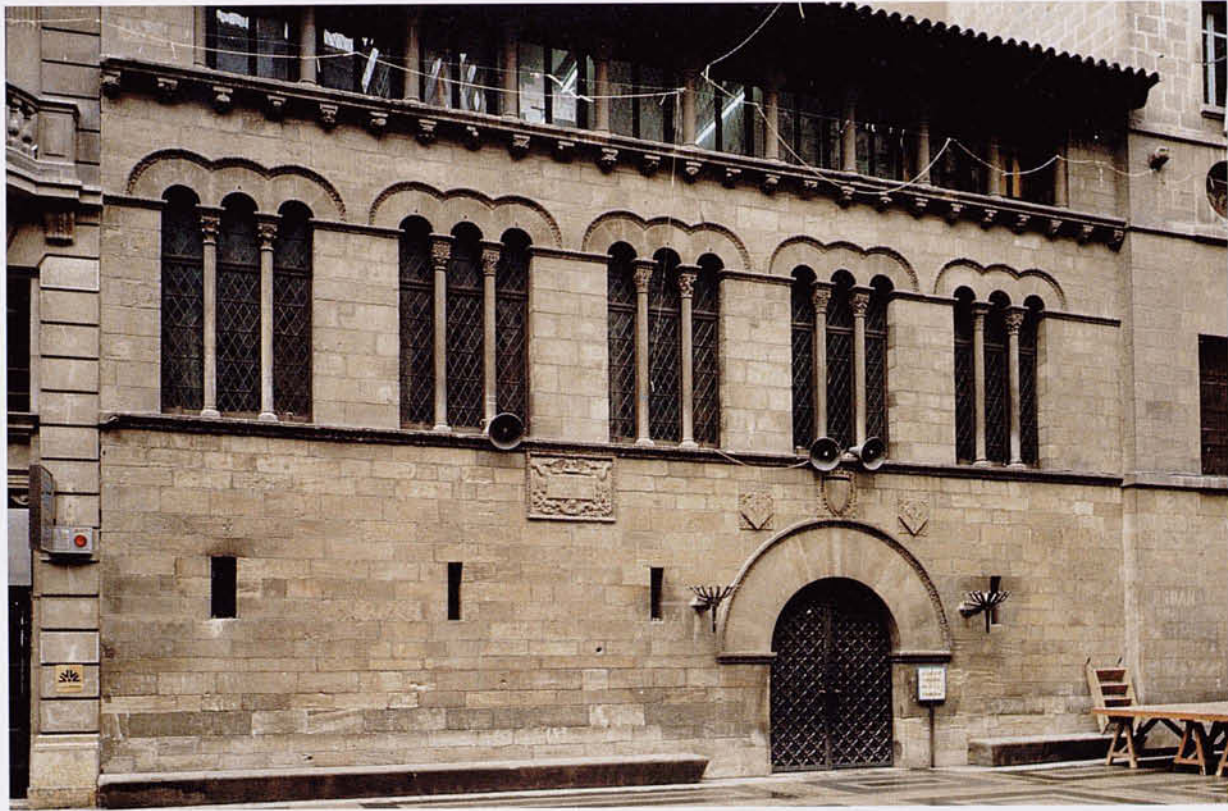


THE ROMANESQUE ROUTES: 11th, 12th AND 13th CENTURIES



CASTLES, TOWERS, WATCHTOWERS, CATHEDRALS, PARISH CHURCHES, ABBEYS, PALACES, BRIDGES, HOUSES AND GATEWAYS, AND MANY OTHER REMAINS, INTACT OR IN RUINS —NOT AS MANY AS AT ONE TIME, BUT A LARGE NUMBER, ALL THE SAME— PROVIDE US WITH PRECISE REFERENCES TO THAT EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE AND ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF THE CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION WHICH, COLLECTIVELY, IS KNOWN AS “ROMANESQUE”.



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In the Middle Ages, Catalonia was an important centre of artistic production, which emerged as a result of the process of consolidation and development of the country, both material and spiritual. Castles, towers, watchtowers, cathedrals, parish churches, abbeys, palaces, bridges, houses and gateways, and many other remains, intact or in ruins—not as many as at one time, but a large number, all the same—provide us with precise references to that early medieval Europe and are all examples of the culture and the civilization which, collectively, is known as “Romanesque”.

Once the initial period was over, when Romanesque art was at its peak, when the counts of Barcelona had been recognized as rulers by the other counties and the links that subordinated them to the king of France were broken, when the expedition to Cordova (1010) held off the threat of an Arab invasion, a favourable situation came about in which, coinciding with the introduction of gold coin and a rapid growth in population, the hierarchic organization of the society was organized

and the families of the nobility became established. This new historical reality had to build the centres it needed practically from scratch and we can therefore say, metaphorically speaking, that the whole country was a construction site: episcopal sees, abbeys, parish churches, manor houses, castles and fortresses—all went up together, giving a unity to the whole, that, in spite of what has disappeared, is still easily imagined. Not everything that has survived from this period has the same value or the same interest. Between the grand, monumental works, such as a great monastery or cathedral, and the rural work, simple and repetitive, of the parish churches, there is the same difference as between a castle or a palace and a small farmhouse, but they are all important historical evidence of the formation and consolidation of Catalonia. There is no denying that the Catalan Romanesque legacy is amongst the richest and most beautiful in Europe. As well as the buildings themselves, there are murals, illuminated manuscripts, sculptures, altarpieces and other objects of the period, either preserved in the setting for which

they were originally intended or else in the museums of Barcelona, Vic, Solsona, Girona, La Seu d’Urgell and Lleida. According to figures from the Patrimony department of the *Generalitat*, Catalonia has some 1,900 churches and some 200 castles and fortified houses with Romanesque elements, a number of manor houses and city palaces which have been partly reformed, unique buildings such as the Jewish *mikwa*, bridges and mills and other less important elements, which add up to a total of more than 2,000 remains from the Romanesque age.

Historically speaking, the counties of Catalonia lay along the north of the traditional route towards Aragon, via the regions of Anoia, Segarra and Urgell, and had an important network of roads of which we have only scanty information today. There was, for example, the road which came from Tolosa de Llenguadoc, passed through the Cerdanya and continued on to Barcelona via, amongst other towns, Besalú, Girona and Hostalric. From Barcelona, it turned west towards Olèrdola. We also know there was communication between la Seu d’Urgell and Solso-



na, between Solsona and Cardona, between Ripoll and Berga and that there were roads that left Barcelona for the lower points of the March. Also, the successive lines of the border, marked by the rivers Cardener, Llobregat and Gaià, led to changes in the defense routes with their fortified and defensive elements. Logically, buildings were concentrated round the nerve centres of the time or else they were intentionally isolated from them as in the case of certain monastic institutions. All this happened in the "Old Catalonia", between the rivers Tet and the Gaià but, when the Christian conquest was completed (1148-49), and the March lands of Tarragona and Tortosa and of Lleida and Camarasa had been incorporated, communication routes extended throughout the territory known as "New Catalonia", which carried on the earlier construction boom. This chronological difference between the two Catalonias explains, in part, why there is such a great density of Romanesque buildings in the Pyrenees and pre-Pyrenees compared with the decreasing number as one approaches the plateau of the Central Depression, and the almost symbolic nature of the Romanesque remains in the south. Also, the fact that the moun-

tain centres were abandoned in favour of the plain as the country was stabilized led to the survival of buildings which, not being fully used, did not have their structures altered or substituted by newer ones. From what has been said so far, it can be seen that in any comprehensive discussion of the Romanesque routes we must not forget those of Old Catalonia, around the most important counties, and those of New Catalonia, across the newly-incorporated lands to the south and west. Similarly, we must bear in mind that, on the north side of the Pyrenees, these historical routes do not conform to the present divisions (Roussillon, Conflent, Vallespir and French Cerdanya), nor do they do so in the case of Vall d'Aran or Ribagorça, part of which are now in Aragon.

Setting out from the north, one should visit the first important Benedictine abbeys at Sant Martí del Canigó (first consecration 1009, second consecration 1014 or 1026) and at Sant Miquel de Cuixà, in the valley of Codalet, (tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries), as well as the Augustinian priory at Santa Maria de Serrabona (eleventh to twelfth centuries) and the canonical church of Santa Maria d'Espirà d'Agli (second half of twelfth century). The sculptural work of the cloisters, galleries

and doorways of the churches, with their columns and ornamentation, is characterized by its plant, animal and occasionally human themes and are remarkable for the beauty of the material: pink marble from the quarries of Vilafranca de Conflent. The uniformity of the Roussillon school of architecture is remarkable and its influence can be seen in nearby Cerdanya and in the area around Girona (Lladó, Cistella and Besalú). In Perpignan, one should visit the architectural remains of Sant Joan el Vell, with a magnificent sculptured doorway dominated by the "Maiestas Domini", a leading example from the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, which takes after the sculpture of the baptistery of Parma. At the neighbouring town of Cabestany, now almost completely absorbed by Perpignan, the tympanum by the "master of Cabestany" (mid-twelfth century) presents a renovation of the sculptural concept related to the classical backgrounds. This artist also worked on the monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes and other places in the south of France and in Tuscany. Continuing on our route, we come to Elna, where the cathedral, with its basilican orientation (eleventh-twelfth century), survives as an example of Ro-



manesque layout and decoration. One of the wings of the cloister is an important example of the work produced by the Roussillon workshops. Sant Andreu de Sureda and Sant Genís les Fonts are two examples of an architectural style that straddles the tenth and eleventh centuries, and also contains twelfth century elements. They respond to the same concept as the monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes. They also have important sculpted lintels and windows, dating from the eleventh century.

As one enters the lands of Girona, the Benedictine monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes (tenth-eleventh and twelfth century), the remains of Sant Miquel de Fluvià (eleventh and twelfth centuries), the canonical church of Santa Maria de Vilabertran (eleventh to twelfth), the remains of Sant Domènec and the "Carme", at Peralada (twelfth to thirteenth century), the Holy Sepulchre of Palera (last quarter of the eleventh century) and the group at Besalú (Santa Maria, Sant Pere, Sant Miquel) are the best examples of eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth century monasteries and of urban remains, with their naked surfaces and delicate ornamental and sculptural work. In Girona, the important Romanesque nucleus is made up of the

tower (eleventh and twelfth centuries) and the cathedral cloister, with outstanding sculptures related to those of the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès, the monastery of Sant Pere de Galligans (twelfth century), Sant Nicolau (eleventh century), the Moorish baths (twelfth to thirteenth century), the episcopal palace (twelfth century) and the "Fontana d'Or", a good example of civic Romanesque. In the cathedral museum, one can see the outstanding tapestry of the Creation, a first class example of European Romanesque (late eleventh to early twelfth century).

The Central Depression, the Ripollès region and that of Osona provide us with two centres of capital importance in Old Catalonia: Vic and Ripoll. The first has been an episcopal see since the earliest times and the second was an extremely important Benedictine monastery, especially in the time of the Abbot Oliva, and one of the great cultural centres of the European Romanesque world. In Vic, one should visit what is left of the original cathedral, the belltower and the crypt (eleventh to twelfth century), incorporated in the neo-Classical building, and in Ripoll we can contemplate, still on its original site, the huge monumental portal of the

monastery of Santa Maria, dominated by an apocalyptic version of the "Maiestas Domini" which relates a series of relevant events taken from the Old Testament. Ripoll being one of the great centres of repopulation of Old Catalonia, founded by Guiffrè *el Pilós* in 879, and at the same time a centre of cultural diffusion, the Romantic spirit of the nineteenth century was attracted by its historical connotations and, applying the criteria of the period, work started on its restoration in 1886, thus saving it from the total ruin with which it was threatened. From Ripoll, one can visit the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses (twelfth century) and, from Vic, Santa Maria de l'Estany and Santa Eugènia de Berga (twelfth century). The cathedral in Solsona maintains the original arrangement of the old abbey of Santa Maria (twelfth century) and the nearby church of Sant Esteve d'Olius preserves the structure of the eleventh century churches with crypt. Following the traditional route, in Cardona, seat of the viscounts of the same name and also an important centre during the reconquest, the remains of the castle, with its *torre de la minyona* (eleventh century), the collegiate church of Sant Vicenç (consecrated in 1040), the thirteenth century palace and



the monastic buildings added later, all still provide an important picture of the structure of early Catalonia. Going up towards Berga, Sant Llorenç prop Bagà, Sant Jaume de Frontanyà and Sant Quirze de Pedret, surrounded by beautiful countryside, complete our picture of eleventh century Catalonia. Following the line of the traditional border, we come across the Benedictine monastery of Sant Benet de Bages (twelfth to thirteenth century), near Manresa, the church of Santa Maria de Matamars (tenth to eleventh century) and the parish church of Sant Martí de Mura (eleventh to twelfth century). Once in the Vallès region, on the way to Barcelona, we can visit the old monastery of Sant Cugat, where there are remains from the Visigothic period, the three-naved church started in the twelfth century, the bell-tower in the Lombardic style and the magnificent cloister from the end of the twelfth century. The sculptural work, related to that of the see of Girona, depicts, amongst plant and human themes, the master sculptor Arnau Cladell at work, with an inscription by which he is identified. Continuing the route to Terrassa, the group of churches of Santa Maria, Sant Pere, and Sant Miquel are a living testimony to the episcopal see of the old city of *Egara*, transformed during the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. In Barcelona, most of the Romanesque city was rebuilt or completely reformed over the course of history, but, if nothing else,

part of the eleventh century city-walls still survive, as well as the church of Santa Llúcia and the gallery in the courtyard of the Bishop's Palace (thirteenth century), the Benedictine monastery of Sant Pau del Camp (twelfth century) and the twelfth century chapels of Sant Llàtzer and en Marcús.

In the westernmost part of Catalonia, the lands of the old counties of Urgell, Pallars, and Ribagorça still preserve many of their Romanesque buildings. The most outstanding are the cathedral buildings of la Seu d'Urgell. The churches of Santa Maria and Sant Pere and Sant Miquel (eleventh to twelfth century) show architectural elements on walls and façades and, in the decoration, sculptural elements and pictorial remains that make this group unique among the existing examples of the Catalan art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The valleys of the rivers Valira, Noguera Pallaresa and Noguera Ribagorçana contain innumerable rural examples in good condition (Isil, Àneu, Ribera de Cardós, Erill, Barruera, Boí, Taüll, etc.) that fall into the same category as those to be found in the Vall d'Aran (Arties, Salardú, Bòssots, etc.), as well as specific examples of Benedictine monasticism, such as Sant Serní de Tavèrnoles (eleventh century), Santa Maria de Gerri (twelfth century), Sant Pere d'Ager (eleventh and twelfth centuries), Sant Pere de Ponts (twelfth century) and Santa Maria de Gualter (twelfth to thirteenth century).

In the neighbouring Aragonese territory, one should visit the old episcopal see of Roda d'Isàvena, directly linked to the Catalan expansion of the eleventh century. Following the route along the Segre valley we come to what is historically known as New Catalonia, where Balaguer, Agramunt, Cervera, Tàrraga and Lleida offer us the opportunity to contemplate works which belong to a later, more developed Romanesque style. On the outskirts of Balaguer, the old Cistercian monastery of Santa Maria de les Franqueses (twelfth to thirteenth century) and the Premonstratensian abbey of Santa Maria de Bellpuig de les Avellanes (Os de Balaguer, twelfth and thirteenth centuries); in Tàrraga, the thirteenth century Palace of the marquises of la Floresta, an example of city architecture, comparable to the Paeria in Lleida; in Agramunt, the parish church (eleventh and thirteenth centuries) with a magnificent doorway which forms part of a typical arrangement known as the "Lleida shool"; in Cervera, on the outskirts, Sant Pere el Gros, an interesting eleventh century building, with a circular floor-plan, and the south door of the early church of Sant Martí, which forms part of the Gothic group of the archipresbiterial church of Santa Maria. Finally, in Lleida, already an important centre during the Arab domination, reconquered in 1149, we find the following Romanesque buildings, intact or otherwise: La Seu Vella (1203-78), with a



three-naved basilica, a wide transept and magnificent sculptured doors (Fillols and Anunciata) which gave the name to the important "Lleida school", characterized by its decorated archivolts supported on columns, with capitals that are also carved, and found in the nearby towns and even as far away as Valencia cathedral; the restored thirteenth century buildings in the Suda (the clergyhouse and the almshouse); the churches of Sant Llorenç and Sant Martí (thirteenth century) and the Paeria, now the City Hall. On the outskirts of the city, there is the church of Santa Maria de Gardeny, an important Templar monastery.

Our final route takes us towards Tarragona. Few Romanesque buildings have survived in the Penedès region but, from Vilafranca, it is well worth visiting the group of Sant Martí Sarroca (church and castle, twelfth to thirteenth century), Olèrdola (church of Sant Miquel, ninth to twelfth century, and chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, with paintings from the ninth century) and the group at Calafell (castle and church of the Holy Cross, ninth century). Once across the Gaià, Tarragona, an important Roman city and see of the Metropolitan archbishopric of Catalonia, examples of Romanesque architecture which are all of a later date than the conquest of 1148: the arrangement of the cathedral, the apse, the side doors of the façade, the cloister and entrance and the sculptured altar frontal; the church of

Santa Tecla la Vella and the chapel of Sant Pau (within the cathedral precinct) and the hospital façade; and, in the centre of the Roman amphitheatre, beside the sea, over the remains of a visigothic basilica, the church of Santa Maria del Miracle. Travelling inland from Tarragona, one can start a double historic route, that of the Cistercians (monastery of Santes Creus, Poblet and Vallbona de les Monges) which preserves thirteenth century remains amongst splendid works of art of a later date, and that of the military orders (Miravet and Ulldesona castles and the ruins at Gandesa) which, at Catalonia's southern limits, include examples of thirteenth century buildings that still make use of Romanesque structures and techniques. In this area, comprising the regions of Tarragona, Camp, Conca de Barberà and Montsià, we find Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou, a former Augustinian clergy-house, the Carthusian monastery of Santa Maria d'Escala Dei, the church of Siurana, that of pla de Santa Maria and the façade of the church of Sant Miquel de Montblanc, all important examples of late Romanesque.

Having completed this brief account of the routes of the Romanesque, it only remains to mention, obviously, those buildings and specific points which exceed the scope of this article. Reference has intentionally been limited to what is traditionally and academically called "Ro-

manesque", concentrating on architectural examples, which, once built, generate other artistic aspects (painting, sculpture) to complement their characteristic period style. Most of these objects are kept in the museums mentioned above. References to ruins and archaeological remains of castles have not been included because of the general lack of information and their particular complexity.

Finally, I would add that, although I extend the concept of Romanesque into the thirteenth century, Romanesque culture took shape in the last years of the tenth century and in the eleventh century, spread during the twelfth century, and the vestiges that lasted into the thirteenth century are no more than specific points that retain the traditional forms and techniques, but which belong to a different historical and cultural situation in Catalonia: the thirteenth century, still largely unknown and little studied as a specific reality (1).

(1) In this respect, it may be of interest to consult the guides and publications issued by the *Direcció General de Turisme de la Generalitat* and, for a deeper understanding of the subject, the following works are recommended:

Núria de Dalmaes and Antoni José i Pitarch, *Els inicis i el Romànic, s. IX-XII* (Història de l'Art Català, vol. I. E. 62, Barcelona, 1986) and *L'època del Cister, s. XIII* (Història de l'Art Català, vol. II. E. 62, Barcelona, 1985).