

Contexts for a fragment. On some thirteenth-century mural paintings from the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Historia de un fragmento

Marta Bertran Armadans

The pictorial fragment known as *Saint Ermengol exorcising a possessed Man* [fig. 1]¹ in the collection of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum comes from the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell (Lleida), from where it was detached from the walls and transferred to a free-standing support. A modern inscription located in an area of paint loss in the lower part of the composition reads: "Fragment of the mural decoration of the chapel of Saint Ermengol from the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell with scenes of the healing of a possessed man and other miracles of the titular saint. Catalan work of around 1300", thus indicating the work's place of origin in the chapel dedicated to Saint Ermengol.

The mural depicts a bearded bishop saint with a halo, wearing a chasuble, tunic and mitre. With his right hand he blesses a praying male figure depicted on a smaller scale. The bishop has his left hand on the head of the man, who expels a small winged demon from his mouth, following a generic formula used for scenes of miracles. The modern inscription identifies the saint as Ermengol, a bishop of La Seu d'Urgell in the 11th century. Still visible on either side of the exorcism are part of the compartments that originally flanked it, separated by vertical bands. On the right is what appears to be half of a bishop (with a halo, mitre and chasuble) in a poor state of conservation. All that survives from the lost compartment on the left are a few decorative motifs which may imitate a textile and possibly depict an altar frontal or altar cloth or, as been suggested, a bishop's throne.² Also visible are traces of the inscriptions (now difficult to read) that framed the painted compartments at the top and bottom and which must have clarified the iconographic reading of the mural as a whole.

* The present study has been undertaken as part of the research project "Artists, patrons and public. Catalonia and the Mediterranean, 11th to 15th centuries – Magistri Cataloniae" (MICINN HAR2011-23015). We would like to thank the members of staff at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum who proposed this study and assisted in its realisation, particularly the director, Javier Viar, for his proposal, and the Department of Conservation and Restoration for providing the infra-red reflectograph and the ultraviolet images of the fragment under discussion here. Thanks are also due to Verónica Abenza for checking some data in New York not available to us.

1 A number of publications have focused on this mural painting: Cook/Gudiol 1950, p. 101, fig. 74 (ed. 1980, pp. 181-182, fig. 211); Cook 1956, p. 34; Lasterra 1969, p. 123, cat. 254; Bengoechea 1977, p. 8; Bengoechea 1978, pp. 38-39; Sureda 1981, p. 357, cat. 116; Dalmases/José i Pitarch 1985, p. 145, fig. 4; Gudiol/Alcolea 1987, p. 25, fig. 96, cat. 4; Galilea 1993, vol. I, pp. 81-87; vol. IV, pp. 16-17, figs. 11 and 11a; Galilea 1995a, pp. 36-40; Galilea 1995b, pp. 21, 27, 42; Barrachina 1997, p. 398; Adell *et al.*, 2000, pp. 147-148; Beseran 2005, pp. 48-49; Melero 2005, pp. 140-141; Puig 2010, pp. 253-288.

2 The latter interpretation in Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 148.



1. *Saint Ermengol exorcising a possessed Man*, final decades of the 13th century
 Mural painting in fresco transferred to a movable support. 142 x 102 cm
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Inv. no. 69/254



2. *Saint Ermengol blessing a Follower*, final decades of the 13th century
Mural painting in fresco transferred to canvas, 129 x 72 cm
Museu Maricel, Sitges, Barcelona. Dr Jesús Pérez Rosales collection
Inv. no. 190

It seems clear that this mural painting would have been part of a larger, now lost hagiographic cycle. In this sense it is interesting to note that in the Museo Maricel in Sitges there is a fragment of a composition that is so similar to the one in Bilbao that on some occasions the two have been confused, leading to the assumption that they are one and the same work [fig. 2].³ Given the compositional and stylistic similarities and despite the fact that the work in Sitges does not have an inscription indicating its origin, it is quite clear that they are related and were both part of the same cycle from La Seu d'Urgell's cathedral. While the arrangement of the figures is almost the same, the male figure in the Sitges fragment is not expelling a demon.

On the basis of the modern inscription, it has been suggested that the paintings may have left the chapel of Saint Ermengol after the Civil War.⁴ Ana Galilea considered that they could have been removed before 1950, possibly by Alejandro Ferrant.⁵ She also noted that according to information supplied by Joan Ainaud de Lasarte, the mural could have been purchased by the collector Lluís Plandiura from the antique dealer

3 Gudiol/Alcolea 1987, p. 25, fig. 96, cat. 4. On this mural painting, see Carabassa 1992, pp. 352-353; Panyella 2013, p. 188. With thanks to the Museu Maricel in Sitges for the information supplied.

4 Beseran 2005, p. 48.

5 Galilea 1995a, p. 39. The architect Alejandro Ferrant was entrusted with the restoration of La Seu d'Urgell cathedral after Cèsar Martinell was removed from this post in 1942. See Adell *et al.*, 2000, pp. 254-260.

LP39-34(1)

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Lluís Plandiura

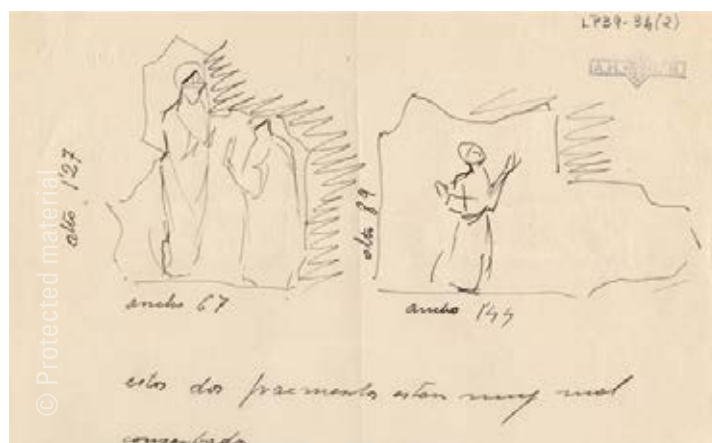
Distinguido amigo J. Lluís He recibido su carta esta fecha 14 del corriente y me apresuro a contestarle para darle satisfacción a sus preguntas, no puedo mandarle fotografías pues no se han terminado el resto de origen, repetidamente he un croquis que le adjunto y le da una cabal idea del conjunto medidos y demás detalles, tan pronto el croquis ya sea que sin ser ninguna cosa extraordinaria una vez transcurrida y restaurada sean dignos de un propósito, el resto es el que se ha dado en llamar Franco Gótico y de este tipo con los muros notable que he visto, no he ido aún al Tossal.

LP39-34(2)

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Josep Bardolet

He recibido su carta esta fecha 14 del corriente y me apresuro a contestarle para darle satisfacción a sus preguntas, no puedo mandarle fotografías pues no se han terminado el resto de origen, repetidamente he un croquis que le adjunto y le da una cabal idea del conjunto medidos y demás detalles, tan pronto el croquis ya sea que sin ser ninguna cosa extraordinaria una vez transcurrida y restaurada sean dignos de un propósito, el resto es el que se ha dado en llamar Franco Gótico y de este tipo con los muros notable que he visto, no he ido aún al Tossal.



3-4-5. Letter from Josep Bardolet to Lluís Plandiura, 19 August 1940

Recto, verso and accompanying sketch

Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Plandiura, AHCB3-233/5D.54, box 8, LP 39-34(1), LP 39-34(2) and LP 39-34(3)

Josep Bardolet Soler, one of his principal suppliers.⁶ A recent study confirms the paintings' origins in La Seu d'Urgell and casts light on the circumstances surrounding their removal from the cathedral.⁷ That study publishes the correspondence between Bardolet and Plandiura now in the Fons Plandiura of the Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona [Historical Archive of the City of Barcelona].⁸ In a letter of 1 August 1940, Josep Bardolet offers Plandiura some 14th-century mural paintings ("... I have in my hands the 14th-century mural paintings").⁹ Some days later, on 19 August 1940, Bardolet wrote to Plandiura again, replying to some questions the latter had asked in a previous letter and also describing the murals to which he is referring and enclosing sketches of them [figs. 3 to 5].¹⁰

"My dear friend Don Luis. I have received your attentive letter of 14 of this month and I hasten to reply in order to satisfy your questions, I cannot send photographs as I did not take any in situ, however I made a sketch which I enclose here and which gives an excellent idea of the group [, the] measurements and other details accompany the sketch and I believe that without being anything remarkable, once transferred and restored they will be worthy of your intentions, the style is the one that has been termed Franco-Gothic and they are the most notable of this type that I have seen [...]."

Bardolet apologises for not sending a photograph and instead sends Plandiura two sketches that are clearly of the mural paintings now in Bilbao and Sitges.¹¹ Various conclusions can be drawn from this interesting documentation. Firstly, it allows us to confirm that it was indeed Josep Bardolet who was responsible for the murals leaving the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell and that their sale probably took place in 1940.¹²

It thus seems reasonable to think that the cycle could have been discovered when liturgical fittings were removed during the Civil War and that after the war it passed into the hands of Bardolet, one of the principal purchasers of artistic religious patrimony in the diocese of Urgell. It is also interesting to ask who could have been responsible for removing the paintings from the cathedral's walls. It seems unlikely that it was Alejandro Ferrant, as Ana Galilea suggested.¹³ Another possibility is the restorer Arturo Cividini, who had previously worked in the cathedral in La Seu d'Urgell and was a friend and regular collaborator of Josep Bardolet.¹⁴ However, the letters that Cividini sent to Plandiura in 1940, now in the Historic Archive of the

6 Galilea 1995a, p. 36, note 113.

7 With thanks to Meritxell Cano for making available to us her Masters thesis (Cano 2013), which gave rise to a subsequent publication (Cano 2015).

8 Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Plandiura, AHCB3-233/5D.54.

9 Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Plandiura, AHCB3-233/5D.54, box 8, LP 39-33. Cano 2013, p. 58; Cano 2015, p. 180.

10 Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Plandiura, AHCB3-233/5D.54, box 8, LP 39-34(1), LP 39-34(2) and LP 39-34(3). Cano 2013, pp. 58-61 and 128-131; Cano 2015, p. 180.

11 The transcription of Bardolet's annotations that accompany his sketch is as follows: LP 39-34 (2), "these two fragments are very poorly preserved / high 1.27 / wide 67 / high 89 / wide 1.44"; LP 39-34(3), "this panel as you can see is in the form of a frieze and has three groups of two figures each, its state of preservation [aside from] what I mark as lost is good / the height measures 1.72 metres seventy-two / width 1.39 metres thirty-nine / The measurement of the lower part is 1.84 / the letters of the upper and lower frieze that I copy out, are in the original Gothic white background the letters black, the text is different I have put letters to give you an idea of how it is more or less / the palette is primarily pinkish ochre and blue with all the forms outlined in black".

12 As also suggested by Cano 2013, p. 60.

13 See note 5.

14 Arturo Cividini and Arturo Dalmati were the assistants of Franco Steffanoni, who introduced the technique of *strappo* which allowed the pictorial layer of murals to be removed from the wall and the resulting fragments transported. On Cividini, see Giannini 2009, pp. 71-79; Mestre 2009, pp. 65-66. Also Xarrié 2002, pp. 73-77; Cano 2013, p. 15. We know that Cividini was responsible for removing the mural paintings of Saint Catherine from the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell between 1927 and 1933: Verdaguer 2009, pp. 13-22; Castiñeiras/Verdaguer 2011-2012, pp. 49-77.

City of Barcelona, indicate that at that time he was living in exile in Bergamo (Italy).¹⁵ This correspondence reveals Cividini's concern to return to Spain, as expressed on numerous occasions.¹⁶ However, there is no evidence to suggest that he was there at any date close to that of the acquisition of the murals.¹⁷ Another hypothesis is that the person responsible was Ramon Gudiol i Ricart, brother of the art historian Josep Gudiol and a student of Cividini's, who worked on the removal of various wall paintings from churches in the Pyrenees at this period.¹⁸

Having been removed from the walls, the fragments had different fates. The one now in Bilbao was acquired by Lluís Plandiura and became part of the so-called "second Plandiura collection". This was the collection that he started after he sold his first collection to the Junta de Museos de Barcelona in 1932¹⁹ and which he installed in his house in La Garriga (Catalonia). Little is known of this new collection, which was dispersed after his death in 1956.²⁰ The contemporary works in that collection all entered the Museu Víctor Balaguer in Vilanova i la Geltrú at the same time, while the other works were dispersed during the course of 1963. It was on 23 September of that year that the *Saint Ermengol* fragment entered the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, having been acquired from the Madrid antique dealer Leoncio Sastre (who took over the Apolinar Sánchez firm), for 125,000 pesetas.²¹ For his part, Bardolet must have sold the Sitges fragment to Dr Jesús Pérez Rosales, who assembled the magnificent collection that gave rise to the Museu Maricel in Sitges.²²

To return to Bardolet's letter, it is particularly interesting to note that the sketches record the existence of two now lost fragments which completed the compositions in Bilbao and Sitges [figs. 4 and 5]. Some unpublished photographs discovered by the present authors in the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona [Photographic Archive of Barcelona] reveal further details on the lost composition that accompanied the Bilbao fragment [figs. 6 and 7]. These photographs, taken by Francesc Serra i Dimas,²³ correspond exactly with one of Josep Bardolet's sketches and were taken while the work was in the Plandiura collection.²⁴ The first of them shows the fragment now in Bilbao before it was restored, together with an adjoining, very damaged composition. It is possible to make out the mitred and haloed figure (half of which is in Bilbao) and another figure next to it, of which the lower part of the chasuble and the tunic can just be discerned. This is followed by another haloed figure and another figure on a smaller scale, probably shown praying. There are numerous losses to the inscription running across the upper part of the fragment. The lower part has the modern inscription which states the paintings' origins. An annotation on the reverse of the photograph describes it as a Romanesque panel from the Plandiura collection, prior to restoration by Arturo Cividini.²⁵ The second photograph shows

15 Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Plandiura, AHCB3-233/5D.54, box 8.

16 See, for example, LP 39-6, 5 March 1939.

17 It seems unlikely that Cividini visited during the months when the murals were removed from the walls. In March 1940 he noted that his wife was about to give birth in the next month (LP 39-42, 30 March 1940), making it unlikely that he would have travelled. The next letter, LP 39-44, 19 August 1940, does not offer any indication that Cividini visited Spain during the time between his two letters.

18 The following publications include information on this restorer: *Prefiguració...* 1992, p. 55; Cano 2013, p. 62, note 218; Xarrié 2002, pp. 73-79.

19 The acquisition of the Plandiura collection provoked enormous controversy at the time. On this subject, see Berenguer 2002a, pp. 11-25.

20 On Plandiura, see Berenguer 2002b, pp. 23-40.

21 According to the Acts of the Board of Trustees of the Museo de Bellas Artes and the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bilbao of 23 September 1963, Galilea 1995a, p. 36, note 112.

22 The antique dealer Josep Bardolet was Pérez Rosales's principal supplier (Panyella 2013, pp. 177-204).

23 Francesc Serra Dimas took photographs of the artists of his day, their studios and also some private collections. On this photographer, see Barcelona 1990.

24 This mural is stated on the reverse of the photographs to be in the Plandiura collection.

25 According to the annotation on the reverse of the photograph.



6-7. *Saint Ermengol exorcising a possessed Man* and an adjoining scene
 Photographs by Francesc Serra Dimas, before and after the restoration of the first scene
 Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

the fragment in Bilbao after it had been restored by Cividini.²⁶ In this case the losses to the polychromy have been reintegrated, although the inscription at the top still has the same losses, which must have been painted in during a subsequent restoration. It should be noted that in this photograph the winged demon emerging from the praying man is not as clearly visible as it is now. A third photograph [fig. 8] shows the now lost fragment after its restoration. Particularly notable is the haloed and veiled female figure who is

²⁶ Ibid.



8. Fragment next to *Saint Ermengol exorcising a possessed Man*
 Photograph by Francesc Serra Dimas
 after restoration
 Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

undertaking some sort of healing, placing her right hand on the mouth of the figure in front of her and her left hand on his head.

It is important to note the contradictions between the dates written on the reverse of the photographs in the Photographic Archive, which vary between 1947 and 1950.²⁷ These contradictions make it difficult to precisely determine the date of the restoration. However, the Arxiu Mas [Mas Archive] has a photograph from 1948 of the painting in Bilbao already restored,²⁸ which provides a *terminus ante quem* for that procedure. However, it still remains extremely difficult to determine the sequence of restorations. A detailed comparison between the photographs in the Photographic Archive of Barcelona and the Mas Archive seems

²⁷ According to information provided by the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona, some of the information on the reverse of the photographs was added later by Francesc Serra, at the time of donating them to the archive. It does indeed seem that the annotations were written at different times, which may explain the discrepancy in the dates.

²⁸ Arxiu Mas, cliché 95848. A very similar or identical photograph is in the Arxiu Fotogràfic de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Francesc Serra i Dimas, published by Cook/Gudiol 1950, fig. 74.

to show two different restorations. Furthermore, for the painting to have the appearance it has now, it must have been restored again at a later date. It should also be noted that in the 1950 edition of volume VI in the *Ars Hispaniae* collection, Cook and Gudiol Ricart only refer to the fragment in Bilbao without mentioning the composition next to it.²⁹ This omission may suggest that the mural had already been split up by that date.

Finally, there is the question of which chapel in the cathedral the mural was removed from. Sadly, Bardolet's letter does not provide the location of these murals inside the building and the present authors are unaware of any other information concerning their removal. For this reason, use must be made again of the modern inscription on the fragment which indicates that it was in the chapel of San Ermengol. At this point it is important to ask where this apsidal chapel is or was located inside the cathedral. When answering this question it should be borne in mind that the cults of the chapels have changed over the years.³⁰ Until 1576, the chapel of Saint Ermengol was located in the first lateral chapel of the south transept, next to the high altar. This is probably where the murals under discussion here came from.³¹ At that period the chapels in the cathedral were reorganised and this apsidal chapel was re-dedicated to Saint Ot, while Saint Ermengol became the titular saint of the first apsidal chapel in the north transept.³² As a result, the two bishop saints of La Seu d'Urgell flank the cathedral's central apse.³³ Once the altars had been redistributed, the new chapel of Saint Ot was embellished with an altarpiece painted by Joan Pau Guardiola in 1536.³⁴ A century later that work was replaced by a Baroque altarpiece that totally covered the chapel's walls and which survived until the Civil War.³⁵ For this reason, it has been suggested that the present mural paintings could have been discovered when the altarpiece was removed during the war.³⁶

With regard to the murals' chronology, some authors consider that they could date from the final decades of the 13th century,³⁷ while others have placed them in the first quarter of the 14th.³⁸ In this regard, Ana Galilea noted that they reveal visible signs of a new approach in terms of spatial concept, movement and volume which suggest Linear Gothic, although they still retain some archaic features.³⁹ Stylistically, parallels have been drawn between these paintings and the *Saint James Altarpiece* in Frontanyà, particularly in the modelling of the folds.⁴⁰ Marisa Melero noted that the fragments reveal the influence of the La Cerdanya

29 Ibid., p. 101: "(...) otro de mayor talla, decoró con temples un altar dedicado al obispo urgellense del siglo XI, san Ermengol, de los que se conserva un solo fragmento (fig. 74) en la col. Plandiura" [another larger one, decorated in tempera an altar dedicated to the 11th-century bishop of La Seu d'Urgell, Saint Ermengol, of which only a fragment survives (fig. 74) in the Plandiura collection].

30 On the changes to the dedications of the chapels in the cathedral, see: Pujol 1927, pp. 11-12; Adell *et al.*, 2000, pp. 188-189.

31 Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 148; Beseran 2005, p. 48.

32 The chapel of Saint Ermengol was significantly altered in the 18th century, involving the demolition of the Romanesque apsidal chapel in order to construct a deeper one that would be severely damaged during the Civil War. When designing the project to restore it in 1940, Cèsar Martinell considered demolishing it in order to reconstruct the Romanesque apse. However, the demolition did not take place for another twenty years. Adell *et al.*, 2000, pp. 219 and 255.

33 Until that time the relics of Saint Ot had been located in the first section of the nave on the right, looking towards the high altar. For the distribution of the cult spaces, see note 30.

34 On this altarpiece, see Madurell 1945-1946, II, p. 31; III, pp. 371-373 (doc. 41); Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 212.

35 On this new altarpiece, see Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 212.

36 See note 4.

37 Cook 1956, p. 34; Dalmasas/José i Pitarch 1985, p. 145; Gudiol/Alcolea 1987, p. 25; Beseran 2005, p. 49. For a summary of the issue, see Galilea 1995a, pp. 38-39.

38 Galilea 1995a, p. 39; Lasterra 1969, p. 123; Melero 2005, pp. 140-141; Barrachina 1997, p. 398, dates it around 1300.

39 Galilea 1995a, p. 39.

40 The *Saint James Altarpiece* from Frontanyà is in the Museu Diocesà i Comarcal in Solsona, inv. no. 13. Cook/Gudiol 1950, p. 101, also relate the painting in Bilbao with a small panel on Saint Giles by a Castilian painter which was in the Gudiol collection in Barcelona. Beseran 2005, p. 49, considers that the linear outlines of the paintings in La Seu d'Urgell are close to the technique of the altarpiece from Frontanyà.

workshop, but also the surviving influence of other pictorial cycles that were in the cathedral and of works from the Ribagorza workshop.⁴¹

Compared to the remains of other surviving mural cycles from La Seu d'Urgell, the episcopal figures of San Ermengol could be seen as more overtly Gothic.⁴² This is, in other words, a work from the last decades of the 13th century and one that reflects the artistic climate of that moment. Some parallels can be observed with the types of faces in works related to the circle of Soriguerola.⁴³ With regard to the connections suggested by the *Saint James Altarpiece* in Frontanyà and the present paintings, there is some stylistic proximity although the altarpiece reveals a more advanced Gothic style.⁴⁴

History of a setting

Anna Oriols Alsina

The study of the present fragment presents considerable difficulties given that it is not possible to securely identify the figures in the scene, nor to be exactly sure of the nature of the cycle that they came from. In addition, it cannot be definitely stated from which wall they were removed nor, as a result, the devotional cult of the chapel at the time they were painted. Some authors have read the name of Ermengol in the upper inscription, where the word "DIMONI" (demon, in Catalan) can be made out. However, if the present state of the paintings is compared with their appearance in the old photographs referred to above, this zone firstly shows losses in those images and subsequently areas of repainting, meaning that the inscriptions should be interpreted with great care. Also doubtful is the dragon-like form of the small figure flying out of the possessed person, which seems to reflect the modern imagination rather than medieval artistic tradition, which in the majority of cases tended to depict a small diabolical figure of an anthropomorphic type and with wings.⁴⁵ Despite this, it is clear that what we have here is part of a cycle that included a series of miracles carried out by a bishop saint whom modern art history has identified as Saint Ermengol. In the scene under discussion here he is carrying out a healing miracle, as the exorcism of a possessed person can be considered.

As an iconographic theme, exorcism already had a well-established tradition in art by this date, which had first emerged in the Paleo-Christian era and was particularly frequent in cycles of Gospel episodes in which Christ undertakes such an act. The healing of possessed people, frequently recounted in texts on the lives of saints, appeared later in art, becoming habitual in hagiographic imagery from the 11th century.⁴⁶ Some of these saints are bishops, with the result that we encounter images increasingly close to the one from La Seu d'Urgell

41 Melero 2005, pp. 49-54, 104 and 140-141. According to this author, the La Cerdanya School produced mural cycles such as the one on Saint Dominic in Puigcerdà and panel paintings including the *Saint Michael Altarpiece* in Soriguerola or the altar frontal from the church of Santa Eugènia in Saga, among others. The term "Ribagorza Workshop" includes a group of religious works, principally altar frontals, which were painted for churches in the area around Ribagorza: Bertran 2008, pp. 183-196.

42 Beseran 2005, p. 49. On the pictorial cycles for the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell, see pages 46-49 in that publication.

43 Melero 2005, p. 140. For example, the lateral wings of the altarpiece from the Ribes Valley, now in the Museu Episcopal in Vic, inv. no. 9694, 9695, and the altar frontal from the church of Santa Eugènia in Saga, now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, inv. no. PE. 121

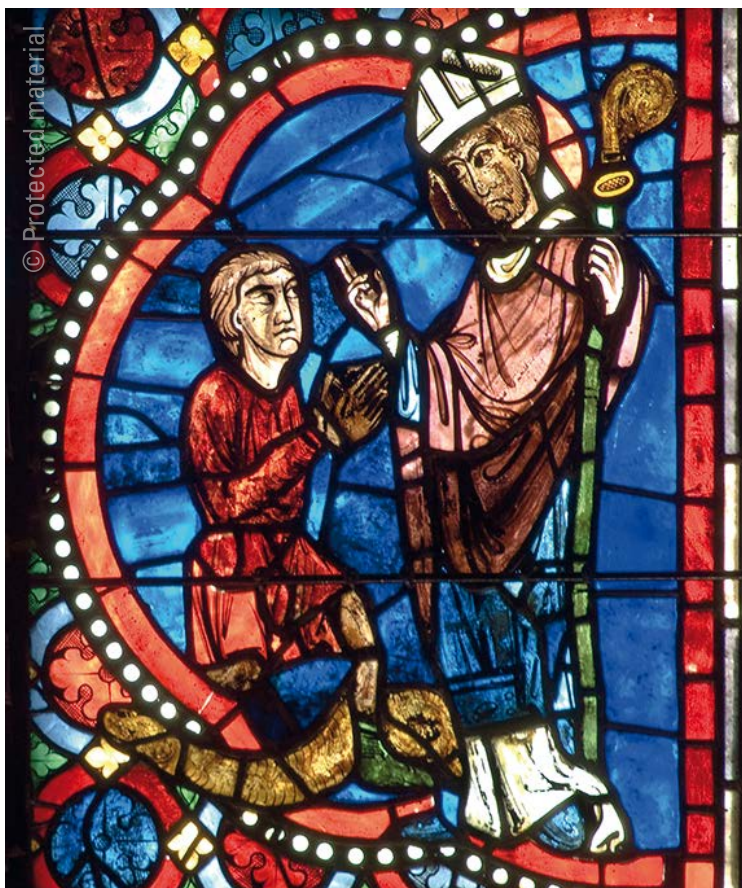
44 The altarpiece from Frontanyà is later than the paintings from La Seu d'Urgell and probably dates to the early 14th century. On that work, see Buttà 2005, pp. 70-71. Melero 2005, p. 141, considers that the figures in the altarpiece have the appearance of silhouettes, which makes them different to the volumetric figures in the Saint Ermengol paintings.

45 In the old photographs from prior to the restoration some undulating lines are visible that may be wings, as well as the remains of a face. This suggests that the winged figure is not an invention, but it cannot be securely determined to what extent the restoration altered its appearance, which is uncommon among the numerous examples of malign spirits in works of this type.

46 Chave-Mahir 2011.



9. *Saint Leo IX exorcising a possessed Man*,
from the *Weissenau Passionary*, c. 1200
Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cologny,
Switzerland, Cod. Bodmer 127, fol. 191 r



10. *Bishop Maurilius healing a Shepherd*
Fragment of a stained-glass window with
scenes from the life of Saint Maurilius of
Angers, 13th century
Apse of Angers cathedral, France



11. *Saint Martin healing the sick and possessed*, from a manuscript on the life of Saint Martin from the abbey of Moyenmoutier, 12th century
Bibliothèque municipale, Épinal, France, ms. 145, fol. 5v

[fig. 9].⁴⁷ Compositionally, they differ little from episodes of healing carried out by bishop-saints, as to be seen in an example from the same period as the present one, namely the stained-glass windows in Angers cathedral [fig. 10], which include several cycles of different saints, most of them bishops, curing figures, including a few possessed by demons.⁴⁸

Exorcisms and acts of healing were habitually depicted together so that in some scenes we see both possessed and sick people approaching a saint. This is the case, for example, in one of the illustrations in a manuscript on the life of Saint Martin, bishop of Tours [fig. 11], in which he simultaneously cures a leper and a possessed person while others wait their turn. There are numerous examples and this formula survived for many years. It is to be seen in a number of interesting depictions from the late Middle Ages of both sick and possessed people visiting saints' tombs.⁴⁹

While the original appearance of the paintings as well as the identity of the figures and even the works' original location are the subject of considerable doubts, the context of their execution can be reconstructed, allowing for an interesting interpretation. They were painted for the cathedral, which has survived to the present day and was started in the early 12th century by Ot, the bishop and future saint. The construction of

47 For example, those in the *Weissenau Passionary*, a manuscript of around 1200 that includes scenes of exorcisms by saints (Leo, Felix and Juliana); Michon 1990, pp. 77-80.

48 Boulanger 2010.

49 Among other examples are various Catalan versions of the second half of the 15th century, such as those by Jaume Huguet for the *Saint Vincent Altarpiece* from Sarrià (MNAC) and by the workshop of the Vergós in the *Saint Stephen Altarpiece* from Granollers. For the subject in Spain in general, see Usabiaga 1996.



12. La Seu d'Urgell from the eastern side with a view of the apse of the Romanesque cathedral

this architecturally striking work lasted for almost a century.⁵⁰ The cathedral was the seat of an already ancient diocese, of which several of its distinguished bishops would subsequently be canonised, including the above-mentioned Ot (1095-1122), son of the Count and Countess of Pallars, and before him Ermengol (1010-1035), who had been involved in the construction of the previous building.⁵¹ There was also an earlier bishop saint, Justus (631-646), whose memory was to some extent eclipsed over time by the popularity of the later bishops, although a chapel at the far south end of the transept under the tower was dedicated to him.

While the apse end of the cathedral still dominates the eastern side of the town of La Seu d'Urgell [fig. 12], in the context of a medieval town of around 1,000 inhabitants its powerful presence (together with that of the adjoining episcopal palace) would have dominated the view,⁵² recalling and symbolising La Seu's status as the seat of a large bishopric whose prelates were lords of the town and whose canons came from the local aristocracy. As on so many other occasions, the history of the diocese was not a peaceful one and was in this case characterised by frequent legal disputes with neighbouring bishoprics. However, the most turbulent and long-lasting dispute was the one that, starting in the late 12th century and continuing for much of the following century, involved the bishop of La Seu d'Urgell in the ferocious struggle for territorial power in the northern region of the county of Urgell, bringing him into direct conflict with a sector of the nobility led by the powerful Viscount of Castellbò. Between 1195 and 1196 the assault on La Seu d'Urgell and the sacking of the cathedral by an army led by Count Ramon Roger de Foix, ally of the Castellbòs, marked a turning

50 Work came to an abrupt end in 1196 when the building was almost completed. The cathedral had a principal nave and two flanking aisles with a large transept onto which opened five successive chapels. One of them housed the fragment from the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. A general study of the cathedral and its art is in Adell *et al.*, 2000.

51 There are numerous studies on Ermengol, including: Delcor 1989, Baraut 1998-2001, Bertran 2000 and Sant Ermengol 2010. Ot has received less attention but he was also venerated in the cathedral where a chapel and various works of art were devoted to him, which have not survived.

52 The episcopal palace was a *casa forta*, a building with towers. Together with the cathedral and the other churches associated with it (at least those dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Michael), it was part of the defensive system of a small town which obtained city status in the 13th century. See Batlle 1985; for the group of churches, see Carrero 2010.

point in this complex and violent situation.⁵³ This turbulent context was worsened by a serious issue of a political-religious nature resulting from the arrival from the Languedoc of the heretical sect of the Cathars, for which La Seu was fertile ground, stirred up by the local nobility's discontent with episcopal authority.⁵⁴

As might be expected, the heresy was combatted, initially by the Episcopal Inquisition, established some years before with the principal aim of persecuting the Cathars in the Languedoc. With the establishment in 1232 of the tribunal of the Pontifical Inquisition, the bishopric benefitted from the crucial collaboration of permanent inquisitors from the Dominican and Franciscan Orders.⁵⁵ Three of the Dominican inquisitors based in the diocese of Urgell would die violent deaths at the hands of their enemies. The first of them was Ponç de Planès, who was murdered, possibly prior to 1238, in the Cathar bastion of Castellbò, followed by Bernat de Travesseres (1260) and Pere de la Cadireta (1279).⁵⁶ At that date the Dominicans did not have a monastery in La Seu d'Urgell, for which reason the bodies of the first two (and probably also of Cadireta), all of them allies of the bishopric in its fight against the heretics, were buried in the cathedral where they were venerated for many years [fig. 13].⁵⁷

While on the one hand the attack on the cathedral of 1195-96 brought about an abrupt end to the almost completed building work and stripped it of its furnishings,⁵⁸ on the other hand the religious conflict gave rise to new individuals to be venerated, in this case the Dominican inquisitors murdered by the Cathars. Inevitably, for the Church these monks became martyrs and defenders of orthodoxy, killed by heretics. It was undoubtedly these circumstances that prompted the need to restore the liturgical setting of the cathedral and which are reflected in its notably propagandistic character. The conflict continued for some decades beyond the end of the 12th century, reaching its peak in 1277 with the attack on the Church's lands and the siege of La Seu d'Urgell.⁵⁹

A conflict of this length left the bishopric and the cathedral considerably damaged and also seriously weakened the episcopal authority. Re-establishing this authority involved the use of one of its principal strong points: the prominent prelates from periods prior to the conflict who had been canonised, namely Ermengol and Ot, whose bodies (as well as those of the recently murdered Dominicans) lay in the cathedral. The last third of the 13th century, when the lengthy conflict had come to an end, seemed to be the most appropriate moment—probably under the bishopric of Pere d'Urtx (1269-1293)⁶⁰—for embarking on the renovation of the places of cult veneration in the cathedral with pictorial cycles that would give the walls of the chapels scenes of the lives of saints. This was also the moment when documents demonstrate the activity of various painters in La Seu d'Urgell.⁶¹

53 This complex and turbulent period has been explained in various recent texts by Carles Gascón, including Gascón 2009 and Gascón 2015.

54 Baraut 1994-1995; Gascón 2003.

55 Baraut 1996-1997.

56 The precise circumstances of their deaths are not clear due to the mythologising tone of the sources, many of them later. The first is said to have been poisoned, the second killed with a sword then cut up and the third stoned to death. There is some information on the date of Ponç de Planès's death, which may be earlier than the traditional date of 1242, in Gascón 2009, p. 47.

57 The caskets of Ponç de Planès and Bernat de Travesseres, which date from more than a century after their deaths, are in the Museu Diocesà in La Seu d'Urgell and were previously in the cathedral until the Civil War. None of the three were canonised (Baraut 1996-1997, p. 414). It is traditionally considered that Pere de la Cadireta founded the first Dominican monastery outside the city walls in 1273. In 1364 it moved to a new location inside the city walls and near the cathedral.

58 There is a mid-18th-century copy of a report on the damage caused, sent at the time by the bishop of Urgell to the archbishop of Tarragona (Duran-Porta 2009). Although inevitably biased, the text records the damage to the artistic and liturgical contents of the cathedral and other churches in the diocese. (Gros 1996).

59 Baraut 1988, vol. I, pp. 74-75 and 301-307 (docs. 126-128).

60 Baraut *et al.*, 1998-2001, pp. 56-58.

61 These references published in Beseran 2005, p. 49. It has not been possible to attribute any of these works to individual names.



13. Attributed to the Master of Estamariu (active in Catalonia between 1360 and 1380)
Side panel of the funerary casket of Friar Bernat de Travesseres showing the martyr addressing a group of heretics, second half of the 14th century
Polychromed wood
Museu Diocesà d'Urgell, La Seu d'Urgell, Lleida

While a painted cycle depicting the miracles of a saint on the walls of a church housing his or her body (or where that saint's relics are venerated) requires no further justification, at the time when this example depicting a bishop-saint of La Seu d'Urgell was painted, it can inevitably be associated with the long and bloody political-religious conflict, still more so given that the Cathars were against the priesthood and the veneration of saints.⁶²

Episodes involving bishops (generally within larger narrative cycles) are common in cathedrals, where they enhance the prestige of the institution and its leading cleric. This need to champion the figure of the bishop in the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell was an urgent one, giving rise to a pictorial campaign that extended over the walls of the chapels around the apse with hagiographic cycles which would have made an effective contribution to the Chapter's aims and interests. The oldest cycle was at the far south end, devoted to

62 Baraut 1994-1995, p. 500.



14. *Saint Catherine debating and her Arrest*, 1241-1255

Mural painting transferred to canvas, 164.5 x 179.5 cm

MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

On deposit from the Ministry of Culture, acceptance in lieu from Banco de Sabadell, 2008

MNAC 214241-000

Saint Catherine of Alexandria and probably painted in the time of Bishop Ponç de Vilamur (1242-1254/55). These scenes, which depict Catherine's debate with the learned pagans and her subsequent martyrdom [fig. 14], acquire particular significance and relevance in the context of the conflict with the Cathars and the role of the preaching Orders as inquisitors.⁶³ Saint Catherine's defence of orthodoxy and her suffering during an earlier period could be compared with the labour of the Dominicans and the recent martyrdom of some of their members.⁶⁴ At the other end of the transept in the most northerly chapel, devoted to Saint James the Greater, there were two cycles, on Saint James and on Saint Ermengol.⁶⁵ The reason for this association lies in the intention to add Saint Ermengol and his tomb to the list of sanctuaries related to the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago. Ermengol's activities as a builder of roads and bridges (he died after falling off a bridge while supervising its construction) associated him with other saints of the Pilgrimage Route. Furthermore, a text dating from the same period as the paintings recounts a miracle of healing in front of his tomb, for which reason, the text states, thanks should be given before the tomb of Saint James, thus making Ermengol's tomb in La Seu d'Urgell a type of secondary outpost to that of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela.⁶⁶

⁶³ As with the murals under discussion, these paintings were removed from the walls and split up. They are now divided between the Museu Episcopal in Vic, the MNAC and the Abegg Foundation (Riggisberg, Switzerland). They are analysed in detail by Castiñeiras 2009, in the catalogue of the exhibition in which they are reunited and studied.

⁶⁴ By the date the cycle was painted, the first of them, Ponç de Planès, had already been killed by the Cathars, a fact that could have prompted the commission of the paintings, as proposed by Castiñeiras 2009, p. 35. That author also suggests that the bodies of the Dominican martyrs were initially housed in the chapel dedicated to Saint Catherine.

⁶⁵ What remains of them—two very fragmentary elements—is in the Museu Diocesà in La Seu d'Urgell.

⁶⁶ Orriols 2007 and Orriols 2010.

Another cycle, this one of the bishop-saint Saturnine, would be painted on the walls of a chapel at the base of the tower at the transept's far south end.⁶⁷

In addition to these cycles, at the end of the 13th century the chapel dedicated to Saint Ermengol (at that time next to the south side of the principal apse) must have been given a new cycle on this venerated local bishop, of which the fragment under discussion here may have been a part. In that case, the paintings in question must have been accompanied by the bishop-saint's tomb. It is interesting to try to use subsequent information to reconstruct this space: a space that survived despite the changes to its furnishings and even following the change of chapel and which demonstrates how the visual representation of the cult of Saint Ermengol was continually updated. In 1420 the procurators of the Confraternity of Saint Ermengol and Saint Blas contracted a painter from the town, Jaume Goçalbo, to execute an altarpiece dedicated to both saints, whose images and stories must appear in it ("tantes com caber y poràn" [as many as can fit in], according to the associated document). The contract also specifies that the predella must have an opening covered by a gilded wrought-iron grille to house the steel casket containing the body of Saint Ermengol and that on the altar's frontal the painter must depict the recumbent image of the saint. This altarpiece has not survived and we cannot know whether it was actually executed, but what is interesting is the way that it was intended to house the saint's tomb within its structure.⁶⁸ The artistic solution proposed in the related document is even more interesting in the light of the fact that it was used at a much later date, in 1576, after Saint Ermengol became the titular saint of a different chapel located on the other side of the main apse.⁶⁹ Between 1616 and 1617 the Barcelona painter Gaspar Altisent designed a new casket for the saint, made of polychromed, gilded wood, with sixteen episodes on his life and posthumous miracles [fig. 15].⁷⁰ In the 18th century the chapel was re-modelled, enlarged, redecorated and provided with a new altarpiece [fig. 16], while an elaborate silver urn was also commissioned [fig. 17] to be set into the lower part of the altarpiece, adjoining the altar. The result can be seen in a number of old photographs [fig. 18].⁷¹ Similar schemes were designed in the early modern age for the chapels of Saint Catherine, where the Gothic wooden tomb of the Dominican monk Bernat de Travesseres was housed behind the predella of a new altarpiece which recorded the life of this preacher;⁷² while in the chapel of Saint Ot the lowest level of the Baroque altarpiece also housed this other bishop-saint's tomb.⁷³ Despite the aesthetic transformation that they implied, the caskets and altarpieces did not essentially modify an undoubtedly effective setting which may have been designed in the late 13th century when the mural paintings under discussion here were executed.⁷⁴

67 Once more, there are surviving fragments divided between the Museu Diocesà in La Seu d'Urgell and a private collection; for a recent summary, see Beseran 2005, pp. 47-48.

68 The contract was published by Madurell 1945-1946, III, pp. 308-309 (doc. 11).

69 As indicated above; see note 30.

70 Recently restored (2011-2012), it is in the Museu Diocesà in La Seu d'Urgell. The documentary references that identify its artist and date were published by Pujol 1927, pp. 13-14.

71 On the remodelling of the chapel, Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 219. The silver urn, made in 1755 by the Barcelona goldsmith Pere Llopart, survives today (Museu Diocesà, La Seu d'Urgell); on the urn, see Pujol 1927. The execution of the altarpiece has been associated with the artist Juan de Segovia from Olot (Adell *et al.*, 2000, p. 219), although it has been suggested that he used elements from an older, 16th-century one, specifically the six compartments now displayed in the apsidal chapel in the cathedral for which they were made (*ibid.*, p. 222).

72 Adell *et al.*, 2000, pp. 211-212; Castiñeiras 2009, pp. 35-36.

73 As with Ermengol, successive caskets were made for Saint Ot, one of them of silver like the one of the same date for Ermengol which was melted down during the Peninsular War in the early 19th century.

74 In general, the inevitable losses and transformations that have taken place over the centuries have altered the arrangement of many cult spaces, sometimes in a radical manner, but surviving information frequently allows for hypothetical reconstructions. Once again the cathedral at Angers offers an example which, despite differences, is in some senses comparable. In the mid-13th century its sole apse and principal place of worship had a large pictorial cycle on the interlinked stories of Saints Maurilius and Renatus, which functioned as a backdrop to their respective reliquary caskets (Subes-Picot 1998), while the stained-glass windows located above them depicted other hagiographic cycles (Boulanger 2010), half of them with bishops as the subject, again including Saint Maurilius.



15. Gaspar Altisent (?)
Funerary casket with depictions of worshippers before the altar of Saint Ermengol, 1616-1617
Gilded, polychromed wood
Museu Diocesà d'Urgell, La Seu d'Urgell, Lleida

While miracles, particularly healing ones, are always present in hagiographic accounts, the importance that they have in the iconographic cycles on Saint Ermengol in La Seu d'Urgell is notable and is to be found in all the works associated with him: mural paintings, altarpieces and the series of caskets. Of the sixteen scenes that run around the four sides of the 17th-century wooden casket, six are devoted to posthumous miracles performed by the bishop-saint, three of which include depictions of the altar that houses his tomb and image. The later 18th-century silver urn has twelve episodes, of which three are devoted to Ermengol's miracles, two of which involve healing. Finally, one of the surviving compartments of the Baroque altarpiece depicts different miracles within a single scene [fig. 16].⁷⁵ From the mural paintings to the altarpiece executed almost 500 years later, the saint's powers of healing were repeatedly remembered and emphasised, as they were in even greater detail and at greater length in liturgical and hagiographic texts.

In striking contrast to the present-day bareness of its walls, it is possible to imagine how the sanctuary of the cathedral would have been provided with a powerful multiple setting in which paintings and saints' tombs effectively projected the message of the power of these bishop-saints and with it that of the institution which they served and which housed their tombs. Despite the changes and up-datings, the same intentions seemed to have been maintained, which gave visual form to concepts associated since antiquity with saints' bodies and the places that housed them: *praesentia* and *potentia*. The former, a guarantee that the relic was actually to be found there, was demonstrated not just by the tomb but by accounts (textual and visual) that were commissioned in order to record the circumstances of these relics' arrival. The power to

⁷⁵ Aside from whether these compartments were reused from an earlier altarpiece (see note 71).



16 . *Miracles of Saint Ermengol*

Fragment of an altarpiece for the chapel in the north arm of the transept next to the central apse in the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell, 18th century
Museu Diocesà d'Urgell, La Seu d'Urgell, Lleida



17. Pere Lleopart (?)

Detail of the funerary urn of Saint Ermengol with a scene of the saint performing healings before the doors of La Seu d'Urgell, 1755
Museu Diocesà d'Urgell, La Seu d'Urgell, Lleida

work miracles (*potentia*) was equally expressed through texts, sermons and images, which complemented and reinforced each other.

By the start of the 14th century the cathedral in La Seu d'Urgell had a series of wall paintings (the above-mentioned ones on Saint Catherine, Saint James, Saint Ermengol, Saint Saturnine and, very probably Saint Ot) which, together with various tombs that were the object of veneration, constituted eloquent demonstrations of what the episcopal seat represented: the prestige and healing power of the saints' bodies and the defence of orthodoxy implied by the struggle against heresy. The events that had so violently characterised the history of this episcopal city since the late 12th century, of so serious a nature that they extended beyond its boundaries,⁷⁶ undoubtedly continued to live on in memory, so that the message that these paintings transmitted must have been quite clear.

The pictorial fragment under discussion here was part of a cycle depicting a series of healing episodes, very probably accompanied by others of which we now have no knowledge. Since antiquity, the Church had associated bodily sickness with the "spiritual sickness" suffered by pagans and heretics.⁷⁷ It is not by chance that scenes of healing (either individual or collective) are extremely close in visual terms to scenes of exorcism and, in general to scenes of preaching to gentiles and dissenters. The presumed Saint Ermengol thus

⁷⁶ The assault on the cathedral is described in the *Historia albigensis* by Pierre de Vaux-de-Cernay (or de Vaulx-Cernay), a contemporary chronicler of the crusade against the Albigenses (chap. XLVI): Guizot 1824, pp. 130-133.

⁷⁷ Mitre 1995. For an example of the use of such terms, see the papal Bull addressed by Gregory IX to the archbishop of Tarragona in 1232, a document that marked the introduction of the Inquisition into Catalonia: "... heretice labis morbus serpens, paulatim ut cancer, loca Tarraconensis provinciae, sicut dicitur, iam infecit" (Baraut 1996-1997, doc. 3, pp. 422-423).



18. Chapel of Saint Ermengol in the cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell, with a Baroque altarpiece and funerary urns
 Photograph taken before the Spanish Civil War
 Arxiu Comarcal de l'Alt Urgell, Fons Maravilla

appears as a figure with the power of healing, an extremely common ability in hagiographic accounts but which can also in a way be associated with the anti-heretical context that characterised the diocese, if only for the fact that until the creation of a specialist tribunal in 1232, it was the bishops who were responsible for inquisitorial matters and who were the principal and habitual figures entrusted with defending orthodoxy. Thus, while they are a traditional device, the lengthy inscriptions that accompany this and other scenes acquire particular meaning at a time when preaching as a weapon against heresy, particularly as deployed by the Dominicans, was exceptionally important and widespread.

Together with its related fragment in Sitges, the pictorial fragment in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum constitutes a small piece of what must once have been a vivid backdrop for hagiographic veneration and for the exaltation of the bishopric and cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell. It can also be seen as part of a vigorous local tradition that survived in texts and remained unaltered in the successive modernisations of the cathedral's spaces of worship.

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