

THE USE AND ABUSE OF HISTORY: THE CREATION OF THE “AUDE, PAYS CATHARE”. AN EXAMPLE OF THE MANAGEMENT OF AN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PATRIMONY?

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a study of one of the groundbreaking programmes for managing historical and cultural heritage in Europe, the one known as “The Aude, Cathar Country”. Driven by the first decentralisation policies initiated in France in the early 1980s, after the socialists had entered the government of the Republic, this heritage management programme wagers on the use of the History of Catharism as an economic booster for a heavily depressed territory. As well as studying the process of creating this programme and emphasising the lack of knowledge of Cathar history among the local population, mention will be made of some of the most relevant problems that arose during construction of the programme. Its mercantilist drift, preferring to use the myth rather than the history of Catharism, and alongside this the marginalisation of the historians of Catharism have been some of the errors in the application of the programme which have provoked its discredit and/or the exasperation, of both the local population, and the tourists who discover this magnificent territory in the South of France.

KEY WORDS

Aude, Cathars, Catharism, Management, Myth, Country.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Atax, Cathari, Catharismus, Administratio, Mythus, Terra.

How does a territory reconstruct its history with the intention of creating an identity? At the time the construction of Europe and its attendant risks of a derivative identity, the creation of a “Cathar Country”, (*Pays Cathare*), began in the South of France at the beginning of the 1980s, the time of the first political moves toward decentralization in France. This creation seemed like a response capable of bringing together the various initiatives and efforts then attempting to economically revitalize a territory that found itself at the brink of disaster. The Middle Ages were used with a view towards bringing meaning to the construction of a territorial identity; the Middle Ages was already the cradle of the national identity created in later times. If the department of the *Aude* was not the only province in the south of France that was able to reclaim the patrimony of the Cathars, the *Aude* would end up cornering the image, making Cathar history and its medieval patrimony their touristic slogan.

The present work offers a study of what is known as “Aude, the Cathar Country”, one of the pioneering and often referenced programs among the efforts to manage the cultural and historical patrimony of Europe. In the first part, the essay will address the political, economic, social and cultural circumstances that allowed the conception, and ultimately the founding of this program. Particular attention will be devoted to the study of the recovery of Catharism throughout history, that is to say, to the construction of the Cathar myth; this recovery insists more on the interest that has been generated among the people of the territory than on history. The second part of the essay will focus on the history of the program of the “Cathar Country”, in order to study the different stages that have made possible the institutionalization of the program through the implementation of the economic development of the territory and through the management of the heritage of the *Aude*. The final part of the work will look at the technical aspects and educational principles that were applied and used in this program to develop and manage the vast patrimony of the *Aude*.

1. The Project for the Creation of the “Cathar Country”

1.1 French Decentralization

France is one the models of centralized politics, known to have resisted the crisis provoked by the creation of the European Union better than other nations. This centralization was influenced by the first laws of political decentralization promulgated by the socialists following the election of François Mitterand to the presidency of the French Republic in 1981. The first consequence of this movement towards decentralization was the mobilization of the representatives of the many regions and departments of France in the search for an identity. Groups turned to history with the intention of constructing territorial specificity, an initiative that was repeated similarly in other types of projects, such as the elaboration of new cultural



or touristic policies and in local development. Policies for the commemoration of certain historical events and the recover of local histories and identities were presented as the foundation that would serve to inspire and construct the actions that politicians should support in their own territories.¹

The idea of the “Cathar Country” program arose in this political context, a project for the economic development and support of the territory in which the Cathars, dissidents of the medieval era, historically lived. The project mandated the imaginary construction of a new territory. At first, the geographic area for which the Cathar Country program was intended extended along most of the French Pyrenees, through the territory of two regions: the Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées.² In the first of these territories, two departments were principally interested in the Cathar topic: the *Aude* and the *Herault*. In the second, there were four departments: the Ariège, the Haute-Garonne, the Tarn and Tarn-Garonne. From the beginning, the heads of the various departments and the representatives of the French state clashed, divided by the different approaches that each one proposed for the program. Their differences were probably caused by their diverse professions as much as by the different approaches defended by the major players in the program. On the one side, the tourism professionals defended a program based on “cultural tourism”; on the other, the representatives of academic community favored the promotion of a “Historical and Cultural Heritage”. To these two approaches, the experts from the French state added a third, which tried to integrate their own project of recovery based on “thematic routes”.³

These different rationales confronted each other early in the conception of the Cathar Country program: economic, patrimonial, and centralizing; The viewpoints prevented the experts from agreeing on the territorial delineation of the program, a question that proved crucial and decisive. In the beginning, all the experts agreed in saying that the area of the department of the *Aude* was too restrictive given that it excluded the consideration of other important places in the history of the Cathars. Jean-Pierre Sarret, then an expert and head of the Cultural Service of the General Council of the *Aude*, proposed a compromise solution: work on the virtual space that represented the living community of the good men and good women, the religious Cathars; that is to say, work on an inter-departmental and trans-regional territory. Even though the proposition seemed viable, a break was inevitable due to the confrontation between the position defended by the experts from the central state, the supporters of the identification and recovery of the historical heritage of a territory and the academic experts, advocates of a regionalist approach to Cathar

1. This section owes the essence of its contents to the survey conducted by the sociologist Marie-Carmen Garcia and the political scientist William Genieys: Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L'invention du Pays Cathare. Essais sur la constitution d'un territoire imaginé*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.

2. See the maps in the appendix.

3. The French state was represented by the *Commission Supérieure des Monuments Historiques*, see: Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L'invention du Pays cathare...: 55-58*.



Country. The first group accused the others of defending too culturalist an approach to Cathar Country.⁴

The idea of constructing the Cathar Country program solely around certain touristic centers near the castles was abandoned, privileging, on the contrary, a broader tour through the territory centered on the recovery of areas that characterized the Cathar past. In effect, the concept itself of Cathar Country reflected the syncretism between both a rereading of the Cathar past and a neo-Occitanist focus on the “country”.⁵ For the builders of this program, the “country” necessarily declined in the singular, given that they tried to invent a new space which would be reflected in local public action. The space in which the medieval dissidents lived was identified and reduced to the program of the “Cathar country”, justifying the recuperation of the medieval past by the Aude.

This recovery can be explained as much within the context of the early implementation of French political decentralization as by the economic crisis of the 1970s. This crisis had had a more severe impact in these territories, changing from that point onward the intervention and management of the territory by the central French state. New forms of development had been launched that were adapted to the differing situations. Policy actions for local development had applied to the territories that met the following criteria: the territory had to have a favorable cosial composition in the population; the territory had to enjoy a dominant position with regard to its surrounding areas, allowing access to political circles that negotiated access to the aid of the State; and finally, it had to have a history that demonstrated that in the past the territory had traditionally opposed centralized power. The department of the Aude met all of these requirements, in fact, the policies of decentralization were thus experienced as a just inversion of the traditional relationship between a powerful central state and a deep and marginalized France.⁶ The different types of strategies that could make possible the affirmation of a local identity had begun.

1.2 The foundation of a Center for Cathar Studies, the CEC

If the French policies of decentralization triggered a return to the history of the Cathars, placing it in the service of the construction of the economic development project of the “Cathar country,” the reuse of the history of these medieval dissidents was not completely novel. From the beginning of the 1970s, the Occitanist political parties and movements with separatist leanings (most of which gained an important acceptance in southern France) had already reclaimed the Cathars. On the other hand,

4. The project of the experts from the French state to establish a thematic route connecting the “Cathar Castles,” similar to the route through the castles of the Loire valley, was quickly abandoned. In fact, the appellation “Cathar Castles” did not reflect the historical reality, given that the majority of the existing castles were constructed later or reconstructed in order to guard the frontier, such as Montségur.

5. Touraine, Alain; Dubet, François; Wieviorka, Michel. *Le pays contre l'Etat*. Paris: Seuil, 1981.

6. Faure, Alain. “Les élus locaux à l'épreuve de la decentralization”. *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 3/44 (1994): 462-479.



the work of some scholars such as René Nelli both further fueled, and was fueled in turn by the political project. Since the 1960s, Nelli was interested in the reappraisal of Catharism and defended the creation of a center for the documentation and study of the Cathars. Especially at the beginning, the political project needed the historical recognition. This explains the creation of the “National Center for Cathar Studies” (*Centre National d’Études Cathares*) in 1981 which was installed in Villegly Castle, near Carcassonne, in the Aude. CNEC was rapidly converted to CEC, losing its “national” character. In recognition and tribute to its founder and principal promoter, the CEC was converted into the *Centre René Nelli*. Responding to the demands of this philosopher, poet and native Carcassonne, the then president of the Aude, Robert Capdeville, accepted the subsidizing and creation of the CNEC in 1981. René Nelli died shortly after the foundation of the center, although he had already designated his successor, Anne Brenon, a young archivist and palaeographer. She served as the scientific director of the CEC until 1999 and founded and edited the journal *Heresis*.⁷ Under her tutelage, the CEC rapidly created a scientific council consisting primarily of passionate scholars of Catharism, including the widow of René Nelli, Suzette Nelli, the journalist Michel Roquebert,⁸ who had already begun work on his *Epic of The Cathars* and the scholar Jean Duvernoy, author of a voluminous historical synthesis on the Cathars.⁹

From its inception, the CEC presented itself as a “center for the investigation and documentation of the Cathars within the context of Christian heterodoxy during the Middle Ages and for the more general study of historical dissidents and southern cultures...” The association proposed to “encourage and nurture the historical research in fields that have been particularly abused or corrupted by an abundance of publications of a commercial or esoteric character”. In short, even before the creation of the Cathar Country program, the CEC presented itself as a center for the “rehabilitation of the Cathars”, by working principally with historical sources. This rehabilitation of Cathar history served to feed, although involuntarily, the political project of the general council of the Aude that had already begun the process of the (re)invention of the territory by promoting its historical and cultural heritage.¹⁰

With regard to the history of the Cathars, the CEC became the mouthpiece for the work of Jean Duvernoy, who thereafter became the scientific reference *par excellence*. Not a historian by training, Jean Duvernoy created an excellent work of scholarship—serious and respectful of the sources—the work was published in the

7. The journal *Heresis*, the journal of the history of medieval dissidents (*Revue d’Histoire des Dissidences Européennes*) has published 49 volumes from 1983 to 2008.

8. Roquebert, Michel. *L’Épopée cathare. 1, L’invasion (1198-1212)*. Toulouse: Privat, 1970; Roquebert, Michel. *L’Épopée cathare. 2, L’épopée cathare. Muret et dépossession (1213-1216)*. Toulouse: Privat, 1977; Roquebert, Michel. *L’Épopée cathare. III, L’épopée cathare. Le lys et la croix (1216-1229)*. Toulouse: Privat, 1986. Two more volumes of the Cathar Epic would be published respectively in 1989 and 1998. The five volumes will become part of the commemorative history event for the victims of the Albigensian Crusade and the Inquisition created by the pope to pursue and eradicate the followers of this heresy.

9. Duvernoy, Jean. *Le Catharisme. 1, La Religion des Cathares*. Toulouse: Privat, 1976; Duvernoy, Jean. *Le Catharisme. 2, L’Histoire des Cathares*. Toulouse: Privat, 1979.

10. The text is part of the first presentational plaques of the Centre d’Études Cathares (CEC).



late 1970s. In contrast to the esoteric tendencies of the first works of René Nelli,¹¹ the work of Jean Duvernoy provided a novel approach to the Cathars, halfway between the traditional vision, that he still defended in part, and a full renovation. The renovation was affirming the fundamentally Christian nature of medieval dissent, a hypothesis contrary to the view defended by medieval Catholic theologians and still present in the research done by Christine Thouzellier.¹² For his part, despite continuing to defend the Eastern origins of the Cathars, Jean Duvernoy, was one of the first to deny any Manichean influence in the beliefs and rituals of the medieval dissidents, insisting, on the contrary, on their medieval Christian character.

One needs to know which was the dominant vision of the Cathars in the southern territories of France in the period prior to the creation of the Cathar Country program and what use was made of this view.

1.3 Catharism as a source of inspiration from myths

The historical study of the Cathars, sometimes recovered or even degenerated by myth during the nineteenth century, had mostly interested Catholic historians. These historians, even in the twentieth century, continued to defend the point of view developed and disseminated by the enemies of the Cathars during the Middle Ages in their treatises of refutation. At the dawn of the modern era, and after having rejected the connection between the supporters of the Protestant Reformation and the Cathars claimed by Catholic theologians, the reformers ended up monopolizing the history of the martyrs of the Albigensian crusade. In the seventeenth century, French protestants reclaimed a link between the two movements, Cathar and Protestant, situating both in a continuity as breaks against the Catholic church.¹³

1.4 The decisive contribution of the Romantic vision

The Romanticism of the nineteenth century again returned to the Cathars, seeing in them the heroes of a Southern resistance against the power of the Church and the desire for conquest of the Northern knights with the king of France at their head. The South of France thus appeared as the land of the troubadours and the

11. Nelli, René. *Spiritualité de l'hérésie: le Catharisme*. Toulouse: Privat, 1951. The ambiguity surrounding René Nelli is probably due to the contact and relations that he maintained with certain esoteric movements. For a recent study, see: Bardou, Frank. *René Nelli, un élan poétique occitan. Une oeuvre entre héritage traditionnel et modernité*. Toulouse: Institut d'Études Occitanes, 2008.

12. Thouzellier, Christine. *Catharisme et Valdésisme en Languedoc à la fin du XI^e et début du XIII^e siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966.

13. Martel, Philippe. *Les Cathares et l'Histoire. Le drame cathare devant ses historiens (1820-1992)*. Toulouse: Privat, 2002.



poets of courtly love, distinguished by their refined manners and noble values that contrasted with the barbarism represented by the Northern knights.

Around 1870, the Albigenian myth reached the form that would become the most widespread. This is due to the work of a Protestant pastor, Napoléon Peyrat (1809-1880). Originally from Ariège, a neighboring department of the Aude, this romantic poet succeeded in creating a “synthesis of all the layers that constituted the Cathar myth”, principally myths surrounding the symbol of Montségur. He is the inventor of the idea that Montségur was the sacred mountain of the Cathars.¹⁴ He published his *Pastors in the Wilderness* (*Histoire des pasteurs du Désert*) in 1842, an epic of the French protestants, and particularly of the “Camisards.”¹⁵ Thus he began to trace the threads of their heretical inheritance: “That same Southern race has moved from one heresy to the next, always embodying the same claim of freedom of conscience”. Through dealing with the Huguenots (French Calvinists), *Pastors in the Wilderness* prefigured the esoteric material from which the Cathar myths derived. By 1860, Peyrat published *Les Réformateurs de la France et de l’Italie au XIIIe siècle*,¹⁶ a work that anticipates a large part of the themes that came to be developed in his monumental three volume work, *Histoire des Albigeois*, published between 1870 and 1872.¹⁷ The pastor-poet devoted himself to a reconstruction of the past.¹⁸ Creating proofs of great imagination and transforming the story into an epic,¹⁹ Peyrat offered up their sacred sites and their heroes and abundantly enriching previous mythology. Before Peyrat, nobody had been interested in Montségur, not even in the siege of 1244. After him, starting in 1870, the Cathar imagery predominantly revolved around this mountain. His work, published at the beginning of the Third Republic in France, opened up the mythology of medieval Languedoc to political polemic, giving ammunition to the republicans, to the radicals, to anti-clerical groups, and even to the “felibres”, the extreme defenders of the languages, Provençal or Occitan, and cultural identities of Southern France.

14. Montségur is a fort or fortified town located in the foothills of the Pyrenes. In this fort, the hierarchy of the Cathar church sought refuge during the first decades of the thirteenth century. Montségur surrendered in 1244 when more than two hundred men and women were burned at the foot of the mountain. A recent study which treats in great detail the construction of the muth around this village can be found in: Barrère, Michel; Brenon, Anne; Cornède, Pierre-Toussant, *et al. Montségur, village ariègeois*. Conseil Général de l’Ariège: Archives Départementales, 2007.

15. Translators note: I have used the English title from the first translation of this work, published in London in 1852.

16. Peyrat, Napoléon. *Les Réformateurs de la France et de l’Italie au douzième siècle*. Paris: Meyrueis, 1860.

17. Peyrat, Napoléon. *Histoire des Albigeois: les albigeois et l’inquisition*. Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1870-1872.

18. Carbonell, Christian O. “D’Augustin Thierry à Napoléon Peyrat”, *Historiographie du Catharisme*. Toulouse: Privat (Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 14), 1979: 143-162.

19. This is the title that would be chosen a century later for the five volume work of Michel Roquebert (Roquebert, Michel. *L’épopée cathare*. Paris-Toulouse: Perrin-Privat, 2001).



1.5 The recovery of Nationalism

At the end of the nineteenth century, among the regionalist currents could be found certain socialist and libertarian currents; groups to some extent inherited from the romantic era, who insisted on the political aspects of the Albigensian Crusade and the conquest of the Southern lands by the Northern barons. Within these currents, the red *felibres* stood out; opposed to administrative centralization, they sought the restoration of the “Occitan Homeland” and of the “Liberties” that the Crusade had exterminated. They were federalists and advocated respect for the regional and communal authorities, the promotion of vernacular languages, and the conservation of provincial customs. They also criticized the “Parisian” vision of the history of France and sang of their own country in the Occitan language. Even though the red *felibres* were republicans, a faction that supported monarchial federalism emerged in 1892. Both currents, the monarchial and the republican federalists, agreed on the glorification and veneration of the Occitan language and civilization.²⁰

1.6 The source of the esoteric currents

The interwar period constituted another decisive era in the construction of Cathar mythology. Interest in esoteric and occult spirituality led to the creation of movements and associations, which included a neo-Cathar circle that formed around Déodat Roché (1877-1978); Roché was a jurist by training and the founder of the Society for the Memory and Study of the Cathars (*Société du Souvenir et des Études Cathares*), created in 1950. One year later, he created a neo-Cathar journal, the *Cahiers d'Études Cathares*. In this journal, the original theses defended by Roché were espoused and expanded; the ideas were strongly infused with Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and the Gnosticism of Early Christianity, combined with the Anthroposophical views advocated by Rudolph Steiner. According to Steiner, the development of one's mental capacity should lead man to a “spiritual science” that would allow for one to access to the supersensible truths about the universe and for the gradual disappearance of evil and sin. Onto this doctrine, Déodat Roché grafted his neo-Catharism, already formulated in his work entitled *The Roman Church and the Albigensian Cathars (L'Eglise Romaine et les Cathares Albigeois)*, published in 1937. In the Sabartés and in the country of Olmes (part of the Pyrenees in the department of Ariège), an entire family of spirits thrived who would eventually spread these Southern legends and develop a sort of pan-Catharism. They appeared as Cathars camouflaged as troubadours or even as Templars and they associated Catharism with the practices of Celtic druids, sun worship, Hindu tradition, Visigothic Gnosticism, and pre-Roman cultures. Some searched the ruins of Montségur for a Gospel of John that had not yet been corrupted by the Catholic Church.

20. Martel, Philippe. *Les Cathares et l'Histoire...*: 85.



The Society for the Memory and Study of the Cathars managed to attract numerous followers who were interested in the search for the roots of Catharism through the study of texts and Cathar myths; these works were presented at the conferences organized regularly by the Society. Each year, the group also commemorated the massacre of 1244 at the feet of the castle of Montségur. In 1959, they installed a funereal monument through the initiative of Déodat Roché. The influences of the school of Anthroposophy and of the occult to which Roché was always faithful resulted in the defection of several historians and scholars from the Society, as had happened to René Nelli, and with the Society's progress marginalization from University circles. Upon the death of Déodat Roché in 1978, both the Society and the Journal went through a difficult time; the positions defended by the neo-Catharists were still defended by a handful of members, including several who linked the ideas to the Nazi theories of Otto Rahn.²¹

1.7 The commercial recovery of Catharism

Several of the most recent works have come out of the neo-Catharist collectives who continue to distill the racist theories of the extreme right disguised as esotericism and medieval spirituality. However, the contemporary publications that continue to feed Cathar mythology are generally the work of individual authors. Their writings are principally inspired by a delusional esotericism that contains no political or extremist bias. These works are welcomed by some publishers who see in them the possibility of increasing their revenue through the sale of books offering a fictional account of the Cathars that pretends to be history but is really nothing more than mythology. This "Catharophile" literature remains very prolific, even today, and the spread of the neo-Cathar myth continues to ignore the religious phenomenon and the spirituality of the medieval Cathars.

1.8 The political recover of Occitan

Just as anti-clericalism was able to use the Cathars during the nineteenth century, so to did Occitan nationalism use them in the twentieth. After the Second World War, the regionalist movements became politicized by organizing around the Occitan Nationalist Party; until that point, the movements had reduced their claims to cultural dominance, such as happened with the *félibres*. Autonomist, the party demanded the "decolonization" of "Occitania" (a term that emerged in the nineteenth century) and a reconquest of Occitan culture. This political line of thinking has incorporated the Cathar myth into its own story, presenting the dissidents and their cause as examples of resistance that have been assimilated into the resistance

21. Biget, Jean-Louis. "Mythographie du catharisme", *Historiographie du Catharisme*. Toulouse: Privat (Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 14), 1979: 314.



of political “Occitanism”. Imaginary thought on the Cathars has thus developed a Cathar-Occitan mythology that has enjoyed a broad influence thanks to works like *Massacre at Montségur (Le Bûcher de Montségur)* by Zoé Oldenburg, published in 1959 in France.²² As a product of this new mythology, the construction of Catharism was converted into “a movement of liberation”, or a “national religion”, even though the religious reality of the Cathars continued to be hidden and ignored, making the belief into an avatar more of Occitan nationalist sentiments.

1.9 The popularization of Catharism

In spite of its diverse reconstructions, the Cathar myth has seeped little or virtually not at all into the popular legends of the South of France until the 1950's. Outside of academic and scholarly circles, Catharism was little known and even ignored by the public, consigned to being a scholarly theme with no echo in the social media of Occitan speakers.²³ Since the 1960's, with the growth of an Occitanism that utilized and articulated the Cathar question in the theories of regional liberation, a decisive change has occurred. Probably contributing to this change, we should remember the impact that Stelio Lorenzi and Alain Decaux had in 1966 on their era with their television broadcast dedicated to the Cathars. This undoubtedly contributed to the popularization of Catharism, little known and even ignored by the general public, and probably also explains the explosion of publications that toyed with the theme during the 1970's. The program with the widest audience at the time, “The Camera Explores the Past”, (“La caméra explore le temps”), that explored the great themes of history, dedicated two episodes to the Cathars. During the two consecutive weeks of its broadcast, the French public discovered the Cathars, the history of the good men, the Crusade against the Albigensians and Simon de Monfort, the leader of the Crusade. One hundred years after the publication of the works of Napoleón Peyrat, Stelio Lorenzi and Alain Decaux succeeded in revitalizing the myth of Montségur. Even though this revitalization was neither conscious nor voluntary on their part, the directors of the series had already been inspired above all by a strong anti-clericalism that denounced the abuses of authority perpetrated by the medieval Catholic Church on the society of the time. Paradoxically, the anti-clericalism passed largely unnoticed, especially by the spectators more interested and impassioned by the myth than the esoteric past.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the myth of the Cathars is multivalent; in it several strata overlap: the Protestant (Huguenot), the romantic and the anti-clerical, as well as the different denominations in the area affected by the Cathars – Occitania, the French-Midi, and Languedoc.

22. Oldenburg, Zoé. *Le bûcher de Montségur*. Paris: Folio, 1953.

23. Biget, Jean-Louis. “Mythographie du catharisme”...: 309.



1.10 The traditional scientific view

Until the early 1990s, in French academic circles, the study of the Cathars was assumed to be almost exclusively a domain reserved for Catholic historians. The image of the Cathars that dominated in the historiography until the end of the 1980s was that which came from the medieval theologians and polemicists in their treatises of refutation. According to those writers, Cathars were followers of a dualistic sect of Manichaeism of origin that had been maintained and perpetuated in the East by different groups. These groups penetrated Western Christianity through the preaching of the Bogomils, heretics from Eastern Christendom. Scientific investigation on the Cathars continued to defend this vision of the medieval polemicists, and still predominated in the doctoral theses produced between 1950 and 1970 by Arno Borst in Germany, Raul Manselli in Italy, and Christine Thouzellier in France.²⁴ For these medievalists, the Cathars were a resurgence of ancient Manichaeism, a doctrine foreign to medieval Christianity.

By affirming the opposite, that the Cathars, like the Bogomils, were a medieval Christian heresy and not a resurgence of Manichaeism, Jean Duvernoy broke with the traditional Catholic view that had dominated since the Middle Ages. Along the same lines, the works of Anne Brenon, chief researcher for the CEC, have helped to demystify the Cathars, opening up their investigation to new generations of historians. Among the most recent research, several contributions by this current author argue along these lines. Being primarily interested myself in the study of the historical origins and doctrines of the Cathars, it has not only been possible to confirm the thesis of the Christian origin of the Cathar dissent but it has also been possible to locate the birth of this dissent within the time and space of Western Christianity during the twelfth century.²⁵

2. The Consolidation of the Cathar Country Program

The unification of the myth of the Cathars with the “Southern” spaces, the one describing the other, the latter providing a social framework for the former, provides the beginnings of the explanation for the construction and conception of Cathar Country. This is not only a political project, but also contributed to the construction of a coherent world—a world including the representations of both the history and the territory.²⁶

24. Borst, Arno. *Die Katharer*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1953 (French translation: *Les Cathares*. Paris: Payot, 1974); Manselli, Raoul. *L'Eresie del male*. Naples: Morano, 1980; Thouzellier, Christine. *Catharisme et Val-déisme...*

25. Jiménez, Pilar. *Les Catharismes. Modèles dissidents de christianisme médiéval (XIF-XIII^e s.)*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008. From 2000 to 2005, Anne Brenon took over the scientific direction of the CEC.

26. Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L'invention...*: 59.



Cathar Country as a program of economic development and as the manager of the monumental patrimony of the department of the Aude started at the beginning of the 1980s. However, the real drive for the program, which would allow its institutionalization, came ten years later with the arrival of financial support from the European Union. This assistance came in the form of two programs: LEADER (1 and 2 —Liaison entre les Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale). These European subsidies were aimed at local development. This was made possible by promoting the links between the various initiatives and actions for economic development in rural areas.

2.1 European Support and the Institutionalization of the Cathar Country program

The LEADER 1 program (1989-1993) forced the most reticent politicians representing the Aude to actually engage in the implementation of the program for regional development. After that point, the construction of an image of the territory's identity became a priority for those involved in the program. The construction of this local identity seemed perfectly compatible, even meeting the goals of European political integration, however much they appeared to threaten the traditional national and state identities. For this reason, at the local level, and particularly in the department of the Aude, the necessity of an image as the bearer of their identity became even more urgent as the territory found itself losing the orientation of its identity after the exodus from rural areas that it had suffered in the 1960s. The Cathar Country program thus appeared as an original response, not only because it required the mobilization of history, but also because it represented a return to the rural versus the urban. For the first time, "the deep Aude", the interior of the territory, which had been represented as an economic burden on the urban and coastal areas of the department ultimately turned into the ideological foundation of the Cathar Country program.

This explains why, during this first phase, the creation of a European program provoked a certain rejection of the services of the State that were seen as dispensable by the new policies of territorial organization.²⁷ In parallel, the Cathar Country program fell within the main priorities of the General Council of the Aude, who committed themselves to co-finance the program. The new political orientation was made clear through a series of changes, including changes in the social profile of the experts responsible for the direction of the program. This then brought about the rise of certain experts, all of whom were defenders and promoters of the program from the beginning. As these experts moved into leadership positions in the services of the General Council of the Aude, others, on the contrary, were marginalized as was the case with some of the experts in patrimony and history from the Cathar Studies Center (the CEC, by then renamed the *Centre René Nelli*). In part

27. This is the case for the agents of DATAR (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et l'Action Régionale): Alieès, Pierre. "L'impact communautaire sur l'aménagement du territoire", *Finances Locales et Aménagement du Territoire*. Paris: Datar et CLF, 1994: 187-232.



in order to replace these scholars, the Council solicited the expertise of European specialists and consultants. Thus a structure was created for the formation of the LEADER program: the Local Action Group (*Groupe d'Action Locale* – GAL), comprised mainly of local representatives (local elites) from the General Council of the Aude, several technical experts on territorial development, and the socio-professional representatives of consular chambers (the chamber of agriculture, the chamber of commerce and the chamber of industry in the Aude.) This new structure replaced the network of experts that had originally been constructed.²⁸

At the end of this first phase of creation of the Cathar Country program, during which the patrimonial recovery of the castles had begun along with the creation of the Museum of the Cathar Country, thanks to the close collaboration between the local and European levels, Cathar Country became a model for the LEADER programs. If this collaboration had revealed the strong creative potential of local experts at the time for inventing a particular form of territorial development, in the end, the oversight of the project has been monopolized by the local political elites, encouraging the rise of territorial leaders who embodied the future of new forms of local government.²⁹

2.2 The “departmentalization” of the Cathar Country program

The second phase of the program of European support, LEADER 2 (1994-1998), witnessed the return of the actions of the State in territorial politics. This return occurred through the control of the European subsidies. The first phase had geographically reduced the territory in which the program had originally be thought to apply — namely within an interdepartmental and interregional area— becoming restricted to the department of the Aude and inaugurated as the “Aude, Cathar Country” program.

The implication of the policies was responsible in large part for this departmentalization, given that even if the majority were in agreement about working towards local development, they were divided over the manner of its implementation. Groups were faced with different approaches represented by distinct sectors of activity: agriculture, tourism, and cultural. In order to attempt to reconcile them, the historical identity of the territory of the Aude was brought to bear and ended up becoming the principal source of local political action. Thus, new criteria were integrated into the program —such as memory, historical memory, and identity— all of which both facilitated the revaluing of certain landmarks with strong historical content and created a problem at the time of integrating the device of the Cathar Country.

During the late 1990s, the program added seven abbeys to the patrimonial monuments of the castles, which were the first places or landmarks for the pro-

28. Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L'invention du Pays cathare...*: 61.

29. Genieys, William; Smith, Adam. “Mobilisation politique et émergence du leadership territorial”, *Que gouvernent les régions en Europe?* Emmanuel Negrier, Bernard Jouve, dirs. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998; Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L'invention du Pays cathare...*: 76.



gram. These locations became the new landmarks; to those were added three more abbeys that became sites of secondary importance based on their quality. After 1999, the department of the Aude established new regulations for their policies of local development that required the territories to agree to sign a contract with the department. In practice, this became a pilot project for local development based on a close relationship between the General Council and the micro-territories.

In 1994, at the beginning of the second stage of the implementation of the Cathar Country program, the General Council of the Aude created the Cathar Country Brand. The impact and consequences of this would be crucial, not only for the economic development project in the territory, but also for the management of its patrimony. The primary focus of the program, based on a patrimonial identity and the history of Cathar Country, would be superseded by a new approach; this approach was essentially commercial and resulted in the creation of the brand, based on a policy of territorial marketing.³⁰ The objective of the General Council was to attribute an identity to products made in the territory, from cultural products to consumables and staples. With this new focus, the Council attempted to give new impetus to local economic development, uniquely privileging the marketing of products from the Aude.³¹ Thus, the “Cathar spirit” of the company of the products that applied to use the brand would be the *sine qua non* required by the experts in applying the brand of the General Council. One of these experts responsible for the application of the brand explained in an interview what he understood by the “Cathar spirit”:

The “Cathar Country” spirit is the awareness of one’s patrimony, the awareness of one’s country, the willingness to promote and simultaneously protect this country... What is important is that every professional knows that his greatest capital is the image, the quality of the human relation he has to offer.

What is important to one is that people are happy to live here, that there is a land of solidarity, that there is a very acute consciousness of our patrimony, which extends from the castle to the colours of the stones in the Corbières, and the knows-how of the baker or the artist... The “Cathar Country” brand is in some sense the link between the historical pretext, the site and the attraction it represents, and the territory for which we are effectively transforming the historical into an economy.³²

Paradoxically, the creation of a commercial trademark that ended up becoming a territorial “Brand” with highly symbolic content —referring to the imagined territory as well as the (re)invented Cathar Country— was based on a logic that aimed to “decommercialize and single out the product ‘brand’”, from that which gave the product its authentic value. For the experts in the distribution of the Brand, the “au-

30. Le Bart, Christian. “Les politiques d’image. Entre marketing territorial et identité locale”, *Les nouvelles politiques locales. Dynamiques de l’action publique*, Richard Balme, Alain Faure, Albert Mabileau, dirs. Paris: Presses de Science Politiques, 1999: 415-425.

31. The General Council of the Aude has registered this brand with the National Institute of Intellectual Property; working papers for the services of the General Council of the Aude, unedited. Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L’invention du Pays cathare...: 121.*

32. Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L’invention du Pays Cathare...: 123-124.*



thenticity”, as they understood it, was based on the values defended by the Cathars, i.e.: purity, truth, etc.; but also in that which “came from the past ... from a place that had conserved its ancient traditions”.³³

Needless to say, the allocation of the Brand has caused discontent and criticism on the part of the local producers, increasing the inequality and economic imbalance between those who manage to enjoy the use of the Brand and those that do not. Among the adverse effects caused by the excesses of this mercantilist policy, we can mention the mockery made of the name of some of the “branded” products: items like “Cathar Country Chicken”, “Cathar Country Lamb”, or “oven”, or even “Cathar Country Crematorium”, not to mention the “Meats” or “Cathar Country Charcuterie”.³⁴

We can conclude the discussion of this second phase of the program by noting how the importance given to the “Cathar Country Brand” as a motor of economic development by the policies of the General Council of the Aude has led to the progressive decline in any interest in historical discourse. This devaluation of history, at least on the part of the services of the Cathar Country Brand, has assumed an alienation and disinterest on the part of the General Council with respect to the activities of the CEC. Almost completely funded by the General Council, from the beginning of its creation, the CEC had manifested a certain reticence to participate in the discussion of the Cathar Country program of territorial development; the program used history as a pretext for participating in the construction of a new Southern identity. The CEC ended up paying dearly for this reticence; their reluctance explains the mistrust shown towards the group by politicians in the 1990s, the exact time of the institutionalization of the Cathar Country program. Tensions also arose within the CEC itself; the group was divided between the defenders of historical study who refused to participate in the creation of a program for economic development—the position defended by the members of the CEC’s scientific community—and those who supported working with the experts of the Cathar Country program.³⁵ Even though this position eventually won out in the CEC, the mercantilist direction of the Cathar Country program and the CEC’s economic dependence on the General Council of the Aude cost the CEC its existence. Paradoxically, on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the foundation, the political repre-

33. Garcia, Marie-Carmen; Genieys, William. *L’invention du Pays cathare...*: 124 et Warnier, Jean Pierre. *Le paradoxe de la marchandise authentique. Imaginaire et consommation de masse*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994; Gilbert, Claude. “L’invention d’une tradition: le boudin de Montagne”, *Le paradoxe de la marchandise authentique. Imaginaire et consommation de masse*, Jean Pierre Warnier, dir. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994: 47.

34. At the start of the appellation of the Cathar Country Brand, intellectuals and scholars in general did not appreciate this mercantilist drive and ridiculed the creators of the Brand.

35. Proponents of this attitude, represented by the managing director of the CEC, Nicolás Gouzy, founded a new association called the Center for the Recovery of the Medieval Heritage (*Centre de valorisation du patrimoine medieval*) (CVPM). The objectives of this new association were to act as a company dedicated to patrimonial recovery in exchange for payment. The creation of this new center was highly unpopular, both to the scientific committee of the CEC, as well as to some of the politicians of the General Council who attended to the division of the functions of the CEC. Until then, the CEC had played an advisory role, financed by the Council, while the services provided by the new CVPM needed to be paid for.



sentatives of the General Council divulged their intention to permanently suspend economic support for the CEC (this support has been gradually reduced over the past few years), and recommended possible closure.

3. The Management of the Heritage of the “Aude, Cathar Country” and Its Techniques

As mentioned above, since 1992, the General Council of the Aude invested in the development of its medieval heritage, using it as the centerpiece around which they began the economic development of the territory. The unifying theme of this new dynamism was historical, but history often served as an excuse and was replaced by the Cathar myth, above all by those responsible for the economic development of the Cathar Country.³⁶ On the other hand, from the beginning of the program, the experts responsible for the management of the medieval heritage have worked seriously and thoroughly to apply techniques and teaching methods³⁷ to the traditional values defended and disseminated by the program with the goal of responding to the three following objectives:

- Restore and rehabilitate the patrimony in order to share it: the visitor will be progressively guided through the territory with marker signs situated along the length of rural roads and trails. From the host sites that will be created, the paths will be arranged to facilitate access to those places or sites that are more difficult to access. The castles that are found in a more dilapidated state have been restored and strengthened to guarantee the security and the comfort of the visitors.
- Bring visitors closer to the population: “back to the village units” have been created, as well as offering cultural activities made in the spirit of preserving the natural look of the place. Located in the centers of towns, these interpretive sites complement the visit, addressing a concrete aspect of history. Thus, the house of Deodat Roché, restored in the center of the village of Arques, presented an exhibition on the historiography and mythology of the Cathars.
- Restoration of the villages near the landmarks: the work of restoring the façades has contributed to making many of these villages more attractive. The construction of new parking spaces at the entrance to the villages and the creation of pedestrian zones for visitors in the center of the village has often been necessary to ensure the flow of tourists.

36. Denefle, Sylvette, dir. *Identités et économies régionales*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992.

37. The main expert of the program was Jean-Pierre Sarret, in collaboration with the Cultural Service of the General Council of the Aude. Among other studies on patrimonial management, see: Krebs, Magdalena; Schmidt-Hebbel, Klaus. “Patrimonio cultural: aspectos económicos y políticas de protección”. *Perspectivas en política económica y gestión*, 2 (1999): 207-245. Among the works about the heritage management in Catalonia: Ballart, Josep. *El patrimonio histórico y arqueológico: valor y uso*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1998; Ballart, Josep. “El patrimoni històric: bases teòriques”. *Gestió del patrimoni històric*, César Carreras, Glòria Munilla, dirs. Barcelona: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 2001: 14-51.



3.1 The Castles

The General Council of the Aude entrusted the work of recovering and restoring the castles to Jean-Pierre Sarret, former expert from the Cultural Service of the General Council and later responsible for a cultural engineering group that specialized in the restoration and presentation of cultural heritage sites. They began with the castles of the department, the most representative of the Cathars, of the Cathar inheritance and of the Albigensian Crusade —at first erroneously characterized as “Cathar Castles”. These castles came to inaugurate the program. Each one became a landmark location or site where the techniques of patrimonial protection or the teaching of history needed to be applied:

1. Each location needed to supply, through presentational plaques, a description of the castle that would permit the visitor to situate the castle in its historical context, providing essential information and reinforcing its most characteristic aspects.
2. Explanatory plaques should equally address the territory in which the castle stands.
3. It should present a concrete theme that is able to illustrate an aspect of Southern medieval society. These theme could be presented or set up in a museum, making the presentation more attractive to visitors.

The castles of the Aude that became the first landmarks or primary sites include those of Aguilar, Arques, Carcassonne, Lastours, Puilaurens, Puivert, Peyrepertusse, Queribus, Saissac, Termes, and Villerouge-Termenès. The majority of these were found in a very deteriorated state, although some of them have been restored, such as the castle of Villerouge. In this village, the last “honorable man” and “Cathar perfect (*perfectus*)”, Guillermo Belibaste, was burned at the stake in 1321. The interior of the castle had been entirely devoted to a museum on the theme, “The World of Belibaste, the last Cathar *Perfectus*”. Thus, the visitor can tour the various rooms that present the history of The Cathars; the museum also explores the path of this unusual Cathar and his worldly lord, the Archbishop of Narbonne, Bernard de Farges, as well as the daily life of the bailiwick of Villerouge in the fourteenth century. New technology (audio guides, rooms of recreation with ambient effects and sound, etc.) have been applied to the teaching of this last period of the Cathars and the result is quite satisfactory. The castle of Villerouge is a good example of the use of the teaching of cultural heritage for the transmission of history.³⁸

Another site of the Cathar Country program that has been turned into a museum is the town of Argues. It was not a castle of the late fourteenth century that was turned into a museum, but rather the house of Déodat Roché, the scholar of the Cathars. Inside, it houses an exhibition that traces the history of the Cathar myth and

38. For a study on the use of cultural heritage for pedagogical ends, see: Gonzalez, Neus; Pagès, Joan. “Quelques propositions pour améliorer l’utilisation didactique du patrimoine culturel Dans le processus d’enseignement-apprentissage de l’Histoire”. *Enjeux contemporains de l’enseignement de l’histoire-géographie*. 2005. Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique. 7th January 2010 <<http://ecehg.inrp.fr/ECEHG/ap-prentisages-et-didactique/patrimoine/gonzalezversionfrancaise.pdf/view>>.



the intense participation of the impassioned and erudite thinker, a native of Arques, in the construction that myth.

3.2 The extension of the program to the abbeys of the Aude

Since 1999, the Cathar theme, originally chosen to organize the cultural tourism offerings of the Cathar Country program, has been extended to a medieval theme with the aim of enhancing other important monuments from the heritage of the Aude; the abbeys are one such case. Seven abbeys were integrated into the program as landmarks or important places of the Aude, Cathar Country: Caunnes, Fontfroide, Lagrasse, Saint-Hilaire, Saint-Papoul, Villelongue and Alet. Three more were made secondary landmarks or complementary sites to the primary locations: Saint Polycarpe, Rieunette and Saint Martín-des-Puits. Of the six abbeys, four date from the Carolingian period (the eighth and ninth centuries): Caunnes, Lagrasse, Saint Hilaire and Saint-Papoul; all are the result of the drive and development of the followers of Benito de Aniano in the department of the Aude. Two of the six are Cistercian abbeys: Fontfroide and Villalongue, both founded in the twelfth century. These latter two played an especially important role in the fight against the Cathar heresy waged by the Catholic church in these territories during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Since 2000, the important documentary work on the different abbeys has been carried out, principally by Geneviève Durand, an art historian, in collaboration with the cultural engineering group run by Jean-Pierre Sarret. Since the Cathar Country program began, the General Council of the Aude has entrusted to this cabinet the requisite work of historical and cultural revaluation for the integration of the monuments into the tourist routes of the program of the Aude, Cathar Country. With the abbeys, the touristic offerings of the program were enriched at the same time that they offered the possibility to other villages and/or owners of other abbeys to integrate this system of territorial development.

The work of Jean-Pierre Sarret has consisted of defining the specific themes that could be addressed by each of the abbeys and then to propose techniques for revaluation that should be applied in order to be able to integrate into the project of the Cathar Country program, as had happened with the castles:

1. A monographic study of the history of each building, emphasizing its special architecture, artistry, functionality, etc.
2. The contextualization of the territory of the abbeys: namely a geographical study that reconstituted the buildings in their surroundings and cultural, social and economic setting.
3. A proposal of a specific theme for each Abbey and its relation to Southern society.

Given that the castles and abbeys are very different buildings, the restoration of the abbeys has been implemented by only applying the criteria utilized for the restoration of the castles. In the first place, the abbeys form a part or are structured within an urban framework, while the castles are found in isolated locations, lost in the interior of an inhospitable landscape. Secondly, because of the isolation of



the castles, they possessed a natural attraction, instantly arousing the surprise and excitement of visitors, while the religious buildings of the abbeys owe their appeal to their reputation as representatives of an artistic movement, a religious order, the historical role that they played, etc. Thirdly, the castles are generally in open spaces and mostly in a state of ruin, while the abbeys have many covered or protected areas that remain cool in summer.³⁹

3.3 *The Museums of Cathar Country*

The attempt to integrate certain permanent collections already in existence in the department of the Aude into the project of restoring the department's heritage — along with the medieval buildings, castles, and abbeys— responded to both the logic and the spirit that had animated the program from the beginning; the collections offered an important heritage that contributed to the stimulation of the economy of the “Country”.

The Museums of the Cathar Country need to meet the following conditions:

- The presented collections need to be significant either in the quantity, quality, or originality and rarity, or through their connection to local history.
- The collections must have a special legal status that officially guarantees that the collection is both inalienable and imprescriptible.
- The owner of the museum must guarantee the contents and enrichment of the collection; this can be accomplished by purchase, gift, or bequeathment of works, and/or through bailment.
- The owner must also ensure the conservation and security of the collections, particularly against theft and fire, at the same level as the museums that must follow the conditions set by the Service of Conservation and Museums.

In agreement with the Charter or necessary conditions, every location of site that seeks to enter the Cathar Country program, particularly in the case of museums, must observe the following instructions:

- They must produce a monographic presentation situating their location or site and focusing on a particular aspect of the place.
- The chosen theme must illuminate an aspect of Southern, medieval, local civilization and should evoke the characters and events that relate to the Cathars and demonstrate how the “Country” is presented in the museum.
- The museum should be under the direction of a curator with a degree in museum work and should employ a conservation technician, reception staff and security who can ensure the opening to the public and the protection of the collection.

The first Museum of the Cathar Country was that of Quercorb, located in the town of Puivert. This museum presented the theme of medieval music in its an-

39. Sarret, Jean Pierre; Poussard, Antoine C; Durand, Gilbert. *Etude thématique de valorisation des abbayes audoises. Etude de définition. Proposition d'intervention*, unpublished (May 2003).



tique instrument collection —the *Instrumentarium*.⁴⁰ Even though the initiative for creating this museum arose between 1989 and 1991, driven by the experience and willingness of archeologists, musicians and instrument makers, currently the museum forms part of the Places of Memory of the Cathar Country.

3.4 The Creation of the Places of Memory

The final phase of the program of improvement of the Aude Cathar Country was the creation of the Places of Memory. Begun in the early 2000's, this constitutes the most recent and as yet incomplete attempt in this program of patrimonial management, directed and funded by the General Council of the Aude. The "Places of Memory" of the Cathar Country are understood as all the material traces of the cultural heritage (monuments, locations, or collections) that relate to the history or memory of the Cathars; the Places all present an attractive patrimonial offering and, if possible, an attached touristic and/or cultural offering. The services of the Culture and Heritage of the Aude have established a list of one-hundred and eleven possible Places of Memory in the Aude and have commissioned a cultural engineering group to evaluate and study them. As a result of this study, a new list has been proposed, defining and determining the Places of Memory, classifying them in categories that take into account the greater or lesser patrimonial potential of each Place. The selection and classification of the Places of Memory has been done according to three criteria:

1. The importance of the place in the history of the Cathars.
2. In the history of the Crusade.
3. Keeping in mind the importance and relevance of the medieval heritage of the studies Place.

From the first results of the survey of one-hundred and eleven places at the beginning, only forty-six met any of the above three criteria. From this selection, the municipalities that sought to obtain the category of Place of Memory had to sign an agreement with the General Council of the Aude. If the site had only limited patrimonial potential, the municipality had to consent to placing one or two plaques describing the history or heritage of the site. If the potential was higher, they needed to present several interpretive plaques and a public reception area —preferably in the town hall, tourist office, or in another location of the Place of Memory. At the most important sites, they needed to offer the following:

- An interpretive tour with plaques to explain and present the site.
- Informational leaflets and brochures, books for sale, postcards, slides, etc., all focused on the Place as well as the "Country" in which the Place of Memory was located.

40. For a description of the museum: Estepa, Jesús; Domínguez, Consuelo; Cuenca, José María, dirs. *Museo y patrimonio en la didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales*. Huelva: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Huelva, 2001.



- Printed tour guides for sale in the Pace of Memory, printed by the departmental publishing house (*Repères culturels*).
- An admissions ticket at the entrance to the Place of Memory with which a visitor who had obtained the certified Guide to the Cathar Country could easily recognize the site, its history, heritage, and services.

The Places of Memory that signed the letter or contract with the General Council of the Aude agreed to have met the conditions that then allowed them access to the category of Place of Memory of the Cathar Country —that is to say, they agreed to respect and maintain the policies of the program.⁴¹ Like the other sites and landmarks designated as major sites by the Aude, Cathar Country program —the castles and abbeys— the Places of Memory utilized an inter-site access card. In general, like the castles and abbeys, the Places of Memory needed to offer touristic and cultural events representing the spirit of Cathar Country; in particular, they offered temporary exhibitions, medieval fairs, conferences, etc.

3.5 The Sites of the Cathar Country Association – an example of heritage management techniques

In 2000, nine sites and landmarks of the Aude, Cathar Country program decided to form an association. The purpose of this group was to encourage the circulation of visitors (they did not use the term “tourists”) between the most famous and well visited sites of Cathar Country —sites such as Carcassonne— and the less visited locations —namely those in the interior of the country. In this way, it was intended to promote greater economic dynamism between the sites. The initiative for this association came from the experts and politicians involved in the Cathar Country program, and their mission was to set in motion joint activities to animate, promote, and enhance the heritage sites. The number of members in the association grew rapidly and currently includes twenty sites and landmarks in the Cathar Country program: eleven castles, seven abbeys, and two museums. Each location or site shares the common cause of promotion, while at the same time preserving and defending their particular architecture, geography, history, and territory. At each location and monument, some aspect of medieval Occitan history is approached, such as music at the Museum and Medieval Instrument collection of Quercorb, in the castle of Puivert, or the cuisine and medieval restaurant in the Castle of Villerouge.

The concrete achievements of this association include creating an inter-site card that allows visitors access to all of the monuments at reduced cost, and discounts for families.⁴² From the momentum created by and between these different sites and landmarks of the Cathar Country program, other promoters of tourism in the territory have associated and involved themselves in the process of promoting their

41. The General Council offers special courses in history and heritage for personnel and tourism agents who will be in charge of welcoming the public: *Charte des Lieux de Mémoire du Pays Cathare*. This study was presented by the cabinet for engineering *Public et Communication*, unpublished (February 2004).

42. *Association des sites du pays cathare*. 7th January 2010 < <http://www.payscathare.org>>.



heritage and identity, other bodies such as restaurants, hotels, merchants, artisans, and farm houses.

3.6 Teaching at the Cathar Country sites

Each related to the other, and sharing the same dynamics of development, the sites and locations of the Cathar Country program are all presented as forming part of the same heritage that stretches throughout the department of the Aude. Despite their differences, variations as much in look as in the landscape in which they are located, these sites are intended to complement each other through the particular theme that each offers (music, medieval cuisine, Occitan literature, historiography of the Cathars). Currently, the sites and places that are classified and valued as part of the Cathar Country system include the castles and/or villages of Arques, Carcassonne, Fanjeaux, Lapradelle-Puilaurens, Lastours, Peyrepertuse, Puyvert, Quéribus, Saissac, Termes et Villeroque-Termenès, the abbeys of Alet les Bains, Caunes-Minervois, Fontfroide, Lagrasse, Saint Hilaire, Saint Papoul, as well as the museum of Quercorb in Puivert. As examples of the utilization of the teaching of history applied to a program of patrimonial management, we will look at two of the sites and monuments of Cathar Country that have benefited from the most modern museum practices and techniques.

3.6.1 The Museum of Quercorb-Puivert

The museum is situated inside a house in the center of the village of Puivert. The museum is dedicated to the history and economy of “Quercorb Country”. The name is taken from the castle of Quercorb (either “Rock of the Crows” or “Curved Rock”) in the commune of Corbières in the canton of Chalabre.

History:

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the country of Quercorb successively from the domain of the counts of Tolosa to the Viscounts of Carcassonne-Beziers. In the twelfth century, the lords of the castle of Puivert had control of Quercorb. It was then when the Cathars spread across the region as one of the seigniorial families, the Congost, had been won over by the dissidents. After the Crusade and the definitive annexation of Languedoc by the French crown in 1271, the castle of Puivert came into the property of the French lords. In the fourteenth century, it was reconstructed and it the castle that we are able to visit today dates back to that time period.

Structure of the Museum:

Several rooms make up the museum. The visit begins on the bottom floor where a reconstruction of a traditional kitchen is presented, animated and with sound effects that reproduce the gestures and work performed in the space. In the Iron Room, we find a forge—and exact replica of the forge of Nebias. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the blacksmith acted at the same time as the blacksmith, far-



rier, veterinarian and wainwright. All the necessary instruments for these different trades are found laid out in the room. On the second floor, in the Wood Room, the museum presents the workshop of a wood turner. On the same floor, displays discuss the history and heritage of Puivert.

The Antique Instrument Room —the *Instrumentarium*— reproduces the music room from the tower of the castle of Puivert. The molded sculptures of eight musicians allows the observer to appreciate the fineness and accuracy of detail. In the center of the room, there are musical instruments which, modeled after images taken from stone sculptures, have come to life: bagpipes, flutes, tamborines, viols, a lute, a rebec, a psaltery, and a portative organ. All of these instruments were produced by professionals based on the archeological interpretation of the sculptures. The music of the fourteenth century, from the court of Gastón Febus, can be heard in the room while admiring the instruments.

3.6.2 *The Castle of Villerouge-Termenès*

Located fifty kilometers southeast of Carcassonne and some forty kilometers west of Narbonne, the village of Villerouge-Termenès sits at the Mediterranean entrance to the high Corbières mountains.

History:

The earliest textual references to this village date back to the beginning of the twelfth century. From 1100 until the French Revolution, the castle and village belonged to the powerful Archbishops of Narbonne, constituting one of their eleven bailiwicks. Up until the thirteenth century, there were a number of conflicts between the Archbishops of Narbonne and the lords of Termes, the latter claiming possession of Villerouge. The village played an important role in the history of the Cathars. The last Cathar perfect, Guillermo Bélibaste, a native of Cubières, was executed —burned at the stake— in the bailiwick of Villerouge. Earlier, during a dispute, Bélibaste had killed a pastor of Villerouge and was forced to flee to Catalonia. Living in exile in San Mateo, a small village in the newly created kingdom of Valencia, he decided to improve himself and become a perfect; while in San Mateo, he encountered a spy of the inquisition of Carcassonne, Jacques Fournier. Fournier succeeded in tricking Bélibaste and luring him back into the jurisdiction of the inquisitor of Carcassonne. There, Bélibaste was tried and turned over to his worldly lord, the Archbishop of Narbonne, Bernard de Farges. Bélibaste was burned at the stake in 1321.

3.6.2.1 *Teaching History and Museum Practice*

The Castle:

The castle is one of the few buildings in the program that has been restored in its entirety. It represents an excellent example of medieval military architecture. It consists of four towers, one at each corner of a square fortified tower; the Lou, the



most important of all of them, is the tower situated at the southeast. The current castle is the result of three periods of construction, the most important occurring during the thirteenth century.

The visit to the castle occurs through a museum space that covers three floors or levels where the theme “The World of Guillermo Bélibaste, the last Cathar *Perfectus*” is presented; this is made possible thanks to the audiovisual guides. During the visit, one can discover the historical and mental universe of Bélibaste and the Archbishop of Narbonne, lord of Villerouge, Bernard de Farges. The visitor can explore the Cathar dissidents as well as daily life in the bailiwick of Villerouge in the fourteenth century. Throughout the castle tour, the visitor is transported back seven centuries thanks to the assistance of techniques and materials including audio, video, slide shows, dioramas with mannequins, and the restoration of the frescoes on the walls.

The Medieval Restaurant:

This is almost a unique example of a medieval restaurant in all of Europe. Located in the interior of the castle and respecting the fourteenth century décor, the restaurant invites you to discover the recipes of the Middle Ages that can be enjoyed maintaining the ambiance and customs of the table from that epoch.

Even if the application of these new technologies to the teaching of history allow us to discover the rich cultural heritage of the Aude in a clearer and more entertaining way, there are still very few examples of this type of patrimonial management—the type seen in Villerouge or the Museum of Quercorb. In most of the Cathar Country locations, the buildings are only presented with the help of plaques containing purely descriptive explanations. The contextualization and global study of the buildings is lacking; such a context would permit the visitor to place them in relation to the other locations at the same time that it could highlight the particular features or characteristics of the studied building or location. Placing the sites in relation to each other would facilitate historical knowledge, the historical consciousness that helps to understand the temporal continuity and the relationships that can be established between our past and our present. This absence can probably be explained, as we have seen above, by the marginalization of which historians have been the victims during the construction of this program of patrimonial management.

4. Conclusion

The journey through the construction of the Cathar Country program has allowed us to study one of the key problems facing any project of patrimonial management: the use of history and the management of it by patrimonial experts.

In the concrete case of the Aude, Cathar Country program, the choice of the Cathars as an historical theme to instigate a new economic dynamic and a new territorial identity has been the occasion to put into practice a process of political economic, social and cultural transformation of the department, a process that now has three decades of experience.



As has been seen, the construction and allocation of a Cathar identity in the territory of the department of the Aude has been carried out resting principally on the Cathar myth to the detriment of historical discourse. The different origins and uses of the Cathar myth have been created, above all since the nineteenth century —the period of the construction of contemporary nationalisms; the uses have contributed to their popularity at the moment in which the political, economic and social situation in France lent itself to the creation of newly imagined territories where a dynamic economy was able to be invented. The privileged use of the myth on the part of the experts responsible for the economic development of the Cathar Country —one use that the creators made of this myth is the Cathar Country Brand— illustrates not only the perverse effects that its use can provoke, but also the difficulties of historical discourse and the resistance on the part of its elaborators to history's economic or political implementation. As stated by the sociologist Marc-Henri Piault, referring to the term “cultural tourism” —the type of tourism that appeared to be privileged at the beginning of the patrimonial restoration of the Cathar Country program— this expression implies an obvious link between tourism and culture. However, the sociologist then says, “the tourism specialists and the cultural experts conflict and contradict one another over ideas that are badly shared, separated by the frontier that represents the economy ... in fact, it then seems as if tourism would be dominated by the value of exchange and culture by the exchange of values”.⁴³

The effects of the economic crisis of the past few years has acted as an amplifier for these types of abusive practices in history. The path of the Cathar Studies Center, the *Centre René Nelli*, may illustrate this type of abuse. If the foundation of the CEC was contemporary and parallel to the start of the Cathar Country program, responding at the time to the need to create a center of research and rehabilitation of the history of the Cathars, the change in the policies of the program anticipated the final outcome for the CEC. By preferring the myth to the history of the Cathars, the technocrats of the Cathar Country program have renounced, more or less consciously, their subsidies not only for historical investigation, but also for the dissemination of that knowledge.

43. Piault, Marc Henri. “Des itinéraires culturels: de la dévoration au dialogue”, *Identités et économies régionales...*: 85.





ILLUSTRATION 1. FRANCE AND ITS REGIONS⁴⁴.



ILLUSTRATION 2. THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AUDE⁴⁵.

44. <http://www.geoatlas.com/en/maps/countries-4/france-1167>.

45. http://www.interatlas.fr/download/Carre_France_InterAtlas.jpg.

