

The Apse of Sant Pere de Burgal - Female Agency in the Image

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As part of the Master's thesis "Women's Agency in the Context of Church Foundations in the Catalan Counties (9th-12th Century)", the Catalan church charters edited by Ramón Ordeig i Mata in the years 1993-2004 were examined. In the course of the work on the documents, the apsis painting presented below is one of the special features, as it is the only representation of a countess of this kind that could be associated with a church consecration of the analysed corpus.

The Catalan Romanesque period has produced a particularly rich fund of apse and wall paintings - mainly in the Pyrenean region. These are still preserved today due to the difficulty of accessing the churches. In the 1920s and 1930s, many of these wall paintings were removed from the churches and collected in the Museo Nacional de Calatunya (MNAC for short), where they are still kept today. This is one of the largest collections of Romanesque wall paintings.¹ The fragment of the apsis painting of the church of Sant Pere de Burgal that was examined - today exhibited in the MNAC - shows the Countess of Pallars Sobirà, Lluçia de la Marca (†1090). The edited document of the aforementioned corpus mentions the Countess' participation in the consecration of the monastery church of Santa Cecilia d'Elins in her capacity as tutor of the still minor Count Ermengol IV of Urgell (†1092). In this document, Lluçia is described as a venerable and particularly pious woman who also held authority and regency over the town of Elins. At this time, Lluçia was already a widow, but during her marriage to Artau I of Pallars Sobirà, she had acquired a reputation for great piety and generosity through her donations and support of various places of worship, including the monastery of Urgell. Lluçia's role as tutor to the Count of Urgell shows that her political influence and great experience were equally valued. In addition to the aforementioned document, the apsis painting shows the appreciation that the countess received after her death from her descendants and contemporaries. In the centre of the upper of three registers there is a *Maiestas Domini* flanked by the figures of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. The composition is completed by the archangels Gabriel and Michael. In the central register, from left to right, are an unidentified apostle, Peter, Mary, John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei, Paul and John.

¹ CASTIÑEIRAS, Manuel/DURAN-PORTA, Joan, *El románico en las colecciones del MNAC*, Barcelona 2008.

In the lower right-hand section, at about eye level with the viewer, the depiction of the Countess has survived. Researchers agree that this is Lluçia.² On the right, at the level of the woman's head, the pale remains of the white inscription identifying the countess by name can still be seen: [LUZ]IA/COME/TESSA. The white writing on a black background could be a reference to the aforementioned veneration of the countess by contemporaries and her descendants, for the names of the saints and prophets are also incorporated into the composition in this way. Lluçia is also at the height of the priest during the celebration of the Mass and, through this position, in a sense participates in the Eucharist and, through her presence, encourages the faithful to remember her. The painting is dated to the reign of the Countess' sons, Count Artau II of Pallars (†1124) and Bishop Ot of Urgell (†1122). It is attributed to the cycle of the Mester de Pedret, who worked in the region between 1080 and 1120. Since the aforementioned church was only transferred to the family of the Counts of Pallars Sobrià in 1094, the painting must have been made after Lluçia's death. This fresco was probably commissioned by the children of the deceased countess. The position of the Countess in the lower register of the painting, at the priest's eye level and at the side of the altar, allows the deceased to participate in the service at close quarters. CASTIÑEIRAS and CAMPS see in the overall composition a response to the Gregorian reform and place the fresco in a series of Byzantine and Italian pictorial cycles which also have as their theme the placement of the laity in the lower register of an otherwise sacred programme.³ In the sense of the reform of the late 11th century, the iconographic programme of the frescoes was intended to express a recourse to the origin of the church in Rome. Especially the pictorial compositions of the churches in Burgal, Santa Maria d'Aneu and Sant Quirze de Pedret are seen in this context. The frescoes in Burgal are attributed to the cycle of Mester de Pedret, who worked in the region in the period between 1080 and 1120.

² Ibid., S. 66; OLAÑETA, Juan Antonio, La representación de donantes y promotoras femeninas en el arte románico: estrategias, modelos y circunstancias., in: *Féminas - el protagonismo de la mujer en los siglos del románico*, hg. v. Pedro Luis HUERTA HUERTA, Aguilar de Campoo (Palencia) 12020, S. 77–115. *Amics de l'Art Romànic, Les esglésies romàniques des de Sant Pere del Burgal a la Vall d'Àsua*, Barcelona 2008.

³ Ibid.