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Like a Psalter for a Queen: Sancha, Melisende and the New Testament Cycle in the Chapter-House at Sijena

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This article discusses the paintings of the chapter-house of Sijena, most of which were destroyed by fire in 1936. To this end, the paper makes use of earlier photographic material, proposes a new reading of the biblical cycle, reconstructs the architectural and ornamental setting of the chapter-house and examines the historical and largely unknown liturgical context that lay behind the selection of images. The striking correspondence between the New Testament cycle at Sijena and the prefatory cycle of miniatures in the Melisende Psalter (1131-1143), as well as the use in the nunnery of a liturgy based on that of the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre and the presence of a Lignum crucis in the chapter-house, sheds light on Sijena's links to the art and liturgy of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and on Queen Sancha's motives as patron of this Hospitaller foundation. Thus, we hope to present a holistic interpretation of the chapter-house in relation to queenship, pious devotion, and the evocation of the Holy Land. This ultimately points up the cross-cultural interests of the Kingdom of Aragon and its developing projection into the Mediterranean.

Keywords: Sijena, Queen Sancha, Melisende, Crusader Art, Hospitallers, Genealogies of Christ, Holy Sepulchre, *Lignum Crucis*, Queenship.

The chapter-house of the monastery of Santa María de Sijena (Huesca) (Fig. 1) is an outstanding example of late Romanesque painting in Spain. It can be reconstructed in large part despite the extensive damage it suffered as the result of a fire in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War. Its extensive iconographic programme was probably commissioned by Queen Sancha of Aragon during her long retirement in the monastery (1197-1208), following the death of her husband, King Alfonso the Troubadour (1157-1196). The hybrid character of these paintings – stylistically somewhere between late-12th-century English illumination and the artistic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean – has already stimulated an intense debate over the sources of the imagery and the identity of the artists. Notwithstanding this attention, however, there has been no attempt to assess this extraordinary pictorial space, which combined Old and New Testament narratives beneath a lavish coffered ceiling, as a whole. The loss of much of the work during the fire – nearly all the New Testament cycle and the whole of the mudejar wooden ceiling were destroyed – as well as the subsequent removal of the surviving paintings for exhibition at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, have hindered assessment of the painted chapterhouse as it might have appeared when first completed.¹

A virtual reconstruction of the Romanesque chapter-house was recently undertaken as part of *El sueño de Sijena (The Sijena Dream, 2020)*. This consists of a documentary film directed by Jesús Garcés Lambert, and produced by Juan Naya and Javier Atance, for which a range of graphic material belonging to the period prior to the 1936 fire was assembled and examined (Fig. 2). Some of this had not been previously published and it led, in turn, to our coming to novel conclusions as to the original layout of the pictorial cycle.

Until now, Karl Schuler's work has offered the most persuasive reconstruction of the New Testament series.² However, the discovery of certain new details led us to a better understanding of how the narrative was coordinated with the architecture of the chapter-house. In particular, thanks to the discovery of a photograph taken in 1918 by the Catalan architect, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, we were able to reconstruct in its entirety the scene of the Three Women at the Sepulchre (south wall), which included a depiction of a group of soldiers sleeping beneath the tomb (Fig. 3). Secondly, the intriguing remains of painting visible in a black and white photograph

belonging to the *Arxiu Amatller d'Art Hispànic* in Barcelona allow us to propose that the west wall (counter-façade) was probably covered by a large painted composition devoted to Pentecost (Figs 4 a-b). Moreover, comparison of the extensive and unusual ensemble of New Testament scenes with that of certain 12th-century devotional psalters belonging to queens argued for a new interpretation of the role played by Queen Sancha in the commissioning of the paintings. This last also underlines their debt to Crusader art.

The status of Sijena as a nunnery belonging to the Order of St John of Jerusalem and its pictorial connections with the art of the Holy Land has already been singled out by Dulce Ocón.³ We now intend to extend this hypothetical Crusader link and look at its broader ramifications. To this end, a study of the monastic Breviary that survives in a printed version of 1547, copied from a medieval manuscript kept at Sijena, enables one to reconstruct the yearly liturgy and the spiritual life of the nuns.⁴ This text follows a liturgy based on the rite of the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, as was generally used in houses belonging to the Order of St John, and sheds light on the peculiar choice of certain scenes in the iconographic programme. Moreover, Queen Sancha donated a reliquary of the *Lignum Crucis* which was displayed in the chapter-house. Ultimately, as will see, the chapter-house evokes the sacred topography of the Holy Land. It is an extraordinary example of the cross-cultural art produced in the Mediterranean around the year 1200, and was the result of Queen Sancha's devotion.

ASSEMBLING THE PUZZLE: THE NEW TESTAMENT CYCLE

Although the rich and suggestive set of paintings of Sijena has been the subject of countless studies, scholars have usually concerned themselves with style, chronology and iconography, while descriptions of the decorative programme are usually partial or incomplete. Furthermore, most modern literature on Sijena follows a trend set by Anglo-American scholarship in which the imagery is largely interpreted in terms of its English connections. Thus, Walter Oakeshott, in his seminal study of 1972, focused on the Old Testament cycle, located on the spandrels of the five diaphragm arches (Fig. 5). These scenes were relatively well preserved, and had been well documented in Gudiol's black and white photographs of 1936, allowing Oakeshott to develop his hypothesis of a direct relationship between the Sijena paintings and the artists of the Winchester Bible (of c. 1185), in particular with the work of the so-called Morgan Master.⁵ However, Oakeshott shied away from attempting to figure out the order of scenes belonging to the lost cycle of the New Testament. This cycle, carried on the walls of the chapter-house, was already fragmentary in 1936 and following the fire no more than a few patches of paint remained on the south wall. Furthermore, Oakeshott's reconstruction of the genealogical portrait series on the soffits of the five arches followed Matthew (1, 1-17) on the outmost northern arches (I-II) and Luke (3, 23-38) on the remaining three (III-V), but was partial and failed to comment on the semantic significance of the inclusion of the ancestors of Christ in a programme that aimed to link the two Testaments.⁶

The only real attempt to cover all aspects of the figurative programme of the chapter-house was made by Karl Schuler in his 1994 Ph.D. thesis. Combining textual, graphic and epigraphic material, this American scholar was not only able to propose a more accurate reconstruction of the New Testament cycle but also provided a broader vision of the original extent of the biblical genealogies.⁷ While Oakeshott thought that 'the series of portraits amounted originally to seventy' (five arches with fourteen portraits on each), Schuler argued that they were actually eighty.⁸ Schuler deserves credit for offering a more integrated view of the different cycles. He both highlighted the intrinsic relationship between the three main cycles and drew attention to Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* (1169-1176) as the key to a comprehensive reading of the pictorial ensemble.⁹ Moreover, Schuler pointed out the importance of the Kufic

inscriptions invoking the sovereignty of God and prosperity, displayed on the first three bays (N-S) of the mudejar coffered ceiling.¹⁰ Schuler was nevertheless very cautious in his approach, and most of his insights remained relatively undeveloped. He also occasionally missed details. The fourth bay of the chapter-house, for instance, included a precious Kufic inscription on the edge of the boards to set alongside the others (Fig. 6).

As far as Spanish scholarship is concerned, recent discussion has been overshadowed by debate on the ownership of the paintings, and their state of conservation.¹¹ Nonetheless, there has been significant interest in the monument as a royal foundation and pantheon since the 19th century. A milestone was the book published by Mariano de Pano in 1883 recording priceless information on the state of the chapter-house at the end of the 19th century. Although at that time the only paintings were those on the five arches, de Pano was responsible for the discovery of scenes that were previously hidden under plaster in the upper register of the north wall. These consisted of the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, and Annunciation to the Shepherds (Figs 7 a-d), where de Pano was also able to read and publish the inscriptions accompanying the Nativity – ‘JOSEPH, FILII DAVID, NOLI TIMERE’ (Matthew 1:20-21) and ‘GLORIA IN ALTISSIMIS DEO’ (Luke 11:14) – and the Annunciation, ‘ANNUNCIO VOBIS GAUDIUM MAGNUM QUIA NATUS EST VOBIS (HODIE SALVATOR)’ (Luke 2:10).¹² Furthermore, de Pano found enough evidence to anticipate the recovery of other New Testament scenes under the plaster of the south wall (Crucifixion, Visit to the Sepulchre, Christ carrying the Cross) and the east wall (Presentation in the Temple, Temptations of Christ).¹³ His description of the chapter-house interior is the most detailed source for the lost aesthetic splendour of the room, with gilded-metallic stars and haloes on a blue background,¹⁴ golden borders framing the arches and dividing the two registers of paintings on the interior walls, and globes hanging from the ceiling.¹⁵

In more recent decades, Spanish scholarship has focused on the relationship between Sijena and another English manuscript dated to the end of the 12th century, the Anglo-Catalan Psalter (Paris, BN, ms. Lat. 8846) (Fig. 8). In terms of style, chronology and iconography, the opening folios of this codex, made in the scriptorium of Christ Church Cathedral at Canterbury between 1180 and 1190, compare very well to most of painted scenes at Sijena. The fact that this psalter was completed by the Catalan painter, Ferrer Bassa (from fol. 72v) during the middle third of the 14th century, has led scholars to speculate as to the possible arrival of the manuscript in Aragon at an early date.¹⁶ Its potential presence in the royal monastery of Sijena when the chapter-house was painted makes it a possible source for the pictorial programme.¹⁷

Notwithstanding the similarities with the Canterbury Psalter, the parallels are not exhaustive; indeed they extend to no more than a selection of images, namely the four scenes of the childhood of Christ. The manuscript certainly does not provide a model for the complete sequence at Sijena. Sijena omits scenes related to the Creation of the World, nor does it feature an extensive cycle of the Ministry of Christ, or an intricate Tree of Jesse, all elements that characterize the Canterbury Psalter. Instead, Sijena stresses Easter, while the succession of New Testament scenes seems to shape a cycle based on the main feasts of the liturgical year.

SIJENA AND MELISENDE PSALTER

It is this relationship with the liturgy that suggests a link between the lost New Testament cycle at Sijena and another 12th-century psalter, that of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem (London, British Library, Egerton MS 1139).¹⁸ The introductory cycle of images of this psalter, which consists of twenty-three New Testament scenes plus an image of the Deesis, appears to have been one of the bases for the creation of the twenty-nine scenes that shaped Sijena’s New Testament (Figs 9-10)

Firstly, the sequence and the arrangement of scenes in both the psalter and the chapter-house match each other rather well. In the Melisende Psalter the order is as follows: Annunciation

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(fol. 1r), Visitation (fol. 1v), Nativity (fol. 2r), Adoration and Departure of the Magi (fol. 2v) (Fig. 11), Presentation in the Temple (fol. 3r), Baptism of Christ (fol. 3v), Temptation of Christ (fol. 4r), Transfiguration (fol. 4v), Raising of Lazarus (fol. 5r), Entry into Jerusalem (fol. 5v), Last Supper (fol. 6r), Washing of Feet (fol. 6v), Agony in the Garden (fol. 7r), Betrayal of Judas (fol. 7v), Crucifixion (fol. 8r), Descent from the Cross (fol. 8v), Lamentation (fol. 9r), Harrowing of Hell (fol. 9v), The Holy Women in the Sepulchre (fol. 10r), Doubting of Thomas (fol. 10v), Ascension (fol. 11r), Pentecost (fol. 11v), Death of the Virgin (fol. 12r) and the Deesis (fol. 12v). Moreover, the *mise-en-page* of scenes in two registers on fol. 2v of the Melisende Psalter anticipates the peculiar double distribution of the narrative in the Aragonese chapter-house.

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As for Sijena, it is not possible to [reconstruct](#) the composition of the entire cycle as many parts did not survive into the 19th century. The sequence was arranged over two registers in each of the four walls and most of the lower register had already been lost by the 16th century due to damp.¹⁹ Humidity was probably the reason why, in the last third of the 16th century, a series of adjustments were made to the chapter-house to improve the space. Thus, the chapter-house floor was raised by around 800 mm to isolate it from the water below, the paintings were whitewashed and a stucco cornice was added to the middle of the walls to give the room a Renaissance character (Fig. 1). This caused irreparable damage to the paintings as the cornice ran across the centre of the lower register of the paintings, whose state was probably already fragmentary by then.

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Two additional works were also carried out during the renovation of the chapter-house. First, the springing points of the five diaphragm arches were cut to match the new Renaissance cornice. As a result, each arch ended in a stucco corbel beneath the stucco cornice. This destroyed some and possibly many of the ancestors of Christ on both sides of the arches and reduced their number to fourteen in every arch, as could be seen before 1936. Schuler proposed that the original number of ancestors was sixteen per arch – a total of 80. However, [it is very likely](#) that the series of ancestors was longer, and that three were lost on each side, meaning there were twenty ancestors on each arch, making a total of one hundred (Fig. 12). Moreover, it should be noted that during the 16th-century process of renewal the portraits of ancestors and their inscriptions were extensively overpainted.

Secondly, the raising of the floor level prompted changes to the space. Towards the east end of the north wall, the door which linked the chapter-house to the nuns' dormitory, the *Cruces enteras*, was raised up, [and a new space created, the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre \(Fig. 13\)](#).²⁰ The opening of a new doorway on this side, crowned by a luxurious Plateresque trilobed tympanum, entailed the total destruction of the paintings below the Annunciation and Visitation. Thus, the recovery of the paintings at the end of the 19th century included only the upper part of the original cycle, together with fragmentary surviving sections of the lower part in the north, west and south walls. The paintings on the east wall had almost totally vanished by then.

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Notwithstanding the gaps, it is possible to reconstruct the original sequence of images. On the north wall, there were originally seven scenes. The four in the upper register – Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, and Annunciation to the Shepherds – were well preserved up until the 1936 fire, while the three episodes in the lower register had largely disappeared by the 16th century. The upper sequence seems to have been an attempt to follow the order of the Melisende Psalter, in which the painters were obliged to adapt a typically crowded Byzantine Nativity to the standard Latin iconography by splitting it into separate groups: the Virgin Mary with an old melancholic Joseph and the Bathing of Christ formed the third scene, while the Shepherds were placed in a fourth frame. As for the lower register, the narrative might have consisted of the Magi before Herod, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Return of the Magi. The first of these episodes was not included in the Melisende Psalter, but it does feature in another 12th-century psalter, that of Ingeborg (Chantilly, Bibliothèque du Château MS 9 olim 1695), on

fol. 14r (Fig. 14). However, the Adoration of the Magi and Return of the Magi probably followed the iconography of fol. 2v in the Melisende Psalter. Earlier photos reveal the traces of an angel who might have been part of the Adoration of the Magi and the Return of the Magi, as in the psalter.

The east wall was covered with twelve scenes (Figs 9 and 10). These were divided into two registers and distributed in six panels which corresponded to the divisions created by the five diaphragm arches. The cycle was devoted to the Ministry and Passion of Christ, and prior to 1936 the only scenes which remained visible belonged to the upper register. These consisted of the Presentation in the Temple, between the first and second arches; the Temptations of Christ, between the second and the third arches; and the Raising of Lazarus, between the third and the fourth arches. This arrangement allows us to guess the original [scheme](#). The first panel might have encompassed the Flight to Egypt and Massacre of the Innocents, absent in the Melisende Psalter but present in the Ingeborg Psalter (fol. 17v). As for the rest of the sequence, this might have been very similar to that to the Melisende Psalter, not only in terms of compositional iconography but also in the distribution of scenes. The two registers at Sijena might even have followed the pagination of the Melisende Psalter, [with the Presentation of Christ and Baptism of Christ](#) (second panel); Temptations of Christ and Transfiguration (third panel), Raising of Lazarus and Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (fourth panel); Last Supper and Washing of the Feet (fifth panel); Agony in the Garden and Betrayal of Judas (sixth panel).

The south wall was the only section of the New Testament cycle which partially survived the destruction. Here the surviving scenes of the Flagellation, Crucifixion and the Visit of the Women to the Sepulchre were removed in 1960 and are currently displayed at the MNAC in Barcelona. Other scenes were unfortunately destroyed in the fire. However, [a photo from before 1936](#) shows Christ's descent into limbo (Fig. 15). It is very likely that the original layout once again combined the arrangement of the Ingeborg Psalter with that of Melisende. So, the Flagellation in the upper register on the left is only found in the Ingeborg Psalter (fol. 25v), while the rest of the scenes reflect the repertoire of the Melisende Psalter. On the left, in the lower register, there was probably the Lamentation or *Threnos* of the Virgin over Christ's dead body. The monumental Crucifixion was in the centre. Finally, on the right, the Holy Women at the Sepulchre occupied the upper part with the Descent into Limbo below.

Much more hypothetical and intriguing is the pictorial decoration on the west wall. This not only linked the chapterhouse to the cloister through four openings but also provided lighting through four windows that rose above the lean-to roof of the cloister walk. Unfortunately, all that survives is the vegetal decoration of the southernmost bay, as this had been walled in before the fire. As far as the figurative programme is concerned, we know nothing. However, two photos offer a potential clue. The photographs reveal, on the spandrels of the second and third openings, traces of a group of haloed saints sitting in a kind of a semicircle. This peculiar composition appears to be an adaptation of the Byzantine iconography of Pentecost, in which the Apostles are seated on a semicircular bench taking the form of a *sigma*, while they receive the rays of the Holy Spirit from a shining disc (figs 4 and 10). This scene is included in the Melisende Psalter, but at Sijena the painter adapted the composition to the architectural setting, [seemingly](#) splitting the scene into four sections which coincided with the four openings and dividing the Apostles into groups of three. By so doing, the architecture and painting combined to dramatize the scene of Pentecost [so that](#) the sunlight entering the room could be seen, metaphorically, as the divine light of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, although most windows were rounded-headed, the second window – as [in Fig. 4](#) – was an oculus. This feature could have been perceived by the beholders as reminiscent of the shining solar disc in depictions of Pentecost.

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The two ends of the west wall might have been decorated with the closing liturgical feasts found in the Melisende Psalter. While the extreme left probably included, from top to bottom, Christ's Ascension and Thomas placing his hand in Christ's side, the right side would have accommodated the *Deesis* and Dormition (*Koimisis: Κοιμήσις*).²¹ The circulation of this type of Byzantinising repertoire in 13th-century Aragonese painting can be compared with the pictorial decoration of the church of Nuestra Señora de Fréscano (Zaragoza). The cycle there includes the Crucifixion, Ascension, Thomas with Christ, the **Three Maries at the Sepulchre** and the Anastasis (Figs 16-17). This latter has even been considered a direct echo of the Sijena paintings.²² It is certainly possible that other scenes at Fréscano, in particular the Ascension and the scene of Thomas with Christ, also reflected the original programme of the chapter-house at Sijena. Their iconography is strikingly Byzantine, with the Virgin Mary wearing a blue mantle among the Apostles in the Ascension, and Christ standing in front of a door in the scene with Thomas. It is probably no accident that both compositions are precisely mirrored in the Melisende Psalter.

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MELISENDE AS MIRROR OF QUEENSHIP AND THE LEGACY OF THE CRUSADERS

The arrival of this New Testament repertoire in Sijena could either have coincided with the foundational years of the monastery (1187-1188) or with the retirement of Queen Sancha to the monastery following her widowhood (1197). Whichever it was, the translation of this set of images into a monumental pictorial cycle could not have been realised until the chapterhouse was complete. The question then is, first, to pinpoint the most probable context for the transfer of a crusader repertoire to Sijena, and second, to determine the point at which the room was ready to be decorated.

In October 1187, the *provisor* the Order of the Hospitallers, Armengol de Aspa, gave to Queen Sancha the villages of Sijena, Sena and Urgelleto so that they could be exchanged with the Knights Templar for the churches of Sena and Sijena. The aim of the transaction was the foundation of a nunnery and hospital of the Order of St John in Sijena. The arrangement was set up in the period during which Saladin took the city of Jerusalem (2 October 1187).²³ The Holy Land was explicitly mentioned in this document, in which the monastery was committed to pay alms yearly to the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem: 'annuatim halemossinas infirmis pauperibus Hospital Iherosolimis transmissura'.²⁴ As part of this transaction, Sancha devoted herself 'in vita et in morte' to the *Deesis* (Christ, the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist), to the poor and sick of the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem, and took Sijena as her place of burial:

Et ego Sancia, Dei gratia Aragonis regina, Barchinone comitissa Provincique marchissa, offero me ipsam Domino Deo et Beate Virgini Marie et Beato Iohani et infirmitatis pauperibus Hospitalis Iherosolimitanus in vita en morte. Et eligo mihi sepulturam in supradicto loco, et non possim me alteri religioni unquam transferre.²⁵

The particular devotion of Sancha to the *Deesis*, as protector of the new foundation, makes sense of the eventual celebration of the theme in the northernmost section of the west wall of the chapter-house. A two-register arrangement consisting of a *Deesis* (upper) and a Dormition (lower) would epitomize the determination of the Queen to make Sijena both a hospital and a burial place. The probable location of the scenes here would also have a significance for perceptions of the room as well as provide possible clues to understanding Sancha's intentions in this commission.

First, it would mean that the *Deesis* was on the right of the seats occupied by the authorities of the monastery, in particular the abbess and the queen. It is very likely that they presided over the daily meetings of the community seated at the centre of the north wall, while the nuns sat on a continuous bench running longitudinally along the east wall. This arrangement

probably changed in the last third of the 16th century, after the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre was opened out of the north wall. Although the throne of the abbess stayed at the centre on the north wall, with the opening of this new chapel the senior officers of the nunnery would have moved to the northwest corner of the chapter-house and an entry arch was walled-in to accommodate their seats. A watercolour made by Valentín Carderera in 1840 and kept at the Ducal Palace of Villahermosa in Pedrola (Zaragoza) shows this new layout, whereby a luxurious bench with backrest occupied the northernmost end of the west wall, while a simple wooden bench was provided opposite (Fig. 18).

Second, the Deesis not only reflects the personal devotion of Queen Sancha and Sijena's mother house in Jerusalem, it could also be read as a direct allusion to the special devotion of Queen Melisende (1105-1161). According to C. N. Johns and Hugo Buchtal, the Melisende Psalter, in which the Deesis is the final image of the introductory cycle, was probably made for Melisende in her capacity as 'a member of the noble confraternity situated in the Church of St Mary in the Valley of Jehoshaphat'.²⁶ Queen Melisende evidently had a penchant for including the Deesis in some of her most spectacular commissions, as Avital Heymann has recently pointed out. Thus, the Deesis was included in the almshouse of the Benedictine monastery of St Mary in Jehoshaphat (now in the Museum of Israel) and in the Chapel of St Helen in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, both dated to the 1140s.²⁷ Furthermore, the north apse in the church of the Hospitallers in Abu Gosh (Fig. 19) and the west portal of the church of St John the Baptist in the Mauristan (Jerusalem), from the third quarter of the 12th century, provide examples which testify to the circulation and popularity of this kind of [iconography](#) in settlements of the Order of St John in the Holy Land.²⁸ Ultimately, the Deesis evokes the topography of the headquarters of the Hospitallers in Jerusalem. Their hospital was located between the churches of St John and the Holy Sepulchre and possessed two churches devoted to the Virgin: St Mary of the Latins and St Mary Minor.²⁹

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Third, it is worth exploring how and why imagery transferred from a crusader context to the chapter-house in Sijena. In Jerusalem, Melisende took the subject of the Deesis from her psalter and repeated it in the decoration of an almshouse in Jehosaphat. She highlighted the role that, in the sight of the faithful, Mary and St John the Baptist performed as mediators in the Last Judgement. This carried a special significance at a holy site which accommodated the tomb of Mary in the monastic lower church, and was where Melisende decided to both bury her parents and herself.³⁰ Similarly, at Sijena, the Deesis might have carried funerary overtones as the northern arm of the nuns church housed a royal pantheon, which included the tombs of Queen Sancha (†1208), her daughters Dulce (†1189) and Leonor (†1226), and her son, King Peter the Catholic (†1213).³¹ Furthermore, as will be seen below, the Sijena breviary makes clear that one of the obligations of the nuns was to care for the dead, which they did by reciting an Office of the Dead [that follows](#) that of the Holy Sepulchre.

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Finally, the prominence of the Virgin in the Deesis emphasized the role that Melisende and other widowed queens had to assume in the spiritual care of the kingdom. Melisende was praised by her contemporaries as an ideal queen and widow. In two separate letters written after the death in 1143 of her husband, Fulk, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that Melisende had to act as a man, doing all she had to do 'in a spirit prudent and strong'.³² Bernard also admired her for being 'a strong woman, a humble widow, and an exalted queen' who served God, and advised her to commit herself to Christ 'to be taught, how she should rule'.³³

Melisende thus became a prototype for the virtuous queen and widow, performing an effective secular and spiritual rule or *ministerium*.³⁴ Her celebrity was based on her pious and artistic commissions in the Holy Land, and her reputation increased with the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin in October 1187. It was probably shortly after this that the Melisende Psalter

arrived in Western Europe. The identity of the man who wrote his name, 'Frere Ponz Daubon', upside-down on an unnumbered pastedown in the manuscript, is not entirely clear (Fig. 20). The signature has usually been dated to the end of the 12th century and attributed to a crusader, either a Knight Hospitaller or a brother in another Military Order, who could have brought the psalter from Jerusalem into Western Europe.³⁵ Notwithstanding this, the only man documented with the name, a certain Ponces de Aubon, was Master of the Knights Templar in France between 1236 and 1240.³⁶ **If we accept the very considerable likelihood that the psalter left the Holy Land around 1187, then** this suggests that the manuscript took a circuitous route from the Holy Land into Europe, and that Ponz Daubon was a later pair of hands through which the manuscript passed.

Prior to its purchase by the British Library, the manuscript belonged to the Grande Chartreuse. Details of its passage from Jerusalem to Grenoble via Ponz Daubon are unknown. However, as Kathleen Schowalter pointed out, the manuscript could have been known in courtly circles before 1200. Ingeborg, Queen of France, used the prefatory images of the Melisende Psalter as a model for her own psalter. In doing so, she aimed not only to reclaim legitimacy as a ruler (she was repudiated between 1193 and 1213 by her husband, King Philip II Augustus), but to establish, following in Melisende's footsteps, a visual bond between her role and that of the Virgin Mary, as Queen of Heaven.³⁷

As we have already argued, Sancha's involvement in the chapter-house at Sijena seems to have been contingent on knowledge of a prefatory cycle of images like that in the Melisende Psalter. In our opinion, it is highly likely that Sancha or her entourage had access to either this manuscript, or a crusader cycle which stemmed from it. From the moment of its foundation, Sijena fostered contacts with the legacy of the Holy Land. Ermengol d'Aspa, who authorized the exchange of land in 1187 and the institution of monastic rule in 1188, was aware of contemporary political events in the Levant. As administrator of the Order of the Hospitallers in Aragon and Provence from 1182, he was involved in the affairs of the Hospitallers in the Holy Land and Europe, especially during the embassy undertaken by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Heraclius, to the West in 1184-1185, when he visited Italy, France and England to enlist support against Saladin.³⁸ The Patriarch was accompanied by the Grand Master of the Hospital, Roger de Moulins (1177-1187), and Garnier de Nablous, who was named Prior of England in Dover in April 1185. In Neil Stratford's view, this is the likely context that explains Sijena's English connections. As Ermengol was the successor to Roger de Moulins as *provisor* of the Order (1187-1190), he might have been in touch with Garnier de Nablous, who in turn rose to become Grand Master (1190-1192) himself. According to Stratford, Garnier **perhaps explains** the international career of 'The Morgan Master' and could have been responsible for sending this English painter to Queen Sancha in the late 1180s.³⁹

Such a context provides one possible route to account for the chapter-house during the early years of the foundation of Sijena. However, the progress of work at Sijena is too uncertain to confirm an early date for its chapter-house. According to the Sijena Breviary, the feast of the dedication of the church was on *XI kalendae Maii* (21st April) (Fig. 21).⁴⁰ This date probably refers to the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone, held in 1188, rather than to the completion of work on the buildings. According to the monastic chronicle a marble slab carried an inscription recording that Richard, bishop of Huesca (1187-1201), consecrated the church in honour of Almighty God; the Virgin Mary; the apostles Peter, Paul and James the Great; St John the Baptist and St Michael, and placed there relics of the saints:

Ego Ricardus Episcopus Oscensis, Jacensis, et Barbastrensis, consecravi hanc ecclesiam ad honorem Dei Omnipotentis; Beatae Mariae Virginis; B.B. Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, atque Jacobis; Beati Joannis Baptistae; et Beati Michaelis Archangeli; et posui in ea

Eliminado: T

Eliminado: if we accept the very great likelihood that the psalter left the Holy Land before 1187

Eliminado: is one of the best candidates to be behind

reliquias Sanctorum Dei, vicesima prima Aprilis: Anno Domini millesimo, centesimo, octogesimo octavo.⁴¹

Although this marble slab is lost, the same inscription was also carved on the south wall of the main church, though this had become invisible by the 19th century as it had been whitewashed.⁴² The building of a new church, especially one where the foundations stood on swampy ground, as with Sijena, usually took a long time. Thus, the marble slab seems most likely **to belong to the ceremony of the *fundatio*, the rite** that preceded the start of the works with the symbolic blessing of the first stone. **The laying of the foundation stone was a specific rite and should not be confused with the church's completion.**⁴³ **It was fairly common practice to record the start of building work, though the carving of inscriptions need not be coeval with the rite, at least in the case of the wall inscription.**⁴⁴ In April 1188, perhaps a few days before the solemn ceremony, King Alphonse the Troubadour was in Huesca, where he issued a document signed by Richard, bishop of Huesca, bestowing Candanos upon Queen Sancha and the Hospital in Sijena, perhaps to help with the start of work on this new enterprise.⁴⁵

In commemoration of the *fundatio* the nuns of Sijena performed a procession every Sunday, and the anniversary was solemnly commemorated on 21st April.⁴⁶ Twenty years later, in April 1208, Queen Sancha wrote to the prioress of Sijena to express her intention to attend, along with Queens Maria of Montpellier and Constanza of Sicily, 'ad festum dedicationis temple de Xixena'.⁴⁷ This document has been wrongly interpreted as referring to the final consecration of the church, but in fact it refers to the aforementioned annual commemoration of the *fundatio*. Furthermore, the text makes clear that at that time some parts of the church was still under construction or at least needed some repairs as Sancha took the occasion to send a master in order to work on the building ('unum magistro pro opera ecclesie mitto').⁴⁸

Verónica Abenza has recently demonstrated that building work at Sijena was slow. Although the east end was almost complete in 1191, the choir aisle did not reach the west end until 1196. This means that the chapter-house, where the south wall doubles as the north wall of the church, could not have been built or painted before 1196.⁴⁹ Abenza argues that the chapter-house paintings were executed later, around 1206, well **after** the dates proposed in most recent scholarship. We simply do not know if the church had been finished by 1208 and, if so, why a master was then sent to Sijena by Sancha. Whatever the case, it is clear that the process of construction took time.

A POTENTIAL MEANS OF TRANSMISSION: THE *LIGNUM CRUCIS*, THE SIJENA BREVIARY, AND THE LITURGY OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

The period of the foundation of Sijena (1187-1188) was a propitious moment for the arrival of crusader manuscripts or repertoires of images in Queen Sancha's entourage.⁵² What is more, the approval of the rule on 6 October 1188 might have been accompanied by the drafting of the Sijena Breviary which, as we shall see, followed the liturgy of the canons Regular of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.⁵³ This means that the Order of St John in Aragon must have possessed a codex containing the liturgy of its mother-house in Jerusalem, the arrival of which might conceivably coincided with the flight of crusaders from the Holy Land in 1187.⁵⁴ Ultimately, we should not discard any hypothesis to account for the transmission to Sijena of a repertoire best represented by the prefatory cycle of the New Testament in the Melisende Psalter. Maybe this sequence of images had been copied into the lost liturgical manuscript of the Hospitallers. Perhaps it was known by means of sketches or collections of drawings made by a travelling artist in the Holy Land, as with the so-called Freiburg Leaf of c. 1200 (Fig. 22).⁵⁵ This includes a scene from the Gospels, showing Christ with Zacchaeus (Luke 10, 1-19), in which the

Eliminado: in commemoration of the foundation

Comentado [TN1]: Can you provide any other examples where *consecrare* was used to refer to a foundation ceremony? This is just the first step in the explanation of this issue. The rite of foundation follows the same structure of that of consecration.

In my opinion, it is very important the difference between the marble slab (probably related to the *fundatio* ceremony) and the inscription on the wall (probably made later when the church was dedicated). In your corrections (John and you), both you put these two inscriptions (marble slab and wall inscription) at the same level even if I have tried to single them out. For me, the first one was as a relic related to the *fundatio*, and the second one is just a memory. I cannot expand on it in this article, because at the present the article is too long.

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Eliminado: As for the lost inscription on the wall of the main chapel in Sijena, this

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Eliminado: ahead of

Movido hacia arriba[1]: the laying of the foundation stone was a specific rite and should not be confused with the finalization of the church.⁵⁰ As for the lost inscription on the wall of the main chapel in Sijena, this was fairly common practice in medieval workshops. The date of the start of the work was solemnly carved on the walls, though the carving need not be coeval with the rite.⁵¹

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three-quarter pose of Christ recalls the depiction of Christ in the Raising of Lazarus in Sijena (Fig. 23). Neither can we exclude the possibility that the psalter itself passed through the hands of Ermengol d'Aspa and Sancha, having the status of a relic of the famed Queen Melisende, before it finally moved to France.⁵⁶

Eliminado: a rhetorical

Whatever the case, there is no doubt that Sancha was personally interested in underlining the bonds that connected Sijena, the Kingdom of Aragon and the Holy Land. From a list of relics dated to 1590, we know that the monastery owned a *Lignum crucis* donated by Queen Sancha.⁵⁷ According to Prior Moreno's *Jerusalén religiosa* (1622-1624), a glass reliquary containing a fragment of the *Lignum crucis* was placed in the south wall of the chapter-house, just below the depiction of the Crucifixion. This means that there was an altar devoted to the Holy Sepulchre in this section of the chapter-house. Indeed, it was before this altar that nuns received their habits, swore their oaths and asked pardon for their sins, following the daily chapter meeting.⁵⁸

Sancha was probably also behind the intriguing decision of her husband, King Alphonse the Troubadour, to include in his will of 1194 a generous donation to support ecclesiastical institutions in the Holy Land after the disaster of Saladin, and to help with the reestablishment of crusaders in the area.⁵⁹ To this end he granted the coastal villages of Palafrugell and Llofríu in Catalonia to the canons of the Holy Sepulchre, in order to support five priests in Palestine: three in the Holy Sepulchre, one at Saint-Mary in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and one in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. This substantial gift was accompanied by the provision of liturgical vessels at the altars of these three churches. Thus, the Holy Sepulchre received one golden chalice, one silver censer and one silver pyxis; Bethlehem one silver chalice, one silver censer and one silver pyxis; and the Tomb of Mary, the same.⁶⁰ This should not perhaps surprise us. Two years earlier, Hubert Walter, then bishop of Salisbury (r. 1189-1193), accompanied Richard the Lionheart on the Third Crusade, and obtained permission from Saladin for two priests and two deacons to reside in Bethlehem and renew services in the Latin rite.⁶¹ Alphonse's generous gift, which should be understood in the very specific context of the Third Crusade, meant that ties between the House of Aragon and the Holy Land involved not only the queen but also the king. At the death of her husband in 1196, it might have been Sancha who ensured the last wishes of her husband, Alphonse, were fulfilled with regard to his will. Just one year later, in 1197, Sancha retired to Sijena,⁶² where she could fully devote herself to the promotion of her foundation, without relinquishing her duties as a widowed queen.

Eliminado: , one silver chalice, one silver censer and one silver pyxis...

Between 1187 and 1196 Sancha enjoyed a privileged relationship with the masters and authorities of the Order of St John of Jerusalem as well as with the remaining churches of the Holy Land. Thanks to this she would have been able to acquire relics (such as the *Lignum crucis*) and perhaps books containing the liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre (Breviary) for Sijena. In her intention to become a virtuous queen, she might also have tried to gain access to the Melisende Psalter or at least to a similar manuscript or collection of drawings. Her purpose then might have been to provide a prestigious model for a cycle of paintings to embellish the walls of the chapter-house so that it would act as a reminder of the Holy Land. However, the painting of the chapter-house could not have been begun before 1196, and probably not prior the retirement of Sancha in 1197. An international workshop was probably recruited to achieve this, consisting of an experienced English painter (Old Testament), an overseas painter who was responsible for most of the Genealogies and the New Testament, and a mudejar master craftsmen who was responsible for the ceiling.⁶³ The ambitious appearance of the chapter-house, with a luxurious wooden ceiling and a wall-to-wall cycle of paintings, far outshines the decoration to be expected in monastic chapter-houses, and could even be taken for a sacred royal hall. The design and execution of such an artwork is unlikely to have been done quickly and the works probably extended into the first decade of the 13th century.

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Eliminado: aesthetics

The earliest text that helps in a reconstruction of the liturgical life of Sijena is the rule issued by Armengol de Aspa on 6 October 1188.⁶⁴ This provides us with information concerning the future use of the (not yet built and painted) chapter-house and touches on liturgical performance in the nuns' church. The community assembled twice each day in the chapter-house, after Prime and Vespers.⁶⁵ The female character of an institution devoted to the Virgin Mary explains the prominence of celebrations in the Advent season. Thus, at Matins on the first Sunday of *Adventus* and the following day the church was completely illuminated with candles.⁶⁶ A nun sang the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79) and *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-56) in honour of the role played by Mary in accomplishing the prophecy of the Messiah as a member of the House of David.⁶⁷ As Suzanne Wittekind observed, this emphasis on the Incarnation and descent from the House of David is an important clue in understanding the iconographic programme of the chapter-house, where the Virgin and the Ancestors of Christ assume particular importance.⁶⁸

The text of the rule is otherwise very sparing, and does not provide a detailed account of the numerous prayers and liturgical uses of the nuns throughout the year. Information on this can be found in a *Processional*, dated to the 14th or 15th century (Huesca: Archivo Histórico de Huesca S 48) and a later *Customary* of 1588. Both bear witness to the richness of the ceremonies in the monastery and offer details as to how the *capitulum* (chapter-house) acted as a point of departure for processions and chants during the major festivals of the liturgical year.⁶⁹

However, much the most important source for a better understanding of the medieval liturgical uses of Sijena, and their implication in the choice and layout of the pictorial cycle in the chapter-house has been overlooked. This is the Sijena Breviary, which survives in a printed edition made by Jorge Coci in Zaragoza in 1547 at the request of the prioress Isabel de Alagón (r. 1545-1548). The manuscript source for the printed edition was evidently in a poor state, as a result of which the nuns evidently made mistakes in their prayers ('corruptelam religiose orent'), hence the decision to edit and print the breviary text.⁷⁰ Unfortunately the breviary has been largely ignored and therefore lacks a critical edition which would allow for a comparative study of the Breviary alongside the *Processional* and the *Customary*.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the printed version of the Breviary contains an anthology of liturgically important elements, which include the calendar, the Temporal (fols I-CXIX), the Psalter (fols I-LXX), the Office of the Virgin Mary (fols LXXI-LXXX), litanies (fols LXXXIv-LXXXII), the Office of the Dead (fols LXXXIIIv-LXXXV), and a common of the saints (fols XCVIr-CCCLiv). Most of them follow the customs of the Order of St John of Jerusalem.

Although there are some later interpolations in the calendar, such as the inclusion of the feast of St Francis of Assisi (canonized in 1228), the breviary provides an insight into the liturgical uses of the early Hospitallers. The Hospitallers in turn followed the rite of the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Sijena Breviary even includes a litany of saints from Jerusalem, as in the Melisende Psalter. Although further specialized research is required to determine what is most specific to the Sijena Breviary, it is possible to at least present a preliminary assessment on those subjects which can be related to the imagery of the chapter-house, and what it might owe to the legacy of the Melisende Psalter.⁷²

Most striking are the litanies. The first forty-five prayers in the Breviary coincide exactly with those of the Melisende Psalter (fol. 192v) (Figs 24-25).⁷³ Moreover, a close working knowledge of the uses of the Holy Sepulchre in the crusader period is especially clear. Thus, in the Temporal, the recitation of responsories and versicles during the four Sundays in Advent (fols Iv-XVv) or the liturgy of Holy Saturday (fols XCV-XCIr) are mostly consistent with those of the liturgy of the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre.⁷⁴

The same happens with the Office of the Virgin Mary (fols LXXIv-LXXIIIv), the Office of the Dead (fols LXXXIIIv-LXXXVr) and the Office of the Dedication of the Church (fols

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Comentado [TN3]: I have add fols but have left in the Roman numerals – is this correct? Can you explain the inconsistencies between the foliation of the Temporal vs other elements? Each part has its own foliation, the Temporal has its own foliation, the foliation is correlative in Psalter, Office of the Virgin, Litanies, Office of Dead and Common of Saints.

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CLXXVIIr-CLXXVIIIv). These latter two are especially significant. As far as the Office of All Souls (2 November) is concerned, the series is also consistent with that of the Melisende Psalter (fols 212r-218r).⁷⁵ In the case of the Dedication of the Church, the breviary (fols CLXXXIIIv-CLXXXIIIv) follows the complete series of responsories of the *dedicatio ecclesie domini Sepulchri* collected in the *Ordinarium* of the Holy Sepulchre (1153-1157) (Rome, BAV, ms. Barb. lat. 699, fol. 102r).⁷⁶

Finally, in our view, the breviary provides a way to explain particular choices in the chapter-house's pictorial programme. On Christmas Day there was a complete recitation of the *Liber Generationis* (Matthew 1:1-17), using the common formula 'autem genuit', while on Epiphany, Luke's genealogy was recited, with all entries starting with 'Qui fuit' (Luke 3:23-38) (Figs 26-27).⁷⁷ The unusual monumental display of these texts accompanying portrayals of the Ancestors on the soffits of the five diaphragm arches at Sijena clearly refers to the liturgical uses of the community, and highlights the bond which links Joseph, husband of Mary, to Adam and to the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament. It is no coincidence that the crusader cycle in mosaic at the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (1167-1169) also emphasized the genealogies of Christ.⁷⁸ The recitation of these passages was characteristic of the liturgy of the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre over the Christmas period and explains the unusual prominence of these genealogies in both Bethlehem and Sijena.⁷⁹

The Sijena Breviary is proof of the arrival of liturgical materials at the monastery directly from the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem at the end of the 12th century, which, in turn, conditioned the pictorial programme in the chapter-house. The celebrity of Queen Melisende, the prestige of crusader art and the significance of the liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre were the basis for the creation of this extraordinary set of images. Sancha and the Knights Hospitaller were agents of this translation from the Holy Land to Sijena. As result, the nunnery became a new Jerusalem, where the chapter-house embodied the highest ideals of the Order of St John and a firm commitment from the queen to make the place of her retirement a heavenly dwelling.

A STARRY CASKET: EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY KING/QUEENSHIP

Immersion in the original [experience](#) of the chapterhouse is only now possible through a reading of the 19th-century descriptions and viewing the 3D-virtual reconstruction recently created by Juan Naya. As preparation for the latter, a semiotic analysis of the room was undertaken, the better to understand the *intentio auctoris* and the *lector idealis* to which the artwork was addressed.⁸⁰ This made it clear that at Sijena both the architectural setting and the pictorial signifier bore meanings that added a particular significance to the subjects depicted there.

[We](#) have already mentioned the relationship between the architecture of the chapter-house and the imagery it was designed to carry. The four doors and the windows of the west elevation (one an *oculus*) were perfectly conceived to carry a monumental depiction of Pentecost, in which sunlight entering the room could be perceived as a metaphor for divine rays illuminating the apostles (Fig. 4a-b). Furthermore, the five diaphragm arches which carried the ancestors of Christ on their soffits acted as a visual and hermeneutic bridge between the Old Testament cycle (spandrels) and the New Testament (walls). This was stressed by natural lighting, whereby daylight illuminated the south and east walls of the Gospel narrative, while casting shadows on the spandrels which carry the Old Testament cycle. Thus, it is very likely that the overall 'devisor' of the chapter-house specified the architecture with the pictorial cycle in mind. In this respect, the room must be interpreted as a whole, even if it was created in stages.

The signifier played an important role in the aesthetics of the chapter-house. Walls and ceiling were conceived and perceived as a continuous glowing surface which transported the spectator to the earthly and celestial realms of the history of the salvation. To create this effect,

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the leitmotif used was the star. Above, on the gilded-wooden ceiling, twelve boards carved with stars simulated Heaven, while below, on the blue-coloured background of the north wall, many metallic discs were applied to the surface to evoke the sky in the cycle of Nativity. As result, the room became a starry casket, in which the beholder could enjoy in two senses – historically and anagogically – the narrative of the Testaments and understand the typological relationship between them.⁸¹

In the cycle of the Nativity, the gilded discs were an evocation of the Holy Land. First, they obviously constituted a reference to the night sky as it appeared in the biblical narrative of the Star of Bethlehem and journey of the Magi (Matthew 2:1). Second, the motif of the star was widespread in crusader painting, as can be seen in the crypt of the Order of St John at Abu-Gosh and in the Cave of Agony in Gethsemane.⁸² Third, these motifs in Sijena were made using materials characteristic of the art of icon painting, namely gilded metallic leaves applied to the pictorial surface. Although Mariano de Pano described them in 1883 as ‘fondos azules sembrados de doradas estrellas’, in our reconstruction we substituted golden discs, of a type similar to those found in parts of the wooden ceiling of the church St Michael in Hildesheim (around 1230).⁸³ Close examination of the black-and-white photos taken before the fire show the holes made to fix the stars to the pictorial layer, but no trace of a starred shape stamped onto the lime mortar (Fig. 7a-d).⁸⁴

Sijena thus parallels the hybridization associated with the art of the crusaders, mixing Byzantine iconography and techniques with Latin repertoires. Dulce Ocón pinpointed some of the obvious debts to icon painting in the use of metal ornaments, not only on the blue background but also in the gilt haloes that covered the heads of the Nativity figures and the ancestors of Christ. In her view, Panagia tou Arakos in Cyprus (1192) was a good point of reference for a better understanding of the ‘Byzantine’ peculiarities of the Aragonese chapter-house.⁸⁵ However, as Ocón also recognized, the monumental depiction of the Crucifixion at Sijena offered persuasive evidence of a direct connection between the Sijena workshop and the art of the crusaders. The architectural background in this scene is dominated by a depiction of the Jerusalem skyline, with the conical roof of the Holy Sepulchre and the rounded Dome of the Rock,⁸⁶ as they had been depicted in the Entry into Jerusalem in the mosaics of the church of the Nativity at Bethlehem (1167-1169) (Figs 28-29).⁸⁷ The Sijena crucifixion also includes a depiction of half-figures of *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia* accompanied by angels, as at Abu Gosh.⁸⁸

All these motifs – the gilded discs and the architectural backgrounds – endowed the New Testament cycle with a historical and topographic specificity which turned the chapter-house into an evocation of the Holy Sites. The Crucifixion on the south wall was the point of reference. Thus, in the first surviving mention of the chapter-house as a built space in 1220, the *domina*, Maria de Narbona, made a solemn oath just before the ‘Crucifixion of the Lord’ (‘feci iusiurandum in capitulo ante crucifixum Domini’).⁸⁹ The main function of a chapter-house was to serve as a meeting place for readings, sermons and the daily assembly of the community. However, the extensive pictorial programme at Sijena, with this extraordinary depiction of the Crucifixion over the city of Jerusalem, suggests that this space was probably used for the Easter liturgy. As mentioned earlier, just beneath the depiction of the Crucifixion, there was an altar with a relic of the *Lignum crucis* Sancha gave to the monastery, where the nuns received their habits, swore their oaths and begged pardon for their sins. It is very likely that this altar was also related to Easter rites. Indeed, in the second half of the 16th century a chapel devoted to the Holy Sepulchre was opened in the north wall of the chapter-house to accommodate an alabaster group showing the Entombment of Christ, at a time when the Crucifixion was whitewashed.⁹⁰ This decision probably formed part of the renovation of the chapter-house as the result of damage by humidity, and

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Comentado [TN4]: Give translation

“blue backgrounds full of golden stars”

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indicates the translation (or rather duplication) of an earlier altar or cult of the Holy Sepulchre from the south wall to the north wall.⁹¹

The dominant feature of the mudejar wooden ceiling was the depiction of stars across its twelve sections (Fig. 12). The carpenters clearly intended to depict the celestial realms. Although the division into twelve is dictated by the five diaphragm arches, this distribution also potentially evoked the twelve signs of the zodiac. The subject, which was included in the calendar of the Melisende Psalter (fols 13v-19r), was reformulated by mudejar artists into a geometrical and aniconic representation of the twelve houses of the sun. As Bernabé Cabañero pointed out, stars were especially associated in Islamic courts with kingship, in which the ruler wore a starred mantle to preside over receptions as the sun was surrounded by the firmament. The decorative carved designs of Sijena are very similar to those of the Throne Room in the Palace of Aljaferia in Zaragoza (11th century), where the taifa king Al-Muqtadir exercised earthly and celestial power.⁹² The origins of these cosmic halls are ultimately to be found in Sassanian art, from where they passed to Roman, Byzantine and Islamic courts.⁹³ This might have been a topical subject in Aragon c. 1200. The Palace of the Aljaferia was used by Aragonese kings as a space for political representation following their conquest of the city in 1118. Furthermore, the starry chapel became a topical subject of kinship during the crusader period through the legendary description of the Palace of Prester John in the East, where this Sun King had a domed chapel decorated as the firmament ('est rotonda ad modum coeli stellate').⁹⁴

Thus, the chapter-house in Sijena exceeds all general expectations for this kind of space in a nunnery. In addition to its elaborate liturgical character, it embodied ideals of royal and cosmic power, as if it were the hall of a royal palace. For this reason we are persuaded that the chapter-house was conceived around 1196-1197, at the time of Queen Sancha's retirement to Sijena and alongside her fulfilment of the wishes of her deceased husband for the Holy Sites in Palestine.⁹⁵ Sancha resided for long periods in the monastery from her retirement up until her death in 1208, and built a series of private dependencies there known as the 'dependencias de doña Sancha',⁹⁶ in which she was accommodated in comfort, as was appropriate to a Queen of Aragon. The luxurious aspect of the chapter-house, likened to a reception hall, was a part of this.

The hybrid nature of Sijena chapter-house, merging mudejar and crusader aesthetics, helped affirm the Crown of Aragon as an emerging power in the Mediterranean and epitomized the creation of a cross-cultural society. As is well known, in the course of the 12th century the conquest efforts of the various Iberian kingdoms, were progressively assimilated to the status of crusade, in which the military orders became the armed and spiritual wing of those kingdoms.⁹⁷ This process was especially developed in Aragon and Catalonia, where the Knights Templar and Hospitaller developed an art which evoked that of the crusader lands.⁹⁸ Sijena is an outstanding example of the phenomenon, whereby a longing for the Holy Land – as seen in the pictorial and decorative programme – is framed in a cross-cultural aesthetic which reflects the complexity of this new society. The workshop responsible for the chapter-house seems to have involved people from different geographies and ethnicities – from England, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Aragon – who used different scripts and languages, Latin and Arabic. In this respect, it is worth recalling that the monastery possessed a Muslim servant along with his family (1193),⁹⁹ and that in 1191 Sancha herself had commanded a Muslim worker to make a mill for the monastery.¹⁰⁰

As in other places in medieval Spain and the Mediterranean, the use of Kufic and pseudo-Kufic inscriptions proclaiming the sovereignty of God in a Christian monument should be understood as a means of unifying different ethnicities and religions of a specific realm in the celebration of the power of a unique God and the king/queen as his earthly representative.¹⁰¹ This is why the chapter-house at Sijena is often compared to the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (Fig. 30) and Monreale Cathedral.¹⁰² Although some authors have argued these similarities in terms of

Eliminado: As such, it is hardly surprising that the Sijena chapter-house merged Mudejar and Crusader aesthetics. Its

Eliminado: Spanish *reconquista* was

Eliminado: a

Eliminado: the various Iberian

a dependency on the Siculo-Norman art,¹⁰³ any likeness was more likely the result of a shared interest in the principles of multiculturalism and nostalgia for Jerusalem.

Ultimately, the precious ‘starry casket’ of Sigena is a dwelling for the earthly and the celestial king. However, kingship in Sigena has been translated in terms of gender. The leading force was Queen Sancha, who transformed a nunnery into a royal court, where she could exercise her queenship until her death. Similarly, in the iconographic programme, the Virgin Mary played a major role in both visual and narrative terms. Her relevance resonated in the general layout of the pictorial cycle, in which a longitudinal axis highlighted the function of the Virgin Mary in the history of the salvation. As mother of God, she is the protagonist on the north wall, whence she looks across to the monumental Crucifixion opposite. Between them, the ancestors of Christ traced a genealogical line from Adam and Eve. What is more, the portraits of fatherhood which shaped the genealogy of Matthew might have included, exceptionally (arch II), a portrait of Mary with Christ as an end point (Fig. 31). This key role of the Virgin, as we earlier pointed out, probably embraced the west wall in scenes such as the Ascension, the Koimesis and the Deesis.

This bond between Mary and queenship is nothing new. Melisende, Ingeborg and Sancha followed this path of devotion and expressed it in their artistic patronage in order to present themselves as virtuous women and perfect queens. This anagogical exploration of sacred scripture took a new turn at Sigena, as the chapter-house entailed a shifting of medium (from parchment to wall) and dimension (from flat surface to a three-dimensional space). The result was an artwork in which the earthly and heavenly realm were mingled, with an effective evocation of the two Jerusalems and the two Queens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Jaroslav Folda. His studies of crusader art, detailed knowledge of the Melisende Psalter and wise counsel have been extremely helpful in our research. We also wish to thank John McNeill, who patiently reviewed our text and discussed certain aspects of Sigena with us. Others who have been involved in the study of the original layout of the chapter-house and who we wish to thank include Albert Burzon and his studio *Burzon Comenge* who helped with the virtual reconstruction of the paintings, ceilings and the making of the 3D models, and Paco Luis Martos, who contributed the virtual reconstruction of the ceilings and made two wooden coffered ceiling boards (*alfarjes*) at full scale.

¹ Following the 1936 fire, the paintings were removed so as to be restored in Barcelona and in 1940 they entered the Museum d’Art de Catalunya. Later, in 1960, those paintings that remained on the south wall were also brought to the museum. However, display of the paintings in the museum had to wait until 1961. Since 1990 the museum has been known as the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya.

² K. Schuler, ‘The Pictorial Program of the Chapterhouse of Sigena’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1994), 89-106; K. Schuler, ‘Seeking Institutional Identity in the Chapterhouse at Sigena’, in *Shaping Sacred Space and Institutional Identity in Romanesque Mural Painting: Essays in Honour of Otto Demus*, ed. T. Dale and J. Mitchell (London 2004), 245-56.

³ D. Ocón, ‘Une salle capitulaire pour une reine. Les peintures du chapitre de Sigena’, *Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 38 (2007), 81-94; Eadem, ‘The Paintings of the Chapter-house of Sigena and the Art of the Crusader Kingdoms’, in *Romanesque and the Mediterranean*, ed. R. Bacile and J. McNeill (Leeds 2015), 277-95.

⁴ *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterij: Ordinis sancti Ioa[n]nis Hierosolymitan. sub regula beati Augustini* (Zaragoza 1547). The book is kept in Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Res 1912-12°.

⁵ W. Oakshott, *Sigena: English Romanesque Paintings in Spain and the Artists of the Winchester Bible* (London 1972). The first scholar to propose a relationship between the Winchester Bible and Sigena was

Comentado [TN5]: 1. The dotted ‘Missing’ sections are very hard to read – can this be changed? The names should also conform to their standard English equivalents, eg [Abraham](#)

2. [Isaac](#)
3. [Jacob](#)
4. [Judah](#) and [Tamar](#)
5. [Perez](#)
6. [Hezron](#)
7. [Ram](#)
8. [Amminadab](#)
9. [Nahshon](#)
10. [Salmon](#) and [Rahab](#)
11. [Boaz](#) and [Ruth](#)
12. [Obed](#)
13. [Jesse](#)
14. [David](#) and [Bathsheba](#)
15. [Solomon](#)
16. [Rehoboam](#)
17. [Abijah](#)
18. [Asa](#)
19. [Jehoshaphat](#)
20. [Jehoram](#)
21. [Uzziah](#)
22. [Jotham](#)
23. [Ahaz](#)
24. [Hezekiah](#)
25. [Manasseh](#)
26. [Amon](#)
27. [Josiah](#)
28. [Jeconiah](#)
29. [Shealtiel](#)
30. [Zerubbabel](#)
31. [Abiud](#)
32. [Eliakim](#)
33. [Azor](#)
34. [Zadok](#)
35. [Achim](#)
36. [Eliud](#)
37. [Eleazar](#)
38. [Matthan](#)
39. [Jacob](#)
40. [Joseph](#)
41. [Mary?](#)

At the moment, Juan Naya is preparing the new fig. 31 following your instructions.

O. Pächt, 'A Cycle of English Frescoes in Spain', *Burlington Magazine*, 102 (1961), 166-75. For a date of around 1185 for the Winchester Bible, see C. Norton, 'Henry of Blois, St Hugh and Henry II: The Winchester Bible Reconsidered', in *Romanesque Patrons and Processes. Design and Instrumentality in the Art and Architecture of Romanesque Europe*, ed. J. Camps, M. Castiñeiras, J. McNeill and R. Plant (Milton Park 2018), 117-41, at 130.

⁶ Oakshott, *Sijena*, 17, 73, Figs 73-126. See also J. Sureda, *La pintura románica en España (Aragón, Navarra, Castilla-León y Castilla)* (Madrid 1985), 78-80, 353, Fig. 38.

⁷ Schuler, *The Pictorial Program*, 89-106; Schuler, 'Seeking Institutional Identity'.

⁸ Schuler *The Pictorial Program*, 72-76, 250.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰ Mariano de Pano recognized the inscriptions in the western ceiling section of the northernmost bay. Between the panels with the Nativity cycle and Creation of Adam and Eve, a Kufic inscription repeated 'Sovereignty belongs to God', while a second inscription in a separate coffer of the same bay read 'Glory belongs to God': Schuler, *The Pictorial Program*, 143. In the second bay, between the depiction of Original Sin and the Expulsion, the ceiling included an Islamic inscription repeating 'Good fortune and prosperity'. Finally, in the third bay, in the eastern section of the ceiling, between the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel and Noah building the Ark, the word 'Knowledge' could be read: Schuler, *The Pictorial Program*, 143-44.

¹¹ The paintings from the chapter-house are currently maintained in Barcelona (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya). However, they are subject to a claim from the Autonomous Government of Aragon for their return to Sijena: F. Biarge, ed., *Real Monasterio de Sijena. Fotografías 1890-1936* (Huesca 1997), 21-22; M. Menjón Ruiz, *Salvamento y expolio. Las pinturas murales del monasterio de Sijena en el siglo XX* (Zaragoza 2017); S. Baches Opi, 'Prólogo', in C. Carrera Costa, *El Real Monasterio de Sijena y su señorío feudal* (Villanueva de Sijena 2018), 7-23.

¹² M. de Pano, *El Real Monasterio de Sijena, su historia y descripción* (Lérida 1883), 58-60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁴ 'Animados aquellos muros con tantas y, tan variadas figuras: unas destacándose sobre fondos azules sembrados de doradas estrellas; otras luciendo en torno de sus cabezas brillantes aureolas': *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵ 'Anchos filetes revestidos de oro recortando las arquivoltas de los grandes arcos ojivales, y marcando la línea de separación entre los dos órdenes de pintura, el fondo oscuro de los artesones, sus dorados salientes y sus lucientes globos suspendidos...': *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶ R. Alcoy, 'Ferrer Bassa y el Salterio Anglo-Catalán', in *Salterio anglo-catalán. Volumen de estudios*, ed. N. Morgan (Barcelona 2006), 59-120. See also M. Pagès, *Pintura mural sagrada i profana, del romànic al primer gòtic* (Barcelona 2012), 100-03; R. M. Gasol, *La tècnica de la pintura mural a Catalunya i les fonts artístiques medieval* (Barcelona 2012), 73; Ocón, 'Paintings of the Chapter-House', 293.

¹⁷ The hypothesis is very attractive, particularly given the similarity of such scenes at Sijena as the cycle of Adam and Eve to fol. 1r in the Canterbury Psalter, particularly The Tree of Knowledge, The Expulsion from Paradise, Adam and Eve at Work, and the Sacrifice of Isaac. Close similarities are also found in other scenes from Genesis (fol. 1v: Drunkenness of Noah and Sacrifice of Isaac) and Exodus (fol. 2r: Pharaoh's Chariots overwhelmed in the Red Sea, Moses striking the Rock of Horeb). The parallelism is even more compelling on the north wall, where the sequence of scenes of the childhood of Christ follows the same order as in the Canterbury Psalter (fol. 4v) (Fig. 8): Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity and Announcement to the Shepherds. The scenes also share the motif of angels displaying scrolls with similar texts: 'Ave Maria gratia plena dominus tecum' (Annunciation) and 'Annuncio vobis gaudium magnum'.

¹⁸ H. Buchtal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford 1957), 1-9, 139-40; C. R. Dodwell, *Painting in Europe: 800 to 1200* (London 1971), 157; B. Kühnel, *Crusader Art of the Twelfth Century: A Geographical, an Historical, or An Art Historical Notion?* (Berlin 1994), 51, 53, 61 n. 1, 63-125, 155, 160, 162-163, 166-167, figs 47, 69, 87; J. Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land 1098-1187* (Cambridge 1995), 137-163, pls 6.8-6.12; idem, *Crusader Art. The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099-1291* (Aldershot 2008), 32-36; idem, 'Melisende of Jerusalem: Queen and Patron of Art and Architecture in the Crusader Kingdom', in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. T. Martin (Leiden and London 2012), 429-77, at 448-59.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the monastery was founded on the site of a pond which had to be drained to excavate the foundations of the church and build the nun's dependencies. According to Mariano de Pano, 'El monasterio de Sijena está elevado sobre un terreno que fue, sin duda alguna, pantanoso: para hacerle habitable, se gastaron allí considerables sumas construyendo macizas paredes y grandes acueductos, aquellas para el apoyo del edificio, éstos para dar salida a las aguas subterráneas': de Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 5. Notwithstanding this, the unhealthiness of the site was proverbial and during Spring and Autumn parts of the building flooded. From the very beginning, the nuns, especially the *dominae* (*dueñas*), were exempted from enclosure and became accustomed to travelling and spending periods away from Sijena when the monastery was flooded. Only for a brief period (1570-1573) were the nuns obliged to

maintain strict enclosure, though their increased mortality subsequently led the Pope to partially lift the ban. See de Pano *El Real Monasterio*, 30-31; J. Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria histórico-descriptiva de Santa María de Sijena* (Lérida 1890), 70.

²⁰ De Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 62-63; R. Del Arco, 'El Monasterio de Sigena', *Boletín de la Sociedad de Excursiones*, 29 (1921), 26-63, at 57.

²¹ A depiction of the *Koimesis* or Dormition of the Virgin was also included on the north wall on the church of the Hospitaller monastery of Abu Gosh (around 1170): F. Boespflug, E. Fogliadini, 'Les peintures de l'église du monastère bénédictin Sainte-Marie-de-la-Resurrection d'Abu Gosh', in *L'église d'Abu Gosh. 850 ans de regards sur les fresques d'une église franque en Terre Sainte*, ed. J-B. Delzant (Paris 2018), 87-119, at 107-14, Fig. 12. This Crusader cycle of paintings has been recently compared to Sijena as regards the scene of the Crucifixion: Ocón, 'Paintings of the Chapterhouse', 291.

²² J. Ibáñez Fernández, *La ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Huerta de Fréscano (Zaragoza) y su decoración pictórica* (Zaragoza 2008), 32-57.

²³ A. Ubieto Arteta, *Documentos de Sigena I*, Textos Medievales, 32 (Valencia 1972), 12 (doc. 5).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 (doc. 5).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 (doc. 5).

²⁶ Buchtal, *Miniature Painting*, 127.

²⁷ A. Heyman, 'Un reto para el "taller de Melisenda": la decoración de Santa María en el Valle de Josafat y el proyecto monumental de la Jerusalén cruzada', in *Entre la letra y el pincel: el artista medieval. Leyenda, identidad y estatus*, ed. M. Castiñeiras (Almería 2017), 263-78, at 272, Figs 4-5; M. Bacci, *The Mystic Cave. A History of the Nativity Church of Bethlehem* (Brno-Rome 2017), 127, Fig. 31.

²⁸ Heyman, 'Un reto', 272, Figs 15-16. Unfortunately, only the figure of John the Baptist survives from the tympanum, with the Deesis that originally embellished the sculpted portal of the Hospitaller Church of St John the Baptist in the Muristan (in the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate). As for the painting of the Deesis in Abu Gosh, see Boespflug-Fogliadini, 'Les peintures de l'église', 103-06.

²⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land. An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford 2008), 63-65.

³⁰ B. Bagatti, M. Picirillo, A. Prodomo, OFM, *New Discoveries in the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsemane* (Jerusalem 2004), 78-79; Heyman, 'Un reto', 269-70.

³¹ The royal pantheon was located in the northernmost end of the north transept of the church, in a chapel dedicated to St Peter and built around 1191: V. Abenza, 'Ego Regina. Patronazgo y promoción artística femenina en Aragón, Navarra y Cataluña' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2018), 677-86.

³² *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. and ed. B. Scott James (Chicago 1953), 346 (letter 273).

³³ *The Letters*, 347 (epistle 289 and letter 274). K. S. Schowalter, 'The Ingeborg Psalter: Queenship, Legitimacy, and the Appropriation of Byzantine Art in the West', in *Capetian Women*, ed. K. Nolan (New York 2003), 99-135, at 104-05.

³⁴ Schowalter, 'The Ingeborg Psalter', 104-05.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130 (n. 81)

³⁶ E.-G. Leonard, *Introduction au cartulaire manuscrit du Temple (1150-1317), constitué par le marquis d'Albon et conservé à la Bibliothèque nationale...etc.* (Paris 1930), 114. We are very grateful to Jaroslav Folda for his comments on this matter.

³⁷ Schowalter, 'The Ingeborg Psalter', 118-19. For the fortune of the image of Queen Melisende in the various different copies of William of Tyre's *History of Outremer* (1185), see J. Folda, 'Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyre's History of Outremer: 1250-1300', *Gesta*, 32 (1993), 97-112.

³⁸ Neil Stratford provides a detailed reconstruction of this embassy in 'The Hospital, England and Sigena: a Footnote', in *Romanesque Patrons*, 109-116, at 110-12; Abenza, 'Ego Regina', 667. See also *L'Estoire de Eracles Empereur et la conquête de la terre d'Outremer*, I, in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades. Historiens Occidentaux*, II, ed. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (Paris 1859), 2-3.

³⁹ Stratford, 'The Hospital', 110-12.

⁴⁰ *Breuiarium*, (calendar pages without foliation).

⁴¹ M. A. Varón, *Historia del Real Monasterio de Sixena* (Pamplona 1773-1776), 50 (Book I, Chapter V); de Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 12 n. 1.

⁴² Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria*, 30-31.

⁴³ L. Arciniega García, 'La ceremonia de la primera piedra en España: símbolo y memoria', in *Las artes y la arquitectura del poder*, ed. V. Mínguez (Castellón 2013), 445-75.

⁴⁴ The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and the monastic church of San Estevo de Ribas de Sil in Galicia provide good examples of this. At Santiago, a monumental inscription was carved in 1105 on the wall of the axial chapel of El Salvador to commemorate the foundation of the new building thirty years previously and the coeval consecration of the main altar in 1105: M. Castiñeiras, 'La catedral medieval: la

dilatada historia de la obra románica y su epílogo bajomedieval', in *La catedral de Santiago de Compostela. Estudios de arte e historia*, ed. R. Yzquierdo Peiró (Santiago, 2020), 241-383, at 259-63. In the case of Ribas de Sil, the start of work on the new church in 1183 was commemorated by an inscription on the right wall of the main chapel: M. Castiñeiras, 'Topographie sacrée, liturgie pascale et reliques dans le grands centres de pèlerinage: Saint-Jacques de Compostelle, Saint Isidore de León et Saint Étienne de Ribas de Sil', *Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 34 (2003), 13-36, at 45, 17 n. 125

⁴⁵ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 17 (doc. 7).

⁴⁶ Varón, *Historia del Real Monasterio*, 51 (Book I, Chapter V); Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 85-86 (doc. 49).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 86 (doc. 49).

⁴⁹ Abenza, 'Ego Regina', 681-87, 718.

⁵² By 'repertoires of images', we mean a collection of drawings based on the Melisende Psalter picture cycle. The existence of this kind of compilation is related to the art of drawing, to travelling artists, and to the training of painters – as can be discerned in drafts, copies, patterns and travel notebooks. It has been extensively discussed in recent years. The Freiburg Leaf (of c. 1200); Oxford, Magdalen College Ms. 3; and the so-called Wolfenbüttel Sketchbook (of the 1230s) are three good examples of the use of drawing by painters so as to master a prestigious composition or image cycle. See R. W. Scheller, *Exemplum. Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900- ca. 1470)* (Amsterdam 1975), 383-93; L. Geymonat, 'Drawing, Memory and Imagination in the Wolfenbüttel Munsterbuch', in *Mechanisms of Exchange: Transmission in Medieval Art and Architecture of the Mediterranean, ca. 1000-1500*, ed. H. E. Grossman and A. Walker (Leiden and Boston 2013), 220-85; M. Castiñeiras, 'Oxford, Magdalen College, MS. Gr. 3: Artistic Practice, Byzantine Drawings and Mobility in Mediterranean Painting around 1200', *Arte medievale*, serie IV, 5 (2015), 87-100.

⁵³ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 18-40 (doc. 8)

⁵⁴ This fate has obviously also been adduced to explain the presence of the Psalter of Melisende in Europe along with other 12th-century liturgical manuscripts from Jerusalem. These include the Sacramentary of the Holy Sepulchre (1128-1130, Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, ms. 477; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS. McClean 49), the Paris Sacramentary (1128-1130, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 12056), and the Ordinal of the Holy Sepulchre (1153-1157, Rome, BAV, ms. Barb. Lat 659. See C. Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem: A Study and a Catalogue of the Manuscript Sources* (Turnhout 2004), 61-66.

⁵⁵ As for the Freiburg Leaf, see Folda, *Crusader Art*, 77, Fig. 49; idem, 'The Freiburg Leaf: Crusader art and Loca Sancta around the year 1200', in *The Experience of Crusading: 2. Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, ed. P. Edbury and J. Phillips (Cambridge 2003), 113-34.

⁵⁶ The Melisende Psalter is in exceptional condition, retaining its ivory covers, and has clearly been cared for with the greatest attention throughout its history. After the death of Queen Melisende in 1161, the manuscript was presumably maintained in royal hands and held, perhaps, by her son Baldwin III, king of Jerusalem, or another member of the royal family. The book must have left Jerusalem before its conquest by Saladin in 1187. In fact, as Kathleen Schowalter pointed out, the Melisende Psalter was well known in courtly circles around 1200 as its prefatory images served as a model for the Ingeborg Psalter, Schowalter, 'The Ingeborg Psalter', 108-110, see also note 37 supra. Therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that around 1187 the Melisende Psalter had been given to the Grand Master of the Hospitallers to protect and transport. Armengaud or Ermengol d'Aspa, who followed Roger of Moulins as Grand Master in October of 1187, could have been responsible for seeing that the book was taken safely to Europe.

⁵⁷ De Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 53.

⁵⁸ 'Toman hábito y traje (...) en el lienzo que cae a la parte del coro, cabeza que es del capítulo (South wall). Hay tradición recibida de este monasterio que allí mandó engastar en una redoma de cristal las reliquias del Lignum Crucis con el fin de que las religiosas, con esta memoria de la Pasión de Cristo, la tengan de la esperanza del perdón de las culpas. De aquí se entenderá el espíritu que representa la capilla del Sepulcro al pie del capítulo (...): Jaime Juan Moreno, *Jerusalén Religiosa o Santa historia del Real Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Sijena de religiosas de la Orden de San Juan de Jerusalén, del reino de Aragón*, Book II, chapter 60, fol. 263v ('La puntualidad con que se acude a la comunidad del capítulo). This, the earliest known history of the nunnery, was written at the request of María Diez de Aux y Alfaro between 1622 and 1624 by Jaime Juan Moreno, prior at Sijena. It is kept in the Archivo Diocesano de Huesca, ADH, Sección 7: "Archivos Parroquiales", Serie 7.3, "Libros de Culto y Fábrica", Sariñena (El Salvador), ms. 7-3-130. **YES, THIS IS CORRECT.**

⁵⁹ M. Castiñeiras, 'La peinture autour de 1200 et la Méditerranée: voies d'échanges et processus de transformation entre Orient et Occident', *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 47 (2016), 207-22, at 212.

⁶⁰ 'Dimitto ecclesie Sancti Dominici sepulcri villam de Palafrugello et villam de Lofredo, post obitum Dalmacii de Palaciolo cum suis terminis et pertinenciis, ad stabiliendum per manum prioris et conventu

Eliminado: who

Eliminado: '

Eliminado: , fol. 263v (

Eliminado: , lib. II, cap. 60, f. 263v). Juan José Moreno, who was prior in Sigüenza in the 17th century, wrote between 1622-1624, by request of the prioress María Diez de Aux y Alfaro (1608-1622), this first documented history of the monastery, which entitled *Jerusalén religiosa*.

sepulcri V sacerdotes imperpetuum: unus ante altare maius in capite, alium ante altare Dominici Sepulcri, alium ante altare Sancte Crucis, alium ante altare Viginis Maria in valle Josaphat, alium ante altare Nativitatis in Bethleem, qui utique sacerdotes stabiliantur a predictis manumissoribus meis per ecclesias Sepulcri in terra mea de redditibus predictarum villarum usque dum terra Iherosilimitana per gratiam Santi Spiritus a christianis sit recuperata [...] Dimitto altari Domici Alta Sepulcri calicem unum auri de quatuor marchis, unum turribulum argenti de quatuor marchis, unam pixidem auri de una marcha qua Sacratissimus Corpus Christi reponatur, altari Sante Marie de Bethlem unum calicem et turribulum de octo marchis argenti et pixidem de una marcha; altari Santa Marie de valle Iosaphat unum calicem et turribulum argenti de octo marchis et pixidem de una marcha': Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, C. reg. 2, fols 94-98v. See A. Udina ed., *Els testaments del comtes de Barcelona i dels reis de la Corona d'Aragó. De Guifré Borrell a Joan II* (Barcelona 2001), 106-16 (doc. 14), 107-08, 110-11.

⁶¹ In 1192 Saladin allowed Hubert Walter to restore Latin worship in Bethlehem with two priests and two deacons: D. Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187-1291* (Farnham 2012), 2. For the treaty between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart in 1192 and subsequent permission to visit the Holy Sepulchre, see *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, V, 28, 30, 33, in H. J. Nicholson, ed., *Chronicle of the Third Crusade. A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Ricardi* (Aldershot 2005), 372-77; H. Skarlakidis, *Holy Fire. The Miracle of Holy Saturday at the Tomb of Christ. Forty-Five Historical Accounts (9th-16th centuries)* (Athens 2001), 182.

⁶² Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria*, 38.

⁶³ This article is not primarily concerned with questions of style. However, we mostly agree with Dulce Ocón that the painting of the chapter-house was a large project which involved both an English artist and an overseas master: Ocón, 'Paintings of the Chapterhouse', 292-93. The date of their interaction in Sijena, however, was, in our opinion, slightly later than the dates proposed by Dulce Ocón (1193-1194).

⁶⁴ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 18-40 (doc. 8)

⁶⁵ Schuler, 'The Pictorial Program', 152-54.

⁶⁶ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 19 ('Dominica prima adventus domini') and 33-34 ('De feria secunda adventus domini').

⁶⁷ 'Puella si ad hoc docta fuerit dicat (...) de Benedictus et Magnificat quam incipiat precentrix': *ibid.*, 34 ('De feria secunda adventus domini').

⁶⁸ S. Wittekind, 'Santa María de Sigüenza als hochadeliges Frauenkloster und königliche Grabstätte', in *Kunst-Kontexte: Festschrift für Heidrun Stein-Kecks*, ed. H.-C. Dittscheid, D. Gerstl, and S. Hespers (Petersberg 2016), 80-90, at 82.

⁶⁹ A. Cebolla Royo, 'El Procesional de Sijena (s. XIV-XV)', *Nassarre: Revista aragonesa de musicología*, 23, 1 (2007), 141-70, at 155 n. 27-28. There are three later copies of the customary kept in Huesca: 'Ceremonial del Real Monasterio de Sigüenza' (Huesca, Archivo Histórico Provincial, S-36), 'Regla de los Hospitalarios et de la milicia del Orden de San Juan de Jerusalén y de la Casa de Sixena' (Huesca, AHP, S-43, fols 38ss), and 'Consueta o Regla que observan las señoras religiosas del Real Monasterio de Sigüenza de la Orden de San Juan en Aragón' (Biblioteca Pública de Huesca, legacy of Valentín Carderera). See Cebolla Royo, 'El procesional', 143 n. 7.

⁷⁰ *Breviarium*, prologus. See also Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria* (as n. 19), 67.

⁷¹ Due to the coronavirus pandemic, primary liturgical research was focused on the Breviary. It was impossible to gain access to the Processional and the Customary.

⁷² As Cristina Dondi stated, 'Unfortunately no liturgical manuscripts from the early Hospitaller communities of Jerusalem and Acre seem to have survived. Nevertheless, all the extant manuscripts and early printed books made for and used by various Hospitaller communities outside the Holy Land present the liturgical use of the Holy Sepulchre': *The Liturgy of the Canons Regular*, 42. The printed Breviary of Sijena belongs to this category and allows us to hypothesize that the lost medieval manuscript which was used as a model derived from a Crusader prototype.

⁷³ *Breviarium*, fol. LXXXIV. As for the Psalter of Melisende, see the edition of litanies in Buchtal, *Miniature Painting* (as n. 18), 127-28.

⁷⁴ This is the result of a first survey of different sections of the printed Breviary of Sijena. It soon became clear that responsories and versicles were taken from the offices of the Holy Sepulchre by cross-checking these with the series published by Cristina Dondi in her study. For instance, the coincidence is striking in 'Dominica Prima Adventus in vespris' (fols Iv-IIr) and in 'Sabbato Sancto ad matutinas' (fols XCV-XVr), in which we find the same texts as Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Canons Regular*, 106 (Advent: 'Dominica I; R. Aspicies a longe, V. Quique terrigena, V. Qui regis Israel; R. Aspiciebam, V. Potestas eius'), 112-113 (Holy Saturday: 'R. Sepulto Domini, V. Ne forte veniat; R. Iherusalem luge, V. Dedulo quasi; R. Plange quasi virgo./ V. Ululate pastores').

⁷⁵ The sequence in the Sijena Breviary for the 'Officio defectorum' (fols LXXIVv-LXXVr) – 'R. Credo quod redemptor; V. Quem visurus sum; R. Qui Lazarum resuscitasti a monumentum fetidum; V. Qui

venturus es' – follows that of the Psalter of Melisende. See Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Canons Regular*, 121 (Office of the Dead).

⁷⁶ See Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Canons Regular*, 126 (Office for the Dedication of the Church).

⁷⁷ *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterii*, fols XXIIv-XXIIIr, XXXIIv-XXXIIIr.

⁷⁸ Ocon, 'Une salle capitulaire', 90-91, Fig. 16.

⁷⁹ For the liturgical interpretation of the genealogies in Bethlehem, see M. Castiñeiras, 'VOX DOMINI: el órgano medieval del Museo del Studium Biblicum Franciscanum de Jerusalén y la perdida Sibila de la iglesia de la Natividad de Belén', *Ad Limina*, 5 (2014), 63-82, at 71-79.

⁸⁰ The concepts *intentio auctoris* (authorial intention) and *lector idealis* (ideal reader) are taken from U. Eco, *Los límites de la interpretación* (Madrid 1992), 41-45, 68, 124-28.

⁸¹ According to medieval exegesis, the *lectio divina* of the Bible encompassed four modes of interpretation: literal or historical, allegorical, tropological and anagogical. See B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1984) 28, 83-87, 245.

⁸² D. Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume 1, A-K* (Cambridge 1993), 15.

⁸³ De Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 61. See also notes 14 and 15.

⁸⁴ In other examples related to the experience of the Crusaders and the art of the Hospitallers, however, such as the castle chapel of Paternò (1227) in Sicily, metallic stars were employed for the decoration of the vault: A. Iacobini, 'Tra Sicilia e Terra Santa: le pitture murali della Cappella del Castello di Paternò', *Arte Medievale*, nuova serie IV, 10 (2020), 33-66, at 36, 62-63 n. 94-95, Fig. 6.

⁸⁵ Ocón, 'Paintings of the Chapterhouse', 287.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁸⁷ On this question Ocón cited several coins and seals from the Latin Kingdom, though we prefer to propose the precedent of Bethlehem, as it looks like more compelling with regard to Sijena. See M. Bacci, *The Mystic Cave. A History of the Nativity Church of Bethlehem* (Brno-Rome 2017), 188, Fig. 55.

⁸⁸ Ocón, 'Paintings of the Chapterhouse', 291. See also Boespflug-Fogliadini, 'Les peintures de l'église', 114-16, Fig. 16.

⁸⁹ September 1220: Ubieto, *Documentos*, 146 (doc. 94). See also Schuler, 'The Pictorial Program', 154.

⁹⁰ De Pano, *El Real Monasterio*, 62-63; Del Arco, 'El Monasterio de Sigena', 57.

⁹¹ Old photos of the chapter-house before the fire show that on the south wall there was a 16th-century altarpiece with a group of The Lamentation over the Body of Christ: *Real Monasterio de Sigena. Fotografías*, Figs 80 (A. Mas) and 81 (R. Comparé). It means that after the 16th-century adjustments the chapter-house had two zones devoted to Easter rites, the former one on the south wall, and the new one on the north wall, in the new chapel of the Holy Sepulchre.

⁹² B. Cabañero Subiza, *La Techumbre mudéjar de la Sala Capitular del Monasterio de Sijena (Huesca)* (Tarazona 2000), 63-65.

⁹³ H. P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (New York 1982), 19-34.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19. See also M. E. Brooks, 'Prester John: a Reexamination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure Who Helped Spark European Expansion' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Toledo, 2009), 253-54.

⁹⁵ See notes 57-58 above.

⁹⁶ *Real Monasterio de Sigena. Fotografías*, 11 (see floor plan of the monastery, n. 2).

⁹⁷ C. de Ayala Martínez, *Las Cruzadas* (Madrid 2004), 305-07. As for the reading of the Kufic inscriptions in Sijena, see note 10.

⁹⁸ J. Fuguet, *L'arquitectura dels Templers a Catalunya* (Barcelona 1995); J. Fuguet and C. Plaza, 'Notes sobre arquitectura militar y religiosa del Temple de la Corona de Aragón y su relación con Oriente', in *As Ordens Militares. Freires, Guerreiro, Cavaleiros. Actas del IV Encontro sobre Ordens Militares, Palmela, 10-14 Março de 2010*, ed. I. C. Ferreira (Palmela 2012), 969-98.

⁹⁹ Ubieto, *Documentos*, 44-45 (doc. 12).

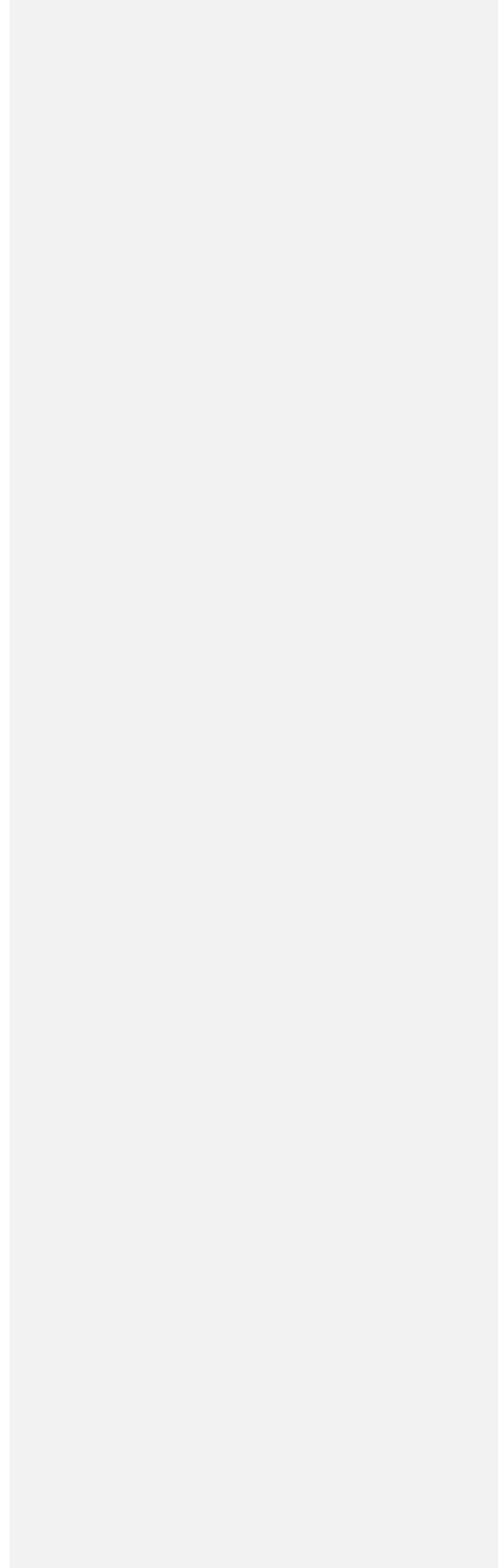
¹⁰⁰ 'etiam mitto illum sarracenum pro constructione moliendi, habet ad hoc prout dicunt habilitatem magnam, curate illum costruere et edificare prout assignatum est': Ubieto, *Documentos*, 43 (doc. 10).

¹⁰¹ M. A. Martínez Núñez, 'Inscripciones árabes en la Catedral de Oviedo: El Arca Santa, la Arqueta del Obispo Arias y la Arqueta de Santa Eulalia', *Territorio, sociedad y poder: revista de estudios medievales*, 11 (2016), 23-62, at 38, Fig. 12, refers to the monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos and the Reales Alcázares in Seville as emblematic examples of the use of the Kufic inscriptions in Christian contexts to equate the faith in a unique God in both religions.

¹⁰² W. Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Princeton 1997); E. Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: the Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily, 1130-1187* (Oxford 1990), 17-73.

Eliminado: as

¹⁰³ Cabañero, *La Techumbre*, 20-22; 97-98; Pagès, *Pintura mural sagrada*, 100-103.



Captions

Fig. 1. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, general view, 1917. C-19635 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

½ page size

Fig. 2. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): 3-D virtual reconstruction of the chapter-house in the film “El sueño de Sijena” (2020) © Juan Naya.

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Fig. 3. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, south wall, left hand: Three Women in the Tomb. Photo taken by Lluís Domènech i Montaner in 1918. © Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya (COAC).

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Fig. 4a. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, west wall before the fire in 1936. GH-441 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 4b. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, west wall before the fire in 1936, detail of the second and third arch with remains of a depiction of the Pentecost. GH-441 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 5. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, view from north-west before the fire in 1936: cycle of the New Testament (east wall), arches with the genealogy of Christ (soffits), scenes from the Old Testament (spandrels), and mudejar wooden ceiling. GH-464 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 6. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, wooden ceiling, bay 4, with Kufic inscriptions. GH 522 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 7. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, north wall before the fire in 1936. A. Annunciation of Christ (GH-457). B. Visitation (GH-458). C. Nativity (GH-459). D. Announcement to the Shepherds (GH-463). © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

¼ page size each one (a, b, c, d)

Fig. 8. The Canterbury Psalter, Infancy of Christ, end of the 12th century. Paris, BN, ms. lat 8846, f. 4v. © Bibliothèque National de France.

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Fig. 9. Reconstruction of the pictorial programme of the chapter-house of Sijena based on the black and white photos of the pictorial remains © Juan Naya.

Full page-landscape orientation

Fig. 10. Reconstruction of the pictorial programme of the chapter-house of Sijena combining the pictorial remains with the prefatory cycle of the Melisende Psalter © Juan Naya.

Full page-landscape orientation

Fig. 11. Melisende Psalter: Adoration and Departure of the Magi, 1131-1143. © British Library Board (London, BL, Egerton 1139, fol. 2v).

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Fig. 12. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, virtual reconstruction of the five diaphragm arches depicting the Ancestors of Christ and the mudejar wooden ceiling. © Juan Naya.

Full page-landscape orientation

Fig. 13. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): ground plan with church, royal pantheon, chorus, chapter-house and chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. [The plan, which is based on that published by R. Del Arco, 'El Monasterio de Sigena', *Boletín de la Sociedad de Excursiones*, 29 \(1921\) 50, has been digitally improved and edited by Pilar Domínguez.](#) F. Biarge, ed., *Real Monasterio de Sigena. Fotografías 1890-1936* (Huesca 1997), 11.

¼ page size

Fig. 14. Reconstruction of the pictorial programme of the chapter-house of Sijena, combining the pictorial remains with the prefatory cycles of Melisende and Ingeborg Psalter © Juan Naya.

Full page-landscape orientation

Fig. 15. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, south wall: Anastasis. GH-489 © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 16. Church of Nuestra Señora de la Huerta de Fréscano (Zaragoza), [second half of the 13th c.](#): mural paintings, vault, second bay: Doubting Thomas. Photo: Manuel Castiñeiras

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Fig. 17. Church of Nuestra Señora de la Huerta de Fréscano (Zaragoza): drawing with the mural paintings in the vaults on the second and third bay: Crucifixion, Ascension, Doubting Thomas/Visit to the Sepulchre and Anastasis (E-W). Source: J. Ibáñez Fernández, *La ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Huerta de Fréscano (Zaragoza) y su decoración pictórica* (Zaragoza 2008), 75.

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Fig. 18. Valentín Carderera, *Interior of the chapter-house at Sijena*. Watercolour of 1840 (Ducal Palace of Villahermosa at Pedrosa).

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Fig 19. Church of St Mary of the Resurrection at the Hospitaller monastery in Abu Gosh: north apse, Deesis, **third quarter of the 12th c.** Photo: Manuel Castiñeiras.

½ page size

Fig. 20. Melisende Psalter: the name 'Frere Ponz Daubon' is written upside-down on an unnumbered front pastedown of the manuscript. © British Library Board (London, BL, Egerton 1139).

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Fig. 21. *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterij* (Zaragoza 1547): calendar, April. Biblioteca de Catalunya, Res 1912-12°. © Biblioteca de Catalunya.

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Fig. 22. The Freiburg Leaf, around 1200: Christ & Zacchaeus (upper) & Saints George & Theodore Stratelates (lower). Inv. G 23/001 c, Augustinermuseum, Städtische Museen Freiburg. Photo: Hans-Peter Vieser

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Fig. 23. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, east wall, Resurrection of Lazarus. GH-528. © Barcelona, Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.

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Fig. 24 *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterij* (Zaragoza 1547, LXXXIV: Letanies (prayers). Biblioteca de Catalunya, Res 1912-12°. © Biblioteca de Catalunya.

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Fig. 25. Psalter of Melisende : Litanies. © British Library Board (London, BL, Egerton 1139, f. 192v).

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Fig. 26. *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterij* (Zaragoza 1547), XXIIv-XXIIIr: *Liber Generationis* (Mt. 1, 1-17). Biblioteca de Catalunya, Res 1912-12°. © Biblioteca de Catalunya.

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Fig. 27. *Breuiarium secundum ritum Sixene monasterij* (Zaragoza 1547), fols XXXIIv-XXXIIIr.: Genealogy of Christ (Luke 3:23-38). Biblioteca de Catalunya, Res 1912-12°. © Biblioteca de Catalunya.

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Fig. 28. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, south wall, Crucifixion, view of Jerusalem with the Anastasis and the Dome of the Rock. MNAC, n. inv. 068708-002 © Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

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Fig. 29. Fig. 13. Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, 1167-1169: mosaic, east wall of the south transept, detail from the Entry into Jerusalem, view of Jerusalem with the Anastasis and the Dome of the Rock. . © Michele Bacci. Source: M. Bacci, *The Mystic Cave. A History of the Nativity Church of Bethlehem* (Brno-Rome 2017), 188, fig. 55.

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Fig. 30. Palermo, Cappella Palatina: wooden ceiling, around 1143. Photo: Manuel Castiñeiras.

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Fig. 31. Santa María de Sijena (Huesca): chapter-house, hypothetical reconstruction of the Genealogies of Matthew in arches I and II.

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