From Visigoth to Gothic – A Tour of Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque Spain

Contents

Introduction Page 1
Visigoths 4
Pre-Romanesque churches of the Asturian Kingdom 20
Mozarab 27
The Early Romanesque period 38
Pilgrimage 50
Romanesque of the XII century 55
Transition towards Gothic 65
Concluding Remarks 70
Annex – Churches of Spain Illustrated in the Text 71
References consulted 74

Introduction

The Iberian Peninsula from before the Christian era until the final defeat of Moslem forces in the XV century was to experience repeated invasions, foreign rule and a cultural diversity that was to mark the culture each generation that lived and built in that peninsula. In some case the influx was to introduce new influences; in others it was to produce an internal reaction.

Late Antiquity gave birth to the Christian basilica. The churches of the Middle Ages were to be based on models that evolved from these early basilicas. The evidence of the Roman presence in the Iberian peninsula is to be seen today, not on the same scale as it was to the inhabitants of the X to XII centuries, but still in dramatic fashion in some localities on the Mediterranean coast from Empuries in the North to Tarragona, near the South edge of Catalonia, to Alberca, just South-east of Murcia and across to Merida and Segovia in the West of Spain. From the I century Christianity began to spread slowly across the Roman Empire, but by the mid IV century its adoption was more general throughout the Empire. At Empuries a small church was constructed on the North edge of what had been the Greek city. It had a rounded apse flanked by lateral rooms and was enclosed in a rectangular space. A few kilometres West of Tarragona, at Centcelles, a private mausoleum at a IV century villa has survived. The cupola of this is decorated with mosaics depicting both secular scenes and illustrations of stories from both the Old and New Testaments. These are but two examples of evidence of the early implantation of Christian culture. There are records of three bishoprics being established in Spain in the middle of the III century but it was in the following century that Christianity became firmly established.
Empuries – Paleo-Christian basilica from South

Near Fraga, on the East edge of Aragon, the remains of a villa, known as ‘The Villa of Fortunatus’, have been excavated. The excavations reveal that the South-west corner of the III century villa complex was converted in the V century with the construction of a Paleo-Christian basilica and a small crypt. Amongst the mosaics found is one with both Fortunatus and the Chi-Rho.
Villa Fortunatus at Fraga, Aragon and a mosaic from the villa

Sarcophagi were adopted by the Romans to bury their dead in pagan times as the burial custom changed from cremation. As Christianity became the official religion of the Empire the motifs changed from pagan scenes to scenes from the Bible. Many of the sarcophagi found at the necropolis of Girona, Tarragona and Barcelona were imported from Italy or the Eastern Mediterranean. There is evidence that the sculptures on these sarcophagi were to provide models for sculptors in the Middle Ages. See http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/from_antiquity_to_romanesque.pdf

Sant Feliu, Girona – IVc sarcophagus ‘Chaste Susanne’

A particularly interesting item is in the former synagogue at Toledo now known as El Tránsito. The item, a tombstone dates from the IV or V century, is decorated in a seemingly normal way for a paleo-Christian item: there is a rounded arch with two columns with capitals to the sides. But, unusually, within the arch there is a candelabra, palms and the name ‘Mixal’. The name is possibly the the equivalent of today’s Miguel. At this time the candelabra was used as a symbol by both the Jews and the Christians. So although this object is now shown as part of a Jewish collection it may not have been for a Jew.
During the course of the V and VI centuries the Visigoths, invading from the North-east, subdued the Iberian Peninsula, conquering the Sueves, and established the capital of a powerful kingdom at Toulouse in 416. After their own defeat by the Franks in 507, the Visigoths established full control of the Iberian Peninsula along with Septimania, the Mediterranean coastal region of France to the North-east, with a new political and ecclesiastic capital at Toledo. This kingdom was to survive until 710 as a centralised form. In that year it was seriously weakened by an internal quarrel; as the result it was rapidly destroyed by the Moors, who invaded from North Africa in 711. The Visigoths were not builders; the Romano-Hispanics were. The Visigoths seem to have been content to adopt and exploit existing Romano-Hispanic buildings and building styles. It is in the ornamentation of the churches that we will see the more distinctive Visigoth seal.

The principal religious and artistic centre before the establishment of Visigoth order was the city of Mérida (between Seville and Salamanca). It was here that, in the last six decades of the VI century, two ‘Greek’ bishops held office, providing a significant indication of connections to the Eastern Mediterranean and Byzantium; it should be remembered that the Byzantine Empire included for a time the coastal strip of what is now Andalusia, an occupation that ended around AD 620. That occupation, however, does not seem to have had significant additional influence on the church architecture of Spain. It had already adopted architectural forms that had their origins in Italy and further East. From the middle of the VI century Toledo was the centre of ecclesiastic power.
The Visigoths were Arian Christians; they adopted Catholicism in 586; the indigenous population had long been Catholic. A fragment of a tomb stone found near Seville is evidence of this. It is from the tomb stone of a Visigoth nobleman, Gundebebius; it has a Latin inscription and a small cross. Another from the VI century in a museum in Badajoz shows the cross between two birds that probably represent Peacocks. The Peacock is not a European bird nor is it from the Middle East. Its natural home is in the jungles of South East Asia. It was brought to Europe centuries ago as an exotic item of display. King Solomon is said to have received one. The bird was a familiar of Juno, the Roman queen of gods, and so was associated with the Queen of Heaven. Those who saw the tomb at the time of installation would have interpreted the birds as symbols of immortality.

The Visigoth churches were small buildings, but frequently the plan of the basilica was employed. The remainder had a cruciform plan. The interiors were usually constructed so as to create small pockets that served their liturgical requirements to keep clergy and laity separate and also, where applicable, to separate priests from deacons. Thus there were many with chancel screens and even a barrier at the chancel. An example is to be seen at the VII century chapel of São Gião de Nazaré, in Portugal North of Lisbon. Here there is
a barrier which provides very restricted access to the sanctuary area and which would have hidden the activity around the altar from the laity in the nave.

São Gião de Nazaré, Portugal – Plan and chancel barrier from nave

Such screens were used in most churches in Spain that date from the VI and VII centuries. The liturgical requirement for them seems to have existed in the coastal belt of Southern France; the Musée Lapidaire at St Guilhem Le Désert has on display a substantial number of fragments of a chancel screen. In Rome, to mention just two examples from Italy, two pre-Romanesque churches retain their marble choir and chancel screens: the basilicas of San Clemente and Santa Sabina.

Rome – Basilicas of San Clemente (left) and Santa Sabina (right)

The Visigoth church of Santa Cruz, in Barcelona, had a cruciform plan; it was probably a development of a Paleo-Christian basilica. The little of it that has survived is an element of the large excavated area below the Plaça Del Rei and is part of the Museu d’Historia de la Ciutat. The foundations for the columns and for the altar may be seen. These are of re-used capitals and columns of the Roman era.
Most Visigoth churches were constructed using roughly hewn stones that were laid without mortar. The arches within them were often horseshoe-shaped, a shape that some suggest they learnt from the Romans; others propose Syrian or Ethiopian origins for the arch. However, the early Syrian churches and those at Aksum and Lalibela, both in Ethiopia, are no older than those in Spain. This horseshoe shape was to be adopted and was to be reproduced in a more exaggerated form by the Moors and their successors. San Juan de Baños is in the form of a basilica with the aisles separated by re-used Roman columns. An inscription records it being built in 661. Santa María de Melque, near Toledo, was built either just before or just after the Moslem invasion of 711, although some authorities put it somewhat later than the Moslem invasion. Either way, it is very much in the Visigoth style and conforms to their liturgical requirements in distinctive ways. At one time it had barriers on the North and South sides of the chancel, as we have seen at São Gião de Nazaré. Less usually, it was constructed from large ashlar blocks that were laid without mortar. Errilynn Dodds comments: ‘It is not hard to see in Melque – in its plan, elevation, spatial arrangements, and fitted ashlar masonry tradition – a distinct connection with traditions of planning and building of the Visigoth period’.
The decoration was usually in the form of bas-relief friezes. These were carved with geometric motifs, scroll-work and Christian symbols. The finest example of this still in situ must be at Santa María de Quintanilla de las Viñas. This small church near Burgos built around or soon after 690AD has several bands of bas-relief sculpture on the South side of the apse. The decoration is of birds, vegetation and animals. Whilst there are several motifs that appear to be decorative only, it is probable that some of the motifs were derived from indigenous symbols used by the ancient Iberian-Celts for whom the motifs had a religious significance; in this context the circle provides a typical example, being associated with fire, the wheel having been the tool for creating fire in early society, and as a symbol of light and the sun. Whether that significance was still valid at the time that these sculptures were executed we do not know; but it is not unlikely. It is of interest that the same motifs were being used in the Eastern Mediterranean a little before this time. Other motifs were part of the cultural heritage of the Goths, brought from Eastern Europe.
Sta María de Quintanilla de las Viñas – Apse and corner of South transept

Sta María de Quintanilla de las Viñas – Friezes on apse
Anicia Juliana’s Palace, Istanbul – Pier (before AD 525) (left) Visigoth belt buckle now in Madrid from VIIc (right)

Inside, at the crossing are two capitals with low relief sculptures; they are set on columns that are from the Roman period. The sculptures do have religious symbolism. The one to the left (which is damaged) shows one (of two) angels holding a disc with the symbol of the Moon. On the other side of the crossing is a similar sculpture of the Sun. These sculptures are of a later date than those on the exterior, dating from the early decades of the X century.

Sta María de Quintanilla de las Viñas – Capitals at the crossing

Lorsch Gospels – Part of the ivory book cover
The resemblance of the two sculptures to the motif at the top of the ivory book cover of the Lorsch Gospels and the Barberini diptych is striking. The Lorsch ivory was produced by the Court School of Charlemagne and it draws its lineage from Antiquity and the Roman triumphal monuments and was produced about a century before the sculptures. The Barberini ivory is a Byzantine work that was brought to Western Europe in the first decades of the VII century. The top panel has one of the first representations of Christ in such form. Either artefact or one like them might have provided the model for the sculpture at Santa María. An explanation for the Sun and Moon at this church might be that paganism and its symbolism was still very fresh in the minds of people; the ‘Pilgrim Guide’ to Santiago written two hundred years later refers to the continued existence of some pagans in the area.

At Algezares, just South-east of Murcia, there once stood a VI century basilica that had a fine chancel screen. Fragments of this and the bases of columns from the same building are now in the Museum at Murcia. Amongst the motifs are small spirals that resemble those to be seen on Iberian pottery that dates from the IV to I centuries BC and which are to be found at many sites across Spain. The same pattern was to be used by the XII century workers creating wrought-iron screens across choirs and reinforcing on the doors in the Eastern Pyrenees (see [http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/index.php?page_id=12](http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/index.php?page_id=12)).
The church of San Pedro de la Nave, near Zamora was built in the late VII century, a few decades earlier than Santa María de Quintanilla de las Viñas. This is the most complete and most beautiful church of the period. The plan of this church is based on that of the basilica with a nave and side aisles separated by pillars and horseshoe arches. As with all the other churches of this group, there are two small, flat-ended side-chapels off the transept.

The choir has a frieze of vegetal and geometric motifs around it; these are typically Visigoth in style as can be seen in the illustration of a belt buckle of the period. The choir and crossing have sculptured capitals. In addition to the typical Visigoth motifs of geometric patterns and motifs drawn from nature there are religious scenes on these.
These are the works of a second and more inspired hand than the frieze. The motifs resemble those on the friezes of Santa María de Quintanilla las Viños and some were used to decorate every-day articles. Particularly well-known is the capital with Daniel and the Lions’ Den. But the sculptures include a scene of Abraham’s intended sacrifice of his son, Isaac, and images of saints. All are executed in shallow relief. The right side of the capital of Daniel shows a figure carrying a tray above his head. No doubt that this was intended to be Habakkuk bring food to Daniel but the sculptor was clearly not familiar with the story and it is labelled ‘Filipus Apostolus’. At least nine belt buckles of Frankish/Merovingian origin with strikingly similar images of Daniel in the Lions’ Den have been found in Eastern France and Switzerland. Two are illustrated below, one from Macon, in Burgundy, and the other from Lavigny, Switzerland. All date from not earlier than the first decades of the VI century; they are probably nearly a century older than the sculptured capital at San Pedro. The image on the capital therefore probably originates not from Iberia but from Central or Eastern Europe.

San Pedro de la Nave – Frieze in choir and capital of Abraham & Isaac

Visigoth belt buckle AD 650-80
San Pedro de la Nave – Capital of Daniel (left) and Habakkuk (right)

Macon, Burgundy – Belt buckle, VIc  
Lavigny, Switzerland, (now Lausanne) - Bofflens buckle, VIc
San Pedro de la Nave – Capitals of St Paul (left) and two birds pecking a cone (right)

At Toledo, long the dominant centre of the Visigoth church, there is in the Iglesia del Salvador a tall sculpture pillar. This has down the length of one side a series of panels with haloed figures in pairs. As is usual at this period, the sculptures are in low relief. The identities of the figures are difficult to determine apart from the top pair which show the young child, Jesus, with Mary, his Mother, whilst the lowest scene may show the Risen Christ beside the empty tomb. The quality of the sculpture when compared to works from the Roman period might be described as naïf or even primitive. In scale it might be compared to one of the many sculptured stone crosses which date from around the same period and which are found in Ireland, Scotland and Northern England.

Iglesia del Salvador, Toledo – Visigoth pillar and detail (right)

The museums of Toledo and Badajoz contain many fine examples of Visigoth sculpture; these date from the IV century when the sculptures were closely modelled on Roman styles, probably because the artisans that were employed only had experience in such work. However by the VI and VII centuries the designs were using locally inspired motifs that no longer drew on Roman models. So we see foliage patterns and many pine cones; the animals and birds that we have seen at San Pedro de la Nave and at Sta María de Quintanilla de las Viñas are not represented in these museum collections.
To the North-west of Barcelona the industrial town of Terrassa stands on the site of the ancient town of Egara which, in Visigoth times, was the seat of the local bishop. Parts of three churches from that period have survived. All have undergone some subsequent modification. Santa Maria was the church for the Bishopric; later it had an Augustine Chapter. Sant Miquel, in the middle, was the former Episcopal baptistery, whilst Sant Pere, on the North side, had been initially a funeral chapel before becoming the parish church. Santa Maria retains the original flat ended apse into which a horseshoe shaped choir has been inserted. It may have been attached to the triple nave of a basilica. The present nave and transepts are Romanesque. Recently a fragment of mosaic has been exposed that reveals the paleo-Christian and pre-Christian symbol of the After-life: a peacock. Sant Pere has a tri-lobed apse; the choir within it is a shallow oval in plan. The small early transepts have also survived; the nave is Romanesque; the original may have been in the form for a basilica In the middle of the three stands Sant Miquel. It consists of a square building that has three short aisles divided by four thick columns at the corners and two slim columns in between; all have sculptured capitals; most of these are Corinthian in style and are modelled on earlier Roman ones. Two at the Western corners are less elaborate. The use of the Corinthian style capital derived from Antiquity seems to
have been common. The great mosque at Cordoba has a fine selection of Corinthian capitals of Visigoth origin that have been re-used. The doorway at Sant Pau, Barcelona has a Visigoth capital of Pyrenean marble that has been re-used; (the capital to the left is a later copy). The floral pattern on the stone above draws on the lineage of the floral motif on the column from the VI century mausoleum at La Alberca, in Murcia.

Sant Pau, Barcelona – Visigoth capital right of door (left) La Alberca, Murcia – Detail of VIc column

However, the Visigoth sculptors did not slavishly follow the models from the Roman period; a capital in a museum in Valencia and two in a Barcelona museum are examples. The latter two have a cross on them, a motif that is seen less frequently after the VIII century. Two from the basilica of Algezares, Murcia reveal the same capacity to innovate whilst still drawing on the experiences of the Roman sculptors.

Valencia – VIc Capital (left) and Barcelona – Two VIc capitals (right)
To the East of the nave at Sant Miquel there is a small horseshoe shaped choir within a polygonal apse. It is above a small crypt. The whole structure is largely in its original form. Because it was thought to have been a baptistery formerly, a central basin was inserted during the restoration in the mid XX century; this has recently been removed. The survival of the baptistery building is notable. It might be compared with the early baptisteries to be found at Poitiers and at Aix-en-Provence and Fréjus.

Whilst most authorities assign the early elements of these churches to the Visigoth period some consider that they are later, being built after the end of Moorish occupation. In support of the earlier date it should be noted that the apses of all three show a form of stonework that is associated with Antiquity, namely rows of small, even stones with the rows sometimes separated by tiles or thin bricks. Those parts that are Romanesque are of entirely different construction.
All these Visigoth churches are strikingly modest in size when compared with the churches that were appearing at this time in the Eastern Mediterranean. The architecture was similarly modest: there were no examples to compare with the cupolas that were being constructed in Constantinople. This is a reflection on the lack of skilled builders and the poverty of economic resources that were available.
Whilst all these buildings have been assigned to the period of Visigoth rule by past authorities some doubts have been expressed in recent years. Until there is more substantial evidence to sustain such doubts it would be inappropriate to discuss them further.

In the church of San Cebrian de Mazote there is a small sculptured fragment that shows two Roman-like figures. Whilst it is improbable that they are Romans they would almost certainly be Visigoths; it is interesting to note how the Visigoths adopted the dress, short hair and clean-shaven look of the Romans, possibly because the Roman fashion was considered to be superior. The surrounding decoration is typically Visigoth.

San Cebrian de Mazote – VIIc sculptured fragment

The Pre-Romanesque churches of the Asturian Kingdom

The Moorish invasion of 711 did not lead to the complete conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. From the middle of the VIII century the small kingdom of Asturias began to assert its independence. The area of most of modern Asturias had successfully held out against the earlier invasions of the Romans and the Visigoths; thus the term ‘Reconquista’ is something of a misnomer as the Astur were never part of the remainder of the Spanish peninsula politically. The capital was established at Oviedo, at the foot of the Cantabrian Mountains; the Kingdom became fully Christian from the VIII century and relations were established with the Carolingian Empire across the Pyrenees. By 924 the Kingdom had expanded West and was renamed the Kingdom of Asturias and León. A cathedral and several churches rose up in and around the capital at Oviedo in the first decade of the IX century. The Cathedral was replaced by another in the XIV century.
Pre-Romanesque Asturias

A study of the pre-Romanesque churches of Asturias indicates two threads in their development: the continuation of themes developed under the Visigoths, but with modification, and the indigenous influences drawn from the local area. Paganism had survived in this geographically isolated area of the peninsula until the VIII century. It is very probable that the pagan culture and customs influenced Christian artistic developments in Asturias, in much the same way that pagan themes and motifs from the Roman Empire were modified and recycled in early Christian art. The oldest building that was representative of the Asturian pre-Romanesque art was Oviedo Cathedral, built at the start of the IX century. Of that building almost nothing remains. The most important building to survive was built between 812 and 842, in the reign of Alphonso II. It was San Julián de los Prados. The building is constructed using small stones in the ancient manner rather than the quarried and cut stones used at the end of the Visigoth period. As a result we see small, flat buttresses supporting the exterior; these are a common feature of churches built after the Visigoth period. It has a nave with side aisles that are not vaulted and three flat ended chapels that are vaulted. At the West end is a porch; each transept arm has an additional porch. The aisles are divided by huge rectangular pillars supporting rounded arches. These arches have no trace of the horseshoe shape that we saw with the Visigoth style. Across the East end of the nave is a screening wall with a wide central arch and smaller arches from the side aisles that lead through to the transept arms; between these arches are two low ‘windows’. Use has been made of spolia from earlier generations, in this case columns and capitals at the crossing. However the most remarkable aspect about this church is the impression of the large, well-lit open space provided by the nave and transepts. This is in contrast to the small, dark enclosed spaces of the Visigoth churches.
A fragment of another building from the reign of Alphonso II is the East wall of San Tirso, in Oviedo. Of particular interest is the *alfiz*, the rectangular moulding that binds the arches of the window. This window is now dated from the last decades of the VIII century; the moulding is a Visigoth characteristic.

On the Eastern slopes of the hills above Oviedo are two more buildings of great interest. One is a two storey rectangular palace/ belvedere built on the orders of Ramiro I; it was completed in 848. In the XII century it was turned into a church. This is Santa María del Naranco. The arrangement has been compared by Puig i Cadafalch to that for Charlemagne’s palace and chapel at Aachen; (close diplomatic relations between the Emperor and the Asturian kings had been established under Alphonso II). The upper storey has a square gallery at each end that opens out allowing viewers outside to gaze inside and see the activities being conducted within. The galleries are decorated with columns that are topped by large Corinthian-style capitals and smaller capitals decorated with lions and dogs. These show Byzantine forms. The Corinthian style capital is significantly more embellished than the more basic capital that we saw at Sant Miquel, Terrasa (see page 11 above). Around the upper walls are discs that are ornamented with animals and birds perhaps modelled on ones seen on material from the Orient. Most of
the sculptures here and in other churches of this period in Asturias are in low relief, following the form used by the Visigoth sculptors.

Nearby stands the church of San Miguel de Lillo. Only the West part comprising the narthex and one bay of the nave has survived. Originally it was in the form of a basilica. The decoration by the door is worthy of note. It consists of a circus scene that is executed in low relief. Such sculptures might have been inspired by Roman Consular diptychs, for example that of Areobindus. It would seem that the inclusion of this scene was a deliberate reminder of the aspirations on the part of the Asturian monarchs to link their rule to the concepts of Imperial Rome.
When looking at the church of San Julián de los Prados we saw how the nave was divided from the transept by a screening wall with a wide opening. At Santa Cristina de Lena there is a somewhat similar arrangement. In this church there are divisions of space within the main space to form ‘rooms’; the rooms are to be found on two levels within the building to meet the liturgical needs that had developed in the Kingdom. The chapel has pillars with a ‘barley-sugar twist’ identical to that found on the pillars at Santa María
de Naranco; in the same way, we find a similar sculptured disc on the walls and similar capitals decorated with lions and other animals. At Santa Cristina de Lena, built in the mid IX century and generally considered to be the Asturian church with the most Visigoth characteristics, there are the remains of a finely sculptured chancel screen; this screen was probably first used in another church as it has been cut down to fit here at Santa Cristina. The position of the screen within the arch at the entrance to the chancel confirms the retention of the Visigoth concept of separating the nave and the laity from the sanctuary area and the clergy. The sculpture is reminiscent of the style seen on the tympanum (a former chancel screen) at San Miguel de Escalada (See page 29 below). On the North side, by the entrance to the transept, there is, high on the wall, a sculptured disc that brings to mind those on the walls of Santa María de Naranco.

Sta Cristina de Lena – Looking East over the transept (left) and chancel screen (right)

Sta Cristina de Lena - Two capitals and detail by North transept
The basilica format seen in the Visigoth churches was to persist. Naves were usually timber roofed; apses were flat ended and might have side bays or niches for relics. An example is to be seen at Priesca, a church that was consecrated in 921. But here as at San Julián de los Prados the impression is one of space and light.

Priesca - Choir

The last church we shall look at in the Asturian group is at San Salvador, Valdediós, to the North-east of Oviedo. This church dates from the last decade of the IX century. This church has a nave that is preceded by a porch area. To the sides are aisles that are divided from the nave by square pillars and narrow arches. The apse and side chapels are flat-ended. There were two small transepts, an innovation; the North one has been destroyed. On the South side is a narrow gallery that is enclosed from the outside world. Such were to be a common feature in the Romanesque period to come. The diminutive arched windows within the alfiz are of a form that was already 200 years old. The general character is similar to the other churches of the Asturian group. The sculpture, mainly on capitals, is unsophisticated. The decoration on these and on the windows has a hint of Moorish style.
San Salvador, Valdediós – From South-west (left) and nave (right)

San Salvador, Valdediós – Capital (left) and apse window (right)

The pre-Romanesque churches of Asturias showed forms and a style that were indigenous; but there was a development that drew on earlier Visigoth and new Carolingian characteristics; however there are few influences from the Moorish occupied Spain. The link to the North was to be greatly enhanced in the next three centuries.

Mozarab

In 711, exploiting the weakening of the Visigoths who were divided by bitter internal feuding, the Moors crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and rapidly destroyed the Visigoth state structure and occupied most of the peninsula. In 732, they were established securely enough to be able to project briefly an army North as far as Poitiers, in North-west France. In the North and North-east of Spain two small kingdoms, Navarre and Asturias,
retained a toe-hold and over the next two centuries. These, along with another Christian domain, the County of Barcelona, would provide an expanding base from which the ‘Reconquista’ movement would, by the end of the XV century, subdue the last Moorish bastions in Granada. Asturias probably did not become fully Christianised until the VIII century.

Initially, the Moorish conquerors were tolerant of their Visigoth subjects, who were permitted to carry out their religious beliefs with little hindrance. From 750 this began to change and the increased pressure from the mid IX century on Christians to convert to Islam or go into exile drove many to the latter option. The majority moved North to the Christian held lands, bringing with them their cultural heritage that they had inherited from the Visigoths. There is a lack of agreement amongst authorities as to the exact community that is embraced by the term. The most usual is that they were the true Spaniards, vassals of Muslim rulers of Spain for a time, who preserved their Christian religion throughout the succeeding centuries, and who kept up the Latin-Visigoth culture which had existed in Spain prior to the Moorish invasion. This Mozarab style, as it is known today, was implanted in the Northern kingdoms along side the styles that had been developed locally. The Mozarab style was, in the main, a direct development of the Visigoth style. The sharing of the peninsula with a sophisticated people who were initially tolerant and who had a superior civilisation inevitably led to an acceptance of elements of Moslem culture. This resulted in a fusion of Islamic and Christian elements of architecture and art. (Some authorities put forward a narrower definition of what constitutes the Mozarab style limiting it to liturgically driven requirements derived from the Visigoth forms of worship. This included the need for small rooms or compartments within the space of the basilica; others confine it to emigrants from al-Andalus who settled in the Northern kingdoms of the Peninsula; another authority limits the use of Mozarab to structures built within al-Andalus). The horseshoe arch was more accentuated; the sculpture continued with the same motifs. The buildings showed a less primitive form, whilst retaining the floor plan of the basilica. The Mozarab style was to spread East along the Mediterranean shores through what are now Roussillon and Languedoc. Examples in these two areas of France of churches that show Mozarab characteristics include St Michel de Cuxa, St Martin des Puits and the crypt at St Guilhem le Désert; in all there are about 20 surviving churches in Southern France showing such architectural characteristics. By the early XI century the Mozarab style in Northern Spain had faded away and been replaced by influences coming South from France and East Italy. However, some Mozarab features were to be adopted by the Spanish Romanesque artists. An important vehicle for this diffusion of style was the manuscript. Of special importance were copies of the ‘Beatus de Liébana’, a commentary on the Apocalypse. First produced in the late VII century by a monk of Asturias, over 30 copies were made over the subsequent five centuries; several contained illuminations of buildings that had a distinctive Mozarab style. These show details of doorways and sanctuaries in forms that were to be replicated in churches from Asturias to Catalonia and across the Pyrenees into the area once known as Septimania.
Al-Andalus in about AD 800

Beatus de Girona (AD 957)  Beatus de Urgell (AD 970)
St Martin des Puits – Entrance arch to choir

San Miguel de Escalada is situated in a valley to the East of León. It dates from 913 and so is of almost the same date as San Salvador at Valdediós (see page 20). It is perhaps one of the finer Mozarab works. It was built on the site of an earlier Visigoth church that was abandoned when the Moors invaded. It was monks who had fled the increasing religious persecution in Córdoba who were responsible for the reconstruction. It comprises a church with a triple nave in the form of the basilica with a wooden roof. Each aisle ends with a short, almost circular choir that resembles a mihrab, the central one being slightly wider than the outer two. The central aisle alone is separated from the nave by a tribune supported by two slim columns that form a horseshoe arch; these once contained small screens that would have obscured the view of the choir from the nave. This concept recalls the enclosed chancels of the Visigoth period. Each side chapel has a narrow central window. The aisles are divided by slim columns topped by a capital that is a variant of the Corinthian capital. On these rest horseshoe shaped arches. Along the south side of the exterior of the nave runs a gallery that is of a slightly later date than the church. It is enclosed by columns and Corinthian styled capitals supporting similar horseshoe shaped arches. These arches are very reminiscent of the arches of the mosque at Córdoba but, as we have said, the form pre-dates the Arab invasion and it was very familiar to the Visigoths. The overall form along with the style and proportions of the arches is very reminiscent of San Juan de Baños (see page 6). The three sanctuaries of San Miguel resemble not those at San Juan but those of a church in the amphitheatre at Tarragona for which only the floor plan survives. But despite all these new visual elements, the masonry for the walls was constructed in the same manner as was used for the other Asturian-Leonese churches and not in the Visigoth manner, suggesting that the workmen were of local origin. As in churches around Oviedo, brickwork was used in the upper parts of the walls to reduce the weight.
San Miguel de Escalada – North aisle and chapel (left) and main nave and tribune (right)

San Juan de Baños – Nave from North-west

San Miguel de Escalada – Gallery from East (left) and capital on South of nave (right)
At the East end of the gallery there is a tympanum over the door to the church. This is a re-used chancel screen that has geometric and vegetative motifs that are part of the Visigoth inheritance. The use of the motifs has a lighter touch than in the Visigoth period. The interlace was a motif that appeared regularly on X century chancel screens. It was a motif that was well known to Christian and Muslim artists. (See [http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/origins_of_interlace_sculpture.pdf](http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/origins_of_interlace_sculpture.pdf)). In San Miguel de Escalada we see the Visigoth styles, the form and the liturgical spaces.

San Miguel de Escalada – Tympanum in South gallery

Also founded by monks from Córdoba is the church of San Cebrián de Mazote, in Castille. This dates from not earlier than 940. Despite similarities with San Miguel de Escalada, San Cebrián lacks the screen or barrier between nave and chancel. Most unusually, the names of at least ten monks are inscribed on the frames of the windows. This would seem to indicate that some of the monks were engaged as masons on the project. The incorporation of Visigoth styles both here and at Escalada (and elsewhere) and these inscriptions seems to be a deliberate attempt to recall the times of a united and prosperous church under the Visigoth rule that preceded the Moslem conquest and to advertise the freedom of the monks to build churches, a right denied to them in Moslem areas.
High in the mountains to the West of León is the village of Santiago de Peñalba. The church was once part of a small priory founded at the start of the X century and consecrated in 930. The plan is a compact cross. Unlike the previous churches that we have looked at it has a single nave with a rounded chapel at each end that is entered through a narrow horseshoe arch. But the South door with twin horseshoe arches, known as an *aljimez* door, with an *alfiz* moulding that indicates its Mozarab and Visigoth pedigree; a smaller door on the North side has a similar though single arch. Despite some decoration, the Visigoth character of the church is its salient characteristic.

At the East end of the Pyrenees the recapture of Barcelona from the Moors in 801 provided increased security to Christian worshipers. The little church of Sant Julia de Boada, situated between the Pyrenees and Barcelona, was first recorded in 934. It has a single nave and a short apse that is sited off-centre to the South. The South door and the arch at the entrance to the choir both have the familiar horseshoe shape; however, the South door at Sant Julia is of modern construction.
Sant Julia de Boada – from the South and arch at entrance to choir

Still in Catalonia, but further inland near the town of Berga stands the small church of Sant Quirze de Pedret. Parts of the present structure date from the VII century. It was built in the area that lay between the conflicting powers and ideologies of the Moorish South and the Christian North. The chapel has a nave and a raised North aisle with a rounded chapel each side of the choir. The entrance arches to all three sanctuaries have distinct horseshoe arches in Mozarab style but with columns that have capitals with simple and worn sculptures that reflect the earlier Visigoth style. In the choir were two small fragments of X century frescos that are now in a museum in Solsona; they have been replaced by copies. One depicts an ‘orans’ figure, thought by some to be St John. The other has a knight in a wreath. This is more interesting because the mounted figure is thought by some to represent St Maurice who had been martyred when his legion was ‘decimated’ for declining to worship the Emperor; the Legion were Christians from Thebes. Given the situation of the church in the turbulent border area between Christian and Moslem Spain, St Maurice might have been a worthy example to those who worshiped at the church.

Sant Quirze de Pedret – North chapel (left) and choir frescos (right)
The lands of the Count of Barcelona extended North and East along the literal of the Mediterranean towards the Rhone estuary. The Mozarab influences were to follow the same path. In Roussillon and Languedoc a number of churches remain that show such characteristics. In the early part of the XI century the Abbot of St Michel de Cuxa, North of the Pyrenees, was also Abbot of Ripoll and Bishop of Vic, to the South of the Pyrenees. The church at Cuxa retains Mozarab style arches in the nave and the North side chapel. Two small chapels in the hills to the North, near Sournia, that were dependencies of Cuxa, display similar characteristics.

St Michel de Cuxa – Arch from nave to side aisle. St Michel, Sournia – West door

In Catalonia West of Barcelona is the former monastery of St Benet de Bages. The capitals in the cloisters date from two distinct periods with the earlier ones being from the X century. Amongst these in the East gallery there is one that closely resembles those to be seen in the Great Mosque at Cordoba which date from around 950. The one at St Benet must surely be the work of a sculptor who once worked in Cordoba.
The most obvious feature from the Mozarab decorative style that was to be retained by later generations of artisans was a classic modillion of a form to be seen in the mosque at Cordoba. On several churches, such as San Miguel de Escalada and San Millán de la Cogolla, the modillion was to be decorated with the circular motifs that were drawn from the Visigoth period.
Córdoba – Modillions over Las Palmas door to the Mezquita.

Sta María de Lebeña, San Millán de la Cogolla and Sta María, Sepúlveda – Modillions

The Moors brought with them a style of sculpture for capitals that was to be refined over the period of their occupation. Their artisans usually employed white marble for these capitals. Whilst the basic form was modelled on the Corinthian capital that was widely used across the Roman Empire, the Moorish masons gave to their capitals a touch of delicacy and lightness that was not to be seen in any works by successor cultures except that of the Jews in Toledo. Examples of the Moorish capitals are to be found in many
museum collections across Spain. The former synagogue in Toledo that is now known as Santa María la Blanca; the date of origin is a matter of dispute amongst authorities; however, it is probably in the bracket of XIII to XIV centuries. The interior has capitals that show a clear Moorish lineage of a style that was to be developed further by Mudéjar artisans that were to continue their craft under Christian rule after the conquest. Strangely this lightness was carried forward by neither the Mozarabs nor, as we shall see, by the Mudéjar masons.

Moorish capital from Cordoba, now Peralada (left) and capital in nave at Sta Maria la Blanca, Toledo (right)

It was natural that the Islamic rulers of Spain should use artisans in the decoration of their mosques and palaces regardless of the religious persuasion of the artisan. In the Archaeological Museum, Cordoba, there are two items where the decoration might not look out of place in a contemporary Christian church. One is a X century basin that was probably used for ablutions by the faithful before they entered the mosque. The other is a base for a column which probably came from a nearby palace. The basin has a band of small animal heads that are set over a wreath of foliage. The foliage and interlace decoration on the column base are motifs that were probably modelled on examples found in Visigoth churches.
Although the Mozarab style was gradually to be swamped by overpowering influences that were to come into Spain from France hints of the style were to appear intermittently. A superb example is provided by the lintel above the West door of the former priory church at St Génis des Fontaines. The lintel can be accurately dated to 1046. The arches across the lintel display the familiar horseshoe arch. The actual buildings of the Mozarabs are few but their influence was considerable; it was to invigorate Asturian-Leonese
building. The special forms they brought to the Northern kingdoms were rooted not so much in Islamic styles as in those of the Visigoth. In that sense they were truly Spanish.

St Génis des Fontaines – Lintel over West door

The Early Romanesque period

The campaign to roll back the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula brought about a huge expansion of church building. By the end of the X century the Moors were increasingly on the defensive as the Christian kingdoms of the North of Spain, aided by Christians from France and beyond began the slow push that was gradually to force the Moors back South. Girona was retaken in 785 and Barcelona in 801. The crusade drew many from France where an explosion of church building had already begun, augmenting the many small chapels and hermitages that had existed along the Pyrenees from the IX century. These churches were, in the main, small, simple buildings with no sculpture or other ornamentation, though this was often added in a later century. There was none of the ostentation that was to come in the next century; these were buildings to serve a small, probably fairly primitive rural society that was living in remote areas that did not attract the attentions of marauding Arab armies.
The influx of French into Spain occurred particularly in the West of Spain. There urban colonies of ‘Francs’ that had special privileges were established to dominate and secure the land. These lands were not ‘empty’ or ‘a desert’ as popular myth would have us believe; but the population, including many Christians, had lived under Moslem rule and was, thus, suspect. In the Kingdoms of León and Navarre the new-comers were welcomed and their influence was soon apparent in the architecture and sculpture. This was enhanced by the decision to impose the Rule of St Benedict in religious houses. This would provide uniformity of liturgy and would ensure that the liturgy that had survived from Visigoth times and which was still in use in parts of ‘occupied’ Spain was effectively superseded. This introduction was strongly supported by the Abbey of Cluny which was already increasingly influential because of the pilgrimage to Santiago. The influence in the West of North Spain was from France. However, as we shall see, in Catalonia the French influence was initially secondary to that from Northern Italy. Given the relative weakness of the Christian church in Spain and the absence of the wealth that the church was beginning to generate and accumulate in France it may seem surprising that it was from the church in Spain that the current of art flowed into the South of France. An example is provided by a reliquary that is in the Treasury at León; it dates from 1059 and has around the sides small carved ivory panels depicting apostles and saints. They are carved in low relief and are framed within an arch formed by two columns with capitals. These are reminiscent of the form used on early Christian sarcophagi from the III and early IV centuries. The same form was to appear in Southern France, at Moissac in about 1100 and at St Sernin, Toulouse, about ten years later.
León treasury – Reliquary of St John the Baptist, 1059
Moissac – Statue of St Bartholomew in cloisters, c1100 (left) and St Sernin, Toulouse – Statue of angel in choir, c1110 (right)

The Spanish masons and sculptors of that period have bequeathed to modern Spain a heritage of monasteries, churches and chapels that numbers many thousands that are in whole or in part Romanesque. We will select just a few of these to provide a taste of characteristics that developed locally over two centuries.

The newly freed lands were to be secured by introducing people of known loyalty and with this new population came the Church. Many of the early great churches have been destroyed and have been replaced. The Catalan Counts of Barcelona created and preserved a flourishing state. It was here that there developed a new style that blended the Mozarab characteristics with locally developed styles. French influence in church architecture and sculpture was slow to develop. Catalonia has four early churches that merit recognition: Sant Pere de Rodes, Sant Vincent at Cardona, Sant Jaume de Frontanyà and Vic. Of these, three survive: Sant Vicenç at Cardona, Sant Jaume de Frontanyà and Sant Pere de Rodes. At Vic the crypt remains and the local museum retains some fragments of sculpture from the old Cathedral. These buildings either had very little sculpture or the sculpture was restricted to foliage and geometric motifs. Sant
Vicenç was consecrated in 1040. The large apse is ‘decorated’ with a line of blind arches round the upper rim; the side chapels have smaller arcs between slim buttresses. The latter are described as Lombard bands, a decorative form that originated in Lombardy. Over the crossing is a large but low octagonal tower. Inside, the choir has seven shallow bays or niches, whilst below the choir, which is raised above the level of the nave, there is a crypt. It is here that important relics would have been secured. The wide nave is divided from narrow side aisles by huge rectangular pillars that support low rounded arches. There are few windows. The structure as a whole conveys a feeling of huge solidity strength and austerity. The crypt at Vic has simply carved capitals. The museum has fragments of an arch that was probably once over the main door. The patterning is mostly of interlace. Sant Jaume de Frontanyà has no internal or external sculptural decoration (though there are two re-used capitals inside the church; the origin of these is not known). This church has a squat, 12 sided tower over the crossing that is unique in Catalonia.
Also in Catalonia stands the former great monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes. It was consecrated two decades earlier than Cardona. Like Cardona, the exterior of this XI century church was without decoration. However the interior of the nave has fine decoration. The nave has narrow side aisles that are divided from the nave by pillars with engaged columns. These columns are unusual in that they fall from the arches at the top by only three quarters of the height. All have fine capitals that have interlace or foliage decoration. These sculptured capitals represent some of the finest examples of the renaissance of early Romanesque sculpture. The XI century cloisters like those from the same period at Vic were without sculpture. A second cloister was constructed in the XII century and a fine West doorway was built to the church. These are discussed in detail at: http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/cloisters_of_catalan_churches.pdf and http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_maitre_de_cabestany.pdf.
In a high valley in the West of Catalonia there are two churches that were built at almost the same time following the form of the basilica, having a nave and two side aisles. They are Sant Climent de Taüll, which is in its original form, and Santa Maria de Taüll, which was over-restored in the XVIII century. Sant Climent has a rounded apse and two rounded side chapels with a line of Lombard bands around the upper edge of the walls. On the South side of the crossing stands a magnificent seven storey square bell tower. The top six storeys have one, two or three openings that are separated by a slim column. At the top of each storey is a line of Lombard bands. This and similar towers are modelled on those that were built in Northern Italy at around the same time. At La Seu d’Urgell there is a record of four ‘lambardos’ being employed to work on the Cathedral, which has fine examples of Lombard bands.
The new styles introduced from France and Italy were to spread Westwards across Northern Spain during the early X century. But these met with adaptations to Moorish techniques. As the Moorish area of control diminished Moorish artisans sought work in the newly conquered Christian lands and they brought with them a style that is known as Mudéjar. The term comes from the Arabic word Mudajjan, meaning domesticated. The artisans employed brick and their churches were built with rows of blind bays, with lobed window arches, doors that were frequently in the form of the horseshoe arch and with church towers to one side. Christian artisans also learnt these skills. The results are to be seen in several churches in Castile, especially just North of Valladolid, West to Toro and South to Toledo which has a particularly rich collection of Mudéjar buildings. This technique was to develop further in the Gothic period when it was to flourish in and around Zaragoza in secular as well as ecclesiastical buildings.
It is in a valley in Navarre that we see a particularly fine example of early French influence. This is the church of San Salvador de Leyre. There are records of two consecrations for the church: one in 1057 and another in 1098. Beneath the church is a huge crypt with three aisles separated by short columns topped by large, archaic looking capitals that may be dated to the IX century. The crypt was the pantheon for the kings of Pamplona. The church above was rebuilt from 1090 with the support of Cluny. It is possible that the consecration dates refer to the crypt and this later reconstruction.
Leyre – Crypt and capital in crypt

The upper church, built over two campaigns, has an austere East end that is built over the crypt. The West end ends in a finely sculptured doorway that is probably mid XII century. The interior has a high triple nave that resembles several large churches from the Poitou region of France.

San Juan de la Peña, in Aragon, was an important monastery that adopted the rule of St Benedict in 1025. In 1035, after the separation of Aragon from Navarre, it became the sanctuary of choice for the monarchs of Aragon. The Pre-Romanesque chapels built into the rock-face have survived. This original church was extended to provide a foundation for a much larger but austere church above it; this was dedicated in 1094 by the Archbishop of Bordeaux, a further reminder of the new links with France. This austerity was very much the style for the Early Romanesque churches of Northern Spain. But this was to change.
In the IX century, in Zaragoza, the Moors built a remarkable palace, the Aljafería. It is an example of Islamic palaces that had been developed since the VIII century across the Arab world. The decoration was of a beauty and quality that was unmatched in the Christian held areas of Spain at the time. It would surely have provided inspiration and models for the artisans working in Christian Spain that was only a small distance to the North.

One of the more remarkable churches in Aragon showing influences from Islam is the church of San Juan de Busa. It is one of about 15 small churches in the foot hills of the Aragonese Pyrenees that have Mozarab characteristics. It is a small church standing on an empty hillside and it was built towards the end of the X century; (it was largely rebuilt in the XX century after severe damage during the Civil War). The West window shows the distinctive small horseshoe arches. There is a simple South door that also shows a slight
horseshoe shape. More remarkable is the suggestion that there is an inscription over the door that reads ‘La ilah illa Allah’ (God is great), a strange inscription to have over a church door.


**Pilgrimage**

Pilgrimage was a significant social phenomenon at the start of the millennium. The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is recorded as early as 844 at which time there was already a Benedictine monastery at Compostela. The role of Cluny in generating and sustaining the pilgrimage (and in supporting the reconquest of Spain from the infidel)
was considerable and Cluny had influence in Spain, especially with King Alfonso IV. Cluny provided men and material support for the re-establishment of Christianity in the conquered lands. The Cluniac order and others established hospices for the pilgrims and shrines and churches along the routes including those through Spain. The pilgrimage brought not only pilgrims but also a cross-section of the social order including artisans, artists and masons; these will have brought with them their skills and cultural styles.

San Gil, Luna, Aragon – Pilgrims in a hospice bed

Five great ‘pilgrim churches’ with a particular form were built, one on each of the principle routes towards the pilgrim’s goal. Of these, four were in France and one in Spain. This latter was the pilgrims’ destination: Santiago de Compostela. All five had similar basic floor plans, having a wide central nave with side aisles, transept arms with rounded side chapels on their East side, a deep rounded choir that was encompassed on three sides by an ambulatory that had radiating side chapels. This general arrangement allowed the offices of Mass to be conducted uninterrupted by the movement of pilgrims. The pilgrims were able to move down the side aisles to access the chapels in the transepts and the ambulatory. The chapels frequently were the site where relics were held and which were the focus for veneration by the pilgrims.
The Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela still dominates the town as it did in mediaeval times. The visual appearance today is significantly different from those times, however. The South side remains largely as it was in the XII century. The North side was entirely rebuilt in the second half of the XVIII century. The West façade was altered in the Renaissance period but the façade still seems to have reflections of the great doorway at Vézelay, in Central France. The two towers at the West end post-date the Romanesque structure. The transepts are large. On the South arm is the Porta de las Platerías. This doorway, which has two doors, was rebuilt and incorporates sculptures from the North and West walls. It has some of the finest sculptures of the Cathedral. These date from the last decade of the XI century.
The interior of the long nave is framed by the harmonious rounded arches that separate the nave from the side aisles. The rounded choir is now richly decorated with Baroque fittings.

Santiago de Compostela – Nave from West and from South-west

Santiago de Compostela did not provide a model for other churches that were to be built along the pilgrimage route across Spain; the builders of these were to look, in the main, to smaller, simpler edifices to be found in South-west France and the Languedoc-Pyrénées. Only in the church of San Martín de Frómista was there any similar plan. This church was very extensively rebuilt in the XIX century. But the floor plan had a triple nave in the Poitou style. The three sanctuaries were in echelon. Over the crossing was a cupola supporting an octagonal tower.

San Martín de Frómista from South-east
On the exterior of the South transept of Santiago de Compostela, above the doorway, are two windows that have a cusped arch over them; this style has been attributed to Moorish influence. Earlier we have stated that artisans and masons would have travelled South-west across France accompanying the pilgrims and bringing with them techniques, skills and cultural styles and influences. We should remember that many of these people would have returned home, having acquired new concepts and ideas that they would incorporate into buildings in their home regions. It is probably this exchange that led to the dissemination of the cusped arch across Northern Spain from Galicia to Navarre and thence into France. The cusped arch was adopted particularly in the West of France, in the Saintonge and Angoumois; it was less common elsewhere, but fine examples exist at Le Puy en Velay. See [http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_cusped_arch_on_romanescque_churches.pdf](http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_cusped_arch_on_romanescque_churches.pdf)
Romanesque of the XII century

Throughout the XII century Romanesque art in Northern Spain gave considerable freedom of expression to local artists and artisans, whilst continuing to absorb new styles and motifs from other areas especially from France. Several monastic communities in Catalonia received new members from the French monasteries of La Grasse, St Victor de Marseille and St Ruf d’Avignon. Naturally some of these immigrants brought with them new concepts. Their contributions were evident in both the floor plans of some new churches and in the sculptural programmes. One of the new features was the ambulatory with radiating chapels. As skills in stone carving improved, so more sculpture appeared on capitals, around windows and across facades and doorways. In Catalonia the doorways provided settings for skilled sculptors to create imaginative decorative and iconographic programmes. Ripoll provides an almost unequalled example of the latter, whilst the church of Sant Pere de Galligans at Girona is a good example of the former.
It was in Catalonia in the great, decorated cloisters that were to replace or succeed the plain ones of the XI century that this infusion was to be most evident. For details of the cloisters of Catalan churches and their links to styles and iconography from France see [http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/cloisters_of_catalan_churches.pdf](http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/cloisters_of_catalan_churches.pdf). It is evident that the great churches of Toulouse and their cloisters as well as the former monastery at St Pons de Thomières, in Languedoc, provided models for sculptors in Catalonia. These influences were enhanced by the dynastic links between Catalan churches such as Sant Pere de Rodes and Ripoll with monasteries in what is now Roussillon, North of the Pyrenees.
The church of Santa Maria de Covet, in Catalonia North of Lleida, provides an example of how the motifs of earlier church builders, in this case Visigoth, were imitated. The church dates from the second half of the XII century. Around the choir is a frieze of birds, animals and foliage that resembles that seen on the exterior of Santa María de Quintanilla de las Viñas or the interior of San Pedro de la Nave.

Sta Maria de Covet – Frieze in choir (detail) (left) Sta María de Quintanilla de las Viñas – detail of apse (right)

Away from Catalonia in the other regions of Spain the churches of the XII century there were evolutionary developments of earlier buildings. At Lugo, Orense and Túy cathedrals or abbey churches were built. These did not have an ambulatory with radiating chapels. Instead there were three parallel sanctuaries. North of Burgos, the churches of De Vajello de Mena and Siones have an apse that could as easily have been set in the Saintonge (the region of France North of Bordeaux), with their engaged columns topped by sculptured capitals, the line of modillions and the decorated windows.

De Vajello de Mena – Apse Siones – Apse

Also showing clear Saintonge characteristics is the façade of Santo Domingo at Soria. It has a door set between stepped columns topped by sculptured capitals. Over the door is a tympanum. The archivolts are splendidly sculptured with a mass of figures. This church was built in the mid XII century on the orders of Alphonso VIII, whose statue is on the left above the West door; his spouse, Eleanor, (daughter of Henry II of England), is to the
right. She came from Aquitaine and the King ordered that the façade be in the style of her home region.

[Soriano, Santo Domingo – West door (left) and detail of arches over the door (right)]

When looking at San Miguel de Escalada we saw the gallery built on the South flank of the church. At San Salvador de Valdediós the gallery was entirely enclosed. These may have had Visigoth antecedents that have not survived or the concept may have been brought from Syria by Moslems. This second proposition is supported by the fact that at two places with fine galleries there had been a substantial Moslem population that remained after the conquest: Sepúlveda and San Estaban de Gormaz. Throughout the XII century such galleries were to be built in large numbers, especially in the Western part of North Castile; a few are to be seen in Navarre and even in Catalonia. They offered shelter from the winter rains and the summer heat and a place for the laity to gather. In Segovia there are three churches with such a gallery on three sides of the church.

[Omeñaca from South-west] [San Estaban de Gormaz – South gallery]
In the West of France, especially in Poitou-Charente and the Périgord, there are numerous Romanesque churches that use a cupola as the principal method of vaulting part or all of the interior space. These cupolas date, in the main, from the latter decades of the XI century through to the mid XII century. It has been widely suggested that such cupolas suggest a Byzantine influence. In Spain the cupola is uncommon. In the West of Spain there are two fine Cathedrals that have a cupola (known as a *cimborios*). Both Cathedrals were built in the fourth quarter of the XII century. That at Zamora has an outer cladding that resembles the outside of the cupolas on the Cathedral of St Front, Périgueux and Abbaye aux Dames, Saintes. The finest such cupola is to be seen in the Catedral Vieja, Salamanca. This has been enhanced by two rows of windows set below the actual cupola. Whether these two Cathedrals owe their cupolas to influences from Western France or directly from Constantinople is unclear. Whilst either is possible, given the penetration of French influence especially in lands conquered from the Moors, it would seem more probable that it was from France that the concept was introduced to Northern Spain.
We have already mentioned the significance of new cloisters in Catalonia. In the West of Northern Spain, cloisters were also to provide an outlet for the expression of new skills, influences and motifs. We will look briefly at four of these: San Juan de la Peña, Santo Domingo de Silos, San Juan de Duero and Santillana del Mar.

The cloisters at San Juan de la Peña were built in about 1190. They were constructed under an overhanging rock. The cloisters were severely damaged and have been rebuilt partially; only two galleries are complete but in the reconstruction capitals have not been restored in either their original places nor in the original sequence. There are two groups of capitals: a small group that depict animals and a larger group numbering twenty that are sculptured with biblical scenes. The first group dates from the late XI century and shows some similarities with capitals that were at St Sernin, Toulouse; they are from the same period as those at Toulouse.

The second group dates from the third quarter of the XII century. They show a strong sense of narrative, such as may also be found at Tudela. The sculptor, who is known as the Maître de San Juan de la Peña, has a very distinctive style that seems to have a touch of the East in it, especially when we see the eyes and those sculptures where there is a sense of movement. There is evidence to show that he worked at several other sites including San Pedro el Viejo at Huesca, at Santiago de Agüero near Huesca, at El Frago and Biota in Zaragoza province and at Santa María la Real in Sangüesa; these are all near the border between Aragon and Navarre. At Elea de los Caballeros he seems to have drawn on a model similar to one used for the façade of the church at Avallon, Burgundy. The same harpist and dancer are to be seen on the capitals at El Frago and Biota. The seductive posture of the dancer (Salome perhaps) reminds one of the famous capital by Gilabertus from the cloisters of St Etienne, Toulouse, that is now in the Musée des Augustins.
San Juan de la Peña – Capitals of Last Supper (left) and Angel appearing to Joseph (right)

Elea de los Caballeros (left) and Santiago de Agüero (right) – Salome

Avallon, Burgundy – Detail of façade  Toulouse, Musée des Augustins – Salome

San Juan de la Peña has sculptures that show links to sculptures that we saw in the pre-Romanesque churches of Asturias. On the North side of the upper church is a courtyard
with sculptured plaques in two lines along the East wall. The format is very similar to those that we saw on the walls of the nave at Santa Maria de Narranco.

San Juan de la Peña – Sculpture in courtyard

The monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos provides a good example of the transition from the indigenous styles of the XI century to those of the XII century with the introduction of Romanesque forms from France. The Romanesque church was destroyed and replaced in the XVIII century. The lower level of the cloisters and the door from the cloisters to the church, the Puerta de las Vírgenes, are Romanesque. The door, on the church side, is plain and displays the characteristic horseshoe shape of Mozarab style. The cloister side has the same basic form but with a heavy overlay of Romanesque sculptured decoration.

Santo Domingo de Silos – Mozarab door from cloister

The lower level of the cloisters has 64 pairs of sculptured capitals and, at the corner pillars, large sculptured panels. These are the works of two Masters who were directly inspired by the styles and iconography that were prevalent in France at that time. The North and West galleries, however, have sculptures that also show characteristics that are
derived from Byzantine or oriental styles. This is especially true with some capitals that show animals.

Santo Domingo de Silos – Capitals of lions and Nativity

On the road from Soria down to the River Duero stands a high wall that hides a small church and a ruined cloister. This is San Juan de Duero, once a commandery of Knights Templar. The cloisters are remarkable; they have three distinct styles. At three of the corners are distinctive entrances, two of which have Mozarab characteristics. The arcades are constructed in three different styles. The larger part on the South and parts of the East and West galleries are in the form of interlocked arches of a pattern that was common in Normandy and Britain in the Romanesque period. The remainder of the East gallery and part of the North gallery has rounded arches that fall on to groups of four engaged columns with foliage capitals. The remainder (parts of the North and West galleries) also has rounded arches that fall onto pairs of capitals and columns. These last two groups are typical of the work to be seen in the Romanesque cloisters of South-west France, whereas the interlocked galleries are more probably of Moslem or Byzantine inspiration.
San Juan de Duero – Cloister from South-west

San Juan de Duero – South and East galleries

The capitals are of three types. The majority depict foliage in a manner that foreshadows the gothic style. The others are of pairs of monsters and of an interlace pattern.

San Juan de Duero – Foliage capital from East gallery

The fourth set of cloisters that is to be examined is at Santillana del Mar. The church and cloisters we see today replace an earlier Mozarab church. They were built in the XII
century. The cloisters are on the North side of the church. The oldest gallery is that on the South side. It is the shortest and adjoins the church nave. It dates from the second half of the XII century; it was reconstructed with two Gothic bays at a later date. The remaining three galleries were built in the last decades of the XII century. There are 49 sculptured capitals. Those in the South gallery have biblical and secular scenes; in the West gallery the capitals with biblical scenes are alternated with capitals that have foliage or interlace. The remaining capitals are all with foliage or interlace. The influences here are almost entirely derived from France; the indigenous content has almost disappeared. The iconography would have been familiar to sculptors in Toulouse, Moissac or Agen in South-west France. The style of sculpture was similarly French; there are examples of animals and figures in interlaced vegetation that might have been modelled on capitals in the cloisters of La Daurade, Toulouse. See http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_romanesque_cloisters_of_the_languedoc_and_the_surrounding_area.pdf

Santillana del Mar – Capitals of Annunciation and interlace

Santillana del Mar – Capitals with animals in interlace

Transition towards Gothic
By the middle of the XII century French and Italian Romanesque art had so developed that it was being transformed into the style we call Gothic; in some regions this transformation started earlier and was carried out more rapidly than in others. By the end of that century Romanesque was no longer in vogue. But to the South of the Pyrenees the Romanesque style was to continue with modifications on into the early decades of the XIII century. The ancient Roman city of Tarragona was recovered from Moorish occupation in the last decade of the XI century. The subsequent consolidation of Christian control and reconstruction was conducted by a Norman baron and a French archbishop. In the second half of the XII century work was begun on a huge cathedral complex. The plan for the Cathedral was Romanesque but this was soon to be superseded by a Gothic plan. The cloisters, constructed in the corner of the North transept and the apse, was essentially a Romanesque complex. The columns and capitals are largely Romanesque in style; they are enclosed by Gothic arches. The iconography is essentially French but there are links to the narrative styles of Aragon and Navarre, and particularly to San Juan de la Peña and Tudela. For a full description of the cloisters at Tarragona and the sources of influence see http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/cloisters_of_catalan_churches.pdf.

Tarragona – South gallery and capitals of two basilisks and the Crucifixion

The lengthy transition to Gothic that occurred in Northern Spain is well illustrated by a group of churches around Lleida. The area was dominated by the Moors until after 1180. One of the churches built as part of the restructuring following its recapture was at Gandesa, which is at the South edge of Catalonia near the Ebro delta. The Romanesque church was destroyed and rebuilt in the XVII century, but the original West façade was retained.
The door is set between sculptured capitals that extend outwards to a frieze on each side. Over the door are five decorated arches. Whilst the work is not of the finest quality, some of the sculptures being somewhat naive, it is still a doorway of great interest, with several clear links stylistically to churches North of the Pyrenees. The doorway and the sculptures are analysed in detail at [http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/gandesa_in_new_catalonia.pdf](http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/gandesa_in_new_catalonia.pdf)

In the mid XII century the Cistercian Order had taken the place in the church of Northern Spain that had been occupied by the Benedictine Order for the previous 150 years. The first of their foundations was at Moretuela, near Zamora. It was followed by others in Asturias and Galicia. Most showed Burgundian influence in their floor plans. In Catalonia there were two great Cistercian foundations: Poblet and Santa Creus. Poblet was a dependency of Fontfroide, near Narbonne, whilst Santa Creus was a dependency of Grandseve, near Toulouse. Both monasteries have a remarkable amount of sculptural decoration when it is remembered that the founder of the Order was so strong in his condemnation of such decoration. At Santa Creus, although there are no capitals depicting figures, there are mythical animals, a pelican, a fine cockerel and lions. In general the capitals show some of the motifs in a form that we associate with the Romanesque period; but others are distinctly Gothic in character; this is particularly true of most of those that depict foliage. The churches are Gothic in style. The church at Santa
Creus is modelled on that at Fontenay. The decoration of the cloisters is sometimes described as in the ‘English Decorative Style’. The presence of the Anglo-Saxon Reinard Fonoyll as architect would explain that.

Sta Creus – Interior of church (left) and capital in cloisters (right)

Poblet – Interior of church (left) and capitals from cloisters (right)
The recapture of Zaragoza from the Moors in 1118 led to the start in the construction of a cathedral. Begun in the second half of the XII century, only the apse and a side chapel were completed before the style was to change from Romanesque to Gothic and Mudéjar; this was the style brought by Muslims who remained and work in the Christian lands.

Finally, the Cathedral of Valencia provides an interesting example of the transition to Gothic. Construction began in 1256, nearly a century after the Gothic principles were adopted in France. The South transept has a doorway that is rooted in the Romanesque style but the North transept door, known as the Apostles’ Door is Gothic in all respects. The Cathedral was by no means the last Romanesque building in Spain; Agramunt near Lleida, Catalonia, has a fine church that in most features is true to the characteristics of the Romanesque church. Its West doorway is stepped between eight sculptured capitals; over the doorway the arches are sculptured. The sculptures have clear Romanesque characteristics. Yet the doorway dates from 1285. The North door, however, though still Romanesque, shows more signs of the forthcoming Gothic style.
Concluding Remarks

This glimpse at the development of church architecture and decoration from the end of Roman times up to the middle of the XIII century allows us to identify two aspects that drove that development. It is easy to define the international aspect. This knew no frontiers, either political or geographic, that were obstacles to the transmission from one region to another across the Mediterranean Basin of skills, artistic design or even the artisans. But, although the artistic traditions of the Iberian Peninsula were, like the rest of Western Europe, modelled on the legacy of Antiquity and the Roman Empire, the natural isolation caused by mountains and sea was unmatched by the rest of Western Europe. This isolation was compounded by the occupation of most of the peninsula by a rich, but non-
Christian culture from the VIII century. The Visigoth styles proved to be remarkably resilient when fostered by the Mozarab immigrants to the Northern kingdoms. From the XI century the international or external movement was predominantly from France (though from parts of France that were not united politically or culturally to France). This dominance was to have an increasingly significant impact so that by the XII century it had largely overwhelmed the indigenous cultural developments; these largely disappeared from sight. The indigenous elements that were so evident in the IX century were the result of influences that had been put into a cultural melting pot: the heritage from the Greco-Roman settlements, the inputs from Byzantium and the East Mediterranean and Islamic culture that came initially out of North Africa with the Moorish conquest of Spain but which was to include strands that led back to Syria and the Moslem heartlands. The French artistic style, which was to create a certain cultural unity, was to remain dominant for a further century before there was a resurgence of the Spanish artistic traditions. The other feature of the developments from the end of the Roman period through to Gothic is that there were no clear breaks. The transitions from one style were gradual with each phase of development drawing on the heritage left by the earlier artists.

Annex

Churches of Spain Illustrated in the Text (in order)

Romano-Hispanic
Centcelles, Tarragona
Empurias, Girona
Fraga, Aragon

Paleo-Christian /Visigoth
Barcelona

Visigoth
São Gião de Nazaré, Portugal
San Juan de Baños, Palencia
Santa María de Melque, Toledo
Santa María de Quintanilla de las Viños, Burgos
San Pedro de la Nave, Zamora
El Salvador, Toledo
Terrassa, Catalonia
Sant Pau, Barcelona

Asturian

San Julián de los Prados
San Tirso, Oviedo
Santa María del Naranco
San Miguel de Lillo
Santa Cristina de Lena
Priesca
San Salvador, Valdediós

Mozarab

San Miguel de Escalada, León
San Cebrián de Mazote, Valladolid
Santiago de Peñalba, León
Sant Julia de Boada, Girona
Sant Quirze de Pedret, Barcelona
Santa María la Blanca (former synagogue), Toledo

Pre-Romanesque

Trejuvell, Catalonia

Early Romanesque

Sant Pere de Rodes, Girona
Sant Vicenç, Cardona, Barcelona
Sant Jaume de Frontanyà, Barcelona
Cathedral, Vic, Barcelona
Sant Climent, Taull, Lleida
Santa María, Toro, Zamora
San Salvador, Leyre, Navarre
San Juan de la Peña, Aragon
San Juan de Busa, Huesca, Aragon
Mudéjar

Samboal, Valladolid
Iscar, Valladolid
Santiago de Arrobal, Toledo
Santo Tomé, Toledo

Pilgrimage

Santiago de Compostella, Galicia
San Gil, Luna, Aragon
San Martín de Frómista, Palencia
San Isidoro, León
Cirauqui, Navarre
Santiago, Puente la Reina, Navarre

Romanesque

Sant Pere de Galligans, Girona
Sant Pere, Besalú, Girona
Ripoll, Girona
Sant Joan de les Abadesses, Girona
L’Estany, Barcelona
Santa María de Covet, Lleida
De Vajello de Mena, Burgos
Siones, Burgos
Santo Domingo, Soria
Omeñaca, Soria
San Estaban de Gormaz, Soria
San Martín, Segovia
Cathedral, Zamora
Catedral Vieja, Salamanca
Elea de los Caballeros, Zaragoza
Santiago de Agüero, Zaragoza
Santo Domingo de Silos, Burgos
San Juan de Duero, Soria
Santillana del Mar, Cantabria

Transition to Gothic
Cathedral, Tarragona
Gandesa, Lleida
Santa Creus, Tarragona
Poblet, Tarragona
Cathedral, Zaragoza
Cathedral, Valencia
Agramunt, Lleida

References Consulted:

‘Early Christian Symbols in Great Britain and Ireland’, R Romilly Allen. 1887 reprinted 2004
http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_mozarabs_their_architecture_and_art.pdf
http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/the_horseshoe_arch.pdf

10.10.2012