CHAPTER 3

REGIONAL NETWORKS AND
PILGRIMAGE SPIRITUALITY

From the fall of the Visigothic kingdom in 711 to the central Middle Ages, officials in the Iberian Peninsula searched for ways to strengthen their connections with the wider Mediterranean world. The founding and development of Santiago de Compostela as a pilgrimage site dramatically advanced this process. It also highlighted the centrality of pilgrimage, especially in a climate of reform. The ecclesiastical reform movement of the eleventh century—often called the Gregorian Reform movement—placed particular stress on order and organization. Pope Gregory VII employed the movement to augment the role of the papacy in the general workings of the church. He and his colleagues in the College of Cardinals, as well as other popes, pressed for objectives that would renew and expand ecclesiastical centers of authority. These officials also tried to bring the churches throughout western Europe more fully into consonance with the practices of the church of Rome. The replacement of the Mozarabic liturgy with the Roman liturgy in 1080 in Iberia signaled one of the most striking changes in this regard for Christian communities.

Yet these connections also brought with them additional responsibilities. Leaders and members of these communities had to be responsive to the wishes of church leaders in Rome and had to assist them in addressing problems when they arose. It was also important for them to foster peaceful connections within their territories. Warfare became an endemic problem in Northern Iberia during the twelfth century, as was ensuring stability in the thirteenth. Leaders in Rome as well as in Iberia worked to resolve the resulting series of conflicts, consistently keeping in mind such foundational themes as peace, reform, and community. Alfonso II and Peter II shared interests in all of these issues, and pilgrimage figured prominently among their techniques for resolving conflicts, building
communities, and forging relationships. Pilgrimage was an especially versatile technique. A process emphasizing spirituality, connectivity, and change, pilgrimage emerged as a vehicle both rulers could use for advancing their policies, working in conjunction with church leaders, and fostering unity throughout their territories.

Near the end of the 1190s, King Alfonso II of Aragon embarked upon a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the most important pilgrimage site on the Iberian Peninsula. As people began using the language of pilgrimage alongside the language of travel to Jerusalem or expeditions of the crusading movement, they also began using similar language to denote travel to Santiago. Alfonso responded to the call of Pope Celestine III to the Christian rulers of Northern Iberia, asking them to stop fighting each other and to unite against the threat that he believed the Muslim communities to the south posed to them. Celestine worked on this issue from a number of angles during his pontificate: he tried to get Alfonso IX of León to work against Almohad communities in Southern Iberia, but Alfonso IX cultivated alliances with them to protect the southern parts of León. He even worked to get the Christian rulers to cooperate with each other as a papal legate before becoming pope himself, working while Navarre encountered difficulties with Muslim forces in the early 1170s. Alfonso accepted Celestine’s request, however, but decided to visit the rulers himself while on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. While on his pilgrimage, Alfonso concluded peace agreements and improved relations with several Northern Iberian rulers. Upon returning to his lands, he discovered a famine in Catalonia, and Alfonso participated in relief operations to help those in need. While at Perpignan, he fell ill and died.

Peter II responded to another danger he believed threatened the security of his realm. Where his father offered relief in the midst of famine, King Peter tried to stem an impending disaster he believed would endanger the spiritual health of his realm and its inhabitants. He perceived the spread of heresy as this new threat. King Peter took these concerns further on a trip to Carcassonne in February 1204. There he issued a declaration that the Cathars were heretics. He also asked for papal legates and members of the Cathars to join him to deal with the consequences of the new decision. Peter of Castelnau, a papal legate, began investigating allegations of negligence against Archbishop Berenguer of Narbonne, Peter’s uncle. Soon after this investigation began, William Durfort and Peter the sacrist of Vic—two of King Peter’s closest allies—began making preparations for a voyage into the Mediterranean. That provides much of the immediate context for Peter’s voyage to Rome later in the same