against the Cathars have garnered enormous scholarly attention for more than a century, including important studies by R. I. Moore, Malcolm Lambert, Malcolm Barber, and most recently, Mark Pegg.^[1] Until now, however, the Cathar wars have not engendered a single focused study of the military campaigns that were at the heart of this struggle. Laurence W. Marvin fills this lacuna with a military and political history of the ten-year-long series of campaigns waged by Simon de Montfort (died 1218) against his Occitan opponents.

The volume is organized chronologically into nine chapters following a lengthy introduction. In that introduction, Marvin provides a valuable overview of a number of important topics that inform the remainder of the study, including a broad historiographical treatment of the Albigensian crusade, the political situation in Occitania on the eve of the northern invasions, the nature of warfare in the Latin West during the early thirteenth century, the crucial role played by logistics in medieval, as in modern, warfare, and the main narrative sources for the crusade. The most important Latin source for the campaign is Peter Vaux-de-Cernay's chronicle, based on his observations as a member of the entourage of his uncle Guy, abbot of Vaux-de-Cernay, who served in the armies of Simon de Montfort, the leader of the crusaders. The second major source is the Occitan *Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*, written in part by William of Tudela, who served in the household of Baldwin of Toulouse, also a crusade leader. The *Chanson* was continued by an anonymous partisan of the crusade. The third major source is a somewhat late history by William of Puylaurens, which provides a southern perspective on the war. In evaluating the information provided by these narrative sources, as well as by the substantial number of surviving charters, Marvin correctly observes that warfare in Occitania, as in the rest of the Latin West, was dominated by sieges in which foot soldiers and artillery played the most important roles. He also makes the important point here that the success of all military campaigns rests fundamentally on a sound grasp of logistics.

Chapters two through ten follow the campaigns and political career of Simon de Montfort as he assumed leadership of the northern crusade against the Cathars, and then became an important actor within Occitania, ultimately coming to dominate the region before being killed at the siege

of Toulouse in 1218. Marvin skillfully weaves together the three main narrative accounts of these campaigns with numerous charters to provide a compelling description of the scores of sieges, numerous minor skirmishes, and handful of major battles in which Simon de Montfort and his officers participated. Perhaps most impressive, however, is Marvin's encyclopedic knowledge of the terrain in Occitania and his understanding of the crucial importance of topography and communications to the conduct of war. He is aided throughout by his own exploration of the routes traveled by the armies of the crusaders and the southern barons against whom they fought. Throughout his narrative, Marvin points to the difficulties faced by both Simon de Montfort and his opponents in providing food and supplies for their men during sieges and on the march, particularly when roads and rivers were controlled by the enemy. The volume concludes with a brief epilogue treating political events in Occitania following the death of Simon de Montfort, leading ultimately to the domination of the region by the Capetian dynasty. This marked the first time that direct royal rule had extended to this region since the ninth century.

This heavily annotated work is augmented by two valuable maps of the region and eight plans of major cities and fortifications that were besieged during the ten-year struggle. The volume is rounded out by an index and a select bibliography of works cited in the text.

This highly accessible work is a benchmark for the writing of military and political history on the regional level. In order to understand medieval society, it is crucial to understand the conduct of war, and the ways in which war affected politics, culture, and religion, as well as social and economic affairs. The great achievement of this text is to interweave military history into the broader patterns of medieval society in which wars were fought. In addition to its value to scholars, this text will be equally useful in undergraduate courses in medieval history and western civilization, and graduate courses in medieval history. One quibble is Marvin's very frequent use of the term "knight" to denote *milites*, without a sufficient explanation of the multi-valent social, economic, political, and military meaning of this term. This relatively minor concern does not detract from the importance of Marvin's accomplishment, and all future discussions of the Albigensian crusade will have to begin with this study.

NOTES

[1] R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998); Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*, (London: Longman, 2000); and Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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