

Stripes of Blood and the Black Monks of St Peter of Rhodes

*The Rise and Fall of the Benedictine Abbey of Sant Pere de Rodes,
described in the context of the comtat d' Empúries and the history
of the empire of Catalonia-Aragon*

Part One: The Rise

THE Catalan poet and priest Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902) once put into literary form the medieval account of the origin of the Catalan flag in *Les Barres de Sang* (Stripes of Blood), a reference to the flag's four vertical red bands on an escutcheon of ochre. According to this traditional account, Guifré I el Pelós, count of Barcelona, answers a plea from Emperor Karolus II Calbus to help him rid West Francia - given him by the Treaty of Verdun in August 843 - of the invading Northmen. Guifré obeys and plays a decisive role in helping to defeat the emperor's enemies; unfortunately, almost the last enemy arrow of the battle strikes him close to the heart. Guifré, mortally wounded, is carried to a captured tent where the emperor visits him as soon as he hears the news:

“Do not have fear, good count, my physician will be here at any moment”.

“No”, Guifré replied quietly, “for I do not feel the pain of my wound, only that of honour, since on this battle-field there were no flowers for my shield”.

“Well,” said the mighty king, “though your shield may be without them, your breast is red with many”.

At hearing these words, Guifré placed the fingers of his right hand into his wound, and then slowly passed them down the length of his golden shield ... and he spoke once more to the king:

“My heartfelt gratitude, O king of Francia; my heartfelt gratitude, O emperor. If I am unable to return one day to see you, then let Catalonia and Aragon be the testament I send you with the blood of my heart. Engrave it on all my castle towers, and embroider it on all my banners to carry it with pride to all the corners of the world. O root of all our counts, God will not allow you to be uprooted, and you will be the bearer of the Catalan stripes. Great provinces shall await them, to engrave them on their brows, as Spaniards will on their arms and Catalans their hearts”.

Karolus Calbus assented to his dying vassal's last request, and the Catalan flag and the history of its people were born.

Or so it was for the medieval Catalan romancers who originally contrived this account, as indeed it was for those like Verdaguer who were participating in the nineteenth-century *Renaixença*, attempting to recover the historical and cultural identity of Catalonia in order to infuse Catalans with national pride. But the truth was somewhat different. Guifré el Pelós died on 11 August 897 after suffering a severe defeat by Llop ibn Muhammad ibn Llop (*d.* 908), the governor of Lleida, who temporarily captured Barcelona. Karolus Calbus, whose forty-five-year misrule saw the effective disappearance of Carolingian imperial authority, had been dead for twenty years; not from the results of any heroic battle, but probably murder, on 6 October 877, at Brides-les-Bains by his own troops

while returning from Italy. The true origins of Catalonia must be sought in the early ninth century, while those of its distinctive flag will probably never be known for certain.

By 718, the Muslim invasion of the Hispanic peninsula had reached its greatest extent, occupying the entire region south of the Pyrenees. Successful attempts to regain the peninsula for Christendom began in Asturias in the same year with minor victories by local chieftains, but it was not until Karolus Magnus (742-814) that the invaders were seriously threatened. In 778, Charlemagne - as Karolus became better known - led a disastrous expedition against 'Abd-al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya ibn Hisham (*d.* 788) and the forces of Saragossa, taking and then losing Barcelona and Girona before making good his escape back across the mountains after his famous defeat by the Navarrese at the Pass of Roncesvalles. This experience determined him to re-establish a strong foothold south of the range that his father, Pipinus III Humilis (715-68), and grandfather, Karolus Martellus (688-741), had sought to maintain.

In 785, his plans were helped when a Catalan insurrection freed Girona, and when Charlemagne's sole surviving son, Ludovicus I Pius (778-840), king of Aquitaine, successfully besieged and entered Barcelona on 4 April 801, the real history of Catalonia began. Rostany (*d.* 812), probably one of Charlemagne's visigothic vassals, was already count of Girona since the insurrection of 785. The March was organised by Charlemagne in 812, with the help of his cousin Guillem I de Tolosa (768-812): Berà (*d.* 820), Guillem's eldest son, who had helped take Barcelona, was appointed its first count and confirmed in his position; Gaucelm (*d.* 834), Guillem's son by a second marriage, succeeded his father's remote governorship of the Roussillon, which had been freed from Muslim control in 759, as first count; the visigoth Bel-ló - grandfather of Guifré el Pelós - had been appointed first count of Carcassonne in about 800, and although little is known about him, he was either confirmed as such in 812, or succeeded by his son Guiscafred; Odiló (*d.* 812) was appointed to succeed Rostany; and Ermenguer (*d.* 813), a native of Ampurias, was made its first count. There were three further confirmations: Adémar as viscount in the tripartite lordship of Narbonne (ruled by a bishop, viscount, and the Jewish community in equal measure); Erlí as count of Besiers; and Laibulf as count of Arles and Provence.

After Count Odiló's death, Berà assumed his authority, while the following year Count Gaucelm did the same when Ermenguer d'Empúries died. Although these absorbed districts retained considerable independence, the moves resulted in the territorial origins of the Girona-Barcelona and Rosselló-Empúries regions - now known collectively as Septimania - that were to become the foundation of the Catalan nation.

Meanwhile, perched on a step cut into the side of the foothills of the Pyrenees, 520 metres above sea level on the southernmost extremity of the Gulf of Lion, a hermitage dedicated to Peter the Apostle allegedly already had a considerable history by the time Charlemagne was arranging the March. Precisely how considerable is disputable, since the origins of the abbey of Sant Pere de Rodes are probably as legendary as those of the Catalan flag. In 1606, the Catalan antiquary Jeroni Pujades (1568-1635) visited it and examined its still extensive archives, discovering a medieval manuscript (no longer extant) titled *Especulum Sancti Petri Rodensis* that purported to relate the abbey's foundation. It

stated that in the early seventh century, Pope Boniface IV (*r.* 608-15) hastily convened a council of those bishops who happened to be in Rome in order to determine how best to save their holy relics from the “admiral of Babylonia”, who was threatening the Italic peninsula at the time.

The council decided that the head and right arm of Peter the Apostle, along with the remains of the martyrs Concordius, Lucidius, and Moderandus, as well as some other relics, should be entrusted to three monks – Felix, Pontius, and Epicinius – who would take them by ship from the Tiber to any distant land where they could be secreted until their safety in Rome could be guaranteed. The ship duly set sail with its precious cargo, eventually coming across a secluded cove in the Gulf of Lion where the three monks discovered a little hermitage erected by Paulus Sergius who, according to a parallel tradition, had accompanied Paul the Apostle across the mountains to Tarragona, where he was appointed bishop of Narbonne. Believing this to be a secure location, the monks deposited the holy remains inside, burying them beneath the altar before leaving. However, when they returned to retrieve them several weeks later, they could no longer remember exactly where the cove was, and rather than return to Rome empty-handed to suffer the rage of the pope, they remained wandering the area until their deaths. However, the story was spread by the crew, the hermitage was eventually found, and the great abbey built on top of it, with the sacred relics becoming part of the High Altar.

Some aspects of this foundation legend are rooted in fact. In 610, the Persian Sasanid, Khosrau II Parviz (590-628), was threatening the Italic peninsula in a revenge war against Rome after the assassination of the Byzantine emperor, Mauricius Flavius Tiberius, in 602 – the man who had restored him to his throne in 591 after a period of exile. Khosrau was not named in the manuscript, but fits the description of the “admiral of Babylonia”. Pujades was a talented observer with a highly developed critical historiographical method, and although he dismissed as pure fancy many historical legends in his writings, this foundation account was not among them.

Unfortunately for supporters of this ingenious and attractive story, there is another claiming precedence. It states that a Roman temple dedicated to the famous “Pyrenean Venus” was Christianized and re-dedicated after the arrival of a piece of the True Cross to the region (occasionally in the same manner as St Peter), since when the ancient toponym *Cap de Venus Pirinaica* became the present *Cap de Creus*, while the church and town of Santa Creu de Rodes were established and dedicated to St Helena (*c.* 255-330), the supposed founder of the relic. A temple in this region dedicated to Venus was mentioned by Strabo of Amasya (*d. c.* 20) in *Geographia*, Pomponius Mela (*d. c.* 50) in *Chorographia*, Gaius Plinius Secundus (23-79) in *Historiae Naturalis*, and Claudius Ptolemaeus (*d. c.* 151) in *Geographike Huphegesis*. However, the remains of this temple have not been found, thereby lending circumstantial veracity to the account for those who assume it to be buried deep under the present structure; but others believe that it was further north near Vallespir – formerly *Portus Veneris* – now in France, and that the monastic association is retrospective, contrived to explain a toponymic alteration.

One less fabulous suggestion has been put forward. In 780, an obscure abbot from the interior of the peninsula named Atala arrived with his flock, having abandoned his

monastery in 778 after Charlemagne's failed invasion, due to the reprisals he had endured afterwards. Among this flock was a young oblate named Agobard (769-840), who would subsequently become bishop of Lyon and counsellor to Ludovicus Pius. His intention was to found a new monastery for himself on the plains of Ampurias (site of an independent Greek colony fourteen centuries earlier), but the political situation was still too unstable, so he was forced to leave. However, he first restored four visigothic hermitages: Sant Cebrià de Pineda, Sant Fructuós, Sant Joan ses Closes, and Sant Pere. This last has been identified with the subsequent Sant Pere de Rodes. Interestingly, these four cells had been found by Atala, and were in a parlous state; he had not built them, so their foundation dates are still conjectural.

Straight away there was a dispute over the ownership of these four cells between the abbots of Sant Policarp de Rasés and Sant Esteve de Banyoles, with Karolus Calbus becoming involved, adjudicating in favour of Banyoles in the Spring of 870. The earliest documentary evidence for the monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes refers to that simple hermitage, when in September 878 Ludovicus II Balbus (846-79), king of Francia Occidentalis, confirmed his father's ruling at Troyes. But it is not until 926 that any documented reference to building work at the hermitage exists. A local landowner named Tassi established himself as its principle benefactor when he made over to it most of his land and personal property, also undertaking to enlarge the building. Tassi's second wife, Hisblanda, then died and he became prior of the cell, and began to press for its independence from Banyoles.

This was not achieved easily, and not finally granted to Tassi until 943, confirmed the following year by Ludovicus IV d'Outremer (921-54), king of Francia, at Laon. This was with the consent of Count Gausfred I d'Empúries-Rosselló (c. 910-91), in whose territory the house lay, and Count Sunifred II de Cerdanya (915-68) on behalf of his elder brother, Count Guifré II de Besalú (d. 957), in whose territory Banyoles lay, whom he would succeed. However, the monastery of Sant Esteve de Banyoles contested the decision, in spite of the fact that Gotmar, bishop of Girona, had given it his blessing, and continued to defy Tassi. Tassi paid them scant attention, and by 947 had succeeded in having his son Hildesind (d. 991) appointed as first abbot, confirmed, along with all previous privileges, at Reims the following year on 29 September. After a mutually satisfactory arrangement, the abbot of Banyoles agreed to relinquish his rights to what was referred to as the *monasterium beati Apostolorum principis Petri situm in loco qui dicitur Rodas*.

In the middle of the tenth century, Catalan counts increased contact with Rome as a step towards international recognition. In December 951, a party led by Count Sunifred de Cerdanya and Guiscad, bishop of Urgell, set out to obtain bulls from Pope Agapetus II (r. 946-55). Also in the party were several abbots, noblemen, and Tassi, who obtained papal confirmation for his new monastery. The monastery owed a great deal to this indefatigable Christian, and when he died on 26 January 955 he was interred with all due honour in the basilica he had built.

In August 968, a gathering of important secular and ecclesiastical figures at the abbey resolved a dispute between Abbot Hildesind and a local landowner named Adalbert over

fishing rights in the region. This record is important because the identity of those present attests to the status so soon enjoyed by Sant Pere de Rodes: Gausfred d'Empúries-Rosselló; his son Sunyer, bishop of Elna (*d.* 978); Arnulf, bishop of Girona; and viscounts Auruco de Rosselló and Adalbert d'Empúries. In addition, because the outcome of the debate favoured Hildesind, the monks were able to cultivate a stable income for themselves for the first time, providing enough funds for Hildesind to continue expanding the abbey.

Count Gausfred, whose sixty-year rule was both pacific and prudent, became the first comtal protector and benefactor of the abbey, helping Hildesind with his plans, and to him can probably be attributed the twenty-seven metre *Torre de l'Homenatge* (Homage Tower). In January 974, he made over to the *domum sancti Petri coenobii quod dicitur Rodas* a vast tract of land – the most significant the abbey would ever receive – that extended from beyond the mountain and valley of the *Serra de Rodes* to the shore-line of *Armi-rodas* (now Port de la Selva). This gift included many of the churches, abbeys, and castles already on the land, as well as all the fishing, forestry, and gaming rights. Within one generation and a half, Sant Pere de Rodes had grown from a dependent cell to a flourishing and important abbey, with its own collection of dependencies. Hildesind immediately consolidated this windfall by obtaining a new bull from Pope Benedict VI (*r.* 973-74) in April of the same year, one that contained still further privileges, including confirmation of Hildesind's elevation to the episcopacy as bishop of Elna, succeeding Sunyer.

Spiritually too the abbey was growing rapidly in prestige. In 979, Pope Benedict VII (*r.* 974-83) issued a bull to the effect that any pilgrim unable to travel to Rome for reasons of infirmity or pressing matters of state could venerate instead the relics of St Peter at Rodes and obtain the same remission of sins. The abbey's history as one of medieval Europe's great centres of pilgrimage dates from this bull, and the infirmary and pilgrim's quarters, situated some fifty metres from the abbey, also date from this period. In 982 Hildesind obtained a precept of confirmation from Lotarius (941-86), king of Francia, at Boussac, for Benedict VI's privileges. In February 990, he travelled to Rome again, obtaining further full confirmation and some minor privileges from Pope John XV (*r.* 985-96).

Count Gausfred and Abbot Hildesind died within a few months of each other. Both men had been the greatest friends of the abbey for almost half a century and had respected and admired one another; their example of abbatial-comtal symbiosis, so important to the welfare of the abbey, would not often be repeated. Gausfred had moved the seat of the county of Ampurias to the small town of Castelló d'Empúries, and before his death divided his jurisdiction between his two sons. Hug I (965-1040) was given Ampurias and Peralada, and Guislabert I (*d.* 1014) the Roussillon.

A period of rapid changes in the abbatial seat resulted in the steady worsening of the relationship between abbot and count, and in 1021 Abbot Pere (*r.* 1008-30) was obliged to obtain a letter of admonition from Pope Benedict VIII (*r.* 1012-24) against Hug that threatened to excommunicate him and his vassals should the violation of the abbey's rights continue. Hug had given a considerable donation to the abbey in November 1008,

and then again in 1014; he had also been instrumental in getting Pere promoted as abbot. But Hug attempted to reunite the counties on his brother's death, against the wishes of his nephew and successor, Gausfred II (*d.* 1074). In the ensuing struggle Hug seized the tenth-century castle of Verdera, one of the fortifications made over to Hildesind by Gausfred I, situated a further 150 metres up from the abbey.

Meanwhile, the chapel of Sant Miquel and the shorter north tower were consecrated in October 1022, a date known, since most of the ecclesiastical dignitaries invited to attend refused on account of the problems, and had to state this on parchment. The antagonism between Hug and Pere was resolved in 1023 through the intervention of Oliba (971-1046), the celebrated Cluniac scholar, bishop of Vic, and abbot of Sant Miquel de Cuixà and the great house of Santa Maria de Ripoll, and one of the few ecclesiastics present at the consecration. He also happened to be the uncle of Count Guillem I el Gras de Besalú (*d.* 1052), one of the principle nobles inculpated in Abbot Pere's supplication to Rome. Pere's last major act as abbot was to purchase for *beato Petro Apostolo coenobii Rodensis* a large tract of land from Hug I and Gausfred II, roughly equivalent to present-day Cadaqués, for four ounces of gold. The land came with fountains, mills, woods, fishing rights, and some properties; more importantly, it meant that the entire coast from Cap Ras in the north to Cap de Norfeu in the south now belonged to the abbey.

The eleventh century was, on the whole, the great period of legal consolidation and material construction. Under abbots Pere Dalmau (*r.* 1040-72), Guillem (*r.* 1072-84), Guiscafred (*r.* 1085-88), and Macfred (*r.* 1088-96), the bell tower was constructed, the three naves and transept, the two porches, and the extensive cellars. Count Hug's successor, Ponç I (990-1078), was very different from his father, who had died shortly after Pere Dalmau's election. Ponç created the see of Castelló d'Empúries, converting the existing church of Santa Maria de Castelló (1007) into a cathedral (1067). The comtal-abbatial relationship had improved to the extent that, in April 1044, Pere Dalmau could successfully petition Ponç I concerning the seizure of viticulture rights near the castle of Miralles, granted to the abbey by Gausfred I.

In 1053, the abbey acquired another important gift of land. Bernat, bishop of Besiers, with the concurrence of his extensive and influential family, gave *ad domum sancti Petri Rodensis* two properties in the county of Toulouse: the castle of Foix with its lands, and half of a vinyard the abbey would own in conjunction with Count Roger I of Foix (*d.* 1064), the first independent count. The county of Foix was bounded by the Languedoc on the north and east, by the counts of Roussillon and the kings of Aragon on the south, and the counts of Comminges and of Armagnac on the west, corresponding approximately to the modern *department* of Ariège. This gift, then, for the first time extended the abbey's holdings across the Pyrenees. The abbey now experienced a period of peace. Hug II d'Empúries-Peralada (1035-1116) consolidated his father's pacific policies by reaching an accord (1085) with Guislabert II de Rosselló (*r.* 1074-1102), befriending the abbey and marking the apogee of a period in which the relationship between Gausfred I and Hildesind was very nearly matched.

A few years earlier, in November 1080, an interesting incident had occurred when Abbot Guillem presided over a trial by ordeal at the church of Sant Feliu de Villajuiga, a

village on the plain a short ride from the abbey, in which a family had been accused of theft. Those accused – Arsendis Argani (possibly widowed) and her son Bernat – were made to fast for three days before attending mass. A cauldron of blessed water – according to Hincmar (806-82), archbishop of Reims, representative of the Flood in which only the virtuous had escaped destruction – was brought to the boil in the nave. This was a single ordeal for a relatively minor offence, so the accused plunged only their right hands into the cauldron for a few seconds. These were then bound up and closed with Guillem’s seal to ensure that there would be no tampering. After a further three days the hands were unbandaged. Abbot Guillem observed that “*tunc sigillo iuducis sicut constitutum est sigillata manu, post tertia die apparuit manus eius husta*”, and he appealed to Count Hug for sentencing. The count, abbot, and judges reconvened at the church of Sant Grau d’Estanyol, and the accused were proclaimed forfeit of all their property rights. This incident was unremarkable in an age when trial by ordeal was commonplace, but what is important here is that the property – a small (but not worthless) house and grounds in the village of Canyelles on the coast - was given over to the abbey. The process of ecclesiastical acquisition could take many forms.

In 1088, Pope Urban II (*r.* 1088-99) issued an important bull at Orvieto, further enhancing the spiritual authority of Sant Pere de Rodes by granting indulgences to pilgrims attending mass and venerating the sacred relics on the feasts of St Peter, St Felix, the Resurrection, and all the days of the Holy Cross. In addition, a special jubilee of eight days was instituted, following each feast of the Cross in May when this fell on a Friday. Visits to Sant Pere de Rodes on these occasions enjoined the same spiritual privileges as pilgrimages to Rome during the later Jubilee Years. By 1100, only Santiago de Compostella was a greater centre for public spiritual activity in the western Mediterranean basin or southwest Europe.

Although the comtal reign of Ponç I was pacific and progressive, some of his decisions laid the foundations for future conflict and instability. In 1065, he swore fealty, for himself and his heirs, to Ramon Berenguer I el Vell (1023-76), count of Barcelona, Girona, and Osona, already far and away the most powerful of the proto-Catalan counts, and soon to also become count of Carcassonne and of Rasés. Not all his heirs would approve of this arrangement. In addition, and like so many rulers who had two sons, he divided his lands before his death. His eldest son Hug succeeded him in Ampurias, while the viscounty of Peralada, formerly a fiefdom but for a century also held by the count, was again sequestered and given to his younger son Berenguer (*d.* 1098), along with the concomitant lordship of Rocabertí, a castle and district deep in the mountains high on a granite peak. This would acquire its own important history when Berenguer’s son, Dalmau Berenguer (*d.* 1131), abandoned the viscounty of Peralada and set himself up as Dalmau I, vescomte de Rocabertí, in about 1109, subsequently adopting the name of the castle as his patronymic.

The precise order of events during the decline in the northeastern nobility is still not entirely clear. Dalmau’s son, Berenguer Renard, died shortly after his father, having resurrected the title of viscount of Peralada but dying without issue. His younger brother, Jofre I de Rocabertí (*d.* 1166), abandoned it again, styling himself viscount of Rocabertí,

Carmençó, and Ceret. He allied himself with Ramon Berenguer IV el Sant (1113-62), count of Barcelona, in 1138, and Count Gausfred III de Rosselló (1113-64) in 1147, then waged open war against Count Ponç II (Ponç-Hug I) d'Empúries (*r.* 1116-54). Ponç, meanwhile, had been at war with Barcelona for years over the issue of overlordship established by his grandfather. In addition, he was involved in a protracted dispute with the see of Girona over its primacy respecting the see established by him in 1067.

Barcelona had struggled to maintain its precarious independence since the days of Berà, establishing hereditary comital rule independent of imperial vassalage by Guifré el Pelós in 878. He may not have run his bloody fingers down a shield, but he was certainly the progenitor of most of the early counties of Catalonia - including Barcelona. But it was only with the vigorous rule of Ramon Berenguer I – Guifré's fifth direct descendant - that Barcelona began to dominate affairs in the northeast of the peninsula.

If dividing lands between two sons rarely worked so neither did the alternate solution of joint rule. Ramon Berenguer II Cap d'Estopes (1053-82) ruled his father's territories with his marginally younger brother Berenguer Ramon II (1052-97). Rows were legion and bitter, eventually resolved on 5 December 1082 when Ramon Berenguer II was assassinated, presumably at the orders of his brother, who ever since has been known by the epithet "el Fratricida". The accusation led to an ecclesiastical ruling, supported by most of the nobility, in 1086, that Berenguer Ramon could never marry and that his sole nephew should become sole heir on attaining his majority (15 years). Berenguer Ramon accepted the conditions, assumed responsibility for his brother's heir, and surrendered his rule in 1097. He then submitted himself to trial by combat presided over by Alfonso VI (1042-1109), king of Castille and León, which he lost, dying in Jerusalem on 20 June, where he had been sent as penance for his crime.

This turmoil settled with the rule of Ramon Berenguer III el Gran (1082-1131), who concentrated on reclaiming land taken by the Muslims and in 1098 consolidated this by marrying Maria Rodrigo de Vivar (*d.* 1104), one of the twin daughters of Rodrigo Díaz (1044-99), better known as *El Campeador*, or *El Cid*. Through her inheritance, established by *El Cid*, Barcelona extended its territories south to Valencia and Tarragona. In 1111 Ramon Berenguer III acquired the county of Besalú on the death of Bernat III, his son-in-law; in 1112 he married Dolça de Provença (1095-1128), whose father died without male issue, enabling Barcelona to acquire Provence the following year; Count Bernat I de Cerdanya, another relative, died in 1117 without issue, and this county also passed to Barcelona. Now the undisputed leading figure among the Catalans, Ramon Berenguer endowed Oleguer (1060-1137), bishop of Barcelona, with the city of Tarragona in 1118 when Pope Gelasius II (*r.* 1118-19) raised the see to an archbishopric, as it had once been, thereby relieving Barcelona of its dependency on the archbishopric of Narbonne, a process initiated in 1091 when Berenguer Sunifred de Lluçà (*d.* 1099), bishop of Vic, temporarily restored the metropolitan diocese of Tarragona. On the death of Ramon Berenguer III, the inheritance was divided. Ramon Berenguer IV was given all the Catalan territories, while the younger Berenguer Ramon (*d.* 1144) was endowed with Provence and its associated holdings.

It was during the reign of Ramon Berenguer IV that the single most significant event for the future of Catalonia took place – one that influenced the subsequent history of Spain. Aragon had had a proud if unusual history, being a constitutional kingdom brought into existence by a testamentary act of Sanç III Garcés (992-1035), king of Navarre, who had established Navarrese hegemony over all the Christian states in the peninsula other than in Catalonia, though he was accepted there as *Imperator totus Hispaniae*. However, he dismembered his empire at his death, distributing the feudal kingdoms among his four sons, giving the county of Aragon to his third (bastard) son Ramir (*d.* 1063), elevating it to a kingdom, to which Ramir soon added the old eastern Frankish counties of Sobrarbe and Ribagorça. His descendant, Alfons I el Bataller, died in September 1134 without issue after conquering Saragossa (1118) and Tarazona (1119). The only surviving member of the dynasty was another Ramir (*d.* 1157), a much younger brother who had entered the monastery of Sant Ponç de Tomeres in the Languedoc in 1093. He was immediately elected to the Aragonese throne and quietly left his monastery.

Meanwhile, Garcia V Ramires el Restorador (*d.* 1150), king of Navarre, and grandson of *El Cid* by his other twin daughter Cristina, broke the union of Aragon and Navarre by declaring himself a vassal of Alfonso VII (1104-57), king of Castille and León. Aragonese nobles rebelled against Ramir II, expelling him in the autumn of 1135, but he soon quelled this uprising with the help of Ramon Berenguer IV. Early in 1136, Ramir married Agnès de Poitou, but this union resulted in one daughter only, named Peronella (1136-73). Tired of secular life and politics, Ramir abdicated in her favour in August 1137 and returned to his monastery, but not until he had betrothed her to his Catalan ally. Ramon Berenguer married Peronella in August 1150 and then governed the effectively unified lands as count, expelling the last Muslims from the region in 1153. After his death, Peronella ruled for two years before formally renouncing her Aragonese crown to their son. Alfons I el Cast i el Trobador (1152-96) was then confirmed as first king of the unified crown of Catalonia-Aragon by an assembly of Catalan and Aragonese nobles and ecclesiastics at Osca.

Catalonia now became a force to be reckoned with, both in the peninsula and abroad. Alone of all the medieval Hispanic states, Catalonia had a unified legal system, known as the *Usatges de Barcelona*, a compendium of 174 consuetudes brought into line with feudal practice, and first referred to in this new form in 1173. Also uniquely, Catalonia was solidly founded on modes of production inherited from its Roman and Greek past, one that had not penetrated the Iberian interior, and Barcelona would remain the principal European slave market – chiefly Muslim – until 1766. Catalonia had a further intrinsic advantage over any other Hispanic state, being geographically ideally situated to push for an eastern empire – the only feasible direction to go before the complete unification of the peninsula. But the time for this was not yet right. In 1114 Ramon Berenguer III had wrested the Balearic Islands from Mubār Nasir al-Dawlā (*r.* 1094-1115) with the aid of the city state of Pisa, but he was not yet strong enough to hold them, and within two years the Muslims had wrested it back.

In spite of the difficulties with the count of Ampurias, Ramon Berenguer III bequeathed two farms in Palafrugell to the abbey of Sant Pere de Rodes in 1131, provided that the monks included him in their daily litany for the benefit of his soul. At about the

same time, Abbot Deodat (*r.* 1118-38) obtained two more papal bulls, one from Callixtus II (*r.* 1119-24), and the other from Innocent II (*r.* 1130-43). The conflict between Ampurias and Barcelona did not evaporate after 1150, and Ponç II threatened to leave his heirs a war with the kingdom of Catalonia-Aragon. Fortunately, his son and successor, Hug III (*d.* 1173), restored stability to the county by not pursuing his father's fractious policies. However, the county was now almost bankrupt, and the abbatial lands had suffered badly during the protracted conflict. The situation was so grave that, in April 1185, Ponç III (Ponç Hug II) d'Empúries (1135-1200) had to sign a document, in the presence of Abbot Berenguer (*r.* 1150-91), solemnly promising to neither harm nor allow to be harmed the abbey, its vassals, or any of its holdings. This he willingly did, however, as he had become the self-styled protector of the Knights Templars (introduced into Catalonia by Ramon Berenguer IV), and consciously attempted to institute a pacific and pious reign, which on the whole he did.

But there was more trouble to come. In 1193, the district suffered a series of natural calamities that encouraged belief in the imminent End of All Things. There were severe storms, local flooding, and unusual weather variations resulting in the loss of the harvest. In addition, there was an outbreak of the plague, and it is said that fire rained in Ampurias and blood came down in Cervera. But this general period also saw the completion of the new cloisters, of forty-four columns and eight pillars, as well as the series of marble and stone sculptures by the renowned Master of Cabestany, among the finest produced anywhere in the world. By 1213, the restructured main basilica was finally completed, and Abbot Bernat d'Avinyonet (*r.* 1208-23) translated the remains of Tassi and Hildesind from the aisles to behind the new High Altar. He obtained two more papal bulls, from Innocent III (*r.* 1119-1216) in 1216, and Honorius III (*r.* 1216-27) in 1217, approving this translation and all the abbey's recent material acquisitions.

Bernat was possibly active in the reconquest of the Balearics, initiated by Ferdinand III el Sant (1201-52), king of Castille-León, and successfully conducted by Jaume I el Conqueridor (1208-76), king of Catalonia-Aragon, between 1229 and 1235. Some of the abbot's villeins were certainly permitted to leave abbey lands and set up new communities on the islands, as with Santa Creu on Mallorca. Whether Bernat supplied this phase of the *Reconquista* with funds and supplies is not known, but the likelihood is that he did. At any rate, the achievements of this mercurial king marked the true origins of the Catalano-Aragonese empire. Jaume I took the entire province of Valencia from Muslim control between 1232 and 1245, establishing a definitive principality there, as well as a kingdom in the Balearics, politically independent but subordinate to the crown. The comtal territories of Roussillon and Cerdanya, and the senyoria de Montpellier, a feudal territory centred on the town, were absorbed into the crown. On Jaume I's death, Mallorca was converted into an independent kingdom, to which his second son succeeded as Jaume II (1243-1311), who also gained the senyoria de Montpellier.

In the 1270s, Count Hug V d'Empúries (1240-77) again severed relations with the unified crowns, so that between January 1273 and June 1275, at the petitioning of Abbot Ramon (*r.* 1252-92), Sant Pere de Rodes had to be placed under the personal protection of the king, who granted it further lands and privileges, confirmed at Rome by Pope

Gregory X (*r.* 1271-76). The extraordinary differences so often observed between father and son in this county became manifest again when Ponç V (Ponç Hug IV) d'Empúries (1264-1313) also reversed his predecessor's policies, becoming a friend to Sant Pere de Rodes. In September 1282, he granted the monastery the right to found its own town in the parish of Sant Julià de Fortià, or some other if preferred, and although this settlement has not been conclusively identified, there is no reason to suppose that it is not to be found. In such a case, at any rate, the taxable revenues from the entire town would have gone to the abbey.

In the late afternoon of 30 March 1282, the bells of the church of the Holy Spirit in Palermo, Sicily, rang for vespers, being also the signal for the general revolt of the Sicilian people against Charles I d'Anjou (1227-85), who had been invested with the crown of Naples and Sicily in 1265. The insurrection was successful, and Pere II el Gran (1240-85), king of Catalonia-Aragon, who happened to be nearby throughout the summer, was called on by the Sicilians to assume the lower crown, which he did in September. There was more than just coincidence in this, however: Pere II had married Costanza II di Sicilia (1247-1302) in 1262 – the daughter of King Manfred (1232-66), killed in battle by Charles d'Anjou, who then executed her cousin, Konradin von Swabia (1252-68), the last of the Hohenstaufens.

Pope Martin IV (*r.* 1281-85) had been pressing for French domination of the Mediterranean since his election. In November 1282, he excommunicated Pere II, and the following March deposed him from all his holdings. Philippe III le Hardi (1245-85), king of France, was supported by most French ecclesiastics in what became a “crusade” to oust Pere II from all his territories, initiated by Martin IV in February 1284, who promised Aragon to Philippe's second son, Charles de Valois (1270-1325), once Pere II had been removed. Philippe advanced with his army into the Roussillon in May 1285, then crossed the Pyrenees in June, at a point just north of Sant Pere de Rodes, capturing the castle of Verdera – now known as Sant Salvador de Verdera – in July. From there he made considerable ingress into Catalan lands at several key points, destroying the viscomtal palace at Peralada, seizing Girona in September, and occupying the Gulf of Roses for a total of six months. Two years earlier, Ponç V had rebuilt the castle, and negotiated from the abbot a three-year lease, but had not had time to garrison it, and Philippe III found it finished, comfortable, and empty. Pere II, meanwhile, had been hampered by an Aragonese coterie of nobles and communes that in 1283 had obliged him to accept a restrictive “charter of liberties”, reflecting continued Aragonese opposition to the union of 1137, and none outside Catalonia came to his aid.

The cost of this “crusade” to Philippe III in money terms alone was estimated at 1,229,000 livres tournois. But after the general capitulation, an epidemic (malaria and dysentery) decimated the occupying French forces. Catalans attributed this to a special divine mosquito, released from the sepulchre of the semi-legendary fourth-century bishop and martyr St Narcissus of Girona, which the French had shattered in an act of wilful desecration – perhaps the first genuine case of a “cursed tomb” legend. A severe defeat at sea off Cap Roig about fifty kilometres south of Sant Pere de Rodes, in the battle of Les Illes Formigues (August), by the celebrated admiral of the Catalan fleet Roger de Lloria

(1250-1305), and another on land at Coll de Panissars (30 September to 1 October), forced Philippe III to retreat across the Pyrenees to Perpignan, where he died, exhausted and sick, on 5 October.

Martin IV's successor in Rome, Honorius IV (*r.* 1285-87), wished to pursue the "crusade" against Catalonia-Aragon, but Philippe IV le Bel (1268-1314), who had always disapproved of his father's pro-papal policy, cancelled it and made peace with Alfons II el Liberal (1265-91), king of Catalonia-Aragon, who had succeeded Pere II on the mainland while his younger brother, Jaume (1267-1327), acquired Sicily. At his coronation in February 1286 Jaume I was automatically excommunicated by Honorius V. But there was little the papacy could do, and when Charles d'Anjou's son, Charles (1254-1309) – who had been captured by Admiral Lloria – renounced his claim to Sicily in exchange for his freedom in October 1288, Franco-Papal ambitions in the Mediterranean were shattered.

The unified crown of Catalonia-Aragon was now able to extend its influence, incorporating Sicily and the two islands of Malta and Gozzo that Admiral Lloria had taken in 1283. The Angevin dukes of Naples, who had always been vassals to the kings of Sicily, found themselves in an awkward feudal position, and such was the strength of opposition to Catalan control that a peace had to be negotiated by the treaty of Anagni, 24 June 1295, held to sort out the tangled results of the "Sicilian Vespers". It was presided over by Pope Boniface VIII (*r.* 1294-1303), Philippe IV, ambassadors of Jaume I of Sicily – who had inherited the mainland as Jaume II el Just on the death of his brother and had not renounced the crown of Sicily according to his brother's will – and Charles II le Boiteux. This was Charles d'Anjou's son, who had been invested with the kingdom of Naples on 29 May 1289 by Pope Nicholas IV (*r.* 1288-92) in the hope that another assault against Sicily could be made. Jaume II, under considerable pressure, agreed to cede Sicily to the church, but the spirited Sicilians did not agree to being thus abandoned and deposed Jaume II, electing as king his other brother, who ruled as Frederic II (1272-1337). The mess created by one treaty had to be resolved by a second, done at Caltabellotta on 31 August 1302, by which Frederic would hold Sicily until his death, when it would devolve to Charles or his heirs.

But on the mainland another problem was worrying certain reflective individuals. How had Philippe III been able to find his way through the convoluted mountain passes north of Sant Pere de Rodes so swiftly and without detection? How was it that he found a conveniently empty castle belonging to the abbot where he could make a base for himself? Suspicion fell on Abbot Ramon. Unfortunately, the two principle Catalan chronicles of the period do not agree on his complicity, though both are quite adamant that some Catalan abbots and monks betrayed their countrymen by revealing mountain passes to the king of France. Bernat Desclot (*fl.* 1283-88) stated in his *Libre del Rey en Pere d'Arago e dels seus antecessors passats* (Cap.cxlvi "How the French entered into Catalonia through a dangerous pass which is situated beyond the town of Peralada") that the abbot of Sant Pere de Rodes (who was not named), and a knight he identified as "Guillem de Pau", joined Philippe III in France on behalf of Jaume II de Mallorca, to "sell out" the Catalans so that Jaume could succeed to the mainland crown. This they are supposed to have done

for “mil sous de tornesos”; not a vast sum, and perhaps only a sly reference to Judas’s thirty pieces of silver.

Ramon Muntaner (1265-1336), on the other hand, had this to say:

It happened that four monks of Tolza, who were from a monastery near to Argilers [Sant Genis de Fontanes], went to the king of France, and one of them, who was the abbot of that place ... said to the king ... “Sire, I and these other monks are natives of your land ... we shall show you the place where you can pass through”, *Cronica* I cap.cxxii.

Desclot has been identified by some historians as Bernat Escrivà (1240-88), Pere II’s treasurer, in which case he may have been happy to find treacherous monks in the hills. Muntaner, one of the ablest and most perceptive of all medieval chroniclers, seems to differ from his perhaps obscure contemporary only in the matter of identification, and prefers to blame monks motivated by ex-patriot nationalism. Pere II was certainly abandoned by his brother Jaume II de Mallorca during the invasion; but he was also not much helped by his sons, and it is difficult to see why Philippe should have entrusted Jaume with the crown as a fealty; it was more likely that Philippe, if successful, would have simply annexed one third of Spain to France, having had full papal backing.

In fact, this issue of papal support makes monastic complicity certainly the more likely. Monks and abbots owed their ultimate worldly allegiance to the pope in Rome, and not to kings and emperors; Catalan abbots and monks were not exempt from this universal code. Since the “crusade” had the blessing of the pope, and had in fact been instigated by him, they would have been obligated to help Philippe III and therefore probably did. Whether Abbot Ramon was involved cannot be proved either way, but the case for his defence does not look strong.

Sant Salvador de Verdera was not subsequently returned to the abbey, so in 1288 Abbot Ramon purchased another castle, at Marzà, for 72,000 sous, which included the surrounding land and the fealty of those on it. The old refectory of the abbey was pulled down and the superior present structure built. In April 1291, at Orvieto, Pope Nicholas IV elevated Berenguer to the status of a mitred abbot, giving him and his successors the right to wear a particular ring, mitre, and other pontifical insignia during solemn masses. More importantly, it endowed the abbot with the right to be present at formal convenings of the *Corts Catalans* - the Catalan parliament.

This elevation may have led to a subsequent abbot, Ramon de Pont (*r.* 1293-1302), exceeding his authority. In May 1299, he informed Count Ponç V that all crimes other than murder or treason currently carrying the death penalty should be commuted to depillation and perpetual imprisonment in the abbot’s dungeons. These dungeons may be visited, and although the great barrel-vaulted chamber, deep in the rocks below the abbey, has numerous cells running off it, it would appear to have been an impractical solution in a world that was not exactly bereft of crime. However, in response, Ponç began constructing the castle of El Far on land belonging to the abbey, without permission, when questioned making the excuse that it was for the protection of the people and not for himself. Unfortunately for the count, pressure on him to prove this obliged him to hand over the uncompleted castle to Ramon de Pont in September 1300, and the abbot

finished it off as a fortified church. A clumsy mistake by Count Ponç had resulted in yet another valuable property being wrested by the abbot from his temporal master.

In May 1308 archdeacon Arnau de Soler of Besalú decreed, as arbiter in a legal case, that the civil jurisdictions of Vila-Sacra, El Far, and Marzà, should be given over to the abbot, Arnau de Serrà (*r.* 1302-08), and all the local counts were charged with ensuring that they complied. Ponç V left his county in debt again, burdened with legal problems, but having left 10,000 sous to the abbey in his will as compensation for the damage caused by his attempts to do further work on the castle of Sant Salvador de Verdera. And when, in March 1313, his successor, Ponç VI (Ponç Hug V) d'Empúries (1290-1322), wished to change the location of his comtal *domus* in Castelló d'Empúries from next to the cathedral of Santa Maria to slightly higher up on the rising plain at Puig, he had to humbly ask for permission from Abbot Berenguer de Riumors (*r.* 1309-34). Sant Pere de Rodes was on the crest of a wave at the geographical and political forefront of a new empire; and the abbot knew it.

Part Two: The Fall

THE Fourteenth Century witnessed the apogee of the empire of Catalonia-Aragon; but it also saw the steady decline in both the spiritual and moral probity of Sant Pere de Rodes, and, in addition, the gradual erosion of the independence of the counts of Ampurias.

The duchy of Athens, formed in 1261 out of Boethia and Attica by the overthrown Latin emperors of Byzantium, was taken from Duke Gautier de Brienne (*d.* 1356) in March 1311 by the almogàvers (mercenaries) employed by the *Companyia Catalana a l'Orient* to protect its interests. At first they attempted to govern themselves but soon put the new duchy under the crown of Frederic II, king of Sicily. In 1308 the duchy of Athens was merged with that of Neopatras after the extinction of the Ducas dynasty of Epirus. Sardinia was taken from Pisa and Genoa by Jaume II in March 1324, while in Sicily, Frederic's son inherited the throne as Pere II (*d.* 1342), in direct contravention of the treaty of Caltabellotta. The Angevins, unable to wait for Frederic to die, had decided to try and wrest it from him by force; they failed, and as a result Frederic considered the treaty null and void. By 1350, then, Guifré's apocryphal dream had been realized and his "Stripes of Blood" fluttered across one third of the Iberian peninsula, one fifth of what is now southern France, and throughout the Mediterranean. Catalan consulates were also established in twenty-five centres outside the empire, including Constantinople, Alexandria, Venice, Florence, Rome, Algiers, Malaga, and Seville. It was said that not even the fish dared poke their heads out of the Mediterranean without the familiar red and ochre stripes emblazoned on their backs.

It was inevitable that sooner or later the independent county of Ampurias would be regarded as anachronistic by the crown. By 1300 the counts were already objecting to what they saw as increasingly oppressive centralization. By this time almost all the autonomous counties founded in the ninth century had, in one way or another, ceded their independence to Barcelona. Osona was absorbed by Ramon Berenguer I in 1054, and it has already been noted how Ramon Berenguer III acquired Besalú, Girona, and Cerdanya.

This last county fell away from Barcelona's influence but was definitively incorporated by Jaume I in 1242. Urgell passed in and out of Jaume I's hands twice before he finally absorbed it in 1267. Pere III el Ceremonios (1319-87) took direct control of the kingdom of Mallorca in 1344, and five years later annexed the Roussillon. The only territory the crown lost was the senyoria de Montpeller, which was sold to France by Jaume III de Mallorca (1324-49) in 1349 after he had become a vassal of Philippe VI Valois (1293-1350) in 1342, as an affront to his by now distant relative on the mainland. The only county to hold out other than Ampurias was Pallars Sobirà, which resisted until 1488; but this was a minor county next to Ampurias.

In practical terms there was little the counts could do against the increasing might of the empire, and, in 1315, Ponç VI accepted the definitive gift – effectively a bribe – of the viscounty of Bas (formerly a feudal jurisdiction under Besalu), to which the counts of Ampurias had been titular overlords since 1162; the price was peace. This scheme turned out to be academic, however, because although Ponç married twice, his only child, a daughter, was born posthumously and died in infancy. The inheritor was Hug I, viscount of Cardona and great-grandson of Ponç IV through the distaff line, who as Hug VI d'Empúries ceded it to King Jaume II in 1325, at the king's command, in exchange for three Valencian lordships, while Pere IV de Ribagorça (1305-81), a younger son of the king, then became count of Ampurias.

By 1330, there were just thirty monks at Sant Pere de Rodes, with about the same number of novices, lay brothers, and servants. This is the earliest such formal record, but analysis of circumstantial documents such as income, inventory, and accounts, has established that there were at least sixty at any one time from Hildesind to Berenguer. Another surviving record states that “in the year of our Lord 1345, innumerable fatalities were incurred throughout the world, and in this monastery twenty-four monks perished within fifteen months”. This date was presumably a scribal error, as the Black Death came a little later, first reported in Mallorca at the beginning of 1348, and reaching first Barcelona then Valencia by May. By 1350, most of the eastern half of the peninsula had been ravaged by it. The incursion of the plague into the monastery may be explained by the general European corruption of monastic standards, accompanied as it was by increased and irresponsible contact with the laity. Abbot Ramon (*r.* 1334-47) was followed by five successors within a decade, some certainly succumbing to the plague.

Alfonso XI, king of Castille and León from 1312, died on 26 March 1350 from the Black Death, the only European monarch to fall victim to it. The young count of Ampurias may have survived but he was unhappy in his position and in 1341 returned to Ribagorça after exchanging Ampurias for the county of Prades with his even younger brother, who succeeded to Ampurias as Ramon Berenguer I. He must have shared some of his brother's sympathies, however, because in 1364 he also renounced his title and retired to a monastery. Nevertheless, he had time to marry, and produced a son. Joan I el Vell (1340-98) merits some attention. He immediately astonished everyone by abandoning Puig and setting up his *domus* within the almost inaccessible castle of Sant Salvador de Verdera. This was not done out of contempt for Castelló d'Empúries, however, which he

began to embellish while also attempting to establish it as a bishopric (the early attempts to found an archbishopric having failed), but from military foresight, if also eccentricity.

To begin with, Count Joan presented himself as the friend of the empire, helping Pere III against Castille in 1364, and marrying, as his second wife the king's daughter Joana (*d.* 1384) in 1373. King Pere III's first wife had died in 1375, and when, two years later, he announced his intention to marry Sibil·la de Fortià (1350-1406), a widow and his mistress, by whom there had been a daughter in 1376, there was a general outcry, particularly within the royal family. This situation involved Ampurias directly since Fortià was a village a short ride southeast of Castelló d'Empúries. The two opposing factions quickly polarized, Joan I around the lesser members of the royal family and Sibil·la's friends and family around her brother, Bernat de Fortià i de Vilamarí (*d.* 1424). Bernat, a knight who had inherited the nearby castle of Garriga from his mother, was appointed governor-general of Catalonia, then captain-general of the royal army in 1384 in order to flush out the count from his mountain perch. This was after a treaty in 1381 had failed, and after the countess had appealed to her father, the king, for peace and then been killed, most probably at his command.

Again, it is not known whether Abbot Bertran (*r.* 1374-1409) conspired in this rebellion, for rebellion it was. In 1370 Count Joan and other nobles had fought against increasing jurisdictional royal authority and forced a baronial charter out of the king. Joan was an extraordinarily cultured and learned man, often portrayed as a proto-Renaissance figure, and no doubt the abbey appreciated the fact. Nevertheless, his gifts to it were few, and the only certain transaction between them was a sale when Joan sold the legal jurisdiction of Llançà to Bertran on 26 November 1381 for 8,500 sous, which no doubt he needed for his struggle against the crown. The fact is that the county was closer to bankruptcy than ever before, and Joan's attempt to acquire Gascon help failed for lack of funds, and as a result he was forced to surrender in 1386.

Pere III died soon afterwards, and his successor, Joan I el Caçador (1350-96), lived up to his epithet ("the Hunter") by tracking down Queen Sibil·la and imprisoning her, then executing her two principle advisors. As might be expected, Count Joan was rewarded by being allowed to administrate Ampurias in his young son's name. But by the time Joan II d'Empúries succeeded to the county, a less sympathetic monarch had also succeeded to the crown. Unlike his brother, Martí I l'Humà (1356-1410) did not live up to his epithet ("the Humane") where Ampurias was concerned, and refused to acknowledge Joan II until he agreed to be dependent on the crown and renounce his political agenda. Joan II died suddenly, intractable, in November 1401, and his brother succeeded as Pere II, dying, however, on 1 January 1402 after only forty days as count. The line was now officially defunct, so Martí I swiftly annexed the county the following day according to the ancient clause by which defunct counties reverted to the crown. This was a specious move, however, as it was also in the king's power to reinvest the county – something that his grandfather had done in 1325, of course.

Sant Pere de Rodes was not molested during this protracted and – for the county of Ampurias – disastrous conflict; indeed, Martí I confirmed all the abbey's ancient privileges in March 1402. But the real tragedy for the abbey was that on 10 April 1409,

the procurator general arrived to explain to the prior and community that they were to swear fealty directly to the king through him, effectively making the abbey the possession of the crown. At the time of the oath there was, for the first time in its history, a vacancy in the abbacy, Bertran having died earlier in the year. The unsatisfactory solution – but which underscored the degeneracy of the times – was to transfer Bernat Estruc, abbot of Sant Esteve de Banyoles, to Sant Pere de Rodes. He was a former monk of the abbey who had also been chancellor to Count Joan I d'Empúries, but his only qualification for the transfer, it would appear, was his ardent desire to be buried at Sant Pere de Rodes rather than at Banyoles. He did not have long to wait and in 1413 his wish was granted. A three-year vacancy followed, with a similar solution applied in January 1416 when Esteve d'Agramunt was transferred from the abbey of Santa Maria d'Amer. In August 1432, shortly before his death, Abbot Esteve purchased one quarter of the land pertaining to Vila-Sacra, which seems to be the only achievement of his rule other than the unification of the priorship with the abbatial office of works in 1422.

A third vacancy, of four years, followed until Berenguer d'Espasenes (*r.* 1437-46) was brought in to stop up the gap. By this time accusations of severe misconduct against the community were becoming commonplace. It was claimed that monks were accustomed to climbing down the hill to the surrounding settlements to sleep with local women, or worse: that they were keeping arms rather than trusting to the protection of God; that they were dressing improperly, sometimes without their habits; that they were amassing great personal wealth; and that they were omitting the more difficult portions of the rigorous daily services in order to sleep off the consequences of their novel lifestyles.

These problems were compounded by the increasingly common practice by which ruling monarchs would elect particular abbots to important monastic centres with the compliance of a sycophantic and politically-orientated ecclesiastical authority. These commendatory Renaissance abbots rarely even stayed at the monasteries to which they had been appointed, and when they did they required conditions of life substantially different from those of their medieval predecessors; it is no accident that it is from this period that the comparatively luxurious abbots' quarters at Sant Pere de Rodes dates. The first abbot appointed *in commendam* – until 1721, with one minor exception, all the abbots would be selected in this way – was Cardinal Iohannis of St Peter's in Rome, in 1447. But it was his successor who demonstrated more clearly the nature of the commendatory abbot. In 1449, the abbey was given to the Mallorcan redemptionist Antoni Cerdà i de Lloscos, general of his own Trinitarian order, consultant theologian to Pope Pius II (*r.* 1458-64), archbishop of Messina, cardinal-bishop of Lleida, and preceptor of Naples under Alfons IV el Magnànim (1396-1458), king of Catalonia-Aragon and from 1435 king of Naples as Alfons I. How he also managed to be abbot of Sant Pere de Rodes is simple – he was consecrated there according to custom then never returned, leaving his abbatial duties in the hands of a procurator, dying in 1459 a thousand kilometres away in Rome. A more different abbot to the humble Hildesind can hardly be imagined.

One interesting document has survived from his tenure, however. On 11 December 1455 Pau Viçens was inducted as a new brother, and the same record lists the presence of

nineteen other monks. All things considered, this may be thought a promising statistic; but the document also states that Brother Pau was already a monk, and that the youngest brother was fifty and the eldest sixty-five.

The next abbot was perhaps a reaction to the new system, and constituted the minor exception to the rule. The community elected Antoni Alemany on 14 October 1459, having been prior of Sant Cugat de Vallès near Barcelona; he even resided at the abbey. But, in 1460, he disappears from the records and we may conjecture that Lloscos had died suddenly and Abbot Antoni had been *locum tenens* before being removed. Even if so, there was still another vacancy before Bernat de Margarit (*r.* 1462-86), bishop of Catania in Sicily, was appointed in a speedy return to the comfortable new system. However, Bernat did make some effort on the abbey's behalf, obtaining a papal bull of confirmation from Paul II (*r.* 1464-71) in 1465; in May 1472 he obtained confirmation of all the abbey's civil privileges from King Joan II Sense Fe (1398-1479).

In 1457 Alfons IV transferred the titular county of Ampurias, still held by the crown, to his nephew, Enric d'Aragó i de Pimentel (1445-1522), duc de Sogorb, known as Enric I Fortuna. The comtal title was now virtually meaningless, but on 24 January 1482, at Figueres, he was empowered to confirm to the abbey all the comtal privileges it had acquired since Gausfred I. But such signed documents did not always mean very much, particularly by this period. In 1469 Bernat had sold off the lordship and jurisdiction of Marzà to the university there, indicating that funds were low, and King Joan II, in his document of 1472, had been persuaded to decree that 10,000 gold florins would be the fine – payable directly to the abbot – imposed on anyone convicted of violating any of the abbey's ancient rights. Such violation must have been commonplace for such a decree to have been issued, but there is, typically, no record of any conviction.

The comtal document also must have been little more than a token since the count was no longer in a position to enforce its pious clauses. Although as early as 1397 the people of Selva de Mar had petitioned Abbot Bertran for permission to fortify their church against piratical attacks, it was after the fall of Constantinople to Muhammad II Fatih (1432-81) in April 1453 that Turkish pirates in the Mediterranean appeared as a serious threat. The coast around Sant Pere de Rodes was subsequently often ravaged, but the abbey itself was always too difficult to reach for it to suffer direct assault. We may be certain that Gausfred I would not have tolerated such a situation, and furthermore that he would have been in a position to do something about it.

After the death of Count Enric I the title of Comte d'Empúries passed to the Cardona family when his grandson died in 1575 without issue. All his titles were inherited by Duchess Joana II d'Aragó i Folc de Cardona, who then passed them onto her husband, Diego Hernández de Córdoba, marques de Comares, a Spanish grandee from a notable Castillian family. After several further marital shuffles, in 1660 it became the permanent possession of the dukes of Medinaceli, also Spanish grandees but with several important marital stakes in Catalonia. From this date the county of Ampurias effectively disappears from active history.

Instead, the future influence on Sant Pere de Rodes would originate inland, with the new Spain. On 18 October 1469, in Valladolid, Isabella I de Castille-León (1451-1504)

was secretly married to Ferran II el Catolic (1452-1516), at that time king of Sicily. Isabella succeeded to the throne of Castille-León in December 1474 as joint sovereign with Ferran II, still only king of Sicily in his own right. However, since the death of his stepbrother in 1462, Ferran had been accepted as heir presumptive to the throne of Catalonia-Aragon, and when Joan II died nothing had happened to alter his position. Thus, on 19 January 1479, Catalonia-Aragon became conjoined with the crown of Castille-León, and the circumstances that gave birth to imperial Spain also spelled the death of the eastern empire. It was almost as though fate had precisely mimicked the situation in 1137, when a relatively minor county had absorbed a kingdom; but now a relatively minor kingdom was about to absorb an empire.

The geographical advantage that had always been Catalonia's trump card was swept away. Suddenly there was talk of distant lands across the Atlantic whose exploitation would bring the new unified crown immense wealth and prestige, and the Mediterranean became yesterday's news; in any case, much of it was in a mess, and some of it had been lost. Nerio I Acciojuoli (*d.* 1394), Florentine lord of Corynth, had taken Athens and Neopatras in 1388, and his descendants would hold it until Turkish rule in 1458. In fact, when in 1443 Alfons IV united the Sicilian crown with the duchy of Naples it was a desperate attempt to strengthen his last important overseas territory, and even this was gradually absorbed into the new crown, becoming a Spanish viceroyship after 1501. The monks of Sant Pere de Rodes no longer faced out towards an expanding empire but suddenly found themselves in the backwater of the new Spain, obliged to watch it disintegrate.

The old empire had internal civil problems as well. In 1251 Jaume I adopted the *Usatges de Barcelona* as the legal foundation of the Catalan half of the kingdom of Catalonia-Aragon, replacing Frankish customs in the outlying regions that had co-existed with it up until then. The customs were not modified, and the traditional Catalan villein-slave, known after 1281 as the *Remença* after the qualification of manumission he was obliged to pay for his freedom, which in practice he could rarely afford, remained unrelieved of his futile servitude. In common with his serf class throughout Europe the *Remences* rose up against the crown several times between 1380 and 1390 following the depopulation after the Black Death and the harvest failures of a cold century. The serfs objected to what was known as the *mals usos* ("bad customs") that had grown out of the *usatges* since the eleventh century: *eixorquia*, by which they lost one-third of their estate to their lord on dying without issue; *intestia*, by which they lost a portion of their estate to their lord on dying intestate; *cugucia*, by which they had to pay a substantial fine if their wives were convicted of adultery; *arsina*, by which they lost one-third of their holding and were liable to a fine if they accidentally set fire to it; and *ferma d'espoli forçada*, by which a lord exacted payment from his serf as a guarantee of a dowry on his marriage.

The ancient House of Barcelona – still descended in a direct line from Guifré el Pelós – was prepared to make concessions. However, King Martí I had died without designating his successor and an interregnum was resolved by devolving the crown to his nephew, son of his sister. Ferran I d'Antequera (1380-1416) was a Castillian and initiated the new

Trastàmara dynasty in Catalonia-Aragon, one that did not have any sympathy for the *Remences*, who again insurrected after 1413. By 1450 the *Remences* had syndicalized, and 20,000 of them presented a demand for the abolition of the *mals usos* to Alfons IV, who had lived up to his epithet (“the Magnanimous”) two years previously by agreeing to concede to their demands under conditions yet to be determined. A provisional ruling in 1455 suspended the *mals usos* indefinitely in exchange for 100,000 Aragonese florins (11 sous per coin) for the royal treasury, payable by the serfs as a whole. This expensive, but ultimately affordable, solution would have hit the nobles, church, and urban patriciate harder still in lost revenue, and they united to insist on a payment of 400,000 Catalan pounds (20 sous per coin), a sum they could never have paid. As a result, the ruling was itself suspended in 1456.

Consequently, in February 1462 there was a general uprising of the *Remences* against their feudal landlords, followed by a civil war in March when the crown became involved on the side of the serfs. The *Remences* were led by Francesc de Verntallat (1444-1500), a minor noble who united the peasantry with the crown against the nobility and the church, concentrating on gaining royal control of the mountain passes around Sant Pere de Rodes. The conflict was protracted, enervating, and in the end served neither side well. On 24 October 1472 a welcome peace was signed at the monastery of Pedralbes in Barcelona. But this resolved the immediate civil conflict only and did little for the *Remences* themselves, only a few of whom were rewarded for their services to the crown.

In October 1481 the noble and ecclesiastic opposition succeeded in imposing a ruling in the *corts* annulling the provisional ruling of 1455 and re-establishing their full senyorial rights. In December 1482 the serfs split into two factions with the moderates pursuing legal claims and the radicals pressing for a second war. Verntallat, a moderate, refused to participate in the second uprising, and Pere Joan Sala, who rejected royal mediation and was now opposed by all sides in a military conflict, led the new movement. He was defeated, captured, and then executed at Barcelona on 28 March 1485, and the second uprising – not this time a civil war – came to an end. However, these rebellions forced Ferran II to reach an agreement, signed at the Hieronymite monastery of Santa Maria de Guadalupe in the mountains of Extremadura on 21 April 1486, which finally resolved the grievances of the *Remences*: *Cugucia* and *intestia* were halved, while *eixorquia*, *ferma d’espoli forçada*, and *arsina* were abolished.

This ruling of course also applied to the serfs under the jurisdiction of Sant Pere de Rodes, but the result does not appear to have affected the abbey unduly. Abbot Jean Jordà de Castre-Pinós de So i Roig (*d.* 1506), cardinal-priest of Sancta Prisca in Rome, governor of the castell Sant’Angelo in Rome, bishop of Agrigento in Sicily, and also commendatory abbot of Santa Maria de Besalú, was ordered by Pope Julius II (*r.* 1503-13) in May 1506 to determine the precise wealth of his two commendatory offices in Catalonia. The detailed result does not appear to have survived, or lies buried in the Vatican archives, but it is known that the papacy was satisfied with the findings.

By this time, appointed abbots were not even bothering to be present at Sant Pere de Rodes for their consecration, while foreign prelates ignored the abbey altogether. However, when the abbot assigned happened to be local, regional, or national, he still

made some effort to take an interest in his holding. The Aragonese appointee Joan Ram (r. 1532-45) even went so far as to commission the celebrated regional artisan Pere Mates de Girona to create a new and magnificent reredos and retable for the High Altar, and this was also the period when the corbels were carved into the porches. However, it was also the period when the ancient monks' cells were converted into a general infirmary, suggesting a by now permanent dearth of brothers.

A highly romanticized episode in the life of the enervated abbey took place in the early seventeenth century. To fully appreciate some of the complex underlying motives of those involved it must be understood that in 1479 Catalonia became a viceroyship of Spain, with Enric I d'Empúries as first vice-regent, and to whom, as the representative of the new crown in Madrid, the abbot of Sant Pere de Rodes had to swear fealty. Berenguer de Sos, the thirty-second president of the *Diputació del General*, which represented parliament to the legislative *Corts de Catalunya*, was appointed in the same year and shorn of much of the authority the first president had had in 1359, or which the body itself had had a century earlier when it had been founded.

Joan Sala Ferrer was born in Viladrau, between Vic and Girona, in 1594, the fifth of nine sons born to a minor noble. He married in 1618, taking the alias "Serrallonga" from his wife's birthplace of Serallonga de Querós, and then embarked on a life of petty local crime with four of his brothers to supplement his income as an agricultural worker. These crimes, though minor, caused considerable local unease, and in 1622 his neighbour betrayed him. Before he could be apprehended, however, Serrallonga murdered the neighbour and escaped into the Pyrenees. There he surrounded himself with a small group of bandits and conducted numerous raids on both sides of the mountains, living with a fiery Carmenesque widow, a native of Castelló d'Empúries.

Serrallonga was eventually captured, on 31 October 1633, and executed at Barcelona on 8 January 1634. He was subsequently canonized by romantics, who converted him from a bandit into Spain's own Robin Hood – a just member of the minor nobility, persecuted by a corrupt centralized authority, who robbed the undeserving rich and gave to the deserving poor. Certainly Serrallonga robbed the wealthy, principally because the poor were hardly worth robbing, but little else of the later romance was true. But what was true is far more interesting. On at least two separate occasions Serrallonga stayed at Sant Pere de Rodes where the monks hid him before introducing him to escape routes into France, the first time from Llançà and the second from Cadaqués, both points of departure still owned by the abbey.

Abbot Pere Joan Desgüell died in 1632, having held the position for sixteen years, and a vacancy of two years followed. Although the precise dates of Serrallonga's visits are not known it seems likely that they took place during this two-year period of virtual anarchy, as the next appointee, Francesc de Ponts i de Turell (r. 1634-44), made a particular effort to put the monastery in order, no doubt horrifying the monks by instituting a series of random inspection tours. It is thought that Serallonga paid the monks to put him up and help him escape, and that his struggle against what was seen as the new centralized authority in Madrid with its satellite in Castelló d'Empúries may have inspired sympathy among Catalan monks for any enemy of the state. In fact, Sant Pere de Rodes

was not the only monastic centre inculpated in this way, though it was far and away the most celebrated.

In 1635 Felipe IV (1605-65), king of Castille-León, Catalonia-Aragon, and Portugal, entered into a protracted conflict with France as an adjunct to the Thirty Years War, which had already been raging in Europe for seventeen years. Five years later the peasantry again rose up, this time against the crown in a drawn-out conflict initially as a reaction to the various anti-regional policies of Gaspar de Guzmán y de Fonseca (1587-1645), comte-duque de Olivares, prime minister to the Spanish crown. The peasantry was now united with Catalans in general, waging war against both France and Madrid. This complex war was of the greatest significance to Catalonia. Both the international and national wars ended on 7 November 1659 at the treaty of the Pyrenees, signed at Faisans on behalf of Felipe IV and Louis XIV of France (1638-1715), ratified the following year at Llivia, and concluded definitively at Nimega in 1678. Spain had effectively lost this conflict, but it was Catalonia that was made to pay the price as all Spanish territory north of a line through the Pyrenees was surrendered to France. At a stroke, one-third of medieval Catalonia was lost, becoming part of modern France; Spain lost nothing other than its prestige, Catalans claimed, since what the Spanish had lost had not been theirs to lose. For Catalans, who considered their parliament still independent of Madrid, the terms of the treaty, conducted without consulting the *Corts Catalans*, were wholly illegal.

For the monks at Sant Pere de Rodes the practical effects of the treaty were a personal tragedy. The line of demarcation was initially drawn so as to include the abbey within France, and it was only much later that the line was moved a few kilometres north to its present position. In 1654 the situation there was already so intolerable that Abbot Pau Tristany (*r.* 1648-60) declared Sant Pere de Rodes abandoned: uncanonically, of course, but necessary as an emergency measure. For the first time since its foundation the great abbey was empty, during which time French troops occupied and sacked it. By this time Sant Pere de Rodes was considered so unimportant by the authorities that noble prelates had long since ceased to be appointed to the abbacy. On the one hand this meant that most of the abbots would now be Catalan and all would actually reside within the abbey; but on the other it meant that the abbot was no longer a man of great influence either at court or in Rome and could therefore do little against the forces that would begin to destroy the monastery.

Tristany, however, did not die in his cell but somewhere in his self-imposed exile, and it was not until perhaps as late as 1663 that the monks returned with a new abbot, Joan Baptista de Castellarnau (*r.* 1663-70). Meanwhile, sporadic conflicts between Spain and France continued and Sant Pere de Rodes inevitably suffered as a consequence. French troops sacked it again in 1675 and once more in 1693. Desperately clinging onto the abbey's illustrious past, Abbot Rafael de Moner (*r.* 1687-98) declared May 1697 to be another Holy Cross Jubilee. It was the last time that a public spiritual feast would be held within its walls.

The next international conflict drove still more nails into the abbey's coffin and signalled the final years of Catalonia-Aragon. The War of the Spanish Succession arose out of the death of Carlos II (1661-1700), the last of the Habsburg dynasty that had

commenced with Carlos I (1500-58), Holy Roman Emperor as Karl V. Carlos II had no children, and his death was followed by the accession of the Bourbon Philippe d'Anjou (1683-1746) – grandson of Louis XIV – to the throne of Spain as Felipe V, according to King Carlos's will. However, Archduke Karl of Austria (1685-1740), who had been proposed king of Spain in 1700 with English support at a time when a partition treaty between the two foremost European dynastic houses had been proposed, was finally elected as Carles III, king of Catalonia-Aragon, in 1703, when Portugal agreed to back him.

Felipe's policies were entirely Francophile and he was initially governed by his grandfather. Naturally enough, Catalans gave their support to Carles III, who arrived in Barcelona in 1705 as king of Catalonia-Aragon, though since 1702 this title was largely meaningless, consisting as it did of no more than the jurisdictional areas of Barcelona and Cardona. The Aragonese and Valencians also declared their support for him, and in 1706 his supporters elected him king of Castille-León when he entered Madrid. However, he failed to consolidate this and was forced to retreat back to Catalonia. The final blow for Catalans came when their king's elder brother died on 17 April 1711. Carles III reluctantly succeeded him as Holy Roman Emperor Karl VI, leaving his wife in Barcelona – where the pair had married – to continue with his cause. But the European powers, appalled at the prospect of Spain becoming part of the Habsburg empire, recognized Felipe as rightful king at the treaty of Utrecht, signed on 11 April 1713, and the Bourbons were secure in their new territory.

This treaty further stripped the flesh from the bones of the defunct empire of Catalonia-Aragon by giving Menorca to Britain, and both Sardinia and Sicily to the House of Savoy – again without consulting the *Corts Catalans*. In July 1713 a special convocation of the *Corts Catalans* and the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (as the *Diputació del General* was now known) under President Josep de Vilamala, representing all the civil and ecclesiastical bodies of Catalonia, agreed unanimously to maintain their historic independence from Madrid. However, since the sympathetic British, Dutch, and Portugese troops stationed in Barcelona by Carles III had left in 1712, there was little the Catalan force of 6,000 troops could do against the 40,000 men Felipe sent against them. Barcelona was put under siege, capitulating on 11 September 1714. Two weeks later Cardona surrendered and the ancient Catalan parliament was suspended indefinitely. On 16 January 1716 the passing of the royal act of incorporation dissolved the crown of Catalonia-Aragon and it effectively disappeared from history.

Sant Pere de Rodes had not fared any better. In the summer of 1708 Adrienne-Maurice (1678-1766), duc de Noailles et comte d'Agèn, a soldier who had led forces into Catalonia several times since 1694, arrived at Sant Pere de Rodes with an army of 8,000 men. Using the excuse that the abbey afforded him a useful “military advantage” after his attacks on Ampurias, and before proceeding to attack Olot in the west, he occupied it, forcing Abbot Josep Despalau (*r.* 1707-17) and his few brothers to escape into the hills. After cleaning out the refectory and stores Noailles and his men proceeded to devastate the abbey. They systematically stripped it of many of its portable treasures and then destroyed or damaged those that could not be moved, such as the sepulchral monuments – Tassi and Hildesind in particular, due to their position by the High Altar – and the exquisite

sculptures by the Master of Cabestany. They also removed or destroyed the great library and archives for which the abbey had been famed, then set fire to it before leaving, in which conflagration Pere Mates's magnificent work was consumed. Sant Pere de Rodes ended up as a part blackened shell; Noailles as French ambassador in Madrid.

The monks did not return until 1720, when there were just eight of them and no abbot, Despalau having disappeared under mysterious circumstances; it is conjectured that he took his own life. Abbot Josep de Gaiolà (*r.* 1721-39), who was the first abbot to be elected canonically since 1437, made strenuous efforts to halt the rapid decline of his abbey. He managed to resolve a dispute with the relatively new town of Port de la Selva in his favour, retrieved dues from Llançà that had fallen into abeyance, fixing the annual rate of payment at 100 pounds in 1739 just before he died. But his abbacy also suffered a severe blow, which he was entirely unable to affect. Between 1726 and 1731 the abbey's own town of Santa Creu was so severely attacked by pirates and robbers – mostly French – that the inhabitants decided to abandon it completely, in spite of the recent conversion of the nearby abbatial woods into profitable vineyards. The people quite understandably wanted personal security above wealth, which the abbey was no longer able to provide. At a stroke, then, the income and prestige of Sant Pere de Rodes was reduced still further.

In 1755 Abbot Francesc de Cortada (*r.* 1740-57) succeeded in having all the ancient privileges of the abbey confirmed by Ferdinand VI (1713-59). In a sense this was necessary in order to safeguard what little the abbey still had, in terms of fishing rights and income, as the monks still had to eat; but on the whole the exercise appears, in retrospect, futile, a grotesque parody of earlier times. It was, in fact, only prolonging the agony, and Abbot Francesc de Guanter i Pi (*r.* 1757-93) finally recognized the inevitable, petitioning Madrid and the see of Girona, on 11 May 1791, for permission to formally abandon the monastery.

On 21 January 1793 Louis XVI lost his head, and all around lost theirs too as Sant Pere de Rodes found itself in the middle of yet another war, this time between the First French Republic and the upset Bourbon monarchy of Spain. Spanish forces crossed the Pyrenees in April, confronting the army of the Republic in the Roussillon. But the Spanish had been tricked, and while they were engaged in a minor skirmish the French once again invaded Catalan territory close to Sant Pere de Rodes. Abbot Francesc and his flock – still waiting for ratification of their petition – hid in the hills while what was left of the abbey was sacked. The conflict resulted in a stalemate, resolved by the Peace of Basel in 1795, but two years later the same troops returned and sacked the abbey for a second time, with the new abbot, Joaquim de Clavera i de Guadell (*r.* 1794-1816), and his monks again fleeing into the hills. Shortly after they returned, on 24 September 1798, the bishop of Girona declared the dissolution of Sant Pere de Rodes as self-evident and canonical. By December, the abbot and his twelve monks – a symbolic statistic, perhaps – were gone, and over one thousand years of cœnobitical life at the abbey came to an end.

But neither the history of the building nor that of the community that once occupied it came to an abrupt end purely on account of this decision. In 1808 the French returned yet again in the form of Napoléon's *Grande Armée* and initiated another period of blind destruction of Catalonia's cultural heritage, including further destruction at Sant Pere de

Rodes. The Bourbon dynasty was deposed, and in April Joseph Bonaparte (1768-1844) was thrust onto the throne of Spain as Josep I Bonaparte. Mimicking the former Republic's idolatry of the "goddess of reason", Josep I abolished all religious orders in Spain on 18 August 1809. Abbot Joaquim and his two monks, who had been hiding in the ancient abbatial fortified dependency at Vila-Sacra just outside Figueres, were forced to flee to Banyoles. They were wise to have done this, as French soldiers sacked the abbatial castle and destroyed the archives, and would no doubt have killed them had they been there. They remained hidden in Banyoles until the definitive collapse of the First Empire in 1814 when they emerged and, with permission, set themselves up next to the church of Sant Pere in the centre of Figueres on 11 October 1818 under Abbot Josep de Viladecans (*r.* 1817-20). The brief resurrection of the First Empire during the Hundred Days did not have time to affect them.

The last phase of the brotherhood's life – at times with an abbot, at times without – was one of dissolution, reformation, and peripateticism, according to how the law was disposed towards them. In 1821 religious orders were dispossessed of their property rights and the brotherhood was dissolved for four years. In 1824 the law was reversed and they reformed again, though without an abbot. On 9 October 1825 Josep Ferrer, a 55-year-old monk within the brotherhood, was elected abbot by the rest of the community. Given what appeared at the time to be a future of tolerance towards religious bodies he set about accumulating what possessions were still extant and refurbishing the new little monastery in Figueres. Visitors to this establishment – really a small collection of houses next to the church – were still astonished at how much the brotherhood had managed to preserve. Abbot Josep was even contemplating the arrangement of a petition to allow the brotherhood – then, incredibly, with eleven monks – to move back into Sant Pere de Rodes. But in 1835 the treasury minister, Juan Álvarez Mendizábal (1790-1853), a middle-class Jewish financier and self-proclaimed "progressive atheist" who had been an exile in England and was principal adviser to the queen regent, Maria Cristina I (1806-78), again dissolved all religious orders in Spain other than healing ones. From this final blow Abbot Josep and his flock did not recover, dispersing and disappearing from all records.

In 1931 the *Generalitat de Catalunya* was restored under the Second Spanish Republic with the election of its 111th president, and three years later – on the centenary of the brotherhood's final dissolution – Sant Pere de Rodes was declared Catalonia's National Historical Monument. Under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1892-1975) the *Generalitat* went into exile, but in 1977 Josep Tarradellas i Joan (1899-1988) returned from exile as 114th president. This brought to an end another century of casual plundering at Sant Pere de Rodas by anyone owning a satchel and a hammer, and a monumental restoration project was undertaken whose objective was nothing less than the fullest possible refurbishment of the abbey as was humanly feasible after so many decades of inertia and wilful destruction. On 20 March 1980 Jordi Pujol i Soley (*b.* 1930) was elected 115th president of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* in a parliament effectively part of a semi-autonomous federated state within Spain. This status, while falling short of the full independence desired by some, has enabled the Catalan government to proceed with the restoration of its great monument without interference from Madrid.

The major task has been to identify whatever objects have survived and then retrieve and restore them, either *in situ* or in a special museum. Six significant donations were made willingly, including one head and some capitals by the Master of Cabestany, while many minor objects, unsuitable for relocation at the abbey itself, have been donated to museums all over Catalonia. The 1989 archaeological season, under Montserrat Mataró, revealed an earthenware jar filled with gold and silver coins buried in the abbots' quarters, a testament to both the uncertainty of the times and the worldliness of the abbots. They had been collected between 1520 and 1530, at the time of Abbot Ferran Ram. The 1992 season revealed an ashlar tomb in the cloisters that for the first time provided incontrovertible proof of a structure prior to Tassi's basilica. It was found to contain the remains of a man aged between forty and fifty, though whether it is any earlier than Carolingian remains conjectural. A number of human bones were also found under the High Altar, and these two discoveries have lent new vigour to those who support the foundation legend discovered by Jeroni Pujades. This great restorative phase was completed in July 1993 with a public ceremony and a commemorative plaque.

But problems remain with the retrieval of objects in Castillian or French hands, not only ones of a legal nature but also those of a very human kind: that unwillingness to part with ancient booty to which the passage of time has lent a certain specious legitimacy. For example, it is unlikely that a certain celebrated tenth-century illuminated bible, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, will ever be returned to Catalonia; it was stolen by the Duc de Noailles, and is now catalogued in Paris – scandalously, according to Catalans – as the “Bible de Noailles”, as though the duke himself had illuminated it.

In the late 1960s, the Italian professor of semiotics, historian of aesthetics, and novelist, Umberto Eco, came across Sant Pere de Rodes while on holiday. Captivated and overwhelmed by what he saw, he remained in Girona for several weeks researching its history. The material he collected became the basis for his first, and most successful, novel, *Il nombre della rosa* (1980). And when, in the 1986 film of the book, William of Baskerville says to Adso of Melk: “What if it wasn't *that* tower he fell from, but somewhere over there?” it is easy to imagine the professor and his principle character walking up the west slope, looking up towards the bell and homage towers of one of Christendom's most remarkable monuments to human piety; one that will still be perched on its fantastic ledge long after its great catalogue of despoilers has been forgotten.

Catalunya – ara i per sempre

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