

My PhD thesis focuses on public debates between the Church and heretics in southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the twelfth century, the lands between Beziers and Bordeaux became the epicentre of heresy with prelates suspecting that networks of heretics were operating across the region infecting Christians with beliefs incompatible with the Catholic faith.

The financial support I received from the Doctoral School Research Awards enabled me to make an academic pilgrimage to visit the towns and villages of southern France where these debates took place and the disputants lived, worked, and died. I visited Toulouse, Carcassonne, Béziers, Bram, Narbonne, Montréal, and Fanjeaux, as well as Fontfroide Abbey and the Monastery of Our Lady of Pouille. All of these sites are significant to my thesis; after three years of reading and writing about these distant places, as familiar in my mind as household words, it was surreal to finally stand where the protagonists of my thesis once stood.



A key component of my research is an attempted reconstruction, as far as our sources allow, of the process of the public debates. How were they organised? What did they look like? But more than this, I am interested in the experience of the audience member. The lay person who downed their tools and attended these theological debates in order to watch, hear, and experience an extraordinary event, sometimes several miles from their own village. Space is a crucial aspect of a public debate. Traversing the topography of the

region myself has influenced my perception of how these debates could have been structured and provided me with new ideas regarding their precise locations.



One of the villages, Fanjeaux, had been home to (the future saint) Dominic in the early years of the thirteenth century, as he campaigned around the local area preaching against and debating with heretics. The village has embraced its disputatious and heretical heritage. Wandering through the winding streets of the hilltop village, the visitor encounters rusted, twisted figures depicting historical events or people. The largest of these vernacular artworks is located in a public square on the edge of the village overlooking hills that roll towards the

fortified city of Carcassonne. It is entitled *La Disputation*. It depicts two brassy heretics debating with their steely clerical opposition. Seeing the, relatively, obscure object of my research transmogrified into a literal object was a welcome surprise. And, more importantly, a welcome reminder of the continued significance of debates on religious freedom and intolerance four-fifths of a millennium later.

Beyond the benefits to my thesis, in February 2024, I will present a research paper on the miracles of St Dominic at a colloquium held by the London Medieval Society. This paper is influenced directly by my journey through the villages of the Languedoc, particularly Montreal and Fanjeaux. At the beginning of this paper, I will be sure to thank the Doctoral School Research Award for providing the funding that made this trip possible.