CHAPTER TWO

WARS, NORTH AND SOUTH (1213–76)

The Minority of James I

After the death of Peter II at Muret, the crown of Aragon faced the possibility of break-up. The heir to the throne, James, was a five-year old, whose right was disputable, and who, moreover, was in the hands of Simon de Montfort. The most important nobleman in the kingdom of Aragon was Peter II’s younger brother, Ferdinand, abbot of Montearagón, who countenanced the possibility of taking the throne for himself. Ferdinand would long remain a thorn in the side of his nephew. In Provence, Count Sanç, Peter II’s uncle, a man whose career can at best be described as checkered, held the reins of power for James’s cousin Ramon Berenguer V (though Arles was in revolt) and was determined to avenge the king’s death at whatever price. In Catalonia, there was no clear leading figure, and, in a contemporary section of the Gesta Comitum Barcinonensium, the monks of Ripoll described with alarm how evils spread across the land and unheard-of confederations and conspiracies arose. Important barons, most notably Guillem de Montcada and Guillem de Cervera profited from the crisis and secured financial and jurisdictional control of vast areas, while Guerau de Cabrera seized power in the county of Urgell. The mortgaging of the king’s domains to meet Peter’s ambitions meant that the financial situation was parlous in Catalonia and only a little better
in Aragon. Both the kingdoms of Navarre and France (as Diego García would lament) sought to profit from the crisis, although, on the plus side, neither the Almohads post-Las Navas nor Castile, soon to be faced with its own minority, were in a position to exploit the crown’s misfortune.

Given this generally unhappy state of affairs, it would seem safe to say that the last thing that the crown needed was to renew the war with the crusaders. Yet that is precisely what a number of people wished to do. As is well-known, the defeat of Muret was not followed by submission to Montfort but rather resistance with renewed fervour, with substantial revolt in winter 1213–4. Some Provençal nobles were, according to Vaux-de-Cernay, occupying the public roads, and harassing crusaders arriving from the North. Both at Narbonne and Montpellier, Montfort and the crusaders were refused entry into the towns and had to pass the night outside the walls, while at Nîmes they were only grudgingly granted permission to enter. While Montfort was in Provence, soldiers from the lands of the crown attacked his position at Béziers. In February 1214, Count Baldwin, the crusader-brother of Raymond VI of Toulouse was captured, imprisoned at Montauban, and then hanged from a walnut tree by the count of Foix, his son and the Lleidan knight Bernat de Portella, in order, according to Puylaurens, ‘to avenge the king of Aragon, since he had been at that battle’. On 20 March 1214, Viscount Guillem de Cardona made his will, intending to go to the region of Toulouse ‘to avenge the death of my lord king and to recover his son who is held as if he were a captive’ and by the spring, with the support of Viscount Aimery of Narbonne, a formidable group of nobles and clergy of the crown had assembled

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7 Llibre dels Fets, ii, 48, ch. 11; Bisson, ‘Finances’, passim.
9 See M. Roquebert, L’Épopée Cathare, 2 vols (Toulouse, 2001), i, 769–83.
10 PVC, ch. 487.
11 PVC, ch. 488.
12 PVC, chs. 487–91, 493 (Aragonese at Béziers); Roquebert, L’Épopée Cathare, i, 773–8.
13 PVC, chs. 495–500; Puylaurens, 92–4, ch. 22.