

NUNS, SIGNATURES, AND LITERACY IN LATE-CAROLINGIAN CATALONIA

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It is somewhat rare to be able to analyze the membership of an early medieval women's religious community in any detail. Sant Joan de Ripoll, which operated from the late ninth century until 1017 at modern-day Sant Joan de les Abadesses in Catalonia, provides not just this opportunity but the even rarer chance to evaluate the nuns' command of writing, by means of a single original charter of 949 that several of them signed autograph. This article argues that the signatures of these nuns indicate that they had in fact been taught to write before joining the nunnery. They are thus a source for female lay, rather than religious, literacy in this time and area. Consolidating this, the article provides a prosopography of the known nuns derived from the other charters of the nunnery's part-surviving archive, including tracing some of their careers beyond the 1017 dissolution of the house. This shows that the members of the comital family who had founded the house and provided several of its abbesses were not otherwise frequent among the nuns; rather, the nunnery recruited from the local notables in its neighborhoods, to whose interest in female literacy these signatures therefore testify. Such support could not prevent the closure of the house, however, and the article closes with a reflection on the agency available to the nuns in a political sphere dominated by male, secular interests.

INTRODUCTION

Sant Joan de Ripoll may have been the first nunnery in what is now Catalonia.¹ Founded, or at least converted from a local church, by the area's half-legendary

This article began its life as a paper given at a conference in honor of Professor Rosamond McKitterick in the University of Cambridge in 2009, the publication of which was projected but never occurred. An alternative offer of publication in a volume edited by Michelle Armstrong-Partida, Alexandra Guerson De Oliveira, and Dana Wessell Lightfoot, still to emerge, was subsequently withdrawn for reasons of theme, but I owe all three thanks for their comments, which have made this essay considerably stronger and better directed. I also owe thanks to Drs. Amy Brown and Rebecca Darley for comments and support during drafting and to the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón in Barcelona for permission to reproduce the illustration. This remains, however, a paper for Rosamond, and it is to her I dedicate it in its final home.

¹ The phrasing is necessitated by the very late combination of the territories that go to make up any version of the political unit we call Catalonia, by the hot debate over its historical independence provoked by that over its modern nationhood, and by the mismatch of most versions of its boundaries with the modern-day situation. My use of the term "Catalonia" in what follows to refer to the area in the ninth to eleventh centuries is not intended to imply any exact equivalence of this historical geographical area with the modern political

founder-count, Guifré the Hairy, between 880 and 898, and ruled initially by his daughter Emma (d. ?942), Sant Joan was like other monasteries in this frontier area deeply involved in the development of settlement and government structures at the edge of the local counts' control but came to be seen as an obstruction to their interests in the area.² Its position was progressively eroded and in 1017 it was shut down by order of Pope Benedict VIII (1012–24), this order having been obtained by an embassy of several of the area's leading churchmen to Rome.³

This much is relatively well studied and the careers of the abbesses of the house have been plotted by careful mining of its part-surviving archive of land charters.⁴ No study has hitherto been made of the nuns themselves, however.⁵ As a result, little is known of the women who constituted the community at Sant Joan except for those who ruled it. When the ordinary nuns are also sought in the archival documentation, however, and linked to their families of origin, it transpires that we can say more about several of them than we can of some of the abbesses.

unit. Although there is no neutral guide to medievalist historiography on this theme, Flocel Sabaté i Curull, *Percepció i identificació dels catalans a l'edat mitjana* (Barcelona, 2016), accessed 8 December 2017, <https://publicacions.iec.cat/repository/pdf/00000238/00000010.pdf>, is of great use.

² On these rulers and the development of their territory see now Cullen J. Chandler, *Carolingian Catalonia: Politics, Culture, and Identity in an Imperial Province, 778–987*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 111 (Cambridge, 2019). The issue will shortly be treated by Josep M. Salrach Marès, “Política i moral: Els comtes de Cerdanya-Besalú i la comunitat de monges benedictines de Sant Joan de les Abadesses (segles IX–XI),” in *El monestir de Sant Joan. Primer cenobi femení dels comtats catalans (887–1017)*, ed. Coloma Boada, Irene Brugués, and Xavier Costa Badia (Barcelona, forthcoming).

³ For the detail of Sant Joan's history see below. The key works are Esteve Albert i Corp, *Les Abadesses de Sant Joan*, 2nd ed., Episodis de la història 69 (Barcelona, 1999); Antoni Pladevall i Font et al., “Sant Joan de les Abadesses,” in *El Ripollès*, ed. Antoni Pladevall, Catalunya Romànica 10 (Barcelona, 1987), 354–410; Jonathan Jarrett, “Power over Past and Future: Abbess Emma and the Nunnery of Sant Joan de Les Abadesses,” *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003): 229–58, DOI: 10.1111/j.0963-9462.2004.00128.x.; Jarrett, *Rulers and Ruled in Frontier Catalonia, 880–1010: Pathways of Power* (Woodbridge, 2010), 23–72; and Antoni Pladevall, “El monestir de Sant Joan, del cenobi benedictí femení a canònica clerical,” in *El monestir de Sant Joan de les Abadesses*, ed. Marta Crispi and Miriam Montraveta (Sant Joan de les Abadesses, 2012), 18–37. I must thank Xavier Costa Badia for alerting me to this last piece and the volume which contains it. All personal names in what follows are normalized to modern Catalan forms, following those used in the principal source editions on which I rely (see n. 6 below).

⁴ Albert, *Abadesses*.

⁵ Araceli Rosillo-Luque, “De nenes a abadesses: llinatge i cultura als cenobis femenins alt-medievals (segles IX–X),” in Boada, Brugués and Costa, *El monestir de Sant Joan*, was not yet available as this article went to press.

Furthermore, in the case of five of the nuns we have their autograph signatures, in a single original charter from 949, which forms the key source for this article.⁶

This is important because the most recent major work on literacy and the use of writing in this area has expressly denied the ability of nuns here to write, and minimizes female participation in written culture in general.⁷ As will be shown, however, the 949 charter is evidence for more than just literacy in one well-connected religious community, but for the support of female literacy in even fairly middling lay social strata in the area of modern-day Catalonia in the tenth century, and perhaps at other times. This article's purpose is to make clear the evidence for these women's ability to write and their wider interest in the written word and to demonstrate a wider social context for their literacy by analyzing the nunnery's identifiable community, both before and after the house's dissolution. In doing so, it has also to reflect on the power interests at play in that episode and to examine the agency of the nuns in the process and in

⁶ I use sigla and document numbers for most primary sources in what follows, as follows:

CC2 = Ramón d'Abadal i de Vinyals, ed., *Catalunya carolíngia*, volum II: *Els diplomes carolíngis a Catalunya*, facsimile reprint of 1st ed. (1922–52), *Memòries de la Secció històrico-arqueològica* 75 (Barcelona, 2007).

CC4 = Ramon Ordeig i Mata, ed., *Catalunya carolíngia*, volum IV: *Els comtats d'Osona i Manresa*, *Memòries de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica* 53 (Barcelona, 1999).

CC5 = Santiago Sobrequés i Vidal, Sebastià Riera i Viader, and Manuel Rovira i Solà, eds., *Catalunya Carolíngia*, volum V: *Els comtats de Girona, Besalú, Empúries i Peralada*, rev. by Ramon Ordeig i Mata, *Memòries de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica* 61 (Barcelona, 2003).

Comtal = Gaspar Feliu i Montfort and Josep M. Salrach i Marés, eds., *Els pergamins de l'arxiu comtal de Barcelona de Ramon Borrell a Ramon Berenguer I*, *Diplomatari* 18–20 (Barcelona, 1999).

Condal = Federico Udina Martorell, *El Archivo Condal de Barcelona en los siglos IX–X: Estudio crítico de sus fondos*, *Textos* 18 (Barcelona, 1951).

Dotalies = Ramon Ordeig i Mata, ed., *Les dotalies de les esglésies de Catalunya (segles IX–XII)*, *Estudis Històrics: Diplomatari* 1–4 (Vic, 1993–97).

Sant Joan = Joan Ferrer i Godoy, ed., *Diplomatari del monestir de Sant Joan de les Abadesses (995–1273)*, *Diplomatari* 43 (Barcelona, 2009), accessed 12 June 2017, <http://www.fundacionoguera.com/libros/DIPLOMATARI ST JOAN.pdf>.

Many of the documents cited appear in more than one of these editions; I have provided alternatives in parentheses. Thus, the charter signed by the nuns is CC4 645 (Condal 128).

⁷ Michel Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire en Catalogne (IXe–XIIe siècle)*, Bibliothèque de la Casa de Velázquez 23 (Madrid, 2003), 1:89: “l'ineptitude à l'écriture est générale chez les moniales,” although this very charter is discussed at Zimmerman, 1:302 n. 111. Zimmermann makes great efforts to hide female literacy in this work; the most startling example is his analysis of a Vic library catalogue, in which his prose genders a female borrower, Riquilda, male: Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire en Catalogne*, 2:593: “Quant à Richeldes, il conserve le livre des Rois.”

general. Sant Joan thus becomes both a type case of deprecation of the ability of medieval women to organize and express themselves both in their time and, despite a substantial and growing scholarship demonstrating it, in ours as well.⁸

A SHORT HISTORY OF SANT JOAN DE RIPOLL

Sant Joan lay in the Ripollès, a territory more or less equivalent to the modern-day *comarc* of that name in the southern foothills of the Catalan Pyrenees, north of the city of Vic. A church of Sant Joan de Ripoll is first documented in 880, but it was apparently not then a nunnery.⁹ It became one somewhere between then and 898, as part of a two-fisted program of monastic development by Guifré the Hairy (d. 898), appointed Count of Urgell and Cerdanya by King Charles the Bald of the Western Franks (840–77) in 870 and of Barcelona by his successor Louis II the Stammerer (878–79), in 878. Guifré returned the abandoned county of Osona, to the south of the Ripollès, to central government in the 880s, meaning that his territory now surrounded the location of the future nunnery.¹⁰ He bestowed his son Radulf on neighboring Santa Maria de Ripoll, probably already a monastery, and by doing the same to Sant Joan with Emma seems to have established it as a women's community.¹¹ The nunnery's earliest documents have suffered

⁸ This scholarship is too large to list here; items of particular influence on this article will be evident in subsequent citation. General benchmarks might however include David Herlihy, "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701–1200," *Traditio* 18 (1962): 89–120, repr. in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia, PA, 1976), 13–45; Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053–76, DOI: 10.2307/1864376, repr. in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2000), 28–50; Mary Carpenter Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, GA, 1988); Janet L. Nelson, "Family, Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages," in *A Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London, 1997), 153–76; Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, eds., *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005); and Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester, 2006). A review of earlier work in the field can be found in Margaret Schaus and Susan Mosher Stuard, "Citizens of No Mean City: Medieval Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 6 (1994): 170–98, DOI: 10.1353/jowh.2010.0303.

⁹ Jaime Villanueva, *Viage á las iglesias de Vique y Solsona, 1806 y 1807*, *Viage literario a las Iglesias de España* 8 (Valencia, 1821), accessed 26 January 2015, <https://archive.org/details/viageliterariola08vill>, ap. I.

¹⁰ Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, *La Plana de Vich en els segles VIII i IX (717 – 886)* (Vic, 1954), repr. as "La reconquesta d'una regió interior de Catalunya: la plana de Vic (717–886)," in Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, *Dels Visigots als Catalans*, ed. Jaume Sobrequés i Callicó, *Estudis i Documents* 13 (Barcelona, 1969), 1:309–21; cf. Jonathan Jarrett, "Settling the Kings' Lands: Aprisio in Catalonia in Perspective," *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010): 320–42, DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-8847.2010.00301.x.

¹¹ Jarrett, "Power." On Santa Maria see Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, "La fundació del monestir de Ripoll," in *Miscel·lània Anselm M. Albareda* (Montserrat, 1956), 1:187–97, repr.

seriously from interpolation to support later property claims and also from abstraction by later mother-houses, but the date that they record for Emma's oblation, 885, is not implausible.¹² We can, however, say with certainty that Sant Joan had become a nunnery only from 898, when now-Abbess Emma obtained a royal precept from King Charles the Simple (898–911), guaranteeing the nunnery's properties.¹³ (It is the list of these given in the precept, which survives in the original, that gives the lie to the endowment documents, which do not.) Emma's vigorous defense and expansion of her nunnery's rights and properties has been described elsewhere; suffice it here to say that she pursued these by acquisition and by confrontation, especially in a large hearing in 913 in which the names of the whole adult population of the valley in which the nunnery was sited, more than 500 men and women all told, were attached to an oath that Guifré had expelled the Saracens from the area and established his daughter as *primus homo*, "first person," on the lands, making those now there Emma's tenants and entitling her to levy the valley's military service and other royal duties.¹⁴ This remarkable document was extracted against the apparent opposition of two of her brother counts, Miró II the Young of Cerdanya (898–928) and Sunyer of Barcelona, Girona and Osona (911–45), between whose territories the Ripollès now lay. The story that the document told, however, was more or less fictional: such early documentation as does survive from the house makes it clear that Guifré bought most of the nunnery's early lands from existing, apparently Christian, owners. Such was the power over both past and present that Abbess Emma could wield, although it seems very likely, not least because of her continuing good relations with Miró, that the two counts were parties to the deception, the real audience being the people of the valley who had to swear that they believed in Emma's rights.¹⁵

Emma's successors lacked the support from the counts that she had enjoyed, even though several of the succeeding abbesses were also from the comital family.¹⁶ Repeated comital encroachments on the nunnery's property are

in Abadal, *Dels Visgots als Catalans*, 1:485–94, and Antoni Pladevall i Font, Joan-Albert Adell i Gisbert, and Xavier Barral i Altet, "Santa Maria de Ripoll," in Pladevall, *Ripollès*, 206–75 and 332–34.

¹² CC4 4, 8 and II (= Condal 3 and 4); see Jarrett, "Power," 235–41.

¹³ CC2 Sant Joan de les Abadesses I (= Condal 11).

¹⁴ CC4 119 and 120 (= Condal 38 and ap. II A, with faulty dates); see Jarrett, "Power," 241–48; Jarrett, *Rulers*, 35–42. Neither of the latter works is used by Martí Aurell i Cardona, "Emma, primera abadessa de Sant Joan de les Abadesses," in Crispí and Monraveta, *Sant Joan de les Abadesses*, 38–45, which makes it little more than an extension of Martin Aurell, *Les noces du comte: Mariage et pouvoir en Catalogne (785–1213)*, *Histoire ancienne et médiévale* 32 (Paris, 1995), 26–27.

¹⁵ Jarrett, "Power" (n. 3 above), 241–48.

¹⁶ See below and Albert, *Abadesses* (n. 3 above). On these women it will soon be possible to consult Xavier Costa Badia, "Les abadesses de Sant Joan després d'Emma: Gestió

evident in their subsequent, incomplete, restorations.¹⁷ Miró's sons particularly worked to bring the twin jurisdictional islands of Santa Maria and Sant Joan, both equipped with royal immunities, into their territories, first by deployment of patronage (to Santa Maria's benefit, but to Sant Joan's detriment), then by placing comital children in the communities to become their heads. Ingilberga, one of these and the last abbess of Sant Joan, seemingly still did not allow the family enough control because in 1017 an embassy comprising most of the great men of the Catalan church swore before Pope Benedict VIII that the nuns were "parricides and whores of Venus," and obtained, despite papal reluctance, the dissolution of the nunnery, along with the establishment of a new and ephemeral bishopric for Ingilberga's half-nephew and a house of canons, both partly endowed with the nunnery's property.¹⁸ The nuns were pensioned off with small allotments from the nunnery's endowment, while Ingilberga herself went to live with her nephew Guillem de Balsareny, a canon of the cathedral who subsequently became bishop in succession to Emma's half-brother Bishop Oliba, who had been among the party swearing to the pope. By supreme irony, therefore, at the death of her unsupportive relative she moved into his palace, where she lived until her death in 1049 when the canons of Vic recorded her in their necrology as *venerabilis femina*, a "venerable woman."¹⁹ There is no indication in any source that the nuns had to do penance for any

econòmica i política del monestir a la segona meitat del segle X," in Boada, Brugués, and Costa, *El monestir de Sant Joan*. I also treat the establishment of the nunnery in more detail in Jonathan Jarrett, "La fundació de Sant Joan en el context de l'establiment dels comtats Catalans," trans. by Xavier Costa Badia, in Boada, Brugués, and Costa, *El monestir de Sant Joan*; Emma's additions to its patrimony will be further covered in Costa, "El monestir i el seu entorn. La formació i consolidació del patrimoni monàstic de Sant Joan durant l'abadiat d'Emma (c.885-c.942)," in the same volume.

¹⁷ For what follows see Jarrett, *Rulers*, 64–71; Pladevall, "Monestir de Sant Joan" (n. 3 above), 26–27, is unaware of this work.

¹⁸ Sant Joan 13; Comtal 121 (= Sant Joan 14), both among numerous other printings referenced there. Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 198, claims that Abbess Ingilberga had rejected papal judgement, but the papal document actually only says that the nuns had avoided facing judgment and that no further delay could be brooked ("Illis vero refugientibus, et ne flagitia earum penitus nudarentur, apostolicum iudicatum declinantibus ... visum est nobis ... ut ulterius dilationem sententiae de absentia ne lucrarentur"); the pope nonetheless invited anyone innocent to seek absolution from him ("quemadmodum qui est innocens, ut absolvantur, quaerit").

¹⁹ Pladevall, "Monestir de Sant Joan," 28–29. Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 197–202, has an obit. of 1040 for Emma, which forces him to attribute the presence in the palace to Bishop Oliba; this seems to derive from confusion with her half-sister Emma Ingilberga, the daughter of Ermemir castellan of Besora, whose earlier date of death this is. Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, *L'Abat Oliba, Bisbe de Vic, i la seva època*, 3rd ed., Biblioteca biogràfica catalana 30 (Barcelona, 1962), repr. as "L'abat Oliba i la seva època," in Abadal, *Dels Visigots als Catalans*, 2:141–277, resolved this confusion (at 190–200 of the reprint). For more on the ex-nuns after 1017 it will soon be possible to consult Irene Brugués Massot and Xavier Costa Badia,

crime or bore any slur on their character, and the modern reader may well be as suspicious as was the pope, or more.²⁰ Nonetheless, that was the end of the original female monasticism at Sant Joan: thereafter the house alternated unhappily between canons and monks via short-lived over-rule by the French monastery of Saint-Victor de Marseille, although for a while between 1099 and 1114 Sant Joan existed as a double house, with nuns under a prioress and monks under a prior, as well as a group of canons living outside. This too passed, and the house was finally dissolved in the sixteenth century.²¹ The monastic church is now the seat of the town's parish, and memorials to Emma and to Guifré are maintained within it, but the nuns are more famous for the story of Comte Arnau, an entirely fictional potentate who is held to have seduced one of the abbesses and therefore been doomed to ride an undead horse for all eternity.²² The reader will detect that there is little female agency in the popular memory of the nunnery. The Bad Count is, alas, too famous in song and story (and associated merchandise) for the real nuns to have much chance of making it back into the popular history of the area, although attempts have recently begun to be made.²³

“Després del 1017: El destí de les monges,” in Boada, Brugués, and Costa, *El monestir de Sant Joan*.

²⁰ Sant Joan 13 includes an offer from the pope of an audience to any of the nuns who feels she has been unjustly accused (see n. 18 above), as well as his expression of disbelief on first hearing the accusation. Pladevall, “Monestir de Sant Joan,” seems to believe that the papal judgment cannot have been founded on nothing (28: “no pretenem pas excusar del tot l’abadessa ni la seva comunitat de la greu acusació de ‘ministres o meretrices de Venus’ amb què la butlla de Benet VIII ... es fonamenta per dissoldre el monestir”). Cf. Jean Verdon, “Recherches sur les monastères féminins dans la France du Nord aux IXe–XIe siècles,” *Revue Mabillon* 59 (1976): 49–96 at 63–69; Janet L. Nelson, “Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages,” in *Women in the Church: Papers Read at the 1989 Summer Meeting and the 1990 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History* 27 (Oxford, 1990), 53–78 at 66–68; and Constance Berman, “How Much Space Did Medieval Nuns Have or Need?,” in *Shaping Community: The Art and Archaeology of Monasticism*, ed. Sheila McNally (Oxford, 2001), 100–16 at 104.

²¹ Pladevall et al., “Sant Joan de les Abadeses” (n. 3 above), 357–69, and Pladevall, “Monestir de Sant Joan” (n. 3 above), 31.

²² Josep Camps and Llorenç Soldevila, *El Comte Arnau (i el Comte Mal): Tres rutes literàries*, Els escriptors i el país 5 (Argentona, 1994). Aurell, *Noçes du comte*, 199–201, provides useful discussion of parallels.

²³ Manuel Riu et al., *El Castell de Mataplana i del comte Arnau: Una història i llegenda singulars de la Catalunya medieval* (Girona, 1999); “El comte Arnau: Arqueologia de la llegenda del comte Arnau,” Caballeria SC, traductors: Traduccions i autoedició, June 6, 2003, accessed 7 December 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030606195843/http://personal.radysoft.es:80/caballeria/revista0/elcomtearnau/elcomtearnau.htm>.

PRIORITY AND ORDER

It is probably not very important whether Sant Joan really was the first nunnery in Catalonia, which is as well since the question cannot be definitively settled. The other serious contender, Sant Pere de les Puelles in Barcelona, maintains a tradition of an earlier foundation but is not reliably documented prior to 945; on the other hand, that house was sacked in a Muslim attack on Barcelona in 985 and many documents may have been lost.²⁴ Two other female houses were operational by the end of the tenth century, but in general religious women's communities were rare in this area until later.²⁵ Neither are any women's houses of the Visigothic period known from the area of modern-day Catalonia, and while it is certainly possible that some escaped record, firstly we cannot assume it and secondly, in any case, continuity through the area's seventy years of Muslim rule and the subsequent Frankish reorganization seems extremely unlikely.²⁶

This is not to say that there was no female religious life in this area prior to the transformation of Sant Joan into a nunnery, merely that that life was probably not cenobitical. There is better evidence, both prior to and contemporary with Sant Joan, for the particular sort of religious woman known in the Iberian peninsula as a *deo vota*, "one vowed to God," of independent means, usually a widow, who had taken up a religious life on her own property, albeit perhaps with

²⁴ Endowment: Dotalies 57. Restoration: Condal 212. Gaspar Feliu i Montfort, *La presa de Barcelona per Almansor: Història i mitificació* (Barcelona, 2007), accessed 27 February 2018, http://www.iec.cat/butlleti/pdf/116_butlleti_feliu.pdf, 13, gives references to the historiography of Sant Pere's extensive trail of forgery. See also now Xavier Costa Badia, "Paisatges monàstics: El monacat alt-medieval als comtats catalans (segles IX-X)," Ph.D. thesis (Universitat de Barcelona 2019), pp. 430–445, for a new review of the total evidence.

²⁵ Sant Pere de Burgal and Sant Daniel de Girona, now de Galligants; see Costa, "Paisatges monàstics," pp. 211–213, 319–320 and 431–432. For a list of nunneries in the area, but including none of these, see Jean Verdon, "Recherches sur les monastères féminins dans la France du Sud aux IXe–XIe siècles," *Annales du Midi* 88 (1976): 117–38, DOI: 10.3406/anami.1976.1632, esp. 128–29, and for female monasticism in early medieval Spain and Portugal generally, Montserrat Cabré i Pairet, "'Deodicaetae' y 'Deovotae': La regulación de la religiosidad femenina en los condados catalanes, siglos IX–XI," in *Las mujeres en el cristianismo medieval: Imágenes, teorías y cauces de actuación religiosa*, ed. Angela Muñoz Fernández (Madrid, 1989), 169–82.

²⁶ Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, "El renaixement monàstic a Catalunya després de l'expulsió dels Sarraïns," *Studia Monastica* 3 (1961): 165–77, repr. as "La vida monàstica després de l'expulsió dels Sarraïns," in Abadal, *Dels Visigots als Catalans*, 1:365–76; cf. Carolyn S. Sniveley, "Invisible in the Community? The Evidence for Early Women's Monasticism in the Southern Balkan Peninsula," in McNally, *Shaping Community*, 57–66, for examples of such forgotten late Antique houses elsewhere. See now also on Visigothic continuity the more optimistic view of Xavier Costa Badia, "Los monasterios nacidos a través de pactos en los condados catalanes del siglo IX. Reflexiones en torno a la pervivencia de un modelo fundacional visigodo en tiempos de la reforma carolingia," *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 23 (2017): 328–35, and more widely on monasticism in this area Costa, "Paisatges monàstics".

much the same household as she had had before.²⁷ *Deo vota* was, indeed, a title sometimes used of the nuns of Sant Joan, alongside other terms such as *ancilla Dei*, *sodalis*, or *sanctimonialis*, although strangely never *monacha*.²⁸ This inconsistency has naturally enough provoked some speculation about what rule the nuns at Sant Joan would have lived under, and whether the 1017 shut-down can in fact be seen as a species of monastic reform that, in an excess of zeal, turned heterodoxy of monastic observance, perhaps along the lines of the older practical monasticism of Saints Basil or Fructuosus or Cæsarius of Arles, into alleged parricide and prostitution to obtain the papal dissolution.²⁹ Such speculation has been fueled by suggestions that some of the nuns retained private property and by the fact that Sant Joan seems to have maintained a staff of clergy alongside the nuns, men who appear only in the nunnery's own documents. This has led to suggestions that it was a kind of double monastery familiar from such earlier Iberian contexts, but nothing in the documentation suggests that these clerics were under monastic vows or living at the nunnery rather than at the ordinary church of Sants Joan i Pau outside.³⁰ As for the claims of private property, with the exception of a Psalter given by one nun to a local church that had been constructed under the nunnery's patronage — not, therefore, a perfect example, but discussed below — all evidence relates to the abbesses, whose control of the house's patrimony is impossible to separate from any private holdings in the documents, and one of whom (Countess Adelaide) was probably not abbess at the time, if at all.³¹

²⁷ Cabré, “‘Deodicatae’ y ‘Deovotae,’” or José Orlandis Rovira, “Traditio corporis et animae: La familiaritas en las iglesias y monasterios españoles en la alta edad media,” *Anuario de historia del Derecho español* 24 (1958): 95–280, repr. in Jose Orlandis, *Estudios sobre instituciones monásticas medievales*, Historia de la Iglesia 2 (Pamplona, 1971), 216–378, esp. 248–49 of the reprint.

²⁸ CC4 4 (= Condal 3): *ancillas Dei*; CC4 35: *sodales*; CC4 37 (= Condal 10): *sanctemoniales*. It should be noted that all these documents are in the voice of Bishop Godmar of Osona, and also consecration acts, which were great areas of grandiloquence for scribes.

²⁹ Orlandis, “Traditio,” 266–67 of the reprint; and now Pablo C. Díaz, “El legado del pasado: reglas y monasterios visigodos y carolingios”, in *Monjes y monasterios hispanos en la Alta Edad Media*, ed. José Ángel García de Cortázar and Ramón Teja (Aguilar de Campoo, 2006), pp. 9–31.

³⁰ José Orlandis Rovira, “Monasterios dúplices españoles en la alta edad media,” *Anuario de historia del Derecho español* 30 (1960): 49–88, repr. in Orlandis, *Estudios*, 165–202 at 197–98 of the reprint; a parallel case at Notre Dame and St. Martin Denain, Arras in Verdon, “Monastères féminins dans la France du Nord,” 52, though there can be no connection. For Sants Joan i Pau see Jordi Vigué i Viñas, Antoni Pladevall i Font, and Joan-Albert Adell i Gisbert, “Sant Joan i Sant Pau de Sant Joan de les Abadesses,” in Pladevall, *Ripollès* (n. 3 above), 404–6.

³¹ Aurell's identification of this woman varies between *Noces du comte*, 46 and 201 (where the new abbess here is the countess who subsequently appears in Condal 130, where she disposed of property, allowing the case for poor Benedictinism to be made) and Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 192–93, 193 n. 2, 202, and 203 (where she is the previous first abbess of Sant Pere de les

All speculation about non-standard observance can probably be dismissed, however. King Charles the Simple, in 898, believed the nuns of Sant Joan to be Benedictines.³² He might have been happy to assume and the nuns' ambassador not to correct, but it is harder to assume the same of their diocesan, Bishop Godmar of Osona, who after, "enquiring into their way of life and their *habitus*," described the nuns as "defending the rule of the blessed Benedict" in the act of consecration of Sant Quirze de Besora, a church which Abbess Emma had built.³³ The two fragments of information we have about the nunnery's regulation thus suggest that it should be described both as Benedictine and as Carolingian from its earliest days, and there is no reason to impute to this new foundation any of the peninsular diversity in the practice of cenobiticism of previous centuries.³⁴ This also means that there is no basis here for the assumption sometimes made in modern scholarship that we can apply to the lives of nuns the somewhat looser strictures of the Carolingian rule for canonesses, the *Institutio sanctemonialium*, of whose preservation or use there is no trace in Catalonia. Despite the occasional description of the nuns of Sant Joan as *sanctemoniales*, these women were thought to live under the Rule of Benedict.³⁵

Puelles, probably actually a fiction — see n. 24 above). This latter identification allows Aurell to argue with equal *brío* that the appointment was an attempt to reform Sant Joan (Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 192: "réformatrice"), but of course then that the homonymous countess had private property implies nothing about Sant Joan's Benedictinism. I argue in forthcoming work, however, that neither of these identifications can be sustained. Aurell lists the documentation that in fact disproves them in Martí Aurell i Cardona, "Jalons pour une enquête sur les stratégies matrimoniales des Comtes Catalans," in *Symposium Internacional sobre els Orígens de Catalunya (segles VIII–XI)*, ed. Frederic Udina i Martorell, *Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 23 (Barcelona, 1991), 1:281–364, accessed 1 July 2014, <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/MemoriasRABL/article/viewFile/202538/298644>, (310–11), but repeats his identification of abbess of Sant Joan with countess in "Emma," 43–45 in order to explain the papal dissolution of the house; cf. n. 19 above and n. 37 below.

³² See n. 13 above.

³³ CC4 35.

³⁴ This means among other things that it should be placed after the end of the traditions of female Carolingian monasticism described so well for the eighth century in Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York, 2014), esp. 1–15; see also Alison I. Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria*, *Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* 10 (Cambridge, 2004), 17–21.

³⁵ On the *Institutio sanctemonialium* see Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 109–20, marred by continuous equation of nuns with canonesses, esp. at 113, as also in Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 12–13; clarity in Beach, *Women as Scribes*, 18–19.

THE SIGNATURES OF 949 AND NUNS' LITERACY

All of this forms necessary context for the key source for this article, an original single-sheet charter of 949 that some of the nuns then at the house signed in their own hands. The document explains its own issue: after Emma's death, Count Sunyer of Barcelona had appointed as abbess, "an unsuitable woman, as later became clear," and, regretting this on the point of his own monastic conversion in 947, had enjoined his son Borrell II (ruled 945–93), now count in his stead, to resolve the issue.³⁶ Accordingly, and respecting the position of Sant Joan between territories, in 949 the teenage count met with his elder cousin Count Sunifred of Cerdanya (ruled 928–66) and the bishops of Osona and Girona and appointed one Adelaide, whose identity is uncertain, as the new abbess.³⁷ This does not seem to have stuck, as she never actually appears as abbess. The next active leader of the nunnery was in fact Borrell's and Sunifred's elder cousin Ranló, first seen in 954, but this is not important for our immediate purposes.³⁸ What is important is that the nuns of the house literally signed up to this change of régime (see Figure 1 below).

There are limits to what it is possible to deduce from the intrinsic structure of this document, but it seems that it was signed in several sittings (albeit they may have all followed each other on the same occasion). Many of the signatures are in the scribal hand, including some of the nuns but also some of the presumed laymen. Those of Chindiberga, on the seventeenth line at the far left, El·ló and Belluça are among these and all appear to be part of the main text, but in fact cannot be, as Chindiberga's signature actually begins with the *signum* device

³⁶ CC4 645 (= Condal 128): "non aptam, quod postea claruit." Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 192–93, features an erudite reading of this phrase which allows him to posit an interregnum with no abbess in place, during which Count-Marquis Sunyer appropriated the nunnery's revenues; this seems anachronistic as well as mistranslated. Pladevall, "Monestir de Sant Joan" (n. 3 above), 24–25, proposes an alternative history of this interregnum, involving an unattested war between the comital families of Barcelona and Besalú-Cerdanya in which Borrell's brother Ermengol was killed and which was here being resolved. Ermengol's epitaph at Santa Maria de Ripoll said only that he died by the sword, the location of his demise in Cerdanya appearing only in the twelfth-century *Gesta comitum barcinonensium*, which is barely factual for this early period: see *Les Gesta Comitum Barchinonensium (versió primitiva)*, la *Brevis Historia i altres textos de Ripoll*, ed. Stefano Maria Cingolani, Monuments d'Història de la Corona d'Aragó 4 (València, 2012), 65 and n. 94. Cingolani and some previous authors prefer an equally unattested death for Ermengol at the hands of a Hungarian raiding army, on which see Jonathan Jarrett, "Centurions, Alcalas, and Christiani Perversi: Organisation of Society in the Pre-Catalan 'Terra de Ningú,'" in *Early Medieval Spain: A Symposium*, ed. Alan Deyermond and Martin Ryan, Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar 63 (London, 2010), 97–127 at 115–19, with references.

³⁷ Condal 130; Albert, *Abadesses* (n. 3 above), 27–30. On Martin Aurell's inconsistent identifications of this woman see n. 31 above.

³⁸ See n. 68 below.

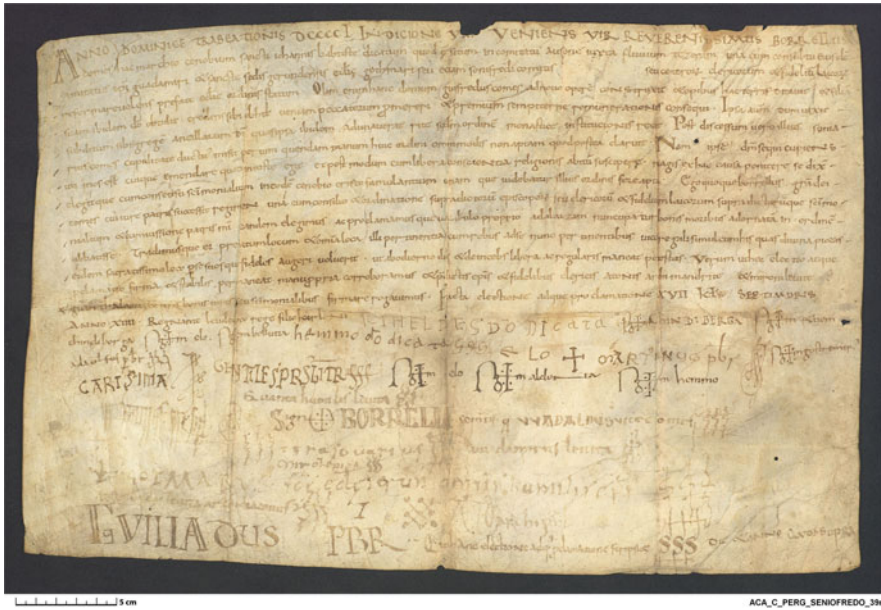


Figure 1. Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Cancillería, Pergaminos, Seniofredo núm. 39, reproduced by kind permission of the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón.

and the word *item* that closes the sixteenth line at the far right. That specification of “another” Chindiberga therefore tells us that the signature to the left, not apparently in the scribal hand as differences in its “h,” “I,” and “R,” as well as its combination of minuscule and majuscule letter-forms, seem to tell us, must have existed already when the scribe (one Guiliadus) wrote those three names. That in turn suggests that the first person to sign was Richeldes, immediately to the right of the dating clause and to the left of Chindiberga. Presumably Chindiberga followed her, and then perhaps Emma and El·ló whose names appear beneath these two; it seems that they must have preceded the scribally-named nuns because one presumes otherwise that the other scribally-written names (like Gostremir at far right) would have followed the names of the second Chindiberga, the second El·ló, and Belluça, which Guiliadus also wrote, in the space that must, therefore, already have been used by Emma and the other El·ló. On the other hand, the priest Adaulf and indeed the nun Carissima, visible at far left below the scribal nuns’ signatures, must presumably have come after those or they would occupy space closer to the body text. Somewhere in all of this, too, must fit the three extra signatures done by the scribe in a darker ink in the middle of the document, another El·ló, Aldena, and another Emma. Aldena’s name is strangely elongated, as if a longer one had been expected, suggesting that El·ló and Emma had been written first even within this block. The whole

sequence implied is extremely complex: at least five signing stages seem to be involved, and possibly more, until the document appeared as we now see it.³⁹

Whether the nuns signed separately or not, however, the obvious import of this is that some of them did not need the scribe to write their names. Most obviously autograph are Richeldes, Emma, the first El·l6 and Carissima (whose seriffed S is unlike anything Guiliadus used). The first Chindiberga also seems likely. They could not all, perhaps, write very well, but four or five of the nunnery's inhabitants at least could form their own name with a pen. That nuns in a Benedictine house could write should not, perhaps, surprise anyone, but it is worth noticing for two reasons.⁴⁰ Firstly, it has been denied: Michel Zimmermann's massive work on literacy in medieval Catalonia declares that "l'ineptitude à l'écriture est générale chez les moniales," founding this generalization on the documents of Sant Pere de les Puelles immediately after its 992 restoration, when the nuns must have been new recruits, and ignoring the documents of Sant Joan even though he cites them, including this very charter, elsewhere in the work.⁴¹

There is also another important aspect to these signatures, however, which is that their handwriting is not at all similar.⁴² Carissima's dark capitals, with

³⁹ I have benefited a great deal here from discussing this document with Professor Wendy Davies, whose remarks have made me rethink the chronology of the process more than once. Similar concerns were raised by an anonymous reviewer of this article. I hope that the above account proves plausible to both. Cf. alternative models offered by Benoît-Michel Tock, *Scribes, scribes et témoins dans les actes privés en France (VIIe-début du XIIe siècle)*, ARTEM 9 (Turnhout, 2005), 391–92, however.

⁴⁰ The bibliography on female monastic literate production has burgeoned in recent years, in the Carolingian sphere and elsewhere. An incomplete list of studies relevant to this period includes Rosamond McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria in England and Francia in the Eighth Century," *Francia* 19 (1992): 1–35, repr. in Rosamond McKitterick, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th to 9th Centuries*, Variorum Collected Studies 452 (Aldershot, 1994), chapter VIII; Jane Martindale, "The Nun Immenna and the Foundation of the Abbey of Beaulieu: A Woman's Prospects in the Carolingian Church," in Sheils and Wood, *Women in the Church*, 27–42; Nelson, "Women and the Word"; McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), 257–58; McKitterick, "Continuity and Innovation in Tenth-Century Ottonian Culture," in *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Margaret Gibson*, ed. Lesley Smith and Benedicta Ward (London, 1992), 15–24; Pamela R. Robinson, "A Twelfth-Century Scriptrix from Nunnaminster," in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, Their Scribes and Readers; Essays Presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. Pamela R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot, 1997), 74–93; Steven A. Stofferahn, "Changing Views of Carolingian Women's Literary Culture: The Evidence from Essen," *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999): 69–97, DOI: 10.1111/1468-0254.00039; and Lifshitz, *Religious Women*.

⁴¹ See n. 7 above.

⁴² On the paleography of the Sant Joan documents see Udina, *Archivo Condal* (n. 6 above), 19–26, and here specifically 286. I owe much here to the kind advice of Professor David Ganz and Dr. Kathleen Neal, although they cannot be held responsible for any of my assertions here.

their unusual bars and serifs, bear some resemblance to the hand of the priest Martí, but her stylings are not quite his (the barred A especially). Chindiberga's tidier capitals look more like those of the first line or the date, presumably by the scribe Guiliadus, and her *signum* device matches the black-ink signatures, whence my uncertainty about her autonomy here. El·l6's and Emma's hands resemble each other more than anyone else on the document, but they differ in their striking tongued letter "e." Richeldes, meanwhile, signs like someone hardly used to holding a pen, and though she used both capitals and minuscules one wonders if she knew the full set of both. Even the abbey's priests show no great homogeneity of handwriting: those here are Gentiles, a long-serving scribe for the nuns here making his last appearance; Martí, a new arrival with only one recent document to his credit before this; and Guiliadus, the main scribe, who had begun writing documents for the abbey ten years before as a deacon, like earlier clerics whose rise through the clerical ranks can be seen in Sant Joan's documents.⁴³ Perhaps a single hand should not be expected from three men at such different career stages, but it is missing all the same.⁴⁴

What we are not seeing here, therefore, is the monastic school that other contemporary Carolingian or post-Carolingian monastic contexts might lead us to expect, and which is indeed apparent among the clerics of Girona who signed the charter.⁴⁵ These nuns could indeed write, but they had not learnt to write in the same place, and none of them wrote their names in an ordinary book-script (unlike Abbess Emma, whose hand in the two documents where we have it is a tidy Caroline minuscule).⁴⁶ The implication of this is that, if these women were not taught to write at the nunnery, they must have been taught before they got there, which is to say, at home.⁴⁷

⁴³ Gentiles's career is tracked in Jarrett, *Rulers* (n. 3 above), 29–30 and n. 27; Martinus appears only here in CC4 645 (= Condal 128), in CC4 641 (= Condal 127), and in Condal 130. Guiliadus worked for other people as well as the nuns and can be found as scribe of CC4 441, 444 (= Condal 111) and 890, as well as this document. For clerics rising through the ranks at Sant Joan see Jarrett, *Rulers*, 29–30.

⁴⁴ On signatures in the documents of this area see Udina, *Archivo Condal*, 15–23, or in (much) more depth Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire* (n. 7 above), 1:57–190.

⁴⁵ Expectation in works in n. 40 above. For clerics in the Girona chapter at this date see Ramon Martí, "Delà, Cesari i Ató, primers arquebisbes dels comptes-prínceps de Barcelona (951–953/981)," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 67 (1994): 369–86 (369–73). Those appearing here are Bishop Godmar II, the archdeacon Ató and, *pace* Martí, the deacon Miró, brother of Count Sunifred.

⁴⁶ CC4 37 (= Condal 10) and Nathaniel L. Taylor, ed., "An Early Catalan Charter in the Houghton Library from the Joan Gili Collection of Medieval Catalan Manuscripts," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 7 (1997): 37–44, accessed 19 May 2007, http://www.nltaylor.net/pdfs/Houghton_charter.pdf.

⁴⁷ As per Janet L. Nelson, "Literacy in Carolingian Government," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), 258–96 at 269, citing Carolingian episcopal legislation for the education of girls at parish level, and indeed

Despite the monastic context, therefore, what we are seeing in this document is evidence for lay female literacy in tenth-century Catalonia. While unusually high levels of male literacy in this area are now generally accepted, with the corollary that if other areas preserved the kind of original charter evidence that Catalonia does it might not seem so unusual, female literacy is much more sparsely attested. Zimmermann's assumption that women in general could not, or should not, write seems to be matched in the attitudes of scribes of the period, including, as we have seen, Guiliadus, even though as a previous scribe for the house he might have known that some of the nuns could.⁴⁸ The enclosure of spaces like this in which women might be found writing usually prevents their detection by historians, but this charter shows us four or five women who could and did write, albeit when it was politically useful for the men who were rearranging their lives to have them on record agreeing to it. Such opportunities arose rarely (another that has been lost is mentioned below), but they permit a belief that such literacy was more widespread than the record now suggests and should perhaps be assumed rather than assumed against.⁴⁹

THE ORIGINS OF THE WOMEN OF SANT JOAN

The question that arises immediately from this is about the origins of Sant Joan's nuns, as of 949 and more generally. What sorts of people were teaching their daughters, or having their daughters taught, to write in tenth-century Catalonia? Evidence that bears on this is unevenly distributed through the nunnery's history for reasons closely connected with the health of the community. At the peak of the nunnery's influence and importance, we see it represented only by Abbess Emma and her servants; our only clue to the community's membership at that time is documents of gifts made by parents committing their daughters to the house, discussed below. Then in 949 we see the community assembled to

Isabel Velázquez, "Ardesie scritte di epoca visigota: Nuove prospettive sulla cultura e la scrittura," in *Privaturkunden der Karolingerzeit*, ed. Peter Erhart, Karl Heidecker, and Bernhard Zeller (Dietikon Zürich, 2009), 31–45 at 34–37, arguing for such education in the Visigothic-era Meseta to explain a similar diversity of signatures on slate documents from there. Cf. however Roger Collins, "Literacy and the Laity in Early Medieval Spain," in McKitterick, *Uses of Literacy*, 109–33, repr. in Collins, *Law, Culture and Regionalism in Early Medieval Spain*, Variorum Collected Studies 356 (Aldershot, 1992), chapter XVI, esp. 131, and Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture* (n. 35 above), 131–44, with examples of girls being sent to school at nunneries, and 144–51, covering teaching at home; the two modes are treated as exclusive.

⁴⁸ Collins, "Literacy and the Laity," for literacy in general in this area at the time.

⁴⁹ Other female autographs are also known, e.g., CC4 782. As Lifshitz observes, in *Religious Women*, 193–96, the key question is whether these were all individual instances or whether there was influence between any of them. This article cannot exclude the latter possibility, but it does not demonstrate it.

recognize their new abbess. Thereafter, alongside a few further oblations, the community is listed only once more, in a connected set of exchanges between the nuns and the counts of Besalú and Cerdanya in 964, by which the nuns got back some of their lost property at the price of other lands that now went to endow the counts' rival house, Sant Pere de Camprodon.⁵⁰ Sadly, in the only part of this exchange that survives in the original, although the nuns' signatures are given, none of them are autographs.⁵¹ One of the nuns of 949, Carissima, also appears in a church consecration act of 960, where as *deo vota* she gave a Psalter to the new church of Sant Hilari de Vidrà, alongside other gifts of books from Abbess Ranoló.⁵² (As mentioned above, this has been used by some scholars as part of an argument that the nuns retained private property, in contravention of the Benedictine rule, but if movables like this weigh in that balance, Saint Bede the Venerable would be only one of many monastics who stand thus accused.⁵³) The social and religious dynamics of gifts of books to and by religious women have, in any case, been ably explored in other contexts, but this occurrence is unique among the nunnery's documentation, and while it is further evidence for some of the nuns having literate interests — ignored equally wittingly by Michel Zimmermann — we do not know what the connection between Carissima and the church in question was that led her to contribute to it on this one occasion.⁵⁴

The best evidence for the nuns' social origins comes, instead, from the era after the dissolution, when we see several of the former nuns active in the land market in ways that identify their relatives, often the sources of their property. (None of them disposed of land that was identified as having been the nunnery's, so the terms of their settlement may not have permitted this.) These transactions are informative, and the sparse documentation of earlier nuns can be fitted into the pattern they set up, but there is still the danger that the house in its more troubled years did not recruit or attract the same sorts of people as it had prior to 949. With these cautions duly expressed, however, the best thing to do is set out the evidence.

We can list twenty-six of the nuns of Sant Joan over its 120-year existence as a nunnery (see [Table 1](#)). We do not know how many others there were, and it is likely

⁵⁰ On Camprodon see Jordi Vigué i Viñas et al., "Sant Pere de Camprodon," in Pladevall, *Ripollès*, 85–95, and Jarrett, *Rulers and Ruled*, 68–69.

⁵¹ CC5 358 (= Condal 162), 359 (= Condal 163) and 360, of which the last is the original.

⁵² CC4 856 (= Condal 146), as well as now Costa, "Paisatges monastics", pp. 565–589.

⁵³ Aurell, *Noces du comte* (n. 14 above), 195–96 and 201; cf. pp. 6–7 and n. 31 above. For Bede's possessions, famously including a box of pepper, see Cuthbert, "Letter on the Death of Bede" in Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1992), 580–86 at 584.

⁵⁴ Zimmermann references the document at *Écrire et lire*, 1:108 and 1:500. On gifts of books to and from religious women in other, better-evidenced, contexts, see Mary Carpenter Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 46 (Cambridge, 2002), 27–46.

Table 1. List of known nuns of Sant Joan de les Abadesses, with key appearances and details noted.

Name	Early appearances	949?	Autograph?	964?	Later appearances?	Notes
Emma	156 total	No	–	No	No	First abbes
Richeldes	oblation 909	YES	YES	Uncertain	No	See below
Elo	oblation 926	YES	YES	Uncertain	No	See below
“non apta”	No	No	No	No	No	Second abbes
Chindiberga	No	YES	YES	No	No	
Chindiberga	No	YES	No	No	No	
El-ló	No	YES	No	Uncertain	Uncertain	See below
El-ló	No	YES	No	Uncertain	Uncertain	See below
(Ermessinda) Belluça	No	YES	No	YES	YES	See below
Emma	No	YES	YES	No	No	
Aldena	No	YES	No	YES	No	
Carissima	No	YES	YES	YES	No	Donates psalter to new church 960
Adelaide	Uncertain (see above)	No	No	No	No	Third abbes; identity disputed
Ranló	YES (as private person)	No	No	No	No	Fourth abbes; unable to write 955
(Riquilda) Enquflia	No	No	No	YES	No	Daughter of ‘countess’
Fredeburga	No	No	No	YES	No	Fifth abbes
Bero	No	No	No	YES	No	
(Sesnanda) Llobeta	No	No	No	YES	YES	See below
Garsenda	No	No	No	YES	No	
Gualatrudes	No	No	No	YES	No	
Guinedildes	No	No	No	YES	YES	See below
‘ <i>Femina appellata</i> ’	No	No	No	No	Uncertain	Oblated 966
Espana	No	No	No	No	YES	Recipient of comital bequest 996

Continued

Table 1. *Continued*

Name	Early appearances	949?	Autograph?	964?	Later appearances?	Notes
Ingilberga	No	No	No	No	YES	Sixth abbess, oblated 987
Emma	No	No	No	No	YES	Oblated 1005
Ledgarda	No	No	No	No	YES	See below

that those of humbler origin are worst attested (although also, from such demographic work as has been done on nunneries of this period elsewhere, that they were also least represented in the community).⁵⁵ On the two occasions that we see the community of Sant Joan assembled, 949 and 964, it numbered only eight nuns (and three clerics) and twelve (with no clerics) respectively and as we shall see, some of the nuns were very long-lived. It may therefore be that we have a good proportion of the nuns attested, and that the community was never very large.⁵⁶ Those we can name are as follows.

Abbess Emma herself, the member of the community whose origin and social standing is most clearly attested. She is recorded in 156 documents all told, and in two wrote her own name, as said, in a tidy Caroline minuscule which she may have learnt from monks of Santa Maria de Ripoll up the river, since Abbot Dagui there was initially placed in charge of the nascent women's house.⁵⁷ Emma's comital origins allowed the nunnery to rank among the great powers of the land while she lived but was obviously not the usual origin of the convent's population.

I leave aside here two women who appear in Sant Joan's documents as *deo votae*, Gurgúria, mentioned in a document of 904, and Osseza, who gave land to Sant Joan in 938. These women were donors to, but not clearly members of, the nunnery.⁵⁸ Next attested as a nun is therefore a woman called Riquilda, who in 909 donated herself to the abbey, "where the lady Emma is *deodicata* or abbess with her *sanctemoniales* who serve there."⁵⁹ Riquilda gave a vineyard that her *senior*, a man whose name ended in *-cello*, had built, and two pieces of farmland

⁵⁵ Jean Verdon, "Les moniales dans la France de l'Ouest aux XIe et XIIe siècles: Étude d'histoire sociale," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19 (1976): 247–64, DOI: 10.3406/cmcd.1976.2044, at 249–52.

⁵⁶ For other small female communities see Verdon, "Monastères féminins dans la France du sud" (n. 25 above), 134–35; cf. the Galician nunnery of Piasca, whose thirty-six nuns signed José María Mínguez Fernández, ed., *Colección diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún (siglos IX y X)*, Fuentes y estudios de historia leonesa 17 (León, 1976), doc. no. 79, cited by Wendy Davies, *Windows on Justice in Northern Iberia, 800–1000* (Abingdon, 2016), 215. For a later context see Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety*, 29–30. Aurell, *Noces du comte*, 185–86, says that there were eleven nuns in Emma's "conseil" and suggests an entire community of 50 nuns, on no apparent evidence. Pladevall, "Monestir de Sant Joan" (n. 3 above), 28: "desconeixem el nombre exacte de membres de la comunitat, però sabem que era superior a 12 monges" appears to be no more than a statement of belief that the house was technically canonical in population.

⁵⁷ See n. 46 above and Abadal, "Fundació" (n. 11 above).

⁵⁸ Gurgúria named as a previous donor to the nunnery in Condal 16; Osseza appears in Condal 112. Despite their religious titles, no actual connection to Sant Joan is apparent for these women beyond the archival, which is to be explained by where their lands wound up, not necessarily where they themselves did; cf. Udina, *Archivo Condal*, 263 n. 1.

⁵⁹ CC4 44 (= Condal 12): "ubi domna Emmo est Deodicata vel abatissa cum suas sanctimoniales ibi deserviunt."

in nearby Vallfogona, as well as another estate and an orchard between there and Ripoll. With these came a range of livestock and furniture, but although the livestock amounted to no more than ten beasts plus some unnumbered sheep, two of the beasts were a breeding pair of oxen, one was an ass and one a *destriale*, “warhorse.” Her *senior*, a word which in other contexts like this seems to mean common-law husband, must therefore have been a man of moderate means, a pioneer and a warrior, and it might be fair to see him as a royal vassal or someone of equivalent status, clearing new land with a royal or comital concession.⁶⁰ He was presumably dead, though this is not said. Riquilda thus appears as a local and perhaps fairly young widow, unable or not wishing to run her lands alone, who sought security with the abbey. It is tempting to identify her with the Riquilda who signed the 949 settlement so uncertainly, though given a marriage and widowhood by 909, she would have been old by then. Either way, this tells us something about the sort of person who saw Sant Joan as a life option.

The oblation in 926 of a girl called El·l6 fits with this profile. Although the document does not survive, as it mainly concerned land in Segúries and the abbey later lost the sack of documents concerning that area, we have a long abstract of it by Abbot Miquel Isalguer, who inventoried the abbey’s documents in 1664.⁶¹ El·l6’s mother, Guinedilda, gave an alod there whose boundaries are all identified using topography rather than neighbors, implying a certain size; it also came with an entire *villa* nearby and whatever Guinedilda had in another one, presumably still leaving her enough to live on besides. The alod had come to Guinedilda from her husband (*vir*) Teudemon, who had had it by a royal precept. In this case, therefore, we are genuinely seeing the daughter of a king’s follower joining the house, and we can believe that she would have found fellows there. This El·l6 is presumably one of the three signatures of this name in the 949 settlement, and probably also one of two named in an exchange of 964 discussed below, but she does not appear thereafter. Since she must have been at least twenty-four in 949, and likely older, this is not surprising. We do not know whether it is her autograph or a later El·l6’s in the 949 document, but since Riquilda, of similar background, seems to have been able to write, it is at least likely that this royal vassal’s daughter was another *literata*.

The next nun known to us is the unfortunate *non apta* who succeeded Emma as abbess. Her name being unknown, her background is unidentifiable to us, as is her level of literacy.⁶² Neither is anything deducible of the background of Chindiberga, who signed the 949 document, beyond that she had learnt one or two ornamental letter-forms. Of the other nuns first attested in the 949 document, what can be said of the second El·l6 depends on whether the autograph signature here is

⁶⁰ Another such *senior* is discussed in Jarrett, *Rulers and Ruled*, 148–50.

⁶¹ CC5 201 (= Condal ap. II 149).

⁶² Albert, *Abadesses* (n. 3 above), 21–25, but cf. n. 36 above.

assigned to the girl given in 926 or the one discussed below who outlasted the nunnery; the latter's age would seem less remarkable then if she were not attested so early, but in that case the second one named in 949 is not otherwise known. The Emma of the 949 document is not otherwise attested; neither is the second Chindiberga, and while Aldena appears again in the 964 exchanges, we know nothing else about her. Even Carissima, whose gift of a psalter in 960 we have discussed, does not appear again after 964, and beyond that she could afford or obtain a book, not a minor expenditure, and that she may have had some ties to Vidrà, we cannot place her in a wider social context.

The remaining nun of 949, however, Belluça, presents a more complex story. She must have been at least fourteen, since her signature was worth having in a legal context, and she signed the documents of 964 (as Ermessenda Belluça), but we also see her in 966, as *deo vota*, buying a vineyard in Sanarús, even though her membership of a Benedictine house ought to have precluded private means.⁶³ It is not impossible that she was buying as the nunnery's agent, since they preserved the document, but it is still surprising; such an agent would normally, inevitably, have been male.⁶⁴ Belluça also received a bequest from her father Seguer in 1012, and this makes it clear that he held the fortress of Castellar d'en Hug, in Cerdanya, on behalf of Sant Joan.⁶⁵ A previous castellan there had been the father or father-in-law of one of Abbess Emma's agents, so this may attest to a longer family connection.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Belluça's apparent independent property needs explaining. It is possible that, as with many another Benedictine community, male or female in this or any other period, the Rule was simply not being observed in this respect, but it is also to be noted that Belluça's father also held property from Count Bernat Tallaferro of Besalú, one of those involved in shutting down the nunnery in 1017, and that even by 1012 Belluça was no longer using a religious title in her documents. It is, therefore, possible that she had simply left the community, possibly even between 964 and her 966 appearance as *deo vota* which, as we have seen, did not necessarily indicate cloistered status.⁶⁷ If so, it would be intriguing to know whether the father's realignment toward the counts informed or indeed compelled Belluça's withdrawal from the nunnery, or whether in fact her disinvestment in the community encouraged her father to make new political arrangements. We cannot know where initiative lay in this

⁶³ CC4 991 (= Condal ap. II 262).

⁶⁴ Orlandis, "Monasterios" (n. 30 above) 170–75; Jarrett, *Rulers*, 58–60, studies such agents at Sant Joan.

⁶⁵ Comtal 162 (= Sant Joan 16). I owe thanks to Doctor Xavier Costa Badia for the identification of this place.

⁶⁶ Jarrett, *Rulers*, 47–48.

⁶⁷ Cabré, "'Deodicatae' y 'Deovotae'" (n. 25 above).

familial interchange, but the 949 and 964 exchanges might have convinced Belluça, daughter in a politically active family, that the nunnery had little future.

The next two nuns we know of at Sant Joan are both abbesses: firstly Adelaide, appointed in 949 but perhaps never actually in office or resident, and secondly Ranoló.⁶⁸ Both women's backgrounds were in the comital family, although Ranoló had married out of it and had several adult children at the point when she took up office. Adelaide is hard to identify in charters before she became abbess or after she ceased, but none of the candidate documents show her signing autograph.⁶⁹ Ranoló, by contrast, is recorded in one document from before her abbacy as being unable to write because of illness.⁷⁰ She was even then in her fifties, but Zimmermann may be right to see a trope disguising illiteracy in such protestations, which occur widely.⁷¹ Whatever the truth may be, Ranoló did not sign in her own hand any of the documents in which she appears, so we do not know if in fact she could write.

Of the background of Abbess Fredeburga, who succeeded Ranoló, nothing is known, and neither did she sign anything that we have in her own hand.⁷² Before her appointment, however, in 961 another member of the comital family, proclaimed as such in her entry gift, had joined the nunnery, a girl called Enquília.⁷³ Her mother's title of countess derived from her marriage to Oliba, second son of Bishop Radulf of Urgell, son of Guifré the Hairy.⁷⁴ Neither Radulf nor Oliba was ever called count, so the title is surprising, but that the comital family were still investing in the house, even if odd bits of the family, is noteworthy.

Enquília is recorded with the forename Riquilda in the 964 exchange documents, and with her appear a number of other new nuns. Of these, we can say nothing else of Bero, Garsenda, and Gualatruda; they do not identifiably recur (and neither does Enquília after this point). Of Sesnanda Llobeta, however, also new in 964, a tale of wider connections can be told. In 1028 a woman called Sesnanda made a substantial donation to the now-canony of Sant Joan of an alod at Ges, in the Vall de Ripoll, which she gave in partnership with her brother Oliba.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Albert, *Abadesses* (n. 3 above), 27–38, and on Ranoló specifically Jaume Marquès i Casanovas, “Domna Ranolón, ilustre dama gerundense de mil años atrás,” *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Gerundenses* 15 (1962): 317–31, accessed 14 September 2016, <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/AnnalsGironins/article/view/53724>.

⁶⁹ See nn. 31 and 37 above.

⁷⁰ CC5 312 (= Marquès, “Domna Ranolón”, ap. 2): “Ranlo, qui pro egritudine scribere non potui, sed digito robravi [*sic*].”

⁷¹ Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire* (n. 7 above), 1:81–83.

⁷² Albert, *Abadesses*, 39–42.

⁷³ CC4 714 (= Condal 132).

⁷⁴ On this branch of the comital family see Manuel Rovira, “Un bisbe d’Urgell del segle X: Radulf,” *Urgellia* 3 (1980): 167–84.

⁷⁵ Comtal 188 (= Sant Joan 20).

An Oliba appears in Sant Joan's documents in 1005 as well, when he pledged, along with several other properties, an alod in Pedrera that he had from Arimany and Llobeta.⁷⁶ He did not there call Llobeta his sister, and it may be that these were his parents and Sesnanda used her mother's name as a surname, but this still indicates that Sesnanda had family connections in the Ges area and that she got lands there in 1017, perhaps because they had previously come to Sant Joan with her. If so, her connection to her family and its land remained active throughout her monastic career, and it was certainly possible for her to reactivate it despite being called a parricide in Rome.

Neither was she the only one. The two other names in the 964 document were El·ló, again, and Guinedilda. Whether or not this El·ló was the one present at the 949 meeting, we can say something about her family and its connections. Even before the dissolution of the nunnery, in 1002, we see her receiving property from her father Asner, the properties being an alod and a manse at a now-lost location in the Vall de Ripoll, Vil·lar d'Ennegó.⁷⁷ The manse's tenant was named; her family were therefore of landlord status at least. El·ló then spent five gold mancuses on further lands in this area in 1015, indicating that she was possessed of substantial independent wealth despite her vows to God and Sant Joan.⁷⁸ Again, as with Belluça, it may be that El·ló was not, for one reason or another, being held strictly to the Benedictine Rule, or it is possible that she had left the convent and was now operating independently as a *deo vota*. Like Sesnanda, however, she retained some kind of tie to the house. In 1028, with the nunnery now a canonry, she bought yet more land at her father's village, and the land that she bought bounded on land belonging to Sant Joan.⁷⁹ Her last recorded act also shows her enduring connection to her erstwhile community, for in 1032 she acted as executor to her fellow former nun, Guinedilda.⁸⁰ Despite the dissolution, Sant Joan received most of Guinedilda's property in this will, some of which was land in Bianyà which she had obtained from a viscountess in 1027 or 1028, when she must have been at least seventy-eight. That bespeaks a certain level of social standing as well as continuing energy, and Martin Aurell suggests,

⁷⁶ Comtal 80 (= Sant Joan 8); he appears in Condal 187 as son of a deacon Guiscafred, otherwise unknown.

⁷⁷ Comtal 62 (= Sant Joan 6). Pladevall, "Monestir de Sant Joan" (n. 3 above), 27, reads this document as an entry-gift, which would mean that this El·ló was unrelated to any previous one. In that case, the 964 appearance would be the last one of the 926 oblate, which is possible. However, the text of this document seems clear that El·ló was a nun already. Pladevall may be assuming that she could not receive goods if this were so, but she did anyway in 1015 (see below); perhaps, like Sesnanda's land at Ges, these were extractable from the nunnery's holdings after 1017 because they were given so recently.

⁷⁸ Comtal 118 (= Sant Joan 12).

⁷⁹ Comtal 187 (= Sant Joan 19).

⁸⁰ Comtal 226.

apparently with some basis, that the nun and the viscountess were in fact sisters, in which case one is surprised that she was not extracted from the nunnery before its wreck.⁸¹ Be that as it may, clearly the life that she and El-ló had shared remained a bond between them.⁸²

This leaves five more nuns of whom something can briefly be said. The name of the first has not made it through to the abstract of her oblation to the nunnery in 966.⁸³ It is therefore possible that she is in fact the same as Espana, a *deo vota* who received a gift from Countess Ermengarda of Cerdanya in 996, although it is also possible that, even though the nunnery preserved the document, Espana was not a nun of Sant Joan. She does not recur.⁸⁴ We know similarly little of Emma, who was given to the nunnery in 1005, although she shows that while some families were already loosening their ties to the house, to others Sant Joan still seemed a good future for their daughters.⁸⁵ A similar deduction can be made from a 1011 document in which Ledgarda, self-identified as a nun of Sant Joan (“I am one handed over to Saint John”), gave an alod at Tresmals, three vineyards whose tenants she names and all that her father Sunifred had held in Vallespir, some distance from the nunnery out towards the coast.⁸⁶ This may have been her entry gift and shows that despite the gathering clouds Sant Joan still looked a safe bet for a wealthy woman. She must have been cruelly disappointed in 1017, if she lived to see it.

The last nun to be named here is of course the last abbess, Ingilberga, whose career has already been summarized.⁸⁷ She was a daughter of Count-Marquis Oliba Cabreta of Besalú (ruled 928–88), but apparently not by his wife, and her membership of the comital family seems to have been insufficiently close to avoid the appeal to Rome which saw her pensioned off to her brother’s castle. She was, however, the last of the community to die, and as said above, she did so in the palace of one of her accusers, which is fitting if a little harrowing.

Leaving aside such sentimental reflections, what does all this tell us about our original enquiry, the status of the apparently literate lay girls who joined the

⁸¹ Miquel dels Sants Gros i Pujol, “L’arxiu del monestir de Sant Joan de les Abadeses: Notícies històriques i regesta dels documents dels anys 995–1115,” in *II Col·loqui d’Història del Monaquisme Català, Sant Joan de les Abadeses 1970*, ed. Eufèmia Fort i Cogul (Poblet, 1974), 2:87–128, ap. 25; Aurell, *Noces du comte*, pp. 198–99.

⁸² Cf. Mary C. Erler, “Religious Women after the Dissolution: Continuing Community,” in *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron*, ed. Matthew Davies and Andrew Prescott, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 16 (Donington, 2008), 135–45. Bonds were not so tight here: note that Abbess Ingilberga was still alive in 1032 but apparently not present at Guinedilda’s obsequies.

⁸³ Unless she actually was called Femina; Condal ap. II 259.

⁸⁴ Comtal 17 (= Sant Joan 2).

⁸⁵ Comtal 81 (= Sant Joan 9).

⁸⁶ Comtal 101 (Sant Joan 11): “sum tradita Sancti Iohannis.”

⁸⁷ See n. 19 above and Albert, *Abadeses* (n. 3 above), 43–50.

community at Sant Joan? Of the twenty-six nuns we can name (or know that we cannot) we can say something substantial about the background of fourteen. Of these, five, Abbess Emma, Abbess Adelaide, Abbess Ranló, Riquilda Enquília, and Abbess Ingilberga, hailed from the comital family, if in the last three cases from minor parts of it. One of the last nuns, Guinedilda, apparently had family who could marry a viscount. The next level down is probably the eldest El-ló, whose father had apparently been a royal vassal. Below this, we might place Belluça, whose father was lord of a castle that belonged to the nunnery, or alternatively Riquilda, whose husband had owned his own warhorse but does not seem to have held any kind of lordship. Sesnanda Llobeta, the youngest El-ló, and Ledgarda all came from families who had tenants, or had them themselves; and Carrissima, Guinedilda, and perhaps Espana, if she was in fact a nun, could all obtain or control reasonable chunks of property. Then, there was the other half of the group of whom we know only their names, if that. Nonetheless, a summary that Sant Joan's community was extensively composed of the independently well off or seigneurially well placed, without much presence of the higher elites of the area except for forgotten branches of the comital family whose members usually became abbess, would not seem inaccurate. If so, these were the people, several far from the top and some not so far from working their own lands, who nonetheless had daughters who could write whom they sent to Sant Joan.

CONCLUSIONS, REPRESENTATION, AND AGENCY

This point about literacy is this article's primary conclusion. Such a pattern has not, as far as I know, been observed elsewhere in this period, but since the key deduction of this chapter is based on a single charter, which can be thus used only because it survives in the original rather than the cartulary into which a longer-lived or larger house might have copied it, it is fair to ask whether if such literacy were in fact common elsewhere, we would now be able to find it.⁸⁸ What these girls' parents thought their daughters would do with their penmanship that made it worth having is a question that goes beyond this article, but we can see all the same that they did, at least in the case of the nuns of 949, and suggest that the others of their background would also have done so, both here and elsewhere.

Regrettably, we can say very little else about what life in this community was like. No manuscripts identifiably survive from Sant Joan's phase as a nunnery with which to do the kind of subtle work that has been done on currents of intellectual and social discourse about female status, theology, or anything else, for

⁸⁸ On cartulary preservation and its implications see Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1996).

example, in early Carolingian communities from Bavaria or the Ottonian convent of Essen.⁸⁹ We cannot reconstruct the nuns' liturgical or monastic practices, diet, or dress without resorting to models from elsewhere that, like the *Institutio sanctimonialium*, may not have applied here.⁹⁰ We do not, especially, know what part the nuns took in the life of the community that had collected around the nunnery, whether there were processions or ceremonies in which they took part and whether they provided medical care or poor relief, all of which might be expected from elsewhere but is simply not the focus of our source material here.⁹¹ We can, however, see that the nuns did not forget the communities from which they had come, may indeed in some cases have returned thither as *deo votae* rather than persist in monastic obedience, and, in at least some cases, either as members of the monastic community or their natal ones, made and kept contacts that could then be exploited the better to secure their position once life in the nunnery was over. To this extent they exercised some control over their own destinies.

To go so far is to say no more than many a scholar of medieval women has said, that the women here studied were often well capable of choosing their actions in such a way as to maximize their own initiative, even in situations in which they were at a disadvantage because of their gender.⁹² It can be questioned, however, whether the term "agency" usefully expresses these opportunities to exercise power over their world. If it does, it does so best at the point when the community

⁸⁹ Respectively Lifshitz, *Religious Women* (n. 34 above); Stofferahn, "Changing Views" (n. 40 above).

⁹⁰ On diet, for example, it would be dangerous to generalize from Michel Rouche, "La faim à l'époque carolingienne: Essai sur quelques types de rations alimentaires," *Revue historique* 250, no. 508 (1973): 295–320, although Jean Verdon, "Notes sur le rôle économique des monastères féminins en France dans la seconde moitié du IX^e et au début du X^e siècle," *Revue Mabillon* 58 (1976): 329–44, did at 332. See now Marta Sancho i Planas, "Recursos alimentaris en el monestir d'època visigoda de Santa Cecília dels Altimiris (Sant Esteve de la Sarga – Pallars Jussà): Primeres aportacions," *Revista d'Arqueologia del Ponent*, 28 (2018): 7–24.

⁹¹ See Felicity Riddy, "Nunneries, Communities and the Revaluation of Domesticity," in Stafford and Mulder-Bakker, *Gendering the Middle Ages* (n. 8 above), 225–32 for references to studies of this kind.

⁹² A perspective taken for this period especially by Garver, *Women* (n. 35 above), 1–20 and passim, but esp. 5: "Elite women created a way of life for themselves through the very constrictions placed upon them." All human beings must do this, however; since we exist in a limited environment, usually subject to social expectations, none of our choices are unconstrained. Vlad Petre Glăveanu, "From Individual Agency to Co-Agency," in *Constraints of Agency: Explorations of Theory in Everyday Life*, ed. Craig W. Gruber et al. (Heidelberg, 2015), DOI: 10.1111/1468-0254.00039, offers a useful way through this impasse, which is known in psychology as the structure/agency debate. Cf. Berman, "How Much Space," or esp. Dana Wessell Lightfoot, *Women, Dowries and Agency: Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Valencia*, *Gender in History* 33 (Manchester, 2013), 6–8, for more nuanced treatments of later evidence.

that these women had joined was dissolving. Unsurprisingly, given that our information is almost entirely documentation of land tenure, we see most agency on the part of the women of Sant Joan once they were free to transact in land on their own account; but that had come to pass because their community had been dissolved by a collusion of powerful men from the pope downwards to the patrons of some of their families, on apparently false but highly gendered charges of outrageous familial and sexual misconduct. That the former nuns were able to rescue any agency from such a situation was due mainly to that collusion's willingness to leave them with the material means to live as independents, once they were no longer an obstacle to the political interests at play.

On the other hand, when the nunnery was powerful enough to resist such pressure from the counts, we can barely see the nuns at all. Although it would be invisible to us, they may have exercised influence on the nunnery's operations, and perhaps even its selection and command of male agents in the outside world, through their abbess and her own staff of men. If so, that was not weakness: the counts were usually represented through male agents, after all.⁹³ It is perhaps necessary, however, to ask whether one can still have agency if one works through agents; to delegate is, after all, in some sense a handing-off of responsibility even if it is also a necessity of power. In this respect, agency and power overlap but are not synonymous.

Clearly the members of this community of women with the most agency, and power too, were the abbesses, even if their options became increasingly constrained over the nunnery's history. Outwith their lordship, however, perhaps the freest action that could be taken by a nun of Sant Joan was to leave the community, and in the two cases where we can suggest that this happened, both women retained important alternative connections to their natal family. Staying in the nunnery meant recognizing the authority of the abbess, including that to speak for her nuns. The abbesses of Sant Joan could mobilize considerable resource and patronage even after the time of Emma, as the program of church dedication in which Carissima uniquely took part shows; but apart from that, their nuns did not join in the nunnery's recorded public actions, except when an unwelcome settlement was being forced upon them by the counts. They were at their most powerful when together but represented by someone else, who was herself represented by someone else in many of her operations. They were at their weakest when they had to act for themselves.

⁹³ Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals and José María Font i Rius, "El régimen político carolingio," in *La España cristiana de los siglos VIII al XI*, volumen II. *Los núcleos pirenaicos (718–1035): Navarra, Aragón, Cataluña*, ed. Manuel Riu i Riu (Madrid, 1999), 427–577 at 492–93; the reason was a legal provision, old but maintained, to limit intimidation by the powerful in court, and in this sense it was also a restriction on agency.

The situation in which the nuns found themselves in 1017, in which those who had retained links in their communities of origin were better placed to renegotiate their position after their chosen community collapsed, shows, however, that there was a middle ground. Taken together, in fact, the nuns of Sant Joan demonstrate how a point of compromise between someone's own agency and that of others can leave that person safer and more successful than pursuing full independence of action. This is, of course, inherent to membership of a community, but it is not always obvious in scholarship on female religious that their choice to be such members meant accepting restriction on all their choices thereafter, even if those restrictions were not always closely applied.⁹⁴

What is now hopefully obvious, however, is these women's access to literacy and the likelihood that this was usual for women in their social milieu in tenth-century Catalonia, even outside religious life. With this established, and some background given to many of the nuns, the study of not just this nunnery but many others of the period may be put on a new footing and stand as an example both of women's participation in early medieval society and the restrictions that powerful men tried to place upon it, as expressed by the signatures of these five women.

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⁹⁴ For example, Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, PA, 1981), 149–74, and Angela Muñoz Fernández, “El monacato [*sic*] como espacio de cultura femenina: A propósito de la Inmaculada Concepción de María y la representación de la sexuación femenina,” in *Pautas históricas de sociabilidad femenina: Rituales y modelos de representación*, ed. M. Gloria Espigado Tocino, Mary Nash, and María José de la Pascua Sánchez (Cadiz, 1999), 71–90, depict the cloister as a space for female agency. Garver, *Women* (n. 35 above), 83, perhaps takes this furthest: her suggestion, “in fact, enclosure can give a certain freedom to religious women,” with reference to n. 66, “Late medieval English women, confined either to the cloister or to certain parts of buildings, may, for example, have found their situations conducive to developing their piety,” could equally be made of prisoners or slaves, but would normally not be (though E. E. Cummings, *The Enormous Room* [New York, 1922], from the perspective of the prisoner, esp. pp. 58–97, shows how it could be). Naturally one can make a choice to abdicate agency, but one therefore then has it no longer.