

The public economic role of Catalan Jewish wives, 1250-1350

Sarah IFFT DECKER

Yale University

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Abstract. This article delineates the role of Jewish married women in economic transactions, including credit, real estate sales, and trade. Relying on notarial registers from Barcelona, Girona, Vic, and Castelló d'Empúries, the article employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to determine how often and under what circumstances Jewish wives, as opposed to widows, participated in credit transactions and other forms of economic activity. Still-married Jewish women played an essential role in family financial management, but this role rarely manifested itself in public, independent economic activity. Even Jewish wives with access to financial resources, such as heiresses, often relied on their husbands to administer property on their behalf. Jewish husbands only occasionally relied on their wives to conduct business in their absence. However, certain families and communities created a different gendered division of labor in which husbands and wives, individually and jointly, made loans to augment the family's financial resources. In these families, Jewish husbands and wives both accessed a shared conjugal fund to extend credit.

Keywords: history, Catalonia, women, marriage, credit, 13th century, 14th century

Correspondence: Sarah Ifft Decker. Yale University. Department of History. Hall of Graduate Studies. 320 York Street. New Haven, CT. USA 06511. Phone: 00 (301) 412-4755. E-mail: sarah.iffi@yale.edu.

El rol econòmic públic de les dones jueves catalanes casades, 1250-1350

Resum. Aquest article descriu el rol de les dones jueves casades en les transaccions econòmiques, incloent-hi el crèdit, les vendes de béns immobles i el comerç. Basant-se en registres notariais de Barcelona, Girona, Vic i Castelló d'Empúries, l'article fa servir metodologia tant quantitativa com qualitativa per a determinar amb quina freqüència i en quines circumstàncies les dones casades jueves, en contrast amb les vídues, participaven en transaccions de crèdit i altres formes d'activitat econòmica. Les dones jueves casades tenien un paper essencial en l'administració financera de la família, però aquest rol rarament es manifestava en una activitat econòmica pública independent. Fins i tot les dones casades jueves amb accés a recursos financers, com les hereves, sovint depenien del marit per a administrar la propietat en el seu propi nom. Els marits jueus només ocasionalment confiaven a la seva dona l'administració dels negocis en la seva absència. Tanmateix, algunes famílies i comunitats van crear una divisió de tasques diferent quant al gènere, en la qual marits i mullers, individualment i conjuntament, feien préstecs per augmentar els recursos financers de la família. En aquestes famílies, tant els marits com les mullers tenien accés a un fons conjugal compartit per a donar crèdit.

Paraules clau: història, Catalunya, dones, matrimoni, crèdit, segle XIII, segle XIV

1. Introduction

In the early 1260s, three sisters from Girona – Dura, Druda, and Dolça, the daughters of Issach de Sant Llorenç – married prominent men from the Jewish community of the town of Castelló d'Empúries.¹ These three young wives embarked on very different economic paths. Dura had married Abraham Cordoví by December of 1260.² Although a gap in the extant notarial registers from Castelló between 1265 and 1279 makes it difficult to trace the full history of Dura's economic involvement, she participated on occasion in credit transactions in the 1280s, for example extending two loans, one for

1. For background on the Jewish community of Castelló d'Empúries, see BENSCH, "A baronial *aljama*".

2. Abraham Cordoví appears as the *gener*, or son-in-law, of Issach de Sant Llorenç (AHG Ca, 2085, fol. 38v).

300 sous of Melgueil and one for 14 sous, in November of 1284.³ Dolça married Provençal Salandí by November of 1262, when Provençal, Dolça, and Dolça's mother, Bonastruga, jointly released a Christian from his debts to them.⁴ Dolça appears only once more in the extant registers – in 1265, when the three sisters, their husbands, their father, and their grandmother jointly deposited 1,500 sous with an intermediary in Girona.⁵ Druda had married Jucef Malet by March of 1265, when they participated in the deposit transaction, but otherwise remains invisible in the notarial registers, and the credit market, of 13th-century Castelló.

These three sisters demonstrate the spectrum of choices Jewish families and communities made about the appropriate public economic role of Jewish wives. Some still-married Jewish women like Dura extended credit to local Christians, both alone and alongside their husbands and sons. Other Jewish wives only acted alongside their husbands or other male relatives, like Dolça. Many women never publicly engaged in economic transactions during their marriage; had circumstances not required all three sisters to participate in the deposit of 1265, Druda's name – and her family connection to Dura and Dolça – may never have appeared in the notarial documentation.⁶ In this essay, I employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the varied ways Catalan Jewish families and communities conceptualized the economic role of wives. I have relied on evidence drawn from the notarial registers of four cities – Castelló d'Empúries, Vic, Girona, and Barcelona – between 1250 and 1350. The focus on several different communities over the course of a century has allowed me to better evaluate the range of choices across the region as well as within particular communities.

3. AHG Ca, 414, fol. 2r-v, 3r.

4. AHG Ca, 156b, fol. 15v.

5. AHG Ca, 206, fol. 74v.

6. Jucef Malet named his brother-in-law Abraham Cordoví as guardian of his minor son Vidal, but this alone would not prove a family relationship, as Jewish men regularly selected non-relatives who were prominent members of the community as guardians. For the first reference to Abraham Cordoví as guardian, in 1281, see AHG Ca, 1944, fol. 57r-v; for male community members as guardians of minor children in the Jewish community, see WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 108–109.

2. Married women moneylenders in Catalan Jewish communities: A quantitative assessment

Most scholarship on Jewish women's economic lives has emphasized the activity of widows, and for good reason: most Jewish women in Catalonia only became economically active after the deaths of their husbands. Rebecca Winer, in her work on 13th-century Perpignan, stated that "Jewish wives had the potential to become independent financial agents, but widows were the most commercially effective of women".⁷ Richard Emery found almost twice as many wives as widows named in the notarial registers of Perpignan between 1317 and 1416, but emphasizes the prominence of widows as independent actors in the credit market.⁸ Andrée Courtemanche noted that while Jewish widowed lenders in Manosque had access to dowry wealth as a source of capital, most Jewish wives could only extend loans if they had received an extra-dotal inheritance.⁹ In Northern Europe, similarly, Cheryl Tallan has found evidence of Jewish widows active in trade, real estate, agriculture, and credit.¹⁰

The more active role of Jewish widows in medieval Europe stemmed from their greater degree of independent control over financial resources; under Jewish law, women could not inherit from their husbands, but a widow could collect her marriage portion (*ketubah*), supplementary gift (*tosefet ketubah*), and dowry (*nedunya*) from her late husband's estate, and independently administer what she had received. Alternatively, a widow could demand maintenance from her husband's heirs, which also came with a broad lien over her late husband's estate.¹¹ During marriage, however, a husband normally controlled his wife's property, unless she had received an inheritance beyond her dowry (*paraphernalia*).¹² As a result, still-married Jewish women rarely independently managed financial resources, and hence had limited ability, compared to widows, to extend loans or sell

7. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 99.

8. EMERY, "Veuves juives", p. 559, 567-568.

9. COURTEMANCHE, "Femmes juives", p. 557.

10. TALLAN, "Medieval Jewish widows", p. 66.

11. KLEIN, "Widow's portion", p. 149-150; TALLAN, "Medieval Jewish widows", p. 64-65; RICH ABAD, *Comunitat jueva de Barcelona*, p. 84-90.

12. KLEIN, "Widow's portion", p. 156-157; WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 96-97.

property. Nevertheless, a careful examination of the economic role of wives reveals a great deal about how different Catalan Jewish families and communities structured the gendered division of domestic labor and the management of household finances.

A quantitative assessment of the role of Jewish wives in credit transactions provides an important basis for this study. The table below focuses on new loans of the simple *mutuum* type extended by Jewish women acting independently, and indicates the proportion of Jewish women's loans extended by wives, widows, and women of unknown marital status in Barcelona, Girona, Vic, and Castelló d'Empúries in the 13th and 14th centuries.¹³ Notarial registers are a particularly rich source for the study of Catalan Jewish communities; Catalonia boasted a vibrant notarial culture, which Jews often relied on to record not only transactions with Christians, but also intra-communal loans and family financial documents.¹⁴ I have selected credit transactions as the basis for a quantitative analysis because, although Catalan Jews participated in a variety of economic activities and trades, their role as moneylenders is best represented in the notarial registers.¹⁵ Hence credit transactions provide the breadth of data required for quantitative study, whereas I have relied on anecdotal evidence to discuss Jewish wives' role in other economic sectors.

13. As Winer notes, emphasizing new loans extended by women acting alone best allows us to discover the agency of women, as opposed to their mere affirmation or support of men's transactions. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 88–89.

14. BAIGES I JARDÍ, "Notariat català"; LLOP JORDANA, "*Libri Iudeorum* de Castelló d'Empúries", p. 43–44. A few Jews even recorded Latin wills; see BURNS, *Jews in the notarial culture*.

15. EMERY, *Jews of Perpignan*, p. 17–29.

TABLE 1

*Jewish women's independent transactions by marital status*¹⁶

	<i>Vic,</i> 1250-1300	<i>Castelló d'Empúries,</i> 1260-1300	<i>Barcelona,</i> 1290-1350	<i>Vic,</i> 1300-1350	<i>Girona,</i> 1310-1350
Widows	129 (30.4%)	59 (73.3%)	22 (88%)	105 (21%)	58 (81.7%)
Wives	261 (61.4%)	18 (22.4%)	2 (8%)	366 (73.2%)	7 (9.9%)
Unknown	35 (8.2%)	3 (4.3%)	1 (4%)	29 (5.8%)	6 (8.4%)
	425	80	25	500	71

In most cities, Jewish widows dominated the portion of the credit market available to women, extending nearly threequarters of women's loans in Castelló d'Empúries, and over 80% in both Barcelona and Girona. Vic, however, differed sharply from these other cities, with Jewish wives extending a majority of women's loans in both the latter half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century. In the remainder of the paper, I will discuss both the unusual encouragement of wives' economic activities in Vic and the circumstances that occasionally allowed still-married women to participate in economic life in other Catalan Jewish communities.

3. Family choices, community choices: Jewish wives in the credit market

Catalan Jewish women rarely participated in public, notarized economic transactions. Winer found that Jewish women acting independently extended slightly less than 4% of Jewish loans in Perpignan.¹⁷ Similarly, I found that women acting alone extended 3.9% of loans in Castelló d'Empúries, while

16. Data taken from the following registers: ACF, 6, 9, 11, 15-17, 19, 21, 24, 27, 28, 31-32, 35, 39, 41, 43, 48, 60, 65, 71, 73, 90, 94/2, 97/2, 130/3, 185/15-16, 217bis, 249/1-2, 255, 259, 286, 289, 299, 316, 4582-4607; AHG Ca, 1-12, 14, 16-18, 20-21, 156b, 206, 305, 358, 364, 414, 419, 1944, 2085-2089, 2092, 2098-2099; ACB, 1-3, 5-7, 9, 12, 16-19, 25, 36, 40, 44-45, 49, 52-53, 57, 62, 65, 67-71, 75-76, 92-97, 130, 232; AHPB, 3/1, 6/3, 14/2, 18/1; AHG Gi-1, 2, 7; AHG Gi-4, 1-4, 6, 8, 11-12, 14, 19, 22, 38; AHG Gi-5, 1, 5-11, 13-15, 20, 23, 25-26, 28-29, 31-32, 34-39, 41, 41a, 43, 43bis, 45, 48, 52-55, 58; AHG Gi-6, 1, 2, 4, 6-7, 9bis, 10, 12-13, 15-19, 21-26, 29-32, 34-40, 43, 45-47; AHG Gi-7, 1, 3; AHG Gi-8, 1-2, 23.

17. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 88.

groups including women extended an additional 2.6%.¹⁸ Women in Barcelona and Girona extended only about 2% of loan until 1348; during the moment of crisis following the Black Death, women took on a newly prominent role, extending 21% of Jewish loans in Barcelona and 10.7% in Girona, but the proportion of wives to widows remained the same.¹⁹ The few Jewish women who practiced moneylending normally acted only out of necessity, most often as widows without adult sons, who needed to support themselves and perhaps other family members.²⁰ A more unusual set of circumstances prevailed in Vic, where wives were more prominent than widows, and women had a large but declining share of the credit market, extending nearly 40% of Jewish loans in the 1260s, nearly a quarter of loans in the 1270s, and between 9 and 14% of loans for each subsequent decade until the 1330s, when the gendered division of the credit market in Vic began to more closely resemble that of other Catalan cities.²¹ In this section, I will consider when the needs of families and communities required still-married Jewish women to publicly administer financial resources.

A small minority of women received inheritance beyond their dowry, and with it, new responsibilities to manage financial resources.²² Parents without sons could not, under Jewish law, pass over their daughters in favor of more distant male relatives; a daughter without brothers became her parents' sole heir.²³ Daughters with brothers, on the other hand, rarely received anything beyond their dowries.²⁴ Husbands had no formal rights over their wives' *par-*

18. Data collected from same notarial sources as employed in Table 1.

19. Data collected from same notarial sources as employed in Table 1. The need for Jewish women to act as creditors likely stemmed from deaths in the community due to a combination of plague and massacre, the latter of which may have disproportionately affected Jewish men. See LÓPEZ DE MENESES, "Una consecuencia de la peste negra", p. 97–106, 127–129; RICH ABAD, "Able and available", p. 71, 73, 79.

20. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 101–102; DENJEAN, *Juifs et chrétiens*, p. 101–103.

21. Based on randomly selected sample of one *Liber Iudeorum* per decade, but findings borne out impressionistically in other *Libri Iudeorum* of the decade. ACF, 4582, 4585, 4588, 4591, 4593, 4595, 4600, 4601, 4606.

22. For daughters as heirs in Jewish wills, see KLEIN, "Splitting heirs", p. 58–59.

23. BURNS, *Jews in the notarial culture*, p. 24.

24. According to Maimonides, daughters inherited only in the absence of sons. See MAIMONIDES, *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilkhot nahalot", 1.1–3.

aphernalia, but in practice married women administering inheritances often relied on their husbands to support, supervise, or mediate their transactions.

Husbands quickly became enmeshed in their wives' transactions involving *paraphernalia* due to both a property system in which couples conceived of a shared conjugal estate, and a gender system in which husbands normally supervised their wives' transactions. Stephen Bensch, in his study of the Christian patriciate of Barcelona, argued that the development of a system of marital assigns that tied the husband's gift (*escreix*) to the dowry (*exovar*, i.e. *aixovar*) led to the creation of a shared conjugal fund, without a clear division between the husband's property and the wife's.²⁵ Klein has argued that Jewish families, in practice, developed a similar system of shared marital property.²⁶

Although this system could give wives control over their husband's property, and often required that they consent to their husbands' debts and real estate sales, husbands normally controlled the shared conjugal fund.²⁷ The absence of a framework that normalized women's independent management of financial resources led some women to formally turn over their *paraphernalia* to their husbands. Among Christians, a married woman had the right to independently administer her *paraphernalia*, but was expected to contribute her goods to support the household if her husband's income and her dowry proved insufficient.²⁸ Christian women often made loans to their husbands out of their *paraphernalia*, to be repaid along with the dowry at the dissolution of the marriage.²⁹ Winer has found similar examples of Jewish women explicitly surrendering their *paraphernalia* in Perpignan.³⁰

Astruga and Reina, the daughters and joint heiresses of Rovén de Camprodon of Castelló d'Empúries, relied on their husbands to administer their inheritance, and even ceded them a number of debts. Rovén died sometime after December of 1297, when he last appeared in the notarial registers of

25. BENSCH, *Barcelona and its rulers*, p. 268–269.

26. KLEIN, "Widow's portion", p. 153–158.

27. KLEIN, "Widow's portion", p. 158.

28. VINYOLÉS, *Barcelonines*, p. 90.

29. See, for example, a loan of 85 sous that Guillema, wife of the miller Bernat de Cervià, extended to her husband from her *paraphernalia*, beyond her dowry of 800 sous (AHG Gi-6, 13, fol. 60v).

30. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 94–95.

Castelló.³¹ Prior to his death, he had found husbands for his two daughters; Astruga married her uncle, Rovén's brother Maymó de Camprodon, and Reina married Gracià Cap, perhaps a scion of the Cap family of Barcelona.³² On June 30th, 1298, Maymó de Camprodon and Gracià Cap, "in the name of Astruga, wife of the aforementioned Maymó, and Reina, wife of the aforementioned Gracià, daughters and heiresses via intestacy of the late Rovén de Camprodon, Jew of Castelló", released Guillem Constanç de Corona of Sant Julià de Verges from all debts he had owed to the late Rovén and, therefore, "to the aforementioned wives".³³

In June, Maymó and Gracià acted on behalf of their wives, but Astruga and Reina also ceded debts to their husbands, thus relinquishing control over the financial resources they had inherited from their father. Over the course of 1298, Gracià issued three quitclaims for debts ceded to him by Reina in her capacity as heiress of Rovén de Camprodon.³⁴ On August 14th, Maymó ceded a debt to his brother-in-law Gracià that his wife, Astruga, had previously ceded to him, also in her capacity as heiress.³⁵ The two sisters jointly ceded all the remaining debts owed to their late father to Maymó on September 18th.³⁶ He collected on one of these ceded debts over a year later, in early November of 1299.³⁷ Although Astruga and Reina, as part of their inheritance from their late father, received a number of outstanding loans, they relied on their husbands to collect, and even ceded debts to them – the writs of quitclaim and debt cession leave it unclear if they received any financial compensation, or if the cessions formed part of their payment of outstanding dowry debts.

Bonadona, daughter and heiress of Bramon de Torroella of Girona, maintained ownership over her *paraphernalia*, but in practice her husband, Vidal Bonet of Majorca, administered her inheritance. On May 24th, 1326, Bona-

31. AHG Ca, 20, fol. 100r.

32. Jewish law permitted uncle-niece marriages, and some Jewish families in Barcelona made this endogamous marital choice. See KLEIN, *Jews, Christian society, and royal power*, p. 180, 279 n. 80. For the Cap family of Barcelona, see KLEIN, *Jews, Christian society, and royal power*, 176–178.

33. AHG Ca, 2098, fol. 26r.

34. AHG Ca, 11, fol. 69v, 71v, 79r.

35. AHG Ca, 11, fol. 72r.

36. AHG Ca, 2098, fol. 66r.

37. AHG Ca, 12, fol. 5v–6r.

dona released Guillem Suredella of Llambilles from 70 sous of the 100 sous he still owed her late father, out of an initial loan of 500 sous extended in 1324.³⁸ By February of 1327 Bonadona had retired from the public economic sphere; she named her husband, Vidal, as her agent (*procurator*) to administer her late father's estate on her behalf.³⁹ Vidal spent nearly a decade collecting on loans owed to his late father-in-law.⁴⁰ On October 21st, 1336, Vidal – as Bonadona's *procurator* – sold a house the couple jointly owned in the *call* of Girona.⁴¹ In this document, he referred to a different agency contract, accomplished before Dalmau Navarra, a notary of Majorca, in November 1335. Bonadona may have returned permanently to Majorca sometime after February 1327, while Vidal travelled between the two cities, and kept a house in Girona for extended trips. Although Bonadona preserved ownership over her *paraphernalia*, she ceded management responsibilities to Vidal. Access to financial resources, for married women, did not always entail independent economic activity.

Women like Astruga, Reina, and Bonadona took the place of deceased fathers, but still normally found themselves subject to the guidance of their husbands. Other wives temporarily replaced absent but still-living husbands. Bonafilla, wife of Cresques Jucef of Girona, extended four loans in January of 1347.⁴² She stood to inherit from a father without sons, Astrug Bedoç of Girona, and had married her uncle.⁴³ Bonafilla lost her father, husband, and a number of other male relatives to the Black Death or the subsequent persecutions in 1348, but in January 1347, she had a still-living father and husband.⁴⁴

38. AHG Gi-5, 6, fol. 86v.

39. Bonadona's agency contract has not survived, but Vidal referred to it, providing the notary and date, when he collected on a loan owed to the late Bramon de Torroella in June of 1330. See AHG Gi-5, 9, fol. 9v–10r.

40. For Vidal as agent, see AHG Gi-5, 9, fol. 9v–10r, 25v, 39v–40r, 51v–52r; AHG Gi-5, 37, fol. 7r–v.

41. AHG Gi-5, 37, fol. 7r–v.

42. AHG Gi-5, 54, fol. 38v, 39r, 43v.

43. The apparent tendency toward uncle-niece marriages involving heiresses likely served to keep the estate (or a portion of it) in the male line, in the absence of male heirs.

44. Bonafilla first appears as widow and as heir of her childless uncle Vidal Bedoç on September 24th, 1348, alongside her cousin Astruga, also a heiress, and two other uncles (AHG Gi-5, 45, fol. 130v–129v). Astrug last appeared in April 1348 (AHG Gi-5, 45, fol. 139v), and had likely also died by September, as he does not appear in the list of Vidal's heirs. He had certainly died before March 1349, when a document refers broadly to the unnamed "heirs" of

The notarial documents provide no information about the source of the combined 423 sous Bonafilla extended in loans over the course of four days. Jewish daughters normally only took possession of their extra-dotal inheritance after their fathers had died.⁴⁵ Notably, Bonafilla's loans came at a moment when her husband, Cresques, was embroiled in the official business of Girona's Jewish community, as one of the secretaries of the *aljama*.⁴⁶ Between Cresques' first appearance as a secretary in September 1346, and his last appearance in August 1348, shortly before his death, he extended no new loans.⁴⁷ Bonafilla may have extended new loans to her husband's clients out of a shared conjugal fund while her husband was otherwise occupied. Her ability to fill in for Cresques served her well during her widowhood; she extended an additional five new loans, and collected on more, in the year and a half following her husband's death in 1348.⁴⁸

Although a number of widows adopted the role once played by their late husbands in providing for themselves and their households, wives who temporarily replaced absent husbands sometimes found their rights to act contested. On April 8th, 1277, Bonafilla, wife of Vidal Gracià of Barcelona, collected on a loan with interest owed to her absent husband. In order to assure her husband's debtor, Jaume de Santa Eugènia, that Vidal would "ratify and approve" her action upon his return, she took the unusual step of providing a guarantor (*fideiussor*), Salomó Gracià, likely a relative of her husband.⁴⁹ Normally, only debtors provided guarantors; Bonafilla provided one when acting

Astrug and Cresques, likely Bonafilla and her minor sons (AHG Gi-5, 45, fol. 119r-118v). Bonafilla first explicitly describes herself as Astrug's heir in July 1349 (AHG Gi-6, 45, fol. 85r-v). Bonafilla's mother, Durona, widow of Astrug Bedoç, appears as guardian of her minor grandsons in July 1350 (AHG Gi-5, 45, fol. 69v-r). For the impact of the Black Death on Girona and its Jewish community, see LÓPEZ DE MENESES, "Una consecuencia de la peste negra"; GUILLERÉ, "Peste noire à Gérone".

45. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 94-97.

46. See RIERA I SANS, "Comunitat de jueus de Girona", p. 23-27 for the role of the secretaries of the *aljama* of Girona.

47. Cresques first appears as a secretary of the *aljama* in September 1346 (AHG Gi-6, 43, fol. 16r-v), perhaps replacing his brother and father-in-law, Astrug Bedoç, who last appeared as a secretary in April 1346 (AHG Gi-6, 43, fol. 15r-v). He last appears in August 1348 (AHG Gi-6, 43, fol. 15v-16r).

48. For new loans, see AHG Gi-6, 45, fol. 21v-22r, 29r, 85r-v, 86v-87r; AHG Gi-5, 45, fol. 72v-r.

49. ACB, pergamins, 1-6-1896.

as a creditor because Jaume, presumably unfamiliar with Jewish wives filling in for their husbands, lacked confidence that he could give money to Bonafilla in order to pay his debt to Vidal. Most families did not choose to leave wives with authority over the estate of an absent but still-living husband.

As Asunción Blasco Martínez has argued, Iberian Jewish women normally limited themselves to the domestic sphere. Even when they contributed to the household economy or the family business, they avoided public economic transactions.⁵⁰ However, some families created a different gendered division of labor, in which wives remained less likely than their husbands to extend independent loans, but occasionally found themselves obligated to participate in the credit market as an extension of their role in the domestic economy. In Castelló d'Empúries, certain families particularly encouraged wives to augment the household's financial resources through participation, alone and alongside their husbands, in public credit transactions. Dura, wife of Abraham Cordoví – with whom I began this essay – married into one of these families. After Dura's two loans in 1284, she extended a third independent loan, for 30 sous, in April of 1288.⁵¹ Her sister-in-law Bonadona, wife of Isach Cordoví, extended four independent loans between 1293 and 1297.⁵² Another wife of the Cordoví family, Goig, wife of Baró Cordoví, extended a single independent loan in October of 1279.⁵³ In Castelló, wives were more likely to be called upon to extend credit if they married into some families than if they married into others.

In the community of Vic, the choice of one founding family to foster wives' economic activity had powerful reverberations over the course of several decades. Jews began to reside permanently in Vic around 1240, and the community continued to grow over the course of the 13th century.⁵⁴ The earliest Jews of Vic included Reina Cabrita and her husband, Bonastrug ça Torre, originally from Girona.⁵⁵ Shortly after, David Canviador and his wife, Goig, Reina's sister, also relocated from Girona to Vic.⁵⁶ By 1252, Goig had established herself as one of the city's most prominent lenders; over the course of a

50. BLASCO MARTÍNEZ, "Queen for a day", p. 91–92.

51. AHG Ca, 4, fol. 14v.

52. AHG Ca, 419, fol. 14v; AHG Ca, 20, fol. 30v; AHG Ca, 11, fol. 10v, 26v.

53. AHG Ca, 1, fol. 37r.

54. LLOP I JORDANA, "Comunitat jueva de Vic", p. 39–40.

55. LLOP I JORDANA, "Comunitat jueva de Vic", p. 54–55.

56. LLOP I JORDANA, "Comunitat jueva de Vic", p. 55–56, 58–60.

30-year career, she extended 95 new loans independently, and several more alongside her son, Llobell Cercç.⁵⁷ Goig's example influenced her own family; two of her daughters-in-law – Preciosa, wife of her son Bonjueu, and Goig, wife of her son Astrug – extended several loans during their married lives.⁵⁸ However, her example also influenced the community at large; until the 1330s, Jewish women, and particularly Jewish wives, in Vic extended an abnormally large proportion of loans. Goig's importance as a founding member led an entire community to create a different economic role for wives for nearly 80 years.

A greater role for Jewish wives went hand in hand with a greater role for Jewish women more broadly. In Vic, where Jewish women extended both more loans and a larger proportion of loans than elsewhere, Jewish wives became particularly prominent. Christian women of Vic played a much smaller role – extending only 3.2% of Christian new loans – and married women were less likely than either widows or women of undetermined marital status to extend credit.⁵⁹ This accords with Claude Denjean's findings for Puigcerdà, where Jewish women, who played a public economic role as both wives and widows, enjoyed greater economic independence than Christian women, who normally only entered economic life during widowhood.⁶⁰

Yet Vic, and perhaps Puigcerdà as well, did not represent the norm for Jewish women; elsewhere, still-married Jewish women experienced certain limitations relative to their Christian counterparts.⁶¹ In Barcelona and Giro-

57. For Goig's first loan in July 1252, see ACF, 6, fol. 4*v*. For her last, in March 1283, see ACF, 4587, fol. 74*r*.

58. Preciosa first appears in 1282 (ACF, 4587, fol. 58*r*); Goig first appears in 1285 (ACF, 4588, fol. 26*r*).

59. Christian women extended 20 of 620 new loans based on a sample from 18 randomly selected general registers (ACF, 8A, 9, 14, 17, 19, 27, 33, 35, 43, 70, 73, 90, 213/1, 249/2, 259, 289, 302, 378/1). A larger randomly selected sample of registers yielded 86 new loans extended by women; married women extended 19 (22%), widows extended 29 (33.7%), and women of unknown marital status extended 38 (44.2%). See above registers, plus ACF, 6, 10, 15, 20–21, 24, 28, 31–32, 39, 41, 46, 48, 53, 60/1, 65, 71, 75, 94/1–2, 97/2, 105/1, 130/1–4, 217bis, 213/2, 223–224, 249/1, 249/3, 255, 263, 274, 286, 292, 299, 316–317, 349.

60. DENJEAN, *Juifs et chrétiens*, p. 103.

61. Jewish women in Puigcerdà extended about 17% of loans, and a number of these lenders were wives, though they often acted with their husbands' permission. See DENJEAN, *Juifs et chrétiens*, p. 98–100.

na, Christian women were not significantly more active in the credit market than Jewish women, but they participated in a broader range of economic activities – including other forms of credit, particularly comanda contracts, as well as real estate sales and rentals – and were less restricted by marital status; still-married women extended about onethird of women’s loans.⁶² Similarly, according to Teresa Vinyoles and Carme Muntaner, Christian women in 14th- and 15th-century Barcelona played an active role in alternative forms of credit (rather than straight *mutuum* loans), such as *violaris*, *censals*, and *comandes*.⁶³

4. Husbands, wives, and family businesses

Christian notaries generally offer no information about how a Jewish wife’s independent lending fit into her family’s household economy. Nor do they provide insight into wives’ less visible contributions. As Winer points out, we cannot easily reconstruct the role of Jewish wives in family businesses, although she found several examples in the notarial registers of Perpignan of wives providing aid to their husbands. Jewish men, she contended, could rely on their wives’ assistance, but rarely chose to do so.⁶⁴ Rich Abad, similarly, argued that Jewish women could and would work, but were “constrained by the rules of patriarchal society”.⁶⁵ Klein argued that although Jewish couples shared rights over marital property, wives were not necessarily

62. In Barcelona, Christian women extended 10 of 173 new loans (5.8%) based on a randomly selected sample of 12 registers (ACB, 1, 7, 17–18, 33, 52, 57, 93, 130; AHPB, 1/1, 2/1, 10/3). Out of a larger sample of 39 loans extended by Christian women, married women extended 13, or 33.3% (from above registers, plus ACB, 2–3, 5–6, 8–9, 12–13, 15–16, 19–24, 26–29, 36, 40, 44–45, 47–49, 53, 58, 62–63, 66–69, 72, 76, 80, 92, 94–96, 98, 100, 113, 119, 137, 220, 224, 232–233; AHPB, 3/1, 6/3, 13/8, 14/1–2, 17/2, 18/1, 19/7–8). In Girona, Christian women extended 8 of 184 new loans (4.3%) in a randomly selected sample of 4 registers (AHG Gi-5, 1, 17, 22, 26). In a larger sample of 61 loans extended by Christian women, married women extended 18, or 29.5% (from above registers, plus AHG Gi-1, 2, 7; Gi-4 1–4, 6, 8, 11–12, 14, 19, 22, 38, 41a; Gi-5, 5–11, 13–15, 20, 23, 25, 28–29, 31–32, 34–39, 41, 43, 43bis, 45, 48, 52–55, 58; Gi-6, 1–2, 4, 6–7, 9bis, 10, 12–13, 15–19, 21–26, 29–32, 34–40, 43, 45–47; Gi-7, 1, 3; Gi-8 1–2, 23).

63. VINYOLES and MUNTANER, “Acreedores y deudoras”, p. 280, 285–286, 290–295.

64. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 98–99.

65. RICH ABAD, “Able and available”, p. 73.

equal partners.⁶⁶ More optimistically, Denjean saw Jewish women's lending in Puigcerdà as demonstrating their integration into the social and commercial life of the family and community.⁶⁷ In this section, I will build on the work of Denjean, Klein, Rich Abad, and Winer by exploring examples of husbands and wives acting, to varying degrees, as business partners. I argue that the occasional glimpses of married couples' joint action demonstrates that although Jewish families rarely called upon wives to take on a public role, they saw them as integral to the management of family finances.

Contracts in which husbands appointed their wives as agents provide perhaps the best example of Jewish men trusting their wives to conduct business on their behalf.⁶⁸ Although women like Bonafilla, who collected on her absent husband's loan without having been formally named her husband's *procuratrix*, found their authority contested, other wives successfully collected on loans by referring to agency contracts. In August of 1330, Dolça, wife of Perfet Issach of Barcelona, described herself as her husband's *procuratrix* when she collected 165 sous from Bernat Ginesta of Sant Boi, representing the capital and interest on a loan that Perfet had extended a year before.⁶⁹

In Vic, all three Jewish *procuratrices* were empowered by their husbands to collect on loans. In February of 1316, Astrug Bonjueu appointed his wife, Bonadona, as his agent to collect all debts owed to him, with or without writs, and regardless of the form of the loan (*cum instrumentis et sine instrumentis, ratione mutui vel comande*).⁷⁰ Bonjueu d'Alborns empowered his wife, Vidalona, to collect on all debts, both capital and interest, owed to him by people living in the city of Vic and elsewhere, in November 1318.⁷¹ Finally, in October of 1327, Vidal Massana appointed his wife, Bonadona, as his *procuratrix* to collect on all loans owed to him, with interest, by debtors living in Vic or the surrounding area, with or without writs of debt, and to issue quitclaims on his behalf.⁷² All three of the *procuratrices* of Vic had prior experi-

66. KLEIN, "Widow's portion", p. 158.

67. DENJEAN, *Juifs et chrétiens*, p. 98.

68. Rich Abad similarly interprets Jewish men naming their wives as *procuratrices* as indicative of both shared financial interests and men's confidence in their wives. See RICH ABAD, *Comunitat jueva de Barcelona*, p. 92–93.

69. ACB, 97, fol. 10r.

70. ACF, 4596, fol. 4r.

71. ACF, 4596, fol. 73r.

72. ACF, 4600, fol. 52v–53r.

ence in the credit market; Bonadona, wife of Astrug Bonjueu, extended four loans between 1310 and 1313.⁷³ Vidalona, wife of Bonjueu d'Alborns, had connected with several debtors who came to Vic from nearby Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà, most recently extending a loan of 91 sous to Pere de Condamina in March 1318.⁷⁴ Bonadona, wife of Vidal Massana, can be considered a professional lender, extending 37 loans between 1315 and 1328.⁷⁵ Their expertise in credit likely bolstered their husband's trust, and their own authority, when collecting on loans.

Wives also appointed their husbands as agents, but we cannot always interpret these contracts as evidence of partnership. For instance, Bonadona, daughter of Bramon de Torroella, likely ceded practical control of her assets to her husband, Vidal Bonet, when she appointed him as her *procurator*. In other cases, however, women who obviously considered themselves capable of acting independently in the credit market relied on their husbands for specific tasks, often ones involving travel. Even Jewish women who transacted business independently balked at traveling beyond the city walls of the towns in which they lived.⁷⁶ Reina, daughter of Bonmacip and wife of Astrug Caravida, had proved herself a capable lender, extending 40 new loans between 1293 and 1310.⁷⁷ In March of 1299, however, she appointed her husband as her *procurator* to recover a sum owed to her by a Jew of Girona.⁷⁸ By relying on her husband, Reina avoided travel and perhaps also took advantage of her husband's social and business links in Girona, his original hometown.⁷⁹ Similarly, in 1303, Goig, wife of Astrug, son of David Canviador, empowered her husband to act on her behalf in collecting money that they had jointly entrusted to two Jews of Besalú.⁸⁰ Although Jewish women in Vic played an unusually active role as creditors, they still found themselves limited by re-

73. See, e.g., a loan extended in February of 1311 for 100 sous (ACF, 4594, fol. 6v).

74. ACF, 4596, fol. 59r.

75. Her last extant loan before she was appointed as her husband's *procuratrix* was in August 1326. See ACF, 4600, fol. 38r.

76. WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 97; KLEIN, "Public activities", p. 59.

77. For Reina's first loan in November 1293, see ACF, 4591, fol. 3r. Interestingly, Reina was the great-niece of Goig, wife of David Canviador – her father, Bonmacip, was a son of Reina Cabrita and Bonastrug ça Torre.

78. ACF, 4592, fol. 5v.

79. For this and other links by marriage between Vic and Girona, see also LLOP JORDANA, "Comunitat jueva de Girona", p. 258–260.

80. ACF, 4592, fol. 36r.

strictions on women's travel. By relying on their husbands, they partially ameliorated this disadvantage.

Occasionally, married couples engaged in joint action; such transactions highlight Jewish families' conception of a shared conjugal estate. At least some Jewish wives who extended loans both alone and alongside their husbands may have relied on these shared funds for their independent credit activities as well. Dura, wife of Abraham Cordoví of Castelló d'Empúries, and her sister-in-law Bonadona, wife of Issach Cordoví, each extended several loans jointly with their husbands.⁸¹ Their role in both independent and joint action suggests that when they participated in their husbands' credit transactions, they did so as partners, not accessories. In Vic, the prevalence of joint quitclaims coupled with the rarity of joint loans suggests that while lending was an independent activity, married couples in which both husband and wife individually extended credit conceived of all family members' profits from lending as sources of income that supported the household as a whole. The two most active women lenders in Vic during the second quarter of the 14th century, Goig, wife of Salomó Vidal, and Tolsana, wife of Astrug Jucef, each extended only a single joint loan with their husbands, but Goig and Salomó extended eight joint quitclaims, while Astrug and Tolsana extended five.⁸²

In Barcelona, married couples jointly held property, and thus jointly administered it. On December 7th, 1281, Cresques Alfaquim and his wife, Sobradona, issued a quitclaim to Joan de Banyeres for the 700 sous he owed them as sale price for a vineyard, which the couple had jointly held.⁸³ However, husbands could more easily manage jointly held property without their wives, than wives could without their husbands. Immediately after Cresques and Sobradona received payment for their jointly owned property, Cresques acted alone to appoint another Jew, Asday Salomó, as his agent to transfer

81. AHG Ca, 3, fol. 30r, 107v; AHG Ca, 358, fol. 19r; AHG Ca, 9, fol. 48r; AHG Ca, 16, fol. 23v; AHG Ca, 11, fol. 39r; AHG Ca, 2087, fol. 16v.

82. Goig and Salomó: for joint loan, see ACF, 4602, act dated December 7th, 1335. For quitclaims, see ACF, 94/2, fol. 1r-v; ACF, 259, fol. 31v; ACF, 286, fol. 9v, 25r, 146v; ACF, 289, fol. 14v-15r; ACF, 4606, fol. 39v; ACF, 316, fol. 159r-160r. Astrug and Tolsana: for joint loan, see ACF, 4593, fol. 17r. For quitclaims, see ACF, 4595, fol. 96r; ACF, 4596, fol. 18r, 99r; ACF, 4598, fol. 99v; ACF, 286, fol. 29r.

83. ACB, pergamins, 1-2-1362.

corporal possession of the land to Joan.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, wives' joint ownership of property limited husbands' ability to alienate it without their wives' consent. As a result, men also acted alongside their wives when pledging land to repay debts. For example, in August of 1341, Salomó Jucef de Beziers and his wife, Astruga, borrowed 2,000 sous from Maymó Xaham, an apothecary and Jew of Barcelona, and offered houses they had purchased several months before in the Call Major of Barcelona as a pledge.⁸⁵

Although Jews' involvement in trades often remains invisible in the notarial registers, one document from the notarial registers of Barcelona indicates that some married couples practiced complimentary trades, likely as part of a shared family business. On April 26th, 1318, Mossé Cohén, a silk merchant, and his wife, Bellaire, a silk-weaver, purchased 6 pounds and 10.5 ounces of raw silk on credit, for 13 pounds 15 sous, "for the practice of our aforementioned trades" (*ad opus dictorum officiorum nostrorum*).⁸⁶ The joint purchase, presumably made out of shared household resources, suggests that Mossé and Bellaire considered themselves as operating a collaborative business, with Bellaire weaving finished products out of raw silk, and Mossé selling his wife's handiwork for profit.⁸⁷ Notably, the seller, Judea, wife of Fabib Maymó, was also a still-married Jewish woman. When Judea issued Mossé and Bellaire a partial quitclaim several months later, she specified that the silk had come from her *paraphernalia*.⁸⁸

These documents suggest that husbands and wives worked together to preserve the financial solvency of their shared household. Extant documentary evidence of such activity likely reveals only a small minority of the many Jewish wives who aided their husbands. As scholars of Jewish and

84. ACB, pergamins, 1-6-2874.

85. ACB, 40, fol. 89v-92r.

86. ACB, 16, fol. 51v. Silk-weaving was among the most important Jewish artisanal professions in Barcelona during the latter half of the 14th century; Rich Abad found a number of Jewish silk-weavers, including married couples who jointly bought silk on credit. See RICH ABAD, *Comunitat jueva de Barcelona*, p. 154-163.

87. Christian women often participated in the textile industry, as both independent artisans and auxiliaries to their husbands. See VINYOLES, *Barcelonines*, p. 39; COMAS, MUNTANER, and VINYOLES, "Elles no només filaven", p. 25-31. Some Christian women also practiced trades linked to those of their husbands, although others simply shared a trade with their husbands, and some practiced completely independent trades. See COMAS, MUNTANER, and VINYOLES, "Elles no només filaven", p. 38.

88. ACB, 16, fol. 169v.

Christian women in medieval Europe have noted, women's work was normally not only less profitable than men's, but also less likely to be considered work at all.⁸⁹ While numerous Jewish widows, left with the responsibility to independently administer financial resources and even support their households, engaged in public labor, recognized by both their contemporaries and by modern historians, the work of Jewish wives often remains invisible.

5. Conclusions

In this essay, I have argued that although Jewish wives rarely participated publicly in economic transactions, families and communities saw them as integral to the management of family finances. Wives' contributions to the domestic economy often remain invisible in our sources, because families infrequently relied on married women to play a public economic role. As a result, even independent ownership of financial resources did not guarantee that wives would act without their husbands' consent, support, or mediation. Although certain families and communities assigned women a more prominent role in extending credit to local Christians to augment the household's financial resources, even these women – with few exceptions – brought in less income from lending than their husbands. Husbands sometimes relied on their wives to conduct business in their absence, but many others sought out male *procuratores*. Married couples' joint activity, I argue, often indicates shared ownership, but women still normally played a lesser managerial role, at least in a public context. Women were, at the same time, essential and marginal.

89. Rebecca Winer discusses the less-profitable character of Jewish women's lending in Perpignan. See WINER, *Women, wealth, and community*, p. 87–89. Vinyoles argues that although women both aided their husbands and practiced independent trades, contemporary writers saw women's work as a way for them to avoid sin, not to contribute to the family income. See VINYOLES, *Barcelonines*, p. 33–35.

List of Abbreviations

ACB: Arxiu Capitular de Barcelona
 ACF: Arxiu i Biblioteca Episcopal de Vic, Arxiu Cúria Fumada
 AHG Ca: Arxiu Històric de Girona, secció Castelló
 AHG Gi: Arxiu Històric de Girona, secció Girona
 AHPB: Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona

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