

2017

## Review of Peter Reed, Church Architecture in Early Medieval Spain c. 700–c. 1100

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### Recommended Citation

D'Emilio, James (2017) "Review of Peter Reed, Church Architecture in Early Medieval Spain c. 700–c. 1100," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1268>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol42/iss2/8>

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**Reed, Peter. *Church Architecture in Early Medieval Spain c. 700–c. 1100*. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2016. lxiv + 448 pp. 50 color plates + 614 B&W photographs, drawings, plans, and maps.**

Peter Reed's book on early medieval church architecture in Spain is a beautifully produced work on buildings less studied outside Spain than contemporary churches elsewhere in Europe. As an architect, Reed describes forms, spaces, and construction with a sharp eye, often identifying and explaining perplexing anomalies. He is sensitive to how architects and builders solved problems of structure, interior space, and illumination in the realization of their designs. He also addresses the challenges of fragmentary or radically restored churches that have suffered poorly documented medieval and modern alterations. The author supplies a generous set of high-quality photographs, but the most complex interiors, like San Miguel de Liño or Sant Pere de Rodes, may still befuddle non-specialist readers.

Reed divides the book, chronologically and geographically, in four parts. The first ("Visigothic, Asturian and Repopulation/Mozarabic") treats peninsular buildings outside Catalonia from the seventh century through the tenth. The shorter second section ("Pre-Romanesque in Catalonia") turns to Catalan buildings of that period, including the cluster of churches at Terrassa—variously dated from the sixth century to the tenth, smaller churches of the tenth-century repopulation, and the great abbeys of Sant Miquel de Cuixà and Sant Pere de Rodes. The third—and longest—section ("Catalonian 'First' Romanesque") examines nearly forty eleventh-century Catalan churches, major and minor, of the "First Romanesque Style," and he includes the excavated remains of cathedrals replaced by later structures. The shorter concluding section ("Catalonia and the Romanesque") takes a broader international view by placing the Catalan buildings in the context of eleventh- and early twelfth-century architecture in the Holy Roman Empire and the western Iberian realms. Ambitiously, Reed breaks traditional chronological and geographic boundaries by including "pre-Romanesque" groups (Visigothic, Asturian, Mozarabic) in a study that spans Iberia and extends to the eleventh- and twelfth-century flowering of Romanesque architecture.

For historians, the detailed architectural descriptions may be daunting and the lack of a larger historical vision disappointing. While patrons, liturgy, and religious significance are regularly mentioned, Reed focuses resolutely on the architecture itself. The author's historical references rest heavily on more general studies like those of Roger Collins, Peter Linehan, and Bernard Reilly, with less use of the most recent or more specialized bibliography. Indeed, his engagement with art historical literature, particularly outside the field of the Catalan churches, is selective and incomplete.

In fairness, a historical synthesis is not easily fashioned from this material, as is evident from the pre-Romanesque churches of the first section. Dates for the few standing buildings widely deemed Visigothic (e.g., San Juan de Baños, San Pedro de la Nave) have nearly all been questioned by Luis Caballero Zoreda and others who tie them to tenth-century resettlement. Even the better-documented Asturian buildings have had their attributions to one or another king disputed. Debates over the sources of this surprisingly varied ensemble echo wider discussions about the contacts of the kingdom of Oviedo with Carolingian Europe, its evocation of a Roman and Visigothic past, and its response to Muslim rivals. Reed surveys these issues, but the term "eclectic" might helpfully be

applied to buildings, culture, and ideology in the kingdom. Tenth-century churches (e.g. San Miguel de Escalada, San Cebrián de Mazote) may be more securely dated and contextualized by documents, but arguments over labels (“Mozarabic” vs. “Art of the Repopulation”) reflect a deeper ideological divide over what Umayyad culture meant to the Astur-Leonese kingdom, and what that culture, in turn, had appropriated from the Visigothic heritage—the shared “cultural substratum” (110) Isidro Bango has invoked. José Camón Aznar’s cited reference to the art of “colonists” from Córdoba as that of a “hostile civilization” (106) makes clear the ideological stakes, but those lie beyond this volume’s scope.

In the end, surviving pre-Romanesque buildings, outside Asturias and Catalonia, are too few, too scattered, and perhaps too minor and idiosyncratic to allow us to generalize and to distinguish recognized norms from meaningful departures. Besides, these churches lack the documentation and ample historical and religious literature of early medieval Italy, Carolingian Europe, or Anglo-Saxon England. I do not mean to privilege textual culture over buildings, but some questions historians would like to answer may simply be unanswerable.

The Catalan churches to which Reed dedicates over half the work are situated in a small geographic area. (A detailed map of these churches and the region’s topography is sorely needed!) Often dependent on closely related aristocratic families, these churches were built and renovated from the late tenth century through the eleventh by builders with a shared repertoire of construction and design. Reed highlights Sant Vicenç de Cardona as a classic paradigm of this “First Romanesque” style and as a monument he praises as “rationalist” for its internal logic and the ways in which the structural system was envisioned and made clear from the very foundations. Wisely, he does not make Cardona a standard against which others are judged, although he emphasizes its precocity and likely debt to Italian models known through the travels of the abbot and bishop Oliba. For all of these remarkable buildings, Reed is attentive to the circumstances that shaped successive campaigns or the adaptation of earlier structures, and he appreciates their full diversity of groundplans, interior elevations, spatial arrangements, coverings in wood and stone, and constructional techniques. To his credit, he deals judiciously with the thorny problems posed by reconstructions—whether physical or imaginative—of buildings that fell into disrepair in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The strength of this section—and of the entire book—lies in the author’s meticulous descriptions and astute observations of architectural detail, but these also expose a flaw. I regret that the author did not opt for a monographic catalog and offer more summary descriptions in a shorter text, organized around key themes and issues and building up to his final “revaluation of Catalanian First Romanesque” (366). These topics might have included some he chose to address in excursions which typically relate the Iberian buildings to other sites and regions (the Mosque of Córdoba, the “First Romanesque” of Italy, imperial Germany, and domed churches). A more concise text might also have brought together and developed selected architectural issues easily overlooked within each description: the problems posed by separate architectural campaigns, for example, or the handling of key areas like the transept and transition between nave and choir. This might have clarified such matters for non-specialists and made stronger connections among the diverse buildings he now presents one after another. Moreover, producing a catalog would have encouraged greater standardization

of descriptions, making them more compact and easier to follow and compare.

Notwithstanding this criticism, this hefty volume leaves a reader with an appreciation of the author's achievement in a lifetime of careful study of remote buildings that pose an array of challenges. To those who devote the necessary time to it, Reed's book is an invitation to carry forward investigations on specific buildings and architectural issues, and on the larger questions of the place of these Iberian buildings in the landscape of early medieval architecture, Mediterranean-wide exchanges, and the purposeful appropriation of the legacy of ancient Rome.

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