

Chapter 4

"The Path of the Foolish Children"

Delusion, Disillusionment, and the Challenge of the Children's Crusade of 1212

The events known as the Children's Crusade present many problems to the modern historian, and have become some of the most mystifying and fabulous events of the entire medieval period. The crusade of 1212 has come to signify many things to many people; for some, it is proof of the simpleminded folly of the medieval period while for others it is a testament to pure devotion. The layers of meaning attributed to it over the centuries must be carefully removed in order for the historian to take stock of the crusade in its thirteenth-century contexts. To study the events of 1212 is, to some extent, to acknowledge the limits of historical understanding of the distant past: Too much of what we can know is, like the tales of ritual murder, questionable, if not completely fictional.

The first difficulty for scholars attempting to study the events is the problematic nature of the sources. In the more than fifty thirteenth-century chronicles, there are many—over two dozen—strongly contradictory accounts purporting to describe the same series of events. Differences of opinion are common enough in chronicles of the period, but these events seem to resist any coherent narrative. Early accounts differ not only over the proper interpretation of these events (such variations certainly exist) but also over the more basic questions of what happened, where, to whom, and in what context. Such a state of affairs has made it difficult if not impossible to analyze the events and calls into question almost every "fact" concerning the events: the movement's origins, progression, and conclusion.

During the past century, scholars have attempted to create a narrative of the Children's Crusade, a narrative that can be summarized as follows:

In the late spring of 1212, two large groups of French and German children or young peasants, spurred on by their pious fervor, gathered together in an attempt to reconquer Jerusalem and to regain the Holy Cross, both of which were lost to the Muslims in 1187. The French contingent, made up of poor children and led by the young shepherd Stephen of Cloyes, gathered near Vendôme in May and traveled through the countryside in a procession, singing and carrying crosses. Some disbanded when Philip Augustus opposed them, while others may have continued to Marseilles in order to cross the sea to the Holy

Land. The German movement originated in the region of Cologne and formed around a leader named Nicholas, who, like his French counterpart, was a child (*puer*). Despite many obstacles, the shepherd boy and his followers—children and adults, male and female—descended to the northern port towns of Italy, in the belief that God would provide them with a means of transportation across the sea. When no such miraculous assistance materialized, some participants sought employment and permanent refuge in Italy, others returned to the north disillusioned, and still others found or bought passage across the sea, never to be heard from again.

Unfortunately, such attempted reconstructions as this place undue reliance on the authority and problematic conflation of several key texts.¹ The most likely scenario is that a group of pilgrims, including and perhaps led by children, originated probably in the Cologne region and descended from Germany into northern Italy. Independent chroniclers writing shortly after 1212 from Piacenza, Cremona, and Genoa noted the arrival of such a surprising contingent at the city gates. There may also have been some movement, probably of local processions rather than of a crusading endeavor, in the Paris region, but little more than that can be accepted as true. Such are the meager facts of the noteworthy events during the spring and summer of 1212.

This study shifts attention away from a reconstruction of the actual events to a reconstruction of the concepts and meanings of childhood within the early accounts of the crusade. The sources reveal very different concerns and attitudes toward children than those found in the writings on medicine, baptism, or ritual murder. The events known as the Children's Crusade provided a unique moment for the thirteenth-century chroniclers to envision the removal of children from the domestic or vocational sphere and their sudden, unexpected entry into the world at large. This repositioning of children in a new context allowed the sources to discuss a wide variety of social and moral issues—particularly the dangers of the world—through the creation of a series of contrasts, particularly concerning the distinction between a child's and an adult's view of the world. Such a focus on the child as different from and more vulnerable than the adult intensified the sense of danger produced by the various threats invoked in the texts. The threats included external forces—Muslims, heretics, pirates, and southern merchants—which exteriorized blame for the failure and placed it onto distant figures who were bent on destroying or distorting the expedition. Yet at the same time the child's very nature also presented a threat to his own existence and survival, as was made evident in many sources that sought to interiorize the blame for the crusaders' failure.

The sources on the Children's Crusade are as varied, difficult, and fragmentary as the events they recount. Among the fifty accounts of the crusade, some consist of a single phrase while others provide lengthy descriptions filled with fanciful details. Almost all come from monastic or mendicant milieux, and are passages in annals or chronicles of the writer's abbey. Some sources are of northern French or German origin, and many are from Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, regions through which the German pilgrims traveled. The earliest references, written within a decade or so of the events, tended to provide straightforward and comparatively disinterested accounts and sometimes mentioned details suggesting that the author or his informant had witnessed the pilgrims' processions. Later sources almost inevitably included accretions, often fantastical in nature, and jaundiced views of the crusade and its participants. Those who wrote more than a generation after the events, such as Alberic of Trois-Fontaines and Matthew Paris, benefited from the certainty of the crusade's failure and created elaborate tales of the children's tragic end.

While nineteenth-century historiography accepted and sentimentalized the idea of the crusaders as children, scholarship from the middle of the twentieth century argued instead that the term *pueri*, the most common term used to describe the participants, should be understood as "peasants" rather than "children."² Both meanings of the word, which appears in the vast majority of the sources, have in common the idea of subservience, whether within a familial structure (submission to the father or parents) or within a wider social relation (service to one's lord or master). However, the latter meaning was used extremely rarely in the thirteenth century, as critics of this view have demonstrated.³ Nevertheless, the controversial notion of the participants as poor adults has focused attention on an important aspect of these events, the largely popular and anticlerical origins of and support for the movement.

In fact, even the earliest sources indicate that the participants—or at least those participants who were most noticeable—were perceived to have been remarkably young.⁴ A considerable number of sources assert that members of other age groups, most often youths and women, but sometimes adult men accompanied the children. Several sources make it clear that the children involved in the movement were poor, often shepherds, peasants who worked the soil, or servants and maids. Only one source specifies that some wealthy people participated, but in a passage that clearly indicates their young age: They, the "children of nobles," brought their nurses with them.⁵ Several sources contradict the interpretation whereby *puer* would be defined as "peasant," by distinguishing neatly between the two groups who constituted the bulk of the movement: "children and poor

people" or "shepherds of both sexes and children."⁶ A more typical account, written around 1220 by an inhabitant of Piacenza (one of the few secular writers), claims that a German boy arrived at the gates of the city "with a large and unending multitude of German children and nurslings, of women and girls."⁷

Like several other chroniclers of the Children's Crusade, the annalist from Piacenza noted an unusual event whose novelty lay in two categories of crusaders, women and children—precisely those groups who did not often "sign themselves with the cross." While the shorter reports may only use the term *pueri*, the lengthier accounts indicate that the participants were thought to be children, as is demonstrated by such qualifying remarks as "from six years of age and older," by references to other age groups in contrast to the *pueri*,⁸ or by allusions to minors' need for parental permission. Many sources use more age-specific terms, such as *infantes*, *parvuli*, *puerulus*, and other markers of childhood. Even when referring to other age groups represented among the crusaders, the chroniclers privilege the status of the children by mentioning them first or by focusing on the needs and weaknesses unique to their stage of life.

A study of the contradictions within and between narratives of the Children's Crusade, one that includes the legendary and outrageous elements in the tales, reveals a considerable amount of material indicating a strong ambivalence toward the child. The primary difficulty for thirteenth-century writers, the issue of how to represent this unusual failure, involves a problematizing of the children's actions and motivations. The dilemma underscores several key historiographic issues—how to interpret the events, how to explain the failure, and where to place the blame.

The chroniclers in their attempts to explain the events consistently deployed images of childhood in order to accentuate the child's inherent weaknesses, intellectual, moral and physical. In the process, the texts noted the children's motivations, hopes, and beliefs, often interpreted as problematic and inherently unrealistic. Several chroniclers articulated what I shall call a negative child psychology, one that provided a pessimistic view of the nature of childhood and accentuated particularly the limitations and vulnerabilities of that stage of life. However, owing to the enigmatic nature of the events—known to the chroniclers as well as to us only through hearsay and vague rumors—the accounts contained views on childhood that were as inconsistent as the narratives themselves. Some sources valorized the children while critiquing a particular aspect of the child's nature, while others condemned children and childhood as inherently unworthy. The narratives of the crusade addressed a wide range of issues that reflected

several problems inherent to the medieval understanding of the child.

In the tangle of tales connected with the events of 1212, only two things remain constant: that children were thought to be involved and that religious motivations supposedly lay behind the movement.⁹ It is precisely these two elements, childish participation and puerile religiosity, that become suspect in many of the chronicles. At time, the texts implicitly and explicitly question the children's sincerity, wisdom, and even worthiness. Accordingly, this chapter is organized around three sections: the possibility and limitations of childhood piety; the problematic mental and physical nature of the child; and the disputed belief in childhood's inherent innocence and sanctity.

Childish Devotion

Despite the many divergent narratives of the events, there appear very often in the sources several themes that were considered characteristic of the child's nature, themes that contain both positive and negative connotations. Such issues as the children's inspired excitement, simple piety, and strength of faith received highly discordant interpretations through which the child was depicted as either the exemplar of religiosity or an exemplum of superficial and therefore dangerous piety. The events allowed writers to explore the possibility of children's religiosity.

Many chroniclers expressed undisguised surprise and awe at the children's exuberance, most often by referring to the crusaders' spontaneity. In a passage often quoted by thirteenth-century writers, Abbot Albert, writing the annals of his Premonstratensian monastery of Stade, near Hamburg, in the 1230s, initially admired urgency and excitement that the children exhibited: "They ran with eager steps from all the towns and cities of every area."¹⁰ By adding that the crusaders acted "without a guide, without a leader," Albert acknowledged the absolute spontaneity of the children's actions and, in so doing, stood in direct contrast to most contemporary writers. There is no implication of direct imitation of adult behavior. The crusade was simply an impulsive desire acted out by the children with no outside influence.

Albert of Stade continued to praise the movement, despite its hasty departure, by mentioning ecclesiastical approval—in sharp contrast to many other accounts—and in this case from the highest authority in Latin Christendom, Pope Innocent III. Papal approval came in the form of a quotation that created a clear dichotomy between the young and the old by simultaneously extolling the children's active efforts and excoriating adult passivity. No curial documents on the crusaders exist, but Albert attributed a tacit approval to Innocent, claiming that "on hearing these rumors, the Pope said with a sigh, 'These children reproach

us, because we sleep while they run to recover the Holy Land."¹¹ The exclamation doubly emphasized the children's alacrity through the use of a pun on the word *inproperant*, meaning both "reproach" and "hasten" (from *propereo*), thereby deepening the contrast between the children's speed and adult Christians' lethargy. Here the connection between childhood and spontaneity is placed in a specifically religious context, one that serves to legitimize the children's sudden inspiration.

Yet youthful exuberance and spontaneity, although apparently praised by Innocent III,¹² were not always seen in such glowing terms. Sometimes it appeared to be rash behavior and became paired with childish irresponsibility. Written within a decade of the events, the second continuation of the Royal Chronicle of Cologne focused on the children's neglect of their duties: "Some leaving behind the ploughs or wains that they drove, others the sheep they were tending or whatever other things they had in their hands, they signed themselves with the cross, one running after the other."¹³ Like Albert of Stade, the chronicler also noted, in order to stress the apparent spontaneity of the movement, that "no one urged or preached" (*nullo hortante nec predicante*) to the children. Instead, these were represented as exceptional instances in which children acted on their own initiative.

Childish irresponsibility became tied to filial disobedience in many accounts. Some sources chose to portray the moment of rupture, the transition from the domestic to the outside world, as a violent clash of wills. One annalist noted the parents' success in restraining their children but simultaneously cited the children's obstinate resistance to their parents' wishes: "Yet those whose fathers and mothers did not allow [them] to leave cried very greatly."¹⁴ Most chronicles, however, characterized the children's departure as an act of defiance, a refusal to obey the wishes of those who were older and wiser. In choosing to depict the moment of departure, chroniclers created a strong contrast between the protective, enclosed world of the family and the painful future that awaited the children in the harsh, harmful world outside. Such scenes occurred only in the sources adamantly opposed to the whole movement and served to justify the view that the crusade and the crusaders were unworthy and therefore destined not to succeed. The Cologne chronicler referred to several attempts to stop the French and German children immediately before the references to the children's rejection of their agrarian responsibilities: "With unwilling parents and with relatives and friends restraining them, many thousands of children from age six and above up to the age of manhood signed themselves with the cross."¹⁵ The

entry of the children into the world—a theme central to discussions of the Children's Crusade—became a premature and inappropriate disruption of the domestic space.

The children's sudden departure was a rejection of their families, an insistent refusal to return despite the parents' use of persuasion, force, and even money. Well before the thirteenth century, separation from one's family to seek a higher cause had become a commonplace in Christian hagiographic literature.¹⁶ Yet the accounts of the movement in 1212 discussed the moment of departure in less than flattering terms. Some viewed the children's sudden departure from their families and abandonment of their work (fields, herds) as the first of many examples of their overzealous and underorganized approach to crusading, and hence as part of their unworthiness or, more practically, as an example of their lack of foresight, on account of which many starved or froze to death. Thomas of Cantimpré perceptively located his account of the crusade within a chapter entitled "Concerning those who are subject to the discipline of their mothers and should do nothing without the command of their elders."¹⁷ Thomas organized the text, his *Summa Bonum universale de apibus*, around the lives of bees, particularly the aspects that, he thought, found direct corollaries in human conduct. Hence, the bee's obedience to its elders found its human equivalent in any act of obedience to one's legitimate superiors, whether parents or others.

Like Thomas, several chroniclers considered the rejection of the family to be unsettling, and viewed it as both insubordination and excessive zeal. In the brief depiction of the crusade in the Annals of Saint Médard de Soissons, the infants and children of France departed "without the license or the assent of the parents"¹⁸ and left on crusade only to meet with failure and/or death along the way. Later chroniclers were more emphatic with such criticism. For Albert of Stade, the young crusaders' enthusiasm was dramatically portrayed as unbounded, unstoppable, and uncontrollable: "Many of them were locked behind doors by their parents, but in vain, because they escaped, having broken down the doors and walls."¹⁹ Matthew Paris noted a resemblance between the events of 1212 and the Shepherd's Crusade of 1250, which ended far more violently than the children's movement. In fact, Matthew explains the correlations by identifying one figure as the instigator of both movements: "He [the leader of the shepherds' movement] used the same type of magic that he had once used in France, when, beardless and adolescent, around forty years earlier, he had enchanted all the people of France and called together an infinite multitude of children who, singing, followed in his footsteps and wondrously could not be restrained by lock or bolt or be withheld by the orders, coaxing, or money of their fathers and

mothers."²⁰ Matthew saw a social disruption, if not destruction, in the children's rejection of the parents' persuasive powers, causing the replacement of a legitimate authority with a far more deleterious one. The child leader stole his fellow children away from the parents through the use of false religious imagery of processions and communal singing.

In strong contrast to the intergenerational tension within the domestic sphere, the chroniclers continuously referred to the children's initial unity and collective sense of purpose derived from their sense of a divine mission. The sources underscored the dual commonality of the participants' age and belief in the righteousness of their actions. A Cologne chronicler (*continuatio* IIIa), different from the Cologne writer who condemned the children's irresponsibility, began by describing the movement's origin among "children of different ages and conditions" who claimed to act by a divine mandate. The chronicler clarified the ambiguity in the reference to different ages by noting that, "following [the children's] example, many youths and women took up the cross" and joined the young crusaders.²¹ After the initial movement of children, members of other, older age groups were inspired by them and imitated them. This introduced yet another variant on the theme of imitation, one in which children were posited as exemplars of piety: Adults emulated the children rather than the other way around. Here, instead of a conflict between young and old, adults witnessed children's unity of purpose and validated it by attempting to reproduce it.

Perhaps the most extensive discussion of the children's unity, found in a detailed verse chronicle from Austria, detailed the international aspect of the movement by listing a dozen different regions from which the crusaders came. In noting that the participants were all under sixteen years of age (*annos infra sedecim euangelizantur*), the poet-chronicler mentioned the children's common age and inspiration, a sense of community among pious children that was accentuated by references to the many regions represented in the army of children (Hungarian, Frank, Briton, Bohemian, Westfalian, Norwegian, etc.). The reference to children from all over northern Europe, both east and west, suggested an imagined unity of Christendom—or at least of young Christians—with one aim, a unification of children that stood in direct contrast to the accounts of the battle of Bouvines and of the conflict over the imperial succession, events that surrounded this highly romanticized narrative in the chronicle. Any praise for such unity of purpose dissolved by the end of the poet's account, however, when the movement's very coherence was destroyed, through the death, enslavement, and rape of the young participants.

Many sources singled out the importance of the crusaders' age by observing that

a child led other children, or that a child led many people, old and young, or simply that children banded together with each other. The *Annales Thuringici breves*, true to its name, pithily reduced the event to a single line, which focused precisely on the children's connection to each other: "In the year 1212 children ran with [other] children to see the holy places."²² Other writers noted the children's unity despite their diversity, with specific references to the claim that boys and girls alike left for the holy lands: "an *expeditio* of children of both sexes."²³ The same source, the Annals of Admunt, recognized the primacy of children among the different groups of crusaders by mentioning the young before the adults and by noting that the leader (*dux*) was a child.

Although the children were represented as united by age and by purpose, the precise definition and limitations of their religiosity became a focal point of discussion in the chronicles. A few writers excluded any reference to the children's possible crusading desires, and saw the movement solely as a local pious movement. In the *Auctarium Mortui Maris*, written within a decade of the event, there is no indication that the children took up the cross. Nevertheless, their songs reflected a contemporary crusading desire and concern with events in the East, as in their exclamations they begged God to "exalt Christianity" and "return the true Cross to us."²⁴ Even here there is no mention of a journey or of a campaign in order to attain their ends. They sang a simple prayer to God for the recovery of the holy relic. The children's stated intention to recover the Cross became a vehicle for Walter of Coventry, in his *Memoriale*, to contrast the small children—whom he specifies as being no older than twelve years of age—with the massive campaign they had undertaken.²⁵ Here, as elsewhere, childhood was closely aligned with simplicity of faith, particularly with an unquestioning and uncomplicated idealism.

Albert of Stade, who had cited Innocent III's approval, linked the children's exuberance, ubiquity, and concord with the children's faith. The author's amazement at the unprecedented unification of children in a declaration of extreme piety flows from every moment of this account. His astonishment derived in part from their naïveté concerning their goals, which itself reflected a greater simplicity of faith that validated the crusaders and their intentions: When asked where they wished to go, "they answered, 'Toward Jerusalem, to seek the Holy Land.'" That simple response, with its lack of specificity as to the means of transportation and reconquest, became extremely exaggerated in an account by William, abbot of Andres, near Dunkirk, written after 1226. In William's brief account, the crusaders, described here as infants or little ones (*infantium, parvulorum*), "responded, each and every one, as if informed by one spirit, 'To

God."²⁶ William, again echoing Albert, stated that "absolutely no one outside advised" the children, a phrase that reminded the audience that, in the minds of both writers, the movement truly reflected an uncontrollable spontaneity and purity of piety previously unknown. The imprecision and ignorance of the crusaders, signs of their naïveté, authenticated the sincerity of their beliefs.

The children's simple religious fervor—considered praiseworthy by some contemporaries—was sometimes parodied and ridiculed as simplistic. Albert of Stade, writing long enough after the event to be certain of the children's failure, suggested as much when he commented, immediately after demonstrating papal approval: "Still, it is unknown where they went. But several returned, who, when asked the reason for the movement, answered that they did not know."²⁷ Albert set up the mystery of the children's whereabouts as a statement of failure and implicitly attributed that failure to the children's ignorance and incomprehensible motives.²⁸ Simplicity and idealism gave way to a hopelessly simplistic and unrealistic reverie.

Similarly, some accounts criticized the young crusaders' efforts to incorporate religious imagery and beliefs into their movement. A childish inability to understand Scripture led to the children's confused conflation of imagery from various parts of the Bible, all of which they used to define themselves as God's chosen. Writing during the first half of the thirteenth century, the chronicler of Ebersheim noted that the crusaders, who consisted exclusively of young subordinates ("servants, maids, and virgins"), followed the "little boy" (*puerulus*) Nicholas to the shore of the Mediterranean in the hope that they would "cross over the waves of the sea with dry footsteps." This naïve notion echoed Christ's miracle of walking on the water, a christological connection reinforced by a reference to another miracle of Christ, Nicholas's astonishing ability to support his vast following with food and to meet other of their needs.²⁹

More common than—and often blurred with—the image of Christ walking on water is the reference to the parting of the Red Sea during Moses' exodus from Egypt, an event that provided a direct correlation between the children of Israel and the children of Western Christendom. One source, from the nearly contemporary annals of the abbey at Schäftlarn near Munich, noted that they hoped for a miracle to help them across the sea "just as the dry path once was offered to the Israelite people."³⁰ The Franciscan Salimbene de Adam, writing long after the event but probably consulting earlier sources, saw the German pilgrims as placing their mission entirely in God's hands:

In the same year, 1212, by the persuasion of three boys, as if twelve (*quasi duodennium*), who said that they saw a vision and who took up the sign of the cross in the region of Cologne, an innumerable multitude of poor people of both sexes and children, pilgrims from Germany, went toward Italy as crusaders, saying with one heart and one voice that they would go across the sea on dry land and would recover the Holy Land [and] Jerusalem, by the power of God; but in the end [it was] as if they all vanished.³¹

Salimbene identified three visionary leaders, rather than just Nicholas. The reference to twelve is obscure, and could refer to the age of the three leaders (also Jesus' age during the debate in the Temple) or to the efficiency of their preaching (three who inspired so many people that there seemed to be twelve preachers, modern-day disciples).³²

The analogies to Christ, the Apostles, and the Israelites, all placed in the mouths of the children, led several chroniclers to accuse the young crusaders of excess, presumption, or visions of grandeur. In various accounts, the children produced claims of a heavenly command, an angelic order, or a divine nod of approval.³³ Elsewhere, the children and even some adult supporters seemed to consider the child leader to be sanctified, *beatus*, and to have the ability to produce miracles.³⁴ The second continuation of the Cologne chronicle branded the children's actions as not simply ludicrous but presumptuous. In fact, the children were depicted as doubly brash, in that they presumed to do what a high noble or even a king could not and, at the same time, to be blessed by God in their venture.³⁵

The movement of 1212 came to be understood as an enactment of other forms of disobedience, not simply of intergenerational familial tension but also of a potentially dangerous recognition of a new religious and secular authority. The chronicler of Laon believed that the movement's main problem lay less with the crowds than with the children themselves and particularly with their leader, Stephen of Cloyes:

All [the multitude of children] recognized that one [Stephen] was the master and leader over them. At last the king, having consulted the masters of Paris concerning the gathering of children, commanded that they return to their own people. And so, just as that puerile devotion was begun easily, so also it was ended easily. It seemed to many that through the spontaneous gathering of innocents in this way, the Lord would do upon the earth something great and new. But it came to pass in a much

different manner.³⁶

Despite its awkward style, the passage provided a glimpse of the many tensions that the writer found—or created—at the heart of the movement: a conflict between learned and ignorant, powerful and poor, adult and child. The children's presumption here entered the secular realm with the contrast between the young Stephen, acting as leader and master, and the king and Parisian faculty, who rightly claimed such titles. In ruminating on the children's faith, the chronicler criticized the popular belief in their sanctity and true religiosity and instead depicted the children as frivolous and suggestible.

Criticisms of the children's piety as simple-minded and therefore presumptuous notwithstanding, a few sources, through the invocation of hagiographic models, postulated the possibility of a true and steadfast puerile faith. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, a Cistercian monk writing between 1227 and 1241, described the fate of several children in a highly dramatic scene of martyrdom. The narrative reflected a Western Christian fascination with Islamic culture as completely foreign and antagonistic, exemplified in the depiction of Muslim violence toward children. Alberic drew a strong contrast between the helpless, betrayed children and powerful, cruel Muslim princes.³⁷ The story became a tale of sanctity and deep piety revealed in the midst of torment inflicted by sadistic unbelievers, a contemporary passion with parallels to the accusation of ritual murder. Alberic claimed that soon after the children were sold into slavery, there occurred a gathering of Muslim "princes" in Baldach (Baghdad). Eighteen of the children were brought before the assembly and killed "in various types of martyrdom" because they would not convert. Like the tale of the Juitel, the story linked threats of violence and conversion. While the eighteen died a painful but praiseworthy death through martyrdom, the others were left enslaved by their enemy for the rest of their lives. Even these children, however, became positive examples of true faith: "One of the above-mentioned clerics whom the caliph bought for his household faithfully recounted that he heard of absolutely none of the above-mentioned infants apostatizing from Christianity."³⁸ Alberic transformed the events of 1212 into an exemplum of the children's perseverance in their faith despite their suffering, a tale that involved puerile naïveté and commitment in spite of—and in opposition to—the antagonism of the adults who surrounded them. Despite their childhood, innocence, bodily weakness, and loss of freedom, the young crusaders remained strong in their piety, the one thing they managed to retain.³⁹

While writers could express ambivalence about puerile piety, they were not so reserved about the adult supporters of the venture. Many harshly criticized and

even blamed the adult Christians, who initially encouraged the children, for not continuing with their moral and physical support. Writing after 1254, Richer of Senones turned his attention and considerable opprobrium toward faithful Christians who failed to maintain support for the children. In Richer's depiction, this was a moment of awakening to the reality of their plight, a moment of sadness, and a moment of doubt not only for those actively pursuing the goal but also for their supporters back at home. As the young crusaders traveled south to the Alps, their hopes of "possess[ing] the Holy Land just as the children of Israel leaving Egypt obtained that land" inspired onlookers to reciprocate the enthusiasm, particularly through donations of food. Richer described the crowd's reactions to the transient pilgrims in terms that implied a familial concern for the children's welfare: "Truly, into whatever city or land they came, the inhabitants, on account of God, took them up as little ones and orphans, just as they were, and gave them food and then sent them away."⁴⁰ The passage utilized the imagery of adoption, the acceptance and rearing of children (the verb *suscipiebant* refers to the moment of taking up an abandoned or lost child), in a manner that illustrated the crowd's sympathy and great concern for the wanderers. The children's devoutly inspired abandonment of their own families found its resolution in this imagery of adoption and concern for the pilgrims in a way that accentuated the crusaders' age.

Unlike most writers, Richer gave considerable attention to the period of disillusionment, the moments after the children realized that faith was not enough to guarantee success, that no ships would miraculously appear to take them overseas to an easy, assured victory. Having arrived at the shore, the crusaders were confounded when they discovered that the sea would not part for them as the Red Sea had for the children of Israel. Many headed back toward their homeland. According to Richer, the discouraged children turned to the Italian faithful for support, only to be rejected and endure poverty, in strong contrast to the warm reception by their northern supporters. His description of the children's suffering allowed Richer to rail against a lack of charity, which led to the protracted and painful deaths of many children in the streets. Quoting Lamentations 4:4, Richer noted with approval the now abandoned children and contrasted them with the harsh town dwellers, who would not even bury the starved bodies: "Little ones begged for food and there was no one who would share with them." Such a description of the children's pain and death led Richer to sanctify the young outcasts by comparing them favorably with the holy Innocents. In fact, he argued, their suffering was not simply parallel to but greater than that of the Innocents:

Everywhere throughout the villages and city streets most of the [children] lay dead from hunger, nor was there even anyone to bury them. And so truly that small group (*gens*) is believed to be compared to those great innocents who were killed for Christ, since that group was worthy of undergoing at such a tender age immense hardships and death by starvation, which is crueler than the sword. Hence Jeremiah said, "It is better to be slain by the sword than killed by hunger," and truly it is better, because the sword slays with one blow, while hunger kills with torment.⁴¹

In a passage that reflected the northern writer's prejudice against Italians, the orphans who had been accepted by the German Christians were abandoned by the Italians in a tragic chain of events that emphasized the adults' diffident rejection and simultaneously further glorified the children through their suffering. The depiction of a slow and painful death simultaneously excoriated the selfishness of the Italians and reestablished the selflessness of the children. The tragic fate that Richer attributed to the children included a moment of disenchantment for the children as well as a critique of adults by the writer.

If children were thought to be fickle in their piety, adults took on capricious attributes with deadly consequences. For the Trier chronicler, the same people who gave so much to the children on their departure offered nothing to the young crusaders on their return journey, causing in the process the deaths of many children.⁴² After the initial furor and piety faded, Richer's orphans were, in these accounts, abandoned by the same Christian society that had previously supported them. The simple faith of children hoping to embody and reenact the exodus of the children of Israel had become for adults an embarrassment, a moment of optimistic piety now reinterpreted as a facile and misguided idea.

In describing the events we call the Children's Crusade, chroniclers acknowledged the possibility of children's active piety. Writers associated the popular religiosity of children with the thirteenth-century crusading fervor, though they considered it an unfortunate and ultimately tragic outlet for the young Christians. While they may have acknowledged the children's expression of faith, chroniclers often viewed it with suspicion. The more elaborate accounts of the crusade examined not only the children's pious outbursts but also the young crusaders' disillusionment, their recognition of errors, and their rejection of childish naïveté.

Gullibility and Folly

The self-conscious awareness that several chroniclers attributed to the children at the failure of their expedition contrasted sharply with what many writers

considered to be the intrinsic lack of discernment in children. Prior to the moments of clarity discussed above, the children seemed to be particularly unable to judge good and bad intentions in others. This gullibility stood as the source of many problems for the children, and indeed for many chroniclers it became the cause of their downfall. The writers perceived an inherent propensity in children to believe others, a simplicity of faith in humans comparable to, but far more problematic than, the children's faith in God's protection. As we have seen with accusations of ritual murder, one common definition of the child's nature, found in canon law, involves an ignorance of deceit (*doli non capax*). Many chroniclers depicted various adults as aware of, and willing to misuse, children's mental weaknesses, particularly the lack of perception of other people's ill will. In the process, children were stripped of responsibility for the movement's failure as the blame was shifted toward adults from both far and near. However, other writers viewed the children not as passive victims deceived by elements of society considered to be dangerous but as guilty of folly and self-deception. Both forms of deceit revolved around understandings of the limitations of children's mental skills.

The greatest amount of contradictory information between the different narratives lies in the depiction of the origin of deception. One continuation (IIIa) of the Royal Chronicle of Cologne carefully distinguished between the various groups involved in this affair and their different moral statuses, honest or deceitful. The chronicler located the origin of the movement in the children's spontaneous devotional fervor and then listed two other groups that later became attached to the movement. The second group, whose motives and mores were not questioned, consisted of women and youths who were inspired by the children's example. If children, youths, and adult women were portrayed positively, only one group remained to be mentioned and condemned as the source of corruption. Evil men (*maligni homines*) mingled with the crusaders and, assuming the roles expected of responsible adult men, received the money given in donation by well-wishers. The men did not protect the alms as expected, but demonstrated their immorality by fleeing with the money that was meant to support the crusaders on their journey. Through the subsequent description of the horrible suffering and death awaiting the pilgrims, the chronicler clearly pointed an accusatory finger at the men's misuse of their authority. In attributing the collapse of the movement to corrupt adult males, the chronicle also created a moral hierarchy in which children appeared at the top and were followed by women and youths, a structure that inverted the familial and social hierarchies.

The more elaborate and outrageous accounts of the crusade explained the children's failure by referring to foreign influences and powers who misused the

children's naïve piety. The strong dichotomy between the inherent goodness of the little crusaders and the partially disguised evil of a foreign enemy constituted an exteriorizing of failure, with the implication that, but for this malice, the children could have attained their goal.

Unlike the Cologne chronicle with its implication of corruption by Christian adults who joined the movement, several chronicles located the source of failure not only in an outside force but also in one whose assistance the children actively solicited. In the tale by Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, the children faced a variety of adversities and adversaries, all of them adults attempting to derail or destroy the movement. Alberic viewed the expedition's disastrous conclusion as the destruction of the children's pious intentions by the thirst for lucre exhibited by two merchants from Marseilles, whose role in the children's doom appeared most evident in Alberic's reference to them as "the traitors of these infants." The pivotal moment in the narrative consisted of the children's betrayal by the merchants, who filled seven ships with the children and shipped them off to the Muslim slave markets of North Africa. The two Provençal traitors, whom Alberic named (Hugo Ferreus and Guilelmus Porcus) in order to authenticate a highly dubious narrative, were represented as misusing their secular power—as owners of ships—and their religious faith by falsely promising "for God's cause to lead them across the sea without a fee."⁴³ Through the Judas-like treachery of the two merchants, the children quickly became slaves of the Muslims or martyrs at the hand of Islamic princes, as we have seen. Sounding the theme of Christian adults exploiting childish gullibility, Alberic's narrative concluded with the spectacle of the children as captives of the very group they set out to conquer or chase from the Holy Land.

Such images revealed one of the key motifs behind various chroniclers' invocation of a foreign threat: the children's exceptional vulnerability, both mental and physical. Several texts expressed a fear of sea travel and particularly of pirates, slavers, and Islamic captivity, all of them heightened by the notion of vulnerable children dislocated from home. The hope of miracle and divine protection here crumbled under the fear of sea scavengers and Eastern slave markets, and it gave way to a concern over children as slaves,⁴⁴ dramatized by the image of the children entering the East in chains rather than in triumph. A brief account from Metz, circa 1250, attributed the children's failure to the dangers of sea travel, and announced simply that "a throng of children is sold by sailors, others are lost at sea."⁴⁵

Other controversial groups in the Western world appeared in these texts as the

malefactors who brought about the children's downfall. In an extremely succinct account written shortly after 1270, Heinrich of Heimburg stated pointedly, without further elaboration, that "a multitude of infants was delivered by heretics to the Saracens."⁴⁶ The idea of union between two enemies of the Church combined a Western problem (heterodoxy) with an Eastern menace. It linked two recognized examples of evil that were thought to threaten not only children but also the West in general.⁴⁷ Such tales reflected the belief in the Eastern origins of Western heresy and drew an obvious parallel between two movements inimical to the true faith. Childhood became a vehicle for discussing the threat of foreign enemies, the children having become vulnerable after they left the relative protection of the domestic sphere in order to risk the dangers of the world.

For the most part, the narratives described a ruinous intervention by adults only after the children's movement had begun. Yet other accounts of the crusade located the movement's very origin and instigation in a demonic source that manipulated the children's good intentions. Such arguments often announced a broad, international conspiracy intent on controlling the children's every move and thereby transformed the children's roles from active participants into passive victims of an outside force. While it did not alter the writers' belief in the children's faith, the view did render the movement suspect from its very inception and redefined the entire event as a delusion. The children still exhibited strong faith, but in the wrong movement. The continuation of the *Gesta Treverorum*, written soon after 1242 by an apparent eyewitness to the event that had occurred thirty years prior, viewed the crusade in a purely negative light, as a misguided movement inspired by the devil: "For children gathered from all the towns and villages of Germany, as if divinely inspired... . [I]n fact they were sold to the gentiles by the father of Nicholas [the young leader], and so they were led by the magic of demons."⁴⁸ In this account, the bishop attempted to save the children by recognizing what they could not: the deception and false sanctity of the leader. Magic and the devil's instigation were for some writers the explanation for an evil that would take advantage of the children's incapacities, particularly what we shall see as their susceptibility to suggestion and magic through song.

Other writers identified a connection between a fear of magic and a distrust of the Islamic world, particularly through a belief in sorcerers' ability to delude large masses of people. In his *Bonum universale de apibus*, a huge collection (written between 1256 and 1261) of exempla for mendicant preachers, Thomas of Cantimpré suggested that Westerners had assisted the Saracens in capturing the Christian children but, unlike Heinrich who believed heretics were to blame, claimed that "certain sorcerers" were responsible for the treachery.⁴⁹ Demonic

inspiration again played a large part in the "spirit of deception" that overtook the children and brought them to their doom. Practitioners of magic appeared in several chronicles as a means of explaining the failure, which was attributed mostly to the magician's dual ability to feign divine inspiration and then to entice his victims into thinking and acting against their will.⁵⁰

Many of the accounts dealing with magical influences claimed that behind the movement was a leader or instigator, an individual toward whom the writers could then direct much of the blame. Richer of Senones, who, as we have seen, had used the Children's Crusade as the background for an elaborate sermon on starvation, later returned to the events of 1212 when discussing a somewhat related movement, the Shepherds' Crusade of 1251. Here Richer tells his audience for the first time about the fate of the children who embarked by sea for the Holy Land, in a passage in which he draws parallels between the two movements: "The enchanters claimed that they wished to delude the shepherds, whom they believed to be very simple, and attempted to lead them away across the sea, and they strove to sell the same shepherds to the peoples of that land, just as we noted above concerning the children."⁵¹ Here the children's simplicity was equated with their ability to be deluded. Magic and enchantment did not appear in the early accounts (before circa 1250); it is only with this retelling of the tale that Richer included a reference to such demonic activity. Contrary to his claim, Richer had not previously mentioned the *incantatores* at all, and he certainly had not suggested that they had organized the entire movement as part of a nefarious international plot. Writing after the violence of the shepherds in 1251, Richer has rewritten his narrative of the Children's Crusade in a manner that conveniently addressed the contemporary concern over the dangers of wrongly inspired popular religious movements.

A similar condemnation of enchantment as the source of deception—that is, a demonization of magicians—coincided with an idealization of the beguiled children in the *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, a source as detailed and as romanticized as the account of Alberic of Trois-Fontaines. The *Chronicon* cited the children as victims of manipulation by outside enemies. The rubric for the passage proclaims the author's views: "See the pilgrimage of the children and how they have been deceived through enchantments."⁵² The poet noted the children's inability to discern deception here and later, when he revealed the actual motives behind the events: "For evil thus grew under the appearance of good" (*nam sub boni specie malum sic succrevit*). Introducing the song he claimed was sung everywhere, the author believed that its spread and its enticements had been accomplished "by a magical art." He implied that the children put their hope in an

illusion and were infatuated by the false image of victory and the semblance of piety. Processional songs played a very important role in thirteenth-century popular piety; here they have become the bait by which the children have been caught.

The idea of pagan control over Christian children by means of magical allurements appears in the writings of several mid-thirteenth-century writers. In his *Opus majus*, written around 1266, Roger Bacon inflated the problem into a multinational conspiracy in which "Tartars and Saracens remaining in their regions send to the Christians men ... in order to cause discord between the princes, because the enemies of the Christians strive most greatly for this, to cause wars and discord between them."⁵³ Roger evoked the memory of the Children's Crusade ("perhaps you saw or heard for certain that children from the kingdom of France gathered together ... "), although he admitted that it occurred fifty-four years earlier. A brief reference to an event considerably earlier sufficed to illustrate his point: that "the stupid multitude" was duped into believing and following agents from the pagan world who pretended to preach a crusade. The fear of foreign influence frames Roger's depiction of the Children's Crusade, which he considered to be a Muslim plot masquerading as a righteous crusade against the very people who planned it.

A variant on the theme of Western paranoia provided an ingenious explanation for the motives of the Muslims' agents. In his massive *Speculum historiale*, written around 1250, Vincent of Beauvais allotted a brief chapter to the event that had occurred almost forty years earlier. He explained the movement by means of a reference to a mysterious legend that captivated Western Europe from the late twelfth century onward, the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain. Tales of the Islamic sect known as the Assassins, led by a timeless and obscure leader (the *Vetulus*), had begun to circulate throughout the West and terrified it for a century.⁵⁴ Vincent expressed some doubt about the truth of the story, but nevertheless devoted the majority of his account to the theory: "It was said, however, that the Old Man of the Mountain, who was in the habit of rearing the Assassins from childhood, held two Western clerics in his prison and would not release them until the children of the kingdom of France had been seduced to take up the Cross by [the clerics] through certain false rumors of visions and through [false] promises."⁵⁵ The moral dilemma lay in this, that it was Christian clerics who, as modern Judases, betrayed the children. The passage made no mention of death or enslavement but instead suggested that the Christian children might be "rear[ed] from childhood" (*a pueritia nutrire*) as Assassins. The same fear of conversion and indoctrination that we saw in Alberic's version of the

events resurfaced here as a fear of distant enemies and of familiar but treacherous Christians.

The previous examples illustrate the variety of consequences that the chroniclers attributed to the children's inherent inability to detect deceit. Yet gullibility was not the only problematic aspect of the child's mental (dis)abilities; several sources focused on the absolute folly of the young crusaders' efforts and in the process provided much information concerning high-medieval views on children's intellectual deficiencies.

One source provided a succinct and withering treatment of the ignorance of the crusaders: "The ridiculous expedition of the children: in the year 1212 the path of the stupid children stretched its way to the sea."⁵⁶ With this statement, Herman of Altaich, writing around 1250, epitomized the negative view of childhood found in these accounts. We have seen the second continuation of the Royal Chronicle of Cologne condemn the children for disobedience to their parents, for their irresponsible shirking of their agrarian duties, and for their presumptuous belief that they enjoyed God's favor. In a passage that focused attention on the very nature of the child, the chronicler identified the source of all of this behavior: "It was judged by all that these ones, still in a puerile age, [had] neither the strength nor the power to do anything and [had] attempted this deed foolishly (*stulte*) and without discretion."⁵⁷ Here even the popular crowd, so often seen as supportive of the children's actions, could recognize and deplore the children's folly.

Discussions of intellectual limitations served to explain the events by placing blame not on the crusaders per se but on their common status as children. That is to say, sometimes childhood itself was made responsible for the failure of the venture. The lengthiest discussion of children's folly can be found in the Chronicle of Marbach, written just after 1240, which harshly criticized the entire movement and its supporters by creating a dichotomy between rational thought and belief that was childish and popular. From the very beginning of his narrative, the chronicler ridiculed the entire event: "At that time [1212] there occurred a certain frivolous expedition by children and by foolish men who, without any discretion, took up the sign of the cross out of curiosity more than salvation."⁵⁸ With extreme derision, the annalist denied the legitimacy of the movement's claim to be a true crusade (*expeditio*), primarily through the implicit connection between the two groups singled out as the primary actors. In canon law and in theological discussions, the child was defined as a creature fundamentally lacking discretion, *sine discretione*,⁵⁹ the same phrase used here to describe the adults involved in the movement. While the children may have acted according to the simplicity of

their nature and were not considered legally or morally responsible for their actions, the annalist implied that adults should have known better. The text, which a few sentences later mentioned children *infra annos discretionis*, equated these adults with children, attributing to the elders a deficiency traditionally attributed to children. This association of adult stupidity with children conforms to the annalist's primary purpose in discussing this event: to identify human folly and frailty, made more striking and apparent by the children's natural mental weakness.

The annalist of Marbach, following the narrative of the second continuation of the Cologne chronicle, mentions the rejection of family and work but includes quite a bit more on the children and, by extension, the foolishness inherent in all humans:

And just as we are often and easily a credulous crowd with such novelties, many indeed considered that these things were done not through a lightness of mind but [rather] through divine inspiration and out of a certain piety; hence they provided them [the crusaders] with expenses, food, and the essentials. The laity vehemently opposed the clergy and others of saner mind who spoke against them and judged that path to be empty and useless. [The laity] said that the clerics were unbelievers and that they were opposed to this deed on account of envy and avarice more than on account of truth and justice. But, because all affairs that have been begun without the balance of reason and without the strength of counsel do not come to a good end, after this dull multitude came to Italy they were scattered and dispersed through the cities and towns.⁶⁰

In this rich passage, the author attributed to the crusaders, adults as well as children, several characteristics commonly associated with the very young, when he described the movement as having been undertaken "without the balance of reason and without the strength of counsel" (*sine libramine rationis et sine vigore consilii*). Just as childhood was the age "without discretion," adulthood was defined as the "years of reason" (*annos rationis*) in direct contrast to the earlier stage of life.⁶¹ The annalist's dislike of the movement stemmed not from any belief in outside forces manipulating the crusaders but from a more personal awareness of the danger of human folly.

The author deplored the extent of human irrationality and yet recognized that everyone was affected by this failing. He even implicated himself (and all of humanity) in his use of the first person plural at the beginning of the passage. "We" are a credulous lot, but "we" refers to the crowd who took up the crusaders' cause and who were associated with childish irrationality and an inability to see

the impious, audacious reality behind the movement. The anticlericalism expressed in the text finds its equal in the chronicler's strong opposition to the children's cause and the easily convinced crowd. The annalist of Marbach documented a contest over the definition of true faith and its proper public expression, a conflict divided between the learned and those of less "sane" mind, the foolish populace. The annalist conflated the children and the crowd, which exhibited the irresponsible and irrational attributes as the children. Although he opposed both the children and the adults who supported them, the chronicler believed that the adult members of the crusade and the followers, all of whom should have known better, deserved the greater opprobrium. What was in the child a basic, unfortunate attribute (weakness of mind) became highly dangerous when found in adults.

The Marbach text was not the only source to represent and then criticize popular piety as a dangerous enterprise. The chronicler of Laon, writing both chronologically and geographically close to his subject, used the events of 1212 as just one example of the dangers of popular piety. Whereas the writer from Marbach found opposition to the authority of the Church only when priests themselves actively disapproved of the events, the Laon chronicler saw the entire movement as a potential critique of both ecclesiastical and secular authority. The Laon chronicler expressed great mistrust of and condescension toward the "common masses" that gathered around the young pilgrims as they headed toward Saint-Denis. Miracles performed by Stephen and several other children in the movement awed the crowd, who accordingly held the children "in great veneration." Such occurrences indicated that the gullible masses were beginning to believe that the children enjoyed a special sanctity.

Distrust of the young crusaders' motives and seriousness of purpose appears in other texts, notably in Jacobus de Voragine's chronicle of Genoa. When the pilgrims approached the city, the Genoese did not trust the pilgrims for a variety of social, economic, and religious reasons, the first being "that they believed that [the pilgrims] were led more by lightness (*levitas*) than by truth."⁶² For the Genoese, the issue revolved around not the possible deception of easily fooled children but rather the children's actual motives. Other chroniclers faulted the children for excessive and unbridled fervor, but the Genoese questioned the sincerity of their commitment and considered the entire movement to be frivolous, foolish in a way slightly different from that indicated a half century earlier by the Marbach annalist, who ridiculed the children's intelligence ("lightness of mind") when commenting on their desire to cross the parted seas. Childhood was linked with amusement or entertainment, in contrast to a sincere,

serious desire to undertake a crusade.

The folly and mental weakness led, according to these writers, to the crusade's inevitable failure. Yet several chroniclers continued the narrative beyond the dissolution of the crusader's movement in order to discuss not the physical hardships endured by the children (as Alberic and Reiner did in discussing slavery and starvation, respectively) but the psychological dimension of the survivors' return home. The Marbach chronicler portrays the event as a voyage of self-awareness for the crusaders, who, on failing to gain the official approval they sought in Rome, "understood that their work was frivolous and empty."⁶³ Before discussing the plot of the Old Man of the Mountain to capture the children of France, Vincent of Beauvais noted the movement's final outcome: "The little children ... returned empty and void."⁶⁴ Here it was not that the crusaders' work (*laborem*) was devoid of significance but rather that the children themselves lost their sense of purpose. The crusaders became aware of their folly, if only through the disillusionment and emptiness they felt on their return. These chroniclers suggested that the crusade lent to the children a greater understanding of themselves, an ability to see their self-deception, just as the children who were duped by outsiders inevitably saw the reality behind their foolish voyage. Such awareness was a kind of maturation, a movement from folly to understanding, although the self-awareness involved a bleak view of reality. The children were represented as having an adult's understanding, being now able to discern the dangers both of the outside world (pirates, sorcerers, heretics, Muslims, merchants, slavers, and others) and the limitations intrinsic to the age of childhood.

The Innocents Abroad

The many negative views of childhood discussed above notwithstanding, several depictions of the child's inherent goodness and purity surface in the sources. The notion of childhood as the embodiment of innocence plays an important role as the foundation of the children's (and their supporters') belief in their own worthiness. But here we encounter yet another contradiction between (and even within) sources: There is abundant evidence of a critique of this notion, evidence of an awareness of the tenuous nature of this innocence and worthiness. One of the earliest sources, a sermon on the importance of crusading, written just a few years after the movement, exhorted its listeners to remember "the innocent little ones who the other year were signed with the cross,"⁶⁵ a strong endorsement of the children and their endeavor. The passage provides important information on the author's views: his belief that the children acted in precisely the way adults

did (*cruce signati*); his invocation of a presumably popular memory of the event; and the undeniable certainty that these were not only children but also "little innocents."

Those writers who approved of the children because of their suffering often focused on the inherent goodness of children. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines argued for the sanctity not only of the children martyred in Baghdad but also of several who did not live long enough to endure slavery. Alberic tells his audience that during a terrible storm two ships, which had embarked from Marseilles and were filled with children, crashed into the rocks off the coast of San Pietro, a small island near Sardinia, "and all the infants from these two ships were drowned." Evidently news of such a tragedy eventually reached the mainland, as, "it is said, after several years Pope Gregory IX made a church of the new Innocents on the same island and instituted twelve prebends; and in that church the still-whole bodies of the infants, which the sea had thrown there, were shown to pilgrims."⁶⁶ Alberic apparently remained skeptical about the establishment of this shrine (*ut dicitur*) but nevertheless kept the detail in his account, including belated papal approval of the expedition or at least of some of its unfortunate victims. That Alberic consistently refers to the participants as *infantes* further strengthens the connection with the newborns who had died in Christ's stead. Here, as elsewhere, the reference to the Innocents elevated the young crusaders from mere drowning victims—or even mere crusaders—into exceptional followers of Christ who were singled out for their unique status as pure children who died in a holy cause. In contrast to the Innocents, these children were not simply passive newborns who died in Jesus' place but rather "infants" who actively sought out the Holy Land and died in Christ's service.

We have already encountered the reference to the Innocents that Richer, in his history of the church of Senones, embedded in a discussion of the poor children's death from starvation in the midst of an uncaring Christian world. Richer suggested that the comparison to the Innocents was justified, as the crusaders were children who died in the service of God. The quotations from Lamentations ("the children sought bread, but there was no one to break it with them") and the reference to the "small people" reinforced the notion of the children's vulnerability and the comparison between them and the "great Innocents."⁶⁷ The combination of the victims' status as children, as servants of the Lord, and as sufferers for Christ led to the connection with the Innocents and to an increased belief in the crusaders' holiness.

Other sources used the image of childhood's inherent goodness in far more ambiguous ways. The *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum* condemned the misuse

and appropriation of religious ideas—including references to the children as Innocents—that were incorporated into a song that enchanted the children for immoral, anti-Christian purposes. Yet the song, which extolled the glorious future to be enjoyed once the children have conquered Jerusalem, was portrayed as inspiring a true and deeply felt enthusiasm in children throughout Western Christendom. With its strong millennialist thrust, it was designed to capture the optimism of the movement:

Nicholas the servant of Christ will travel overseas
 And with the innocents will enter Jerusalem.
 He will walk the sea safely with dry feet;
 Youths and virgins will commingle chastely.
 He will accomplish such [great] things in honor of God
 That peace, rejoicing, and praise to God will resound.
 He will baptize all the pagans and infidels.
 Everyone in Jerusalem will sing this song:
 There is peace now for all Christians. Christ will be near
 And will miraculously brighten those redeemed by blood,
 He will crown all of Nicholas's children.⁶⁸

It must be remembered that the song (*cantus*) was part of the enchantment (*incantatio*) rather than a declaration of truly pious hope. Nevertheless, the narrative of the *Chronicon* insisted that, despite the composer's evil intentions in producing it, the song successfully convinced many children of their own virtue and potential sanctity as children. It is a song of innocence, written in the future tense and reflecting hopeful expectation and youthful optimism. It declares a simple faith that assumed God's benevolence would support the expedition throughout the journey and would assure a peaceful crusade, leading to salvation for all instead of death to many. For good or evil, the song presents a positive image of child crusaders and brings into the present several scenes from the Old and New Testaments, combining an Edenic vision of sexual purity with the crossing of the Red Sea, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and the slaying of the Innocents.⁶⁹ It is an evangelizing poem that presents a sacralized vision of childhood and ends with the children's coronation at the hands of Christ himself.

After discussing the children's transformation from hopeful victors to hopeless victims, the Austrian chronicler returned to the figure of the Innocents, noting that crying had replaced laughter and that "mothers cried like Rachel; their children (*nati*) had been given to death."⁷⁰ This return to the Innocents reflected an odd tension in the text: The chronicler criticized the enchanters' misuse of religious imagery to trap children but then later interpreted the same imagery in a positive and now tragic context. The poet suggested, as did Alberic in discussing

Gregory IX's establishment of a church, that the children actually were comparable to the Innocents and that further evidence of their innocence was provided by their gullibility and susceptibility to enchantment and unrealistic ideals. Other sources mention parental opposition, but this is the only one to focus on the parental suffering, here resembling the children's own torments, in a way that strengthens the connection with the Innocents.

Just as the annalist of Marbach criticized the many supporters who believed in the holiness of the children's cause, so the chronicler of Laon focused on the children's and particularly the leader's holiness. Stephen of Cloyes, the young shepherd who began the movement, claimed to have been visited by the Lord disguised as a poor pilgrim. There quickly developed around the boy a throng of other child-shepherds who believed in his ability to produce miracles and who in turn inspired hope and amazement in the population around Vendôme and Saint-Denis. The Laon chronicler dismissed the movement and its supporters by simply noting that "it seemed to many that, through the spontaneous gathering of innocents of this kind, the Lord would do something great and new on the earth, but it came to pass very much otherwise."⁷¹ Here the chronicler, true to his antagonism toward the movement, criticized the popular idea that the actions of the "innocents" must portend something important and positive. Instead their movement came to nothing, proof to the chronicler that they were not worthy of such veneration and hope.

The very notion of childhood's innocence came under attack in several texts, most of them dating from after 1250. In the *Chronica majora*, Matthew Paris decried the entire movement as "a certain error unheard-of throughout the ages." The other chroniclers' common but usually ambiguous exclamations of surprise at a marvelous event have here given way to unbridled disgust, a relentless antagonism that shapes the entire (and entirely negative) narrative. Matthew's first references to the child's character suggest a very adult manipulation of religious emotion: "Led by the enemy of humankind, a certain child, who truly was a child in age and most base in morals, wandering through the cities and castles of the kingdom of the French, as if sent by God, sang in the vernacular, 'Lord Jesus Christ, restore the holy cross to us.'"⁷² The explicit claim that a child actively deceived his fellow children is utterly novel in these texts and belies the other chroniclers' claims that the children were at least initially innocent and naïve. The phrase "a child in age and most base in morals" (*puer aetate fuit et moribus pervilis*) seems to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in such a pronouncement, a tension between childhood and immorality. The same demonically inspired enchantment through song appears as an evil plot wrought

not by an adult, but by an evil child.

Acting as a false prophet, the boy pretended to exhibit signs of holiness and drew his peers away from "their fathers and mothers, nurses and all their friends," thereby labeling this withdrawal from the family as demonic (*praestigio diabolico*). Matthew noted the imitative aspects of the duped children's behavior as they sang "in a manner very similar to their teacher's singing."⁷³ What was elsewhere simply well intentioned foolishness is here diabolical, through the leading child's conscious decision to deceive, the result of his inspiration by the devil.

The questioning of the moral worth of children is most obvious in a later source dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Writing a century after the event, Bernard Gui revised Vincent of Beauvais's account of the crusade, removing the details concerning the Old Man of the Mountain and, most importantly, altering one other particular aspect of Vincent's narrative. He described the children not as *parvi pueri*, little children, but as *pravi pueri*, depraved children.⁷⁴ The simple transposition of two letters alters the moral content immensely, from a statement of stature, a diminutive with implications of the Christian valorization of the small and weak, to a declaration of character, a condemnation of immoral conduct in children.

These last two examples, Matthew Paris and Bernard Gui, are exceptional in their implications of childhood immorality; the vast majority of sources retain a notion of the children's purity relative to adults. Nevertheless, a few chronicles include references not to inherent depravity but to an intrinsic susceptibility to be corrupted. Before introducing the merchants from Marseilles and their Muslim masters as the primary enemies, Alberic of Trois-Fontaines suggests that all was not well among the infants on their travels to the south of France: "Rogues (*ribaldi*) associated with them, and bad men corrupted the entire army so that, after some died in the sea and others were sold, few out of such a multitude returned."⁷⁵ Alberic rewrites his tale over the course of the next few sentences, focusing on the southern merchants and Muslims, but here he establishes an enemy closer to the children—the corruption of their morals, an infection (*infecerunt*) of immorality affecting both the infants (as Alberic insists on designating them) and the attainment of their goal.

A concern over moral debasement could be—and was—applied to people from any stage of life. However, several chroniclers pondered the implications of immorality in children, particularly the physical and sexual corruption of the young. Throughout most of the literature, the young crusaders' actions did not

require gender identification. The sad conclusion of the quest did involve gender differentiation in one important instance: The fate of the young virgins who participated in the German children's march toward Italy.

The chroniclers put a considerable amount of emphasis on the image and meaning of the girls who had left as virgins but who returned home pregnant. The Ebersheim chronicler identified the girls' sexuality as the moment of definitive proof that the crusade had been demonically inspired: "Some attempting to return were consumed by hunger; also, many girls who left virgins returned pregnant, and so it is clearly to be understood that this journey arose from the deception of the evil enemy, since it was the cause of ruin to many."⁷⁶

The Marbach annalist, who had opposed the entire event as an example of dangerous popular piety, described the important changes at the close of the venture, dramatizing the loss of innocence through sexual violence:

The confused and deceived [crusaders] began to turn back, and those who earlier were accustomed to travel together in groups, never without a song leading them forward throughout the land; now returning alone and in silence, barefoot and hungry, they have been held in derision by all, because several virgins were raped and lost the flower of their modesty.⁷⁷

Their sad fates illustrated the drastic changes brought about by disillusionment and failure and echoed by the crowd's rejection of those they had earlier cheered. While to the Ebersheim chronicler forced sexual intercourse simply was a sign of failure, to the Marbach annalist rape became the apparent cause of the young crusaders' rejection and ridicule by the previously enthusiastic crowd. The Ebersheim chronicler suggested that the derision derived from the importance of pregnancy as a sign that the children were morally unworthy and hence doomed to failure.

For the writer of the *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, the girls' loss of virginity referred back to the song that charmed the children into taking up the cross, the song that invoked a New Jerusalem where youths and virgins could "commingle chastely."⁷⁸ Instead, the ubiquitous dangers of the world (filled with false images, the poet tells us) could not allow such an Edenic vision. The comparatively pure children became impure, sexualized beings as they were rudely awakened to the dangers and sins of adulthood. It is important to note that such claims still privileged childhood as a space of physical and moral purity—in comparison to adulthood, at any rate—but simultaneously suggested how tenuous that status was, how easy it was for an outside influence to destroy

that greater virtue. The girls' pregnancy stood for the loss of innocence, an abrupt entry into the harsh reality of the world and of adult life.

Conclusions

The problem or "challenge" of the Children's Crusade is a discursive problem, raising for thirteenth-century chroniclers—and/or their sources—the question of how to represent and explain the ultimate failure of the campaign. Many chroniclers acknowledged the elusive obscurity of the movement, while others created or repeated fantastic tales that placed the events in the realm of the legendary. The enigmatic nature of the events we call the Children's Crusade led to the many, radically different narratives and interpretations. All of the more extensive accounts—and some of the brief versions—represented the children as acting in an extraordinary way, one that was founded on a sense of the child as different from the adult. By resorting to various characteristics believed to be typical of children, the chroniclers sought to explain the movement's origins and the causes of its tragic conclusion.

Over the course of the thirteenth century, the events now known as the Children's Crusade quickly became the locus of a considerable amount of contradictory discussion about the events of 1212 and about the nature of the child. Taken together, the chronicles that reported on the crusade read as a unique but oblique commentary on the fragility of childhood. The thirteenth-century accounts often connected the Children's Crusade, as a failed expedition, with a sense of loss for the child: a loss of family, fervor, unity, innocence, moral purity, life, virginity, freedom, ignorance, purpose, and optimism. The delusion lying behind the crusade led to dissolution of the children's unity, their desolation in the pain and starvation that became their fate, and their disillusionment after the unveiling of the deception. The accounts of the Children's Crusade alternated between a belief in the youthful participants' inherent goodness or purity and a criticism of that belief, one that desacralized childhood by viewing children as all too flawed.

In this sense, the narratives of the Children's Crusade find corollaries in the contemporary literature on the contempt of the world, as both studied the problematic aspects of human nature. The narratives discussed here emphasized humanity's failings by identifying the child as uniquely susceptible to folly and deception. The child was seen to be different from the adult but at the same time emblematic of human error. In terms of high-medieval understandings of the negative characteristics of humanity, childhood was represented as overly vulnerable to human foibles: The child appeared as unreflectively spontaneous,

overzealous, irrational, uncounseled, gullible, mentally weak, frivolous, fickle, presumptuous, corruptible, unrealistic, etc. Through such negative views of the child's mental, moral, and physical constitutions—a negative definition of childhood—these narratives enacted adult fears of the world and, more importantly, of the child in the world.

It is this dual aspect of thirteenth-century understandings of the child, as both other than and the same as adults, that allowed the Children's Crusade to take on a variety of metaphoric meanings. Several writers directly connected the children's situation and general human behavior, so that the children's journey exemplified, in an exaggerated and vivid way, the all-too-human transition from delusion to disillusion. By presenting children as unique in the severity of their susceptibility to human folly, the chroniclers were able to delineate a wide spectrum of dangers—both internal to each person and external in the world at large—that threatened humanity in general but were intensified by their focus on the peculiar weaknesses of the child. The idea of the child as an extreme example of human frailty suggests that the narratives of the crusade could be taken as cautionary tales for everyone and thus reveals the child's metaphoric potential.

Comparisons between the children's situation and the deficiencies inherent in the human condition appear in several chronicles, which seek to criticize and oppose certain expressions of popular piety. As we have seen, the child's lack of discretion and reason directly correlated to the simple nature of the crowd that supported the crusaders. The clerical chroniclers' contempt for the crusaders' actions (*derisoria* or *nugatoria expeditio*) corresponded to the writers' hostile and pessimistic view of not just this crowd but of human nature in general: "We are a credulous crowd." The children's frivolity (*levitas, curiositas*) and the popular belief in their worthiness seem to exist in direct contrast to other adults' ability to see the truth and reason (*sanioris mentis*). The child and the crowd came to be defined as "insane" or inherently less mentally healthy than the clergy and more-rational people. The child here became both the hope of the average (adult) Christian and a marker of the foolishness of popular piety. And so a popular notion of the children as innocents was called into question by the children's failure.

To many chroniclers, the root of the movement's failure lay in the child's inherent failings, which were represented as intensified versions of human deficiencies. Even in those chronicles that sought to understand the tragedy of the crusade by placing the blame on an outside influence (enchanters, traitors, merchants, or Assassins), the primary factor in the malefactors' exploitation of the children involved the child's mental and moral handicaps. The narratives often

linked adult fears of the outside world with anxieties over childhood. Other chroniclers simply looked internally, to problems within Christian society or the child's natural weaknesses and limitations. The tales of the Children's Crusade articulated the distinction between child and adult, but at the same time marked the moment of the collapse of this distinction—as seen in the children's realization of their delusion and sense of disillusionment or as symbolized in the image of the pregnant girls—and dramatically represented the transition from childhood to adulthood. The pessimistic view of human nature, the recognition of the child's even weaker nature, the representation of the world as alienating and full of perils—all of these were portrayed as elements of what was to some chroniclers the primary motif of the crusade: the children's movement toward maturity.

Notes:

Note 1: The synthetic summary is mine but based on the general studies of the phenomenon. They began in the middle of the nineteenth century with J. F. C. Hecker's intriguing "Child-Pilgrimages" in *The Epidemics of the Middle Ages*, tr. B. G. Babington (London, 1859). That was followed by R. Röhrich, "Der Kinderkreuzzug, 1212," *Historische Zeitschrift* 36 (1876): 1–8, G. De Janssens, "Etienne de Cloyes et les croisades d'enfants au XIIIe siècle," *Bulletin de la société dunoise* 90 (1891): 109–33, and G. Z. Gray's grossly over-romanticized *The Children's Crusade* (1870; reprint, New York, 1972). In this century, the general surveys are D. C. Munro, "The Children's Crusade," *AHR* 19 (1913–14): 516–24; J. E. Hansbery, "The Children's Crusade," *CHR* 24 (1938–39): 30–38; N. Zacour, "The Children's Crusade," in *A History of the Crusades* (1962), 2:325–42; J. Delalande, *Les extraordinaires croisades d'enfants et de pastoureux au moyen âge* (Paris, 1962); and U. Gaebler, "Der 'Kinderkreuzzug' vom Jahre 1212," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 28, nos. 1/2 (1978): 1–14. [back](#)

Note 2: Most notably G. Miccoli, "La 'crociata dei fanciulli' del 1212," *Studi medievali*, 3d ser., 2, no. 2 (1961): 407–31 and, in a less marxist vein, Peter Raedts, "The Children's Crusade of 1212," *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 279–324. The latter article is crucial for any serious study of the phenomenon, as it includes an almost complete listing of the early sources (pre-fifteenth century), indispensable for modern scholars. [back](#)

Note 3: See the work of Gary Dickson—"Stephen of Cloyes, Philip Augustus, and the Children's Crusade of 1212," in *Journeys toward God: Pilgrimages and Crusade*, ed. B. N. Sargent-Baur (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1992), 83–105 and "La genèse de la croisade des enfants (1212)," *BEC* 153 (1995): 53–102. Dickson very carefully argues that in the earliest accounts the *pueri* could have been children, mostly young shepherds. The argument for the definition as *peasant* is derived mostly from an article by Duby that argues for such an extension of the semantic field of the term. See Raedts, 291–293. [back](#)

Note 4: One of the few scholars to analyze the significance of the child is Paul Alphandéry, who discussed the events as a reenactment of the story of the Innocents, first in "Les croisades d'enfants," *Revue d'histoire des religions* 73 (1916): 259–82, and then in a more elaborate argument, *La Chrétienté et l'idée de croisade* (Paris, 1959), 115–48. [back](#)

Note 5: *Jacobi de Voragine Chronicon*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *RIS* 9, col. 45: "multi autem inter eos erant filij nobilium, quos ipsi etiam cum nutricibus destinaverunt." [back](#)

Note 6: *Salimbene de Adam Cronica*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SS* 32.30; *Alberti Milioli notarii Regini Cronica imperatorum*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SS* 31.657; *Reineri Annales S. Jacobi Leodiensis*, ed. G. H. Pertz, *MGH SS* 16.665. [back](#)

Note 7: *Johannis Codagnelli Annales Placentini Guelfi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SS*

rer. germ. 23.42: "quidam puer Theotonicus ... cum magna et indefinita multitudine Theothonicorum puerorum et infantium lactantium, mulierum et puellarum, signo crucis signatorum ... ultra mare proficisci festinantes." [back](#)

Note 8: I shall postpone a discussion of the gendered significance of the term *puer* until later, in the final section, where the inclusion of girls among the crowd takes on great significance. For now, the term *pueri* could be translated as simply "boys" or as the more potentially inclusive "children." Many sources specify *puerorum utriusque sexus* or *pueros et puellas* or *tam masculorum quam puellarum* (without any reference to the males as boys, although the second half of the phrase implies the youth of the former; see *Annales Spirenses*, ed. G. Pertz, *MGH SS* 17.80, which finds a parallel in *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, ed. L. Weiland, *MGH SS* 23.450: "puerorum comitatu ... tam masculi quam puella"). Otherwise, the sources are ambivalent in gendering the crusaders, identifying the sex only of individual children, most notably the leaders, who were male. [back](#)

Note 9: Several chroniclers make no mention of a crusade or pilgrimage but discuss the phenomenon as literally a movement: a procession through the countryside, with no direction and no intention other than the exaltation of God. [back](#)

Note 10: *Alberti Stadensis Annales*, ed. I. Lappenberg, *MGH SS* 16.355: "Circa idem tempus pueri sine rectore, sine duce, de universis omnium regionum villis et civitatibus versus transmarinas partes avidis gressibus cucurrerunt." [back](#)

Note 11: *Alberti Stadensis Annales*, p. 355: "Papa auditis hiis rumoribus, ingemiscens ait: Hii pueri nobis inproperant, quod ad recuperationem terrae sanctae eis currentibus nos dormimus." [back](#)

Note 12: There are no documents whatsoever from the papal court that discuss the crusading events of 1212. Nevertheless, papal approval or censure is invoked several times in the sources on the Children's Crusade, often in very different, contradictory ways. [back](#)

Note 13: *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio IIa*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS rer. germ.* 18.190: "quidam aratra vel currus quos minabant, alii pecora que pascebant, vel si qua alia habebant pre manibus, relinquentes, subito unus post alium currentes, crucibus se signaverunt." [back](#)

Note 14: *Reineri Annales S. Jacobi Leodiensis*, ed. G. H. Pertz, *MGH SS* 16. 665: "Flebant autem uberrime illi quos patres et matres non sinebant abire." [back](#)

Note 15: *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio IIa*, p. 190: "Circa pasca enim et penthecosten ex omni Theutonia et Francia, nullo hortante nec predicante, nescio quo spiritu acti, multa milia puerorum a 6 annis et supra usque ad virilem etatem, invititis parentibus, cognatis et amicis retrahentibus... crucibus se signaverunt." [back](#)

Note 16: Francis of Assisi was only the most famous of many holy people who abandoned their earthly family for a larger one. See most recently the material on women abandoning, as a sign of piety, their families, even newborns who subsequently died, in Barbara Newman, "'Cruel Corage': Child Sacrifice and the Maternal Martyr in Hagiography and Romance," in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995). [back](#)

Note 17: *Thomae cantimpratensis Bonum universale de proprietatibus apum* (Cologne, 1479) 2.2, title: "Disciplina matribus subdite sunt nec quicquam agunt sine maiorum imperio." [back](#)

Note 18: *Annales S. Medardi Suessionensis*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 26.521: "absque licentia et assensu parentum exeuntes." [back](#)

Note 19: *Alberti Stadensis Annales*, p. 355: "Plurimi ex eis a parentibus claudebantur, in vanum tamen, quia fractis clausuris aut parietibus exilierunt." The reference to parents here clarifies any ambiguity concerning the crusaders' ages. [back](#)

Note 20: *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica majora*, 2nd ed., H. R. Luard, Rolls Series (London, 1874), 5.247, anno 1251: "Utebatur nempe illo maleficii genere, quo quondam in Francia utebatur, adhuc imberbis et adolescens, quando videlicet, elapsis tunc circiter quadraginta annis, universum populum Francorum infatuaverat, convocans puerorum

infitam multitudinem, qui cantantes ipsum sequebantur e vestigio; et quod mirum fuit, non eos poterant serae vel repagula retinere, nec patrum vel matrum imperia, blanditiae, vel munera revocare." [back](#)

Note 21: I shall discuss the importance of singling out these two groups (as opposed to adult men, the excluded social category) later in this chapter. [back](#)

Note 22: *Annales Thuringici breves*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 24.40: "Anno milleno bis centeno duodeno / Cum pueris pueri currunt loca sancta tueri." [back](#)

Note 23: *Annales Admuntenses* (continuatio), ed. W. Wattenbach, *MGH SS* 9.592: "Facta est expeditio puerorum utriusque sexus instintu diabolico, et preterea virorum et mulierum provectorum, quorum dux erat Nicolaus quidam puer de Colonia." [back](#)

Note 24: *Auctarium Mortui Maris*, ed. L. Bethmann, *MGH SS* 6.467: "Eodem tempore in regno Francorum pueri et puella cum aliquibus adolescentulis et senibus ... processiones faciebant, et per urbes, vicos et castella canentes ibant, Gallice proclamantes: Domine Deus, exalta christianitatem! Domine Deus, redde nobis veram crucem!" [back](#)

Note 25: *Walteri de Coventria Memoriale*, ed. W. Stubbs, *Rolls Series* (London, 1873), p. 205: "Denique Parisius dicebatur eorum ad xv aestimata, quorum nullus duodenne major erat." [back](#)

Note 26: *Willelmi chronica Andrensis*, ed. I. Heller, *MGH SS* 24.754: "cum a parentibus vel ab aliis interrogarentur, quo vellent ire, quasi uno edocti spiritu singuli et universi responderunt: 'Ad Deum.'" [back](#)

Note 27: *Alberti Stadensis Annales*, p. 355: "Adhuc, quo devenerint, ignoratur. Sed plurimi redierunt, a quibus dum quaereretur causa cursus, dixerunt se nescire." [back](#)

Note 28: See below, at the end of section 2, for a fuller discussion of this issue in relation to childhood. [back](#)

Note 29: *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, ed. L. Weiland, *MGH SS* 23.450: "Quidam puerulus Nicolaus ... asserebat se posse sicco vestigio maris undas transvadare et sufficientem expensam sequentibus se ministrare." [back](#)

Note 30: *Annales Scheftlarienses maiores*, ed. P. Jaffé, *MGH SS* 17.338: "Eodem anno quidam puer nomine Nicolaus surrexit, qui multitudinem puerorum et mulierum sibi aggregavit, cum quibus Ierusalem, crucem dominicam liberaturus, iussu angelico adire debere, mare sicut quondam populo Israelitico siccum iter prebere, asserebat." [back](#)

Note 31: *Salimbene de Adam Chronica*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SS* 32.30: "Eodem anno, scilicet MCCXII, trium puerorum quasi duodennium, qui se visionem vidisse dicebant, crucis signaculum assumptum in partibus Colonie persuasum multitudo innumera pauperum utriusque sexus et puerorum de Theotonia peregrinantium in Ytalia crucesignatorum accessit, unanimi corde et una voce dicentium se per sicco maria transituros et terram sanctam Ierusalem in Dei potentia recuperaturos; sed demum quasi evanuit universa." [back](#)

Note 32: The number has other biblical implications (the twelve tribes) and also works as a pun on the repetition of twelves in the year (1212). The number appears also in Walter of Coventry's account, where he states that none of the crusaders was older than twelve; see *Walteri*, p. 205. [back](#)

Note 33: *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio IIIa*, p. 234; *Annales Scheftlarienses maiores*, p. 338; *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio IIa*, p. 190. [back](#)

Note 34: *Gesta Treverorum continuatio IVa*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 24.398-99; *Alberti Stadensis Annales*, p. 355. [back](#)

Note 35: *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio IIa*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS rer. germ.* 18.190-91: "in hoc se nutui parere divinet ideo, quicquid Deus de eis fieri vellet, ipsi libenti ac prono animo sustinerent." [back](#)

Note 36: *Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensis*, ed. A. Cartellieri and W. Stechele, *MGH SS* 26.443: "Omnes illum magistrum et principem super se recognoverunt. Tandem rex, consultis magistris Parisiensibus super puerorum congregatione, ex eius precepto reversi sunt in sua. Sicque puerilis illa devotio sicut fuit de facili incoata, ita fuit

de facili terminata. Videbatur vero multis, quod per huiusmodi innocentes spontanee congregatos, Dominus facturus esset aliquid magnum et novum super terram, quod longe aliter provenit." [back](#)

Note 37: In contrast to R. W. Southern's claims (*Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge, Mass., 1962], chap. 2) of high-medieval Western understanding of Islamic culture, the accounts of the Children's Crusade suggest instead that fear and ignorance of Eastern society were deeply rooted in Western culture. See Leon Neal McCrillis, "The Demonization of Moslems," chap. 4 in "The Demonization of Minority Groups in Christian Society during the Central Middle Ages" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1974). [back](#)

Note 38: *Albrici monachi Trium-Fontium Chronicon*, p. 640: "Qui vidit et fuit unus de predictis clericis, quos califas in parte sua emit, fideliter retulit, quod nullum omnino de predictis infantibus audivit a christianitate apostatare." [back](#)

Note 39: For another image of the child enduring in his faith against Muslim aggression, see Hroswitha's *Passio sancti Pelagii*, PL 137.1093-1103. [back](#)

Note 40: *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis ecclesiae*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 25.301: "et Terram Sanctam, sicut filii Israel ex Egypto exeuntes terram illam obtinuerunt, ita et ipsi eam sorte possiderent. In qua vero civitate vel terra veniebant, habitatores illarum quasi pusillos et orfanos, sicuti erant, pro Deo suscipiebant et eis alimenta ministrabant et ita eos dimittebant." [back](#)

Note 41: *Richeri*, p. 301: "Alii vero qui remanserunt ad tantam penuriam devenerunt, ut non ipsos quis hospicio reciperet; ut de ipsis illud Ieremie dici posset: Parvuli petierunt panem, et non erat qui frangeret illis. Unde per vicos et plateas maxima pars ipsorum fame mortua iacebat, nec erat etiam qui sepeliret. Et sic vere illa parva gens illis magnis innocentibus, qui pro Christo occisi sunt, comparari creditur; quia et ipsa in tam tenera etate labores immensos et mortem famis, que crudelior est gladio, subire meruit. Unde Ieremias: Melius fuit occisi gladio quam interfectis fame. Et vere melius, quia gladius solo ictu occidit, fames vero diu cruciatum interficit." [back](#)

Note 42: *Gesta Treverorum continuatio* IVa, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 24.369: "Plurimi etiam puerorum perierunt; nam qui euntibus copiose ministraverunt, redeuntibus nichil dederunt." [back](#)

Note 43: *Albrici monachi Trium-Fontium Chronicon*, p. 640: "Qui cum essent navium rectores, debebant sicut eis promiserant causa Dei, absque pretio eos conducere ultra mare." [back](#)

Note 44: *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, ed. L. Weiland, *MGH SS* 23.450: "a piratis divecti, Sarracenis venduntur." Compare the following three texts—the previously-mentioned *Passio sancti Pelagii* by Hroswitha; *Filius Getronis*, a twelfth-century play of St. Nicholas from St.-Benoit-sur-Loire; and the tale of the snow child (a fabliau and several other retellings throughout the period). [back](#)

Note 45: *Chronica universalis Mettensis*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 24.520: "Bis sexcenteno duodeno plebs puerorum / Venditur a nautis, alii pelago pereunt." [back](#)

Note 46: *Heinrici de Heimburg Annales*, ed. W. Wattenbach, *MGH SS* 17.714: "1212. Multitudo infancium ab hereticis traditur Saracenis." [back](#)

Note 47: As discussed in an earlier chapter, various heretical groups were accused of many atrocities toward children and orthodox Christians in general, but I know of no other connection between slaving and heresy. There was, however, a strong connection between heresy, magic, and the devil, just as there was a parallel connection between Muslims, enchantment, and Satan. See McCrillis, "Demonization," chaps. 2 and 3. [back](#)

Note 48: *Gesta Treverorum continuatio* IVa, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 24.398–99: "Pueri namque congregati ex omnibus oppidis et villis Theutonie, quasi divinitus inspirati, convenerunt in singulis quibusque locis, et coadunati in turmas, iter arripuerunt versus Iherosolimam, quasi Terram Sanctam recepturi... . Venditi enim erant gentilibus a patre Nicholai, et sic demonum maleficio attracti." [back](#)

Note 49: *Thomae cantimpratensis Bonum universale de proprietatibus apum* (Cologne, 1479) 2.2: "per maleficos quosdam sarracenis in mari venditos extitisse." [back](#)

Note 50: Most sources (except Roger Bacon, below) do not call the magicians "Saracens." Although the Western belief in Islamic magic in its usual, negative sense was very widespread. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. chap. 6. [back](#)

Note 51: Richeri, p. 301: "Asserebant quidem dicti incantatores, quod tales pastores, quia simpliciores esse creduntur, arte sua ita deludere volebant et ad transmarinas partes ipsos deducere conabantur et populis illius terre ipsos pastores venundare moliebantur sicut in superioribus de pueris huic pagine adnotavimus." [back](#)

Note 52: *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, ed. W. Wattenbach, *MGH SS* 25.356: "Hic vide peregrinationem puerorum et qualiter per incantaciones sunt decepti." [back](#)

Note 53: *Rogeri Bacon Opus majus*, ed. J. H. Bridges (London, 1964), 1.401: "Et timendum est valde quod Tartari et Saraceni in suis regionibus commorantes ad Christianos mittant homines, quibus opera astronomiae conficiant ad infortunandum et ad ponendum discordias inter principes, quia ad hoc maxime nituntur inimici Christianorum, ut ponant inter eos bella et discordias." [back](#)

Note 54: Charles E. Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," *Speculum* 22.4 (1947): 497–519. Although dated, this source contains a valuable collection of high-medieval Western writers who discuss the Old Man and the Assassins, a Shi'ite sect known as the Ismaili, who controlled several mountain strongholds throughout Syria during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. [back](#)

Note 55: *Vincentii Bellovacensis Speculum historiale* (Douai, 1624), col. 1238: "Ferebatur autem quod Vetulus de monte qui Arsacidus a pueritia nutrire consueverat, duos clericos Cismarinos in carcere detinuerat, nec vnquam eos dimittere voluit, donec ab eis vt regni Francia pueri quibusdam falsis rumoribus visionum, atque promissionibus ad se cruce signatos illecti." [back](#)

Note 56: *Hermannii Altahensis Annales*, ed. P. Jaffé, *MGH SS* 17.386: "Derisoria expeditio puerorum / Anno milleno duocento duodeno / Ad mare stultorum tendebat iter puerorum." [back](#)

Note 57: *Chronica Regia Coloniensis continuatio* IIa, p. 191: "ipsos vero adhuc etate puerile nec robur nec vires ad aliquid agendum habere et ideo stulte et absque discretione hoc factum attemptatum ab omnibus iudicaretur." [back](#)

Note 58: *Annales Marbacenses*, ed. H. Bloch, *MGH SS rer. germ.* 9.82: "Ipso tempore [1212] facta est nugatoria quaedam expeditio, pueris et stultis hominibus sine aliqua discretione signum crucis arripientibus curiositatis causa potius quam salutis." [back](#)

Note 59: See e.g. one of the authors discussed in this chapter, Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, ed. A. Steiner (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), 158–59. For secondary literature, see Elizabeth L. Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton, 1986). [back](#)

Note 60: *Annales Marbacenses*, pp. 82–83: "Et sicut ad tales novitates sepe et de facili credula turba sumus, multi quidem arbitrati sunt hec non de levitate mentis, sed per divinam inspirationem fieri et ex quadam pietate; unde et subveniebant eis in expensis, victum et necessaria ministrantes. Clericis autem et aliis quibusdam quibus erat mens sanior contradicentibus et iter illud vanum et inutile iudicantibus vehementer laici resistebant, dicentes clericos esse incredulos ipsosque propter invidiam et avariciam huic facto se opponere magis quam propter veritatem et iusticiam. Sed quoniam omne negotium quod sine libramine rationis et sine vigore consilii fuerit inchoatum non bonum sortitur exitum; postquam hec stolidi multitudo pervenit ad partes Ytalie, diffusi sunt et dispersi per civitates et oppida." [back](#)

Note 61: See Sears, *Ages of Man*, chap. 2. [back](#)

Note 62: *Jacobi de Voragine Chronicon*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *RIS* 9, col. 45: "placuit autem Ianuensibus ut de civitate recederent, tum quia credebant illos pocius duci levitate quam veritate." [back](#)

Note 63: *Annales Marbacenses*, p. 83: "Reliqui vero pervenientes Romam, cum viderent, quod non poterant habere processum utpote nulla fulti auctoritate, tandem laborem suum cognoverunt esse frivolum et inanem, et tamen a voto crucis minime

fuerunt absoluti preter pueros infra annos discretionis existentes et eos quos senium deprimebat." [back](#)

Note 64: *Vincentii Bellocensis Speculum historiale*, Douai, 1624, col. 1238: Anno quoque praenotato parui pueri ... inanes & vacui redierunt. [back](#)

Note 65: BN, nouv. acq. lat. 999, fol. 233b: "innocentes parvuli qui alio anno fuerunt cruce signati." Gary Dickson refers to this unpublished sermon, written c. 1220 ("Genèse," 53, n. 1). [back](#)

Note 66: *Albrici monachi Trium-Fontium Chronicon*, ed. P. Scheffer-Boichorst, *MGH SS* 23.640: "cumque venissent ad duas dietas in mari ad insulam sancti Petri ad rupem, que dicitur Reclusi, orta tempestate due naves perierunt, et omnes infantes de illis duabus navibus submersi sunt, et—ut dicitur—post aliquot annos papa Gregorius IX. ecclesiam novorum Innocentium in eadem insula fecit et 12 prebendarios instituit; et sunt in illa ecclesia corpora infantium, que mare ibi proiecit, et adhuc integra ostenduntur peregrinis." [back](#)

Note 67: Richer tends to avoid the idea that, in his narrative, the children died because they were ignored by fellow Christians rather than by a hostile, pagan force (King Herod, in the case of the Innocents). [back](#)

Note 68: *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, ed. W. Wattenbach, *MGH SS* 25.356: "Arte quidam magica ista late sevit: / 'Nicolaus famulus Christi transfretabit, / Et cum innocentibus Ierusalem intrabit. / Mare siccis pedibus securus calcabit, / Iuvenes et virgines caste copulabit. / Ad honorem Domini tanta perpetrabit, / Quod pax, iubilacio, Deo laus sonabit. / Paganos et perfidos omnes baptizabit, / Omnis in Ierusalem carmen hoc cantabit: / Pax est nunc christicolis, Christus proximabit, / Et redemptos sanguine mire collustrabit, / Nycolai pueros omnes coronabit.'" [back](#)

Note 69: Alphandéry, in both articles cited above, argues that the movement of 1212 was on some level a ritual reenactment of the story of the Innocents. I only partially agree with his thesis. Certainly the Innocents play a large part in the popular association between purity, goodness, and childhood. Nevertheless, in this account, as in several others that mention the Innocents, the crusaders are not truly comparable to the entirely passive Innocents. Unlike the newborns in Bethlehem, these children lose their "innocence" by the end of the narrative, as seen most dramatically in the rape of the virgins; see below. [back](#)

Note 70: *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, p. 356: "Risum luctus occupat, digne lamentantur. / Plorant matres ut Rachel, nati morti dantur." [back](#)

Note 71: *Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensis*, p. 71: "Videbatur vero multis, quod per huiusmodi innocentes spontanee congregatos, Dominus facturus esset aliquid magnum et novum super terram, quod longe aliter provenit." [back](#)

Note 72: *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica majora*, 2.558: "Quidam enim puer, hoste humani generis procurante, qui vere puer aetate fuit et moribus pervilis, per civitates vadens et castella in regno Francorum, quasi a Deo missus, cantabat Gallice modulando, 'Domine Jesu Christe, crucem sanctam nobis restitue.'" [back](#)

Note 73: *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica majora*, 2.558: "qui praestigio diabolico penitus infatuati, relictis patribus et matribus, nutricibus, et amicis universis, cantantes modo consimili quo eorum cantabat paedagogus." [back](#)

Note 74: Bernard Gui, *Vitae pontificum Romanorum*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *RIS* 3 (1723), p. 482: "Eodem autem anno [1210] pravi pueri ultra XC. millia sompnis recepti Cruce-signantur & Massiliam, atque Brundusium diversis agminibus venientes inanes redeunt." [back](#)

Note 75: *Albrici monachi Trium-Fontium Chronicon*, p. 640: "Ribaldi vero ipsis associati et mali homines ita totum exercitum infecerunt, quod quibusdam pereuntibus in mari, quibusdam venundatis, pauci de tanta multitudine sunt reversi." [back](#)

Note 76: *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, p. 450: "Aliqui reditum affectantes inedia consumuntur, puella etiam multe que virgines exierant gravide revertuntur, et ita liquido datur intelligi, quod hic cursus ex deceptione maligni hostis emanarit, quia multis perditionis causa fuit." [back](#)

Note 77: *Annales Marbacenses*, p. 83: "Sic ergo decepti et confusi redire ceperunt; et qui prius gregatim et per turmas suas et numquam sine cantu celeumatis transire solebant per terras, modo singillatim et in silentio, nudipedes et famelici redeuntes facti sunt omnibus in derisum, quia plurime virgines rapte et florem pudicie sue amiserunt."
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Note 78: *Chronicon rhythmicum austriacum*, p. 356. [back](#)
