INTRODUCTION

On 6 July 985, the armies of the Cordoban dictator al-Mansūr breached the walls of Barcelona and sacked the city. The Arabic chroniclers give the impression that this was just another successful raid, and there is no reason to believe that al-Mansūr thought any differently. It was, after all, his twenty-third campaign in just nine years.1 From the perspective of Barcelona, however, the event was of capital importance, not only because of its effect on the city itself, but for its impact on the imagination of her inhabitants. An early and strong historiographical tradition sees in the events of 985 a formative step in the creation of a Catalan national identity. After the Carolingian reconquest of Barcelona in 801, Charlemagne organized the region between the Conflent and the Ebro River into the Spanish March. Over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, Barcelona came to predominate over the other counties in the region. While the counts remained loyal to the faltering Carolingian house, they began to operate in an ever more independent fashion. The last Frankish military expeditions into the area took place in the 820s; Guifré I “the Hairy” of Barcelona (878–97) was the last count to be appointed by a Frankish king, Guifré II of Besalú (941–57) the last to swear fidelity. Following al-Mansūr’s attack, Borrell II of Barcelona, reversing his earlier policy, appealed to the Frankish court for aid. By 988, when an offer of assistance in return for renewed promises of fidelity finally arrived, Borrell had lost interest. The Catalan counties went their own way; 985 was the last straw.2

1 Manuel Sánchez Martínez, “La expedición de Al-Manṣūr contra Barcelona en el 985 según las fuentes árabes,” in Catalunya i França, 293–301; Luis Molina, ed., “Las campañas de Almanzor a la luz de un nuevo texto,” Al-Qantara 2 (1981), 249–50. Muhammad ibn Abī’ ‘Amir, or al-Mansūr, was from 976 to 1002 the hadjib, or chancellor, to the powerless caliph Hisām II (976–1002, 1010–13). He turned the title over to his son ‘Abd al-Malik, though he continued to rule until his death in 1002. ‘Abd al-Malik, in turn, ruled in the name of Hisām until his own death in 1008.
We may discount parts of this tradition as court propaganda, but it is harder to ignore a document from within two years of the event that attests to its immediate impact:

In the year of the Lord 986, the thirty-first year of Lothar’s rule, on the kalends of July, a Wednesday [1 July 985], Barcelona was besieged by the Saracens and, with God’s leave, and with our sins hindering [the defense of the city], it was captured by them in the same month, on the sixth, and all of the inhabitants of the city – and those of its county, who had entered the city on the order of the lord-count Borrell, for the purpose of guarding and defending it – all died or were taken captive; and all of their property was destroyed, whatever they had assembled there . . .

Though recovery was in fact relatively rapid – Borrell II’s son led a raid on Córdoba in 1010 – in the closing years of the tenth century Barcelona remained an abandoned frontier outpost of a fragmenting Carolingian empire. The principal city of the region lay in ruins, and Catalonia did not as yet exist.

On 12 September 1213, Borrell II’s direct descendant Pere I suffered another defeat, losing his life in the battle of Muret while leading forces against Simon de Montfort and the knights of the Albigensian Crusade. But by now the count of Barcelona was no longer just one of many in a loosely organized frontier region; he had become the ruler of a confederation of counties that had for a century been called Catalonia. Furthermore, this confederation had been united since 1137 with the realm of Aragón; the count was also a king. Pere’s ancestors had long pursued interests north of the Pyrenees and had played a major role, alongside the kings of Castile, in the Reconquista. The political community had recently begun the process of organizing the assemblies known as the Corts. And the city that lay in ruins in 985 was now a Mediterranean commercial capital of the greatest importance. Much had changed in two and one-quarter centuries.

This dramatic growth of the power of the count of Barcelona, the influence of his region, and the importance of his city in the eleventh and twelfth centuries rested on fundamental changes in Catalan society. These changes were in the first instance economic: Catalonia took part in the general expansion of the European economy in this period, and

3 DBarciona 172: “Annus Domini DCCCCLXXXVI, imperante Leuthario XXXI anno, die kalendas iulii, IIII feria, a sarracenis obsessa est Barchinona et, permittente Deo, impediente peccata nostra, capta est ab eis in eadem mense, II nonas, et ibidem moruit uel capti sunt omnes habitantibus de eadem ciuitate uel de eiumdem comitatu, qui ibidem introierant per inessionem de domino Borrello comite, ad custodieendum uel defendendum eam; et ibidem perit omnem substanciam eorum, quincidunt ibidem congregauerant…” See also Michel Zimmermann, “La prise de Barcelone par Al-Mansûr et la naissance de l’historiographie catalane,” Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest 87 (1980), 194–201.

4 Bisson, Medieval Crown, 23–57.
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its location on the sea and on a frontier gave it a particular advantage. More important, however, was the ability of Catalonia to capitalize on its new prosperity. This required a restructuring of the social order to allow the ruling classes to transform prosperity into power. The history of power and social order in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is likewise a European, rather than a particularly Catalan problem. That history is best examined in different ways in different regions, by taking advantage of the peculiar characteristics of the available evidence. What Catalonia offers for evidence is a wealth of archival records. This material can often seem lifeless, especially because the documentary riches of the region are not matched by a similar abundance of narrative sources. Nevertheless, certain highly descriptive records can compensate for the absence of narrative accounts, allowing studies to move beyond the presentation of patterns without context. For questions of power and social order in this period, one subset of these records is particularly rich: the written agreements known as convenientiae.

The phrase “Hec est convenientia . . .” (“This is the agreement . . .”) opens hundreds of documents from the eleventh and twelfth centuries preserved in the archives of Catalonia. The substance of the documents and the status of the persons they concern vary widely: agreements detailing the terms of tenure of a castle from a count, or of a simple plot of land from a monastery; peace treaties between great lords, or settlements between brothers concerning division of an inheritance; promises to be faithful, or grants of right of first refusal of purchase of a property. Despite this variety, or perhaps because of it, convenientiae determined a social and political order.

This study developed from the detailed examination of approximately 1,000 of these convenientiae. The documents themselves prompted a first series of questions. When did the convenientia first appear in the Catalan counties? What were its sources? What were the reasons for its appearance and the rhythms of its diffusion? How did the various types of agreements to which scribes applied the label convenientia develop, and how and why did the distinctions among these various types gradually dissolve amidst a breakdown in formulae? The answers to these questions form an interesting story in themselves. They provide a window on the inner workings of scribal culture and a case study of semantic and diplomatic development and change. Such a study, however, would be incomplete; these narrower questions about documentary typology and language

must serve only as a foundation for a broader examination of the changing associations of individuals and communities over time. Thus a second series of questions focuses not on the documents themselves, but on the legal, social, political, and economic structures for which they provide detailed evidence. What explains the appearance, development, and spread of the institutions and relationships described in these agreements? How did these structures persist over time? How did they change? How did they operate within various segments of society? How may they be seen as providing the bases of social and political order? These are the larger historical problems that justify the close scrutiny of the conveniencia. This second story, however, is inseparable from the first, for in reconstructing the history of a society, it is essential to understand the nature of the evidence that was generated by and, in turn, helped to shape that society.

Regional studies run the risk of isolating an area under consideration from its wider context. This observation is particularly true for studies of late- and post-Carolingian Europe, where regions, rather than nation-states and empires, are increasingly seen as the proper units of analysis. The muses of regional historiography in the twentieth century always saw the method as a means to an end, however, and if regional studies are to prove useful, they must remain conscious of what lies beyond.7 By accidents of geography and politics, Catalonia’s context in this era was particularly complex.8 Histories of the region point to a turn away from the Carolingian dynasty toward Rome and Córdoba as the principal development of the period. The appearance of the Venetian doge-turned-saint, Pietro Uresol, and his companion Romuald at Sant Miquel de Cuixà in the 970s; Gerbert d’Aurillac’s contemporary residence at Santa Maria de Ripoll; embassies to Córdoba in 930, 936, 961x66, 971, and 974; meetings of Catalan counts with the Ottonian emperors at Rome: these are all indicators of Catalonia’s “opening up to the world.”9 The travels of Sunyer, monk of Cuixà (950), and then of Bishop Guisad of Urgell, Abbot Arnulf of Ripoll, and Count Sunifred of Cerdanya (951) to the papal court marked an important opening on a different front, and the relationship between Catalonia and the papacy became a crucial

8 For a concise survey of physical and human geography, see Freedman, Origins, 20–23.
9 Bonnassie, La Catalogne, 1:325–61; Abadal i de Vinyals, Els primers comtes, 301–38.
factor not only in the religious history of the region, but also in its political development.\(^{10}\) While valid, this approach views the Catalan counties as a peripheral region, dependent on distant power centers.\(^{11}\) The relations between the counties and their immediate neighbors, both across the Pyrenees and on the Iberian Peninsula, were in fact much more significant for the fate of the region.

The establishment of the Spanish March assimilated the Catalan counties into the Carolingian empire. Connections to the North were not new, as Visigothic rule had straddled the Pyrenees, and the Catalan counties shared with their neighbors in Septimania a traditional adherence to Visigothic law. From a Parisian perspective, they remained technically a part of the West Frankish and then French kingdom until 1258, when Louis IX abandoned his claims to the counties of Barcelona, Urgell, Besalú, Roselló, Empúries, Cerdanya, Conflent, Girona, and Osona in the Treaty of Corbeil.\(^{12}\) From Barcelona, as suggested above, the situation looked rather different; Capetian rights were long moribund, if not extinguished, by the millennium. If juridically independent, however, the Catalan counties remained nevertheless a part of the late- and post-Carolingian world, more closely attached to that milieu than to their Iberian neighbors. The notarial habits of Catalan scribes provide an apt symbol of the region’s position. Despite the de facto political break from the Carolingian and Capetian dynasties, dating clauses refer to the regnal years of French kings until 1180; scribes in the rest of the peninsula, including Aragón after the union, employed the Spanish Era.\(^{13}\)

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The northern orientation of the Catalan counties is evident, too, in palaeography; while Aragonese documents maintain strong Visigothic influence, the escritura condal of tenth- and eleventh-century Catalan documents is a purer caroline minuscule. Catalonia also followed a particular path in linguistic development, both in terms of the vernacular and Latin. As Roger Wright observes, “For practical purposes it can be regarded as a part of the Frankish and European area,” meaning that in contrast to the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, Romance and Latin became distinct well before 1100.

The ecclesiastical history of the region explains these palaeographical, linguistic, and notarial traditions. After the fall of the Romano-Visigothic metropolitan see of Tarragona in 714, and despite premature attempts at its restoration, the dioceses of the Catalan counties – Barcelona, Urgell, Vic, and Girona – became subject to the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Narbonne; these ties only became stronger with the notorious purchase of that office by the count of Cerdanya for his ten-year-old son sometime before 1019. Administrative and cultural links were thus to the Carolingian church, rather than to the remnants of its Visigothic counterpart; while the western Pyrenean kingdoms resisted Benedictine monasticism and Roman liturgy until the late eleventh century, these took root in Catalonia from the ninth century. Although Cluny lacked direct jurisdiction in the region, leading abbots established monastic con-
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federations along the Burgundian model that included monasteries on both sides of the Pyrenees. The marriage practices of the Catalan comital families confirm these northern leanings. The families all descended from Bello, a count of Carcassonne under Charlemagne, and after a brief period of endogamy, they looked back across the Pyrenees for marriage partners. Between 930 and 1080, twenty-two of thirty Catalan countesses came from outside the region, mostly from Languedoc, Auvergne, La Marche, Provence, and Burgundy; marriage alliances with the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula, while they did occur, were rare.

Catalonia’s strongest ties were to the North, but it also looked to the South. The relationships between the counties and peninsular Islamic powers passed rapidly through five distinct stages. From the establishment of the frontier in 801 to the mid-tenth century, contact was limited to the occasional visit and the slightly more frequent raid; the polities of interest for the Catalan counties in this period were not so much the central powers in the South as the independent and occasionally rebellious governors of the northern marches, such as the Banū Qasıım of Zaragoza. The establishment of the caliphate under ‘Abd al-Rahmān III (912–61) eliminated these buffer areas, and from 950, the counts of Barcelona established direct diplomatic, economic, and cultural contacts with Córdoba. The dictatorships of al-Manṣūr (978–1002) and his son, ‘Abd al-Malik (1002–8), ruptured whatever political ties had developed; Catalan sources report devastating raids in 985, 1000–1001, and 1003. From c. 1010, the political dynamic changed once again, with the dissolution of the caliphate into the taifa realms. The Catalan counties entered into and broke alliances with various Islamic and Christian factions in the subsequent years; their closest ties were with the coastal kingdoms of Málaga and Dénia and the adjacent polities of Zaragoza, Huesca, Lleida, and Tortosa. While this fluid situation continued into the late eleventh century—the Cid ruled in València until 1099, for example—from c. 1060 Castilian policy, papal intervention, the conquest of Toledo (1085), and the Almoravid response transformed the peninsular world once again; in the twelfth century, Catalonia was increasingly part of a united Christian front in the Reconquista. Despite these vicissitudes, throughout much of this period Catalonia’s southern frontier remained very stable: Carolingian

19 Aurell, Les noces du comte, 38–64.
forces withdrew from Tarragona in 809; the city was definitively restored only in the first decades of the twelfth century. Another constant in Catalonia’s relationship with the South, at least from 950, was economic contact. Mercenary wages, ransoms, piracy, and the regime of tribute payments (parias) kept money and goods flowing even during times of conflict; Islamic gold fueled Catalonia’s first economic takeoff.

With the exception of the often independent western counties of Urgell, Pallars, and Ribagorça, Catalonia’s involvement in Iberian politics before the twelfth century was almost entirely defined by these relationships with the Islamic South. The progress of the Reconquista created closer ties between Catalonia and the Christian kingdoms, but only slowly; such contacts leave few traces before the twelfth century. Alliances, whether military or matrimonial, were few and far between. Religious contacts operated solely through the occasional pilgrimage or pious bequest to Santiago de Compostela; Catalan bishops rarely met or even corresponded with their peninsular counterparts. Castilian fabrics listed in the inventory of a Catalan baron attest to economic contacts, but these, too, were limited; Catalonia’s trading interests looked north, south, and east. Most importantly, the counts of Barcelona resisted submission to potential hegemons, whether Sancho III Garcés of Navarre (1000–1035), Alfonso VI of León-Castile (1065–1109), or his grandson Alfonso VII (1126–57). This independence allowed for Catalonia’s less consistently belligerent stance toward her taifa neighbors. Counts and barons of the western regions were the first to be drawn into Aragonese and Castilian adventures from the 1060s. Berenguer Ramon II of Barcelona followed, joining Aragón, Navarre, and the taifa states of Lleida and Tortosa in attacking the Zaragoza of the Cid in 1082. The marriage of the future Ramon Berenguer IV of Barcelona (1131–62) to Petronilla of Aragón sealed not only the formation of the Catalan-Aragonese confederation, but also Catalonia’s deeper involvement in peninsular politics. Ramon Berenguer IV’s collaboration with Alfonso VII in expeditions against Murcia (1144) and the conquest of Almería (1147), followed by his own capture of the remaining Islamic outposts of Tortosa (1148), Lleida (1149), and Fraga (1149), signaled the end of...
an era. From then on, frequent treaties and squabbles with the Christian kingdoms marked Catalonia as a full partner in the Reconquista.27

Further expansion in southern France in the twelfth century brought Catalonia into contact with such distant powers as England, the German empire, Italian city-states, and even Byzantium.28 The most important influences on Catalonia, however, were always closer at hand. Administrative ties to Septimania and the strength of Carolingian traditions have encouraged the study of Catalonia as an extension of the empire, rather than as one of the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula.29 Still, the region was not simply an appendix to Languedoc. The separate linguistic developments of Catalan and Occitan provide one proof; the distinct relationships between the papacy and the Catalan counties, on the one hand, and the other dioceses of the province of Narbonne, on the other, show this as well.30 Furthermore, Catalonia shared the pressures and opportunities of the frontier with the Christian kingdoms in a way that it could not with lands north of the Pyrenees. Institutions, such as the archaic social structures of mountain enclaves, and movements, such as the repopulation of the plains below, are better understood in an Iberian context.31 Thus Catalonia falls between two well-defined historical (and historiographical) frameworks. A third – the Mediterranean world – is rapidly establishing itself as an alternative model. All three must be kept in mind in following the region’s internal development.

FEUDALISM IN ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY CATALONIA

The aspect of that internal development studied here is the changing role of written agreements in Catalan society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is not in the first instance a study of feudalism in Catalonia.


29 In addition to Roger Wright’s observation above, n. 15, see Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400–1000*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1995), 261: “Catalonia . . . was patently distinguishable from the rest of the peninsula.” He rightly goes on to note, however, that “this should not obscure the fact that it was one amongst several parts of a greater whole.” Cf. Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making, 483–1180* (Oxford, 1985), 78.


Making agreements in medieval Catalonia

Yet the subject matter and particularly the sources of this study implicate it in two heated controversies over the topic. The first of these is the debate concerning the “transformation of the year 1000” (mutation de l’an mil) or the “feudal revolution.” This model stems primarily from the studies of Georges Duby. Duby’s earliest work demonstrated the persistence in Burgundy until the year 1000 of a system of justice based on a Carolingian public order. Between 1000 and 1030, this jurisdiction collapsed, giving way to the private exercise of formerly public powers. In his landmarkthèse on the Mâconnais (1953), Duby showed that additional changes occurred around the year 1000: the end of ancient slavery, the proliferation of castles and oppressive regimes of lordship, the rise of a knightly class, the suppression of a once free peasantry, and the reorganization of aristocratic families into lineages. Duby’s initial findings have been confirmed and extended, with minor chronological variations, in a number of important French regional studies.32 Challenging this model of rapid and radical change, proponents of continuity argue that “mutationism” exaggerates the notion of public order before the year 1000 and the extent of the violence after that date. The distinction between a monolithic ancient slavery and an equally monolithic free peasantry before the millennium oversimplifies a highly complex situation. Likewise, the idea of the rise of the knightly class is spurious. Too much of the argument rests on reading changes in language as evidence for changes in institutions, and changes in the nature of documentation as evidence for changes in society.33 The convenientia has attracted the attention of partisans of both sides of the debate. Pierre Bonnassie described the convenientia as one of the three elements with which counts and princes throughout southern Europe reconstituted public authority after the millennial crisis.34 On the other hand, Dominique Barthélémy,

