Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude

Essays on Cistercians, Art and Architecture in Honour of Peter Fergusson

Edited by Terryl N. Kinder

Brepols | Cîteaux
The Cistercians and the Romanesque Churches of Galicia: Compostela or Clairvaux?*

JAMES D’EMILIO

Galicia was the first region of Iberia settled by Cistercians (Fig. 1), and the establishment of monks from Clairvaux at Sobrado in 1142 was followed by new foundations at Meira (ca. 1151–54) and Melón (ca. 1154). By the end of the century, existing communities at Montederramo (ca. 1155–63), Armenteira (ca. 1162), Oia (ca. 1185), and Oseira had been directly affiliated to Clairvaux, and the Galician monasteries soon created their own daughter houses. When the expansion of the Order had ended, Galicia could claim thirteen communities for men and one for women; all belonged to the family of Clairvaux except for Penamaior, a member of the congregation of Carracedo which was affiliated with Citeaux (ca. 1200–03).

These monasteries enjoyed the patronage of the Galician nobility. Some favoured individual houses which sheltered aging kin and guarded family tombs. Thus, the powerful Traba family were founders and benefactors of Sobrado where one of the founders, Vermudo Pérez, professed in his old age. Count Alvaro Rodríguez of Sarria and his wife, Sancha Fernández, endowed Meira, and a document refers

* I am grateful for the generous support of the George A. and Eliza Gardner Howard Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, the Edilia and François-Auguste de Montéquinius Senior Fellowship in Iberian and Latin American Architecture awarded by the Society of Architectural Historians, and the Research Council and College of Arts and Sciences of the University of South Florida. I also acknowledge the kind collaboration of diocesan authorities, parish priests, monastic communities, and villagers. Finally, I am honoured to pay tribute to Peter Ferguson whose work on the Cistercians in England is an inspiration and a challenge for those of us who toll in Iberian fields.


2. Portela Silva has argued for a late affiliation for Oseira (1184–91): La Colonización cisterciense, p. 49–52; for a date between 1148 and 1151 or earlier, see José Carlos Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura cisterciense en Galicia, 2 vols (La Coruña, 1982), t. p. 95–97; Miguel Romani, El monasterio cisterciense de Santa María de Oseira (Ourense): estudio histórico (1137–1310) (Santiago de Compostela, 1989), p. 11–20. The uncertainty clouding such dates is a sign that affiliations were less clear-cut and, sometimes, more contested than later accounts might suggest.


The Cistercians and the Romanesque Churches of Galicia: Compostela or Clairvaux? 313
to the funeral of one of their sons, Vermudo Alvarez, majordomo of King Ferdinand II, at the abbey in 1187.\textsuperscript{5} Others, like Fronilde Fer-

\textsuperscript{5} Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional (henceforth AHN), Clero, carp. 1128, no. 5. On the patronage of the founders and their family, see Valle Pérez, \textit{La Arquitectura cisterciense}, 1, p. 153–54.

and her donation to Armenteira in 1162 likely coincided with its affiliation to the Cistercians. She also made a grant to Meira and, in 1175, subjected her own nunnery of Ferreira de Pantón to that house.

Countess Fronilide had married Rodrigo Pérez de Traba, a half-brother of the founders of Sobrado, and such marriages wove networks of patronage that sustained Cistercian communities across Iberia. The family of the founders of Meira exemplifies this pattern. Countess Aldonza Rodríguez, the sister of Count Alvaro, wed a Castilian count, López Díaz de Haro. Widowed in 1170, the countess entered the nunnery the couple had founded at Cañas in the Rioja, and subsequently made gifts to Meira and to the Cistercian monastery of Sandoval and nunnery of Gráfedes in León. Three of her daughters would govern the Cistercian nunneries of Cañas, San Andrés de Arroyo, and Vileña. Their cousin, Count Rodrigo Alvarez of Sarria, supported his parents' foundation at Meira, and married María Ponce, a daughter of the founders of Sandoval. Together, they granted an estate to Gráfedes, and, once he organized the military Order of Montjoy, his wife joined the Cistercian nunnery her mother had established at Carrizo and eventually became its abbess.

The local aristocracy were the foremost patrons of the Galician houses, but they also profited from royal grants and privileges, particularly as the Leonese kings sought to ensure the loyalty of their nobles and enlist Cistercian support in the complex political manoeuvring that characterized the Christian kingdoms of late-twelfth-century Iberia. The noble founders of Sobrado and Meira had received those sites from the crown, and their foundations won swift approval from King Alfonso VII. Oia and Melón lay near the disputed border with Portugal, and charters were forged to portray Queen Teresa of Portugal and her son, King Afonso Henriques, as founders of the earliest community at Montederramo. The strategic importance of Melón led King Ferdinand II to grant at least eight privileges to the community.

At the end of the century, the gifts of King Alfonso IX to Cistercian houses across León coincided with his efforts to overcome papal opposition, first, to his marriage to Princess Teresa of Portugal in 1191 and his participation with the Almohades in a coalition against Castile, then to his incestuous union with Princess Berenguela of Castile in 1197. Between 1191 and 1193, Meira, Melón, and Sobrado received a total of eight gifts from the King; more were awarded to Cistercian houses in Galicia between July 1200 and February 1202 during the effort to persuade Pope Innocent III to accept the Castilian marriage. This was the context, too, for the entry of Cîteaux into Galicia, as the Leonese king countered the acceptance of the Castilian royal nunnery of Las Huelgas as a "special daughter" of Cîteaux in 1199 by urging the affiliation of Carracedo and its ample congregation.

The Cistercians soon joined the highest ecclesiastical circles of Galicia. The Abbots of Sobrado and Melón met the papal legate, Cardinal Hyacinth, in 1154, and the Cistercians quickly solicited papal privileges, setting an example


9. The founders of Sobrado acknowledge the King's support and allure to the earlier gift in the foundation charter, published in Portela Silva, La Colonización cisterciense, p. 154–55. For the royal gift of 1151 to Count Alvaro Rodríguez, see ibid., p. 157; the privilege Meira received from King Alfonso VII in 1154 is in Manrique, Cisterci-... annudium, t. i, p. 456.


11. Ibid., t. p. 208–09.


for other Galician monasteries. Cistercian monasteries typically occupied the jurisdictional wastelands near diocesan boundaries, and initially, most steered clear of the conflicts that had pitted older monasteries against Galician sees as a territorial episcopate consolidated its authority in the wake of the eleventh-century reforms. In fact, there is some evidence that the Cistercians nurtured a broader movement of monastic reform, mediating conflicts for other communities and encouraging an aristocratic piety that found expression in the success of the military Orders as well. The Cistercians entered fully into the religious life of the Galician countryside, adapting to entrenched traditions and introducing new ways. In a region where the proprietary church system remained strong, gifts to the Cistercians included numerous parish churches and rights of patronage. The monasteries accepted these arrangements, leasing shares of churches to laymen and reaching agreements with them over the appointment of clerics. In other instances, they founded churches that competed with existing parishes for tithes and burial rights. A document of 1275, for example, describes a dispute between Sobrado and the villagers of Cambás over the monks’ insistence that villagers receive the sacraments and pay tithes and parochial dues at the new church the monks had constructed. In a more ambitious venture to populate the rugged mountains of northeastern Galicia, Abbot Heymericus of Meira issued eleven charters to groups of settlers between 1238 and 1262.

Early charters demonstrate that the monastic scriptoria pioneered the use of the Caroline script at a time when local parish priests and village scribes still clung to the Visigothic script. That a knight would seek a liturgical book for a parish church in return for an estate he gave to Sobrado offers one tantalizing hint of broader patterns of activity. Through the foreign monks who dominated the early abbeys and the descendants of Muslim slaves who served them as artisans and bailiffs, the Cistercian communities brought a range of new cultural practices to the Galician countryside.

Buildings, however, were the most visible — and enduring — monuments of the Cistercian patrimonio de Oseira: derechos sobre iglesias rurales (1155–1306), in Actas. Congreso Internacional sobre San Bernardino e o Cister, i, p. 167–88.


16. For the proprietary church system in Galicia, see James D’Emilio, “Los Documentos medievales como fuentes para el estudio de las parroquias e iglesias gallegas: el distrito de Monte de Meda (Lugo)”, Cuadernos de estudios gallegos, 43.108 (1996), p. 57–95 (p. 68–79). For the rights Oseira acquired over parish churches, see María de las Nieves Pérez Graner and María José Portela Silva, “El
presence. From the third quarter of the twelfth century through the middle of the thirteenth, large churches and extensive dependencies rose on a scale seldom seen in Galicia. Despite baroque reconstructions and losses resulting from the secularization of the nineteenth century, the early churches of Meira, Oseira, Oia, and Armontela stand nearly intact, and the choir of Melón is well preserved. In addition, Xunqueira de Espadañedo and San Clodio offer more traditional buildings constructed after affiliations with Galician abbeys. Finally, continuing investigations have yielded modest remains of the medieval churches at Sobrado, Montederramo, and Monfero and contributed to plausible reconstructions of their plans.

These projects had a pervasive effect on the surrounding countryside, but no simple notion of artistic influence does justice to the diversity and complexity of the dynamic exchanges between the abbeys and rural churches. The Cistercian buildings dwarfed most Galician churches. Consequently, builders of typical Galician parish churches with single-cell, wooden-roofed naves and small vaulted chancels could hardly embrace the architectural innovations introduced by the Cistercians. Middle-sized monastic buildings did offer some scope for such features. The rib-vaulted crossings at the monastery of Bremo and the church of the military Order of Santiago at Vilar de Donas have been plausibly understood as reflections of the crossing at Meira, but these are exceptional cases. Most often, it is in the spare decoration of Galician churches that responses to the Cistercians can most profitably be considered.

Church construction increased sharply in rural Galicia in the last third of the twelfth century and the first quarter of the next when the region formed part of an independent kingdom of León and Santiago de Compostela held a privileged position in that realm. Nonetheless, many rural craftsmen adhered to artistic vocabularies drawn from early-twelfth-century work at Santiago cathedral, sometimes mediated by the mid-century projects at the cathedrals of Tui and Lugo. Boldly carved figures and foliage lent a rich plasticity to the corbels of the eaves and the capitals of portals, shafted windows, and chancel arches. Well-rounded mouldings on bases and arches, billeted string courses and hood arches, the foliate sprays of impost, and, less commonly, carved reliefs on tympana and metopes completed the decoration of these churches.

Alongside the well-established traditions of Compostela and the Hispano–Languedocian “school” to which it belonged, new artistic vocabularies arrived in Galicia in the last third of the twelfth century. The completion of Santiago cathedral, the decoration of its west porch and stone choir, and the building of Ourense cathedral introduced an architectural and sculptural repertory that reflected current developments in Burgundy and the Ile-de-France. This style, commonly associated with Master Mateo of Compostela, included use of rib vaults and column statues, as well as capitals cloaked with lush acanthus and delicately carved figures, arched corbel tables profusely ornamented with carved metopes and decorated soffits, saucer-shaped mouldings on bases, plinths with sunken arcades, and a liberal display of cusping. The characteristic acanthus leaves with drilled grooves, beaded ribs, and deeply carved lobes with frilled or spiked edges were quickly adapted for corbel tables, arches, impost, and string courses.

Cistercian builders shared a basic vocabulary of architectural elements and mouldings with

22. For Cistercian architecture in Galicia, see Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura cisterciense; Arte de Cister en Portugal e Galiza/Arte del Cister en Galicia y Portugal, ed. Jorge Rodríguez and Xosé Carlos Valle Pérez (Lisbon/La Coruña, 1998).

23. For reconstruction of the so-called Bernardine plan of Clairaun II at Sobrado, see Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura cisterciense, 1, p. 66–71; for Montederramo, see id., "Sobre los restos aparecidos recientemente en la iglesia de Montederramo (Ourense)", in Actas del II Coláquio Galácico-Minhoto, Santiago de Compostela, 14–16 abril de 1984, 2 vols (Santiago de Compostela, 1985), ii, p. 169–78.


the Matean craftsmen, due to their own familiarity with contemporary work in Burgundy and the Île-de-France, but they chose sculptural forms more suited to their austerely decorated buildings. Corbels repeated simple prows, superposed planes, and geometric motifs. Some capitals lacked sculpture entirely or limited it to plain leaves that barely broke the profile of the basket. Interlacing ribbons and foliate sprays accented other capitals, imposts, or hood arches. Easily reproduced, such forms were adopted throughout the Galician countryside, and the taste they represented led rural craftsmen to rethink their approach to long-established practices.

Specific connections between Cistercian abbeys and rural churches were determined, partly, by the place of individual abbeys in the artistic geography of the region. Montederramo, Oia, and Armenteira made relatively small contributions to local architecture, for each was geographically marginal. Montederramo stood isolated in the mountains of southeastern Galicia. Oia faced the Atlantic, penned between the ocean and thinly populated hills. Beyond them, the nearby cathedral of Tui had furnished training and inspiration for builders of numerous village churches before the Cistercians arrived. Its vigorously carved capitals and abundant variety of human and animal figures posed the stiffest challenge to the Cistercian aesthetic. For its part, Armenteira had the smallest of the churches in the direct affiliates of Clairvaux; its impact was also constrained by its place on a peninsula in a district of the archdiocese of Santiago where craftsmen familiar with the cathedral had been active for a generation. An assessment of responses to these buildings is further complicated by the nearly complete rejection of sculpture at Oia, the limited scale and decoration of the church at Armenteira, and the loss of the medieval buildings at Montederramo.

The most complex and fruitful artistic exchanges involved the more centrally located abbeys of Sobrado and Meira in the north, and Melón and Oseira in the south. Each was established near diocesan boundaries, and in each pair of monasteries, the surviving architecture and decoration reveals the close collaboration of their builders. The choir at Melón has commonly been regarded as a reduced version of that at Oseira, and the two churches share distinctive foliate capitals and ornament. At Sobrado, few traces remain of a church that adopted the Bernardine plan and likely kept sculptural ornament to a minimum. Whether there were connections with the varied foliate capitals of the earliest work in the eastern chapels at Meira can only be conjectured. On several pieces at Sobrado, however, including some from the chapterhouse, the ribbons, pelletted stems, and simple leaves tipped with balls and buds of various types resemble the decoration of capitals of the nave and portals in the second campaign at Meira (Figs 2, 3). By the end of the twelfth century, the two projects shared a repertory of ornament that would also be employed in the remodelling of the chapterhouse of the newly affiliated house at Carracedo in the neighbouring region of the Bierzo.

In the large and sparsely settled parishes surrounding Meira and Sobrado, there is little evidence of earlier Romanesque building, and in some districts the prevalence of slate and schist discouraged ashlar construction or sculptural decoration. With little competition from other traditions, it is not surprising that several nearby churches offer relatively straightforward artistic connections with the abbeys. The portal capitals at Valonga, for example, match pieces at Meira, and, in the vicinity of Sobrado, clusters of churches within twelve kilometres of the abbey present variations on capitals with palmettes hanging from beaded stems that are interlaced, clasped, or knotted together (Figs 2, 4). Such capitals recur at Verís, just nine kilometres south of Monfero, a monastery which was affiliated to Sobrado at the beginning of


29. These include the churches of Dormeá, Os Anxeles, Carelle, Silvela, Rocha, and Anafeira.
the thirteenth century. The medieval buildings at Monfero were almost wholly replaced in the baroque period, but the capitals at Veris are a clue to the role of craftsmen from Sobrado or Meira at the nearby site. Their work at Monfero likely explains the lingering echo on the doorway of the fourteenth-century chapel of San Antón de Mántaras (Fig. 5) of one of the hallmark capitals of the eastern chapels at Meira (Fig. 6): a piece of northern French ancestry with paired palmettes and clasped stems (Fig. 7).

Further away, displacement of craftsmen from the abbeys was more purposeful. Near the end of the twelfth century, Gutierre Rodríguez de Castro and his wife, Countess Elvira Osóriz,

---

30. For the affiliation of Monfero, Manrique gave a date of 1201, and the monastery’s earliest mention in the General Chapters was in 1207: Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura asturiana, i., p.84, n. 68. More recently, José Luis López Sangil, “Un problema resuelto: La Fundación del Monasterio de Santa María de Monfero, los privilegios de Alfonso VII y su filiación al Cister”, Estudios Mundiastens, 13 (1997), p.621–83.

gave the monastery of San Fiz de Incio and other estates to the Hospitallers. 32 This important grant specified that the Hospitallers' possessions throughout Lemos, between the Lor and Miño rivers, should be part of one commandery with Incio. The donors arranged to be buried at the church and obliged the Hospitallers to maintain three priests there. A more splendid temple was evidently under construction or contemplated, for the sanction imposed a penalty of two hundred gold pieces, earmarked for the works, if the Hospitallers baulked at the agreement. 33

Incio lies more than sixty kilometres south of Meira, but the scale and importance of the project demanded craftsmen trained at a major site. 34

32. Libro de Privilegios de la Orden de San Juan de Jerusalem en Castilla y León (siglos XIII-XV), ed. Carlos de Ayala Martínez (Madrid, 1995), p. 412-13. In the 15th-century cartulary, the charter is dated 1210 in the Spanish Era (1172 AD). Part of the date is missing, since the presence of Count Gómez and the naming of King Alfonso of León place it between 1188 and 1209 AD. Gutiérrez Rodríguez disappeared from Leonese royal documents after 1194, making an earlier date most likely, though the simplest amendment would change Era MCCX to Era MCCXL (1202 AD) with a title.

33. “si fratres istud impliere noluerint, parentes nostri habeant potestatem constringendi eos et pugniantur penam ducentorum aureorum qui mittantur in opere ecclesie Santi Felicis de Unitio.”

The role of craftsmen from Meira explains the massive stepped buttresses. In addition, they reproduced the capital with palmettes and clasped stems from the eastern chapels at Meira (Figs 6, 8), transferred the candelabra of the south tympanum (Fig. 9) to a capital (Fig. 10), and carved two respond capitals, loosely based on a type in the nave, with grooved or pelleted ribs and balls. A local workforce simplified the palmette and ribbon capitals at Incio and copied these versions at Samos, Castro de Rei de Lemos, Cervela, and Friolfe.

More intriguing is the choice of chevron to hood the arch and line the jambs of the west portal at Incio. Chevron was rare in Galicia and it seems plausible to credit its use at Incio to the foreign builders from Meira, even though they withheld it from the austerely decorated abbey.  

35. An isolated use of chevron at Bembibre—a church with an inscription of 1191—may indicate knowledge of the work at Sarria or Incio, offering a clue to its date; D'Emilio, "Romanesque Architectural Sculpture", p. 208-16; id., "The Romanesque Churches", p. 563. Elsewhere in Iberia, wide use of chevron among the Cistercians (e.g., Moreruela, Huerta, San Andrés de Arroyo, Valledios, and Gradeles), particularly in claustral dependencies, led to its adoption in local churches.

36. Santa Mariña was reconstructed between 1883 and 1885, but descriptions and drawings record the chevron: Antonio López Ferreiro, Leciones de arqueología sagrada (Santiago de Compostela, 1894), p. 68, 70; Angel del Castillo, "Pórtico de Santa María de Sarria", Boletín de la Real Academia Gallega, 1 (1906), p. 188.

37. Count Alvaro Rodríguez died between November 1166 and 20 January 1167. Rodrigo Alvarez was titled Count of Sarria on 15 July 1167; Barton, The Aristoocracy, p. 230, 290; Julio González, Regesta de Fernando II (Madrid, 1943), p. 392-95.

38. Vermudo Alvarez was described as "dominans in Sarria" in a royal charter of 1181 and "tenente Sarria" in a private document of 1187; José Luis Martín, Orígenes de la Orden Militar de Santiago (1171-1195) (Barcelona, 1974), p. 309-10; AHN, Clero, carp. 13250, no. 24. He held Limia (1185-87) and served as royal majordomo (1186-87): González, Fernando II, p. 501, 504-13.
and the extinction of the male line of the Counts of Sarria in the 1180s, the county was eclipsed by other tenancies and passed to various nobles. Initially, Meira suffered as well: in 1184, King Ferdinand II responded to the depredations of the local nobility by confirming the immunities and reserve of the abbey.

Among the signatories of the royal privilege was Gutierre Rodríguez de Castro, titled, significantly, as “dominans in Monte Nigro et Sarra et Lemos”. He was only named as tenant of Sarria in two other royal diplomas, and he occasionally appeared as tenant of neighbouring Lemos (1182–85, 1194) where his descendants held sway in the thirteenth century. Gutierre Rodríguez consolidated his power in the district by acquiring properties once held by the family of the former counts, continuing their religious patronage, and, finally, setting up his family pantheon at Incio. In fact, when Countess Sancha Fernández and her sons ceded an estate in Lemos to Gutierre Rodríguez and Countess Elvira in 1181, shortly before her death, she stipulated that he should be like a good son to her and a brother to her sons. Gutierre Rodríguez made a gift to Meira in 1186, and Countess Elvira, who had important holdings in the district, joined in this patronage: her family’s nunnery at Pantón had been given to Meira in 1175, and she surrendered her own shares in 1182.

By choosing the Hospitallers as guardians of their tombs, Gutierre Rodríguez and Countess Elvira were following their families’ well-established tradition of patronage. In 1183, the couple themselves had made a pact with the Order, receiving two Leonese houses and seeking burial in one of their cemeteries. Their choice also mirrored a larger pattern, as Galician nobles turned towards the military Orders in the 1170s and 1180s. In 1178, Countess Sancha Fernández, founder of Meira, had pledged to be buried in a Hospitaller house, and Countess Fronilde Fernández, a longstanding patron of the Cistercians, made a gift to the Hospitallers as well.

The career of Count Gómez González de Traba, the leading nobleman in Galicia at the end of the century, typifies the close relations among the Cistercians, military Orders, and Galician nobility. The count accumulated tenancies in the region, including the county of Sarria, in the 1180s and 1190s. In 1184, he followed the example of his sister, Urraca González, and her husband, Count Froila Ramírez, with a large donation to the Hospitallers. He added gifts to Meira and Sobrado, mediated an agreement between Sobrado and

39. The last known reference to the Countess is in 1181: Barton, The Aristocracy, p. 230, n. 3. For subsequent tenants of Sarria, see González, Alfonso IX, t. p. 358.


41. He was tenant of Sarria in 1183 and January 1184: ibid., p. 323–25, 487, 493–94; for his tenancy of Lemos, see ibid., p. 188, 484–96, 500–01; González, Alfonso IX, t. p. 353–54; n. 131–32; Libro de Privilegios de la Orden de San Juan, p. 363–64; on his career and that of his son, Fernán Gutiérrez, and grandsons, Andrés and Esteban Fernández, see Eduardo Pardo de Guevara y Valdés, Los Señores de Galicia: Tenentes y condes de Lemos en la edad media, 2 vols (La Coruña, 2000), t. p. 96–122.

42. For his acquisition of properties once held by Count Rodrigo Alvarez, see El Timbro de San Julián de Sanes, p. 428–29.

43. “Do ubiis pro tali condizione que a mili et ad filios meos sedeatis quomodo bono filio a bona madre et ad ceos filios quomodo bonos germanos per bona fide”: AHN, Clero, carp. 1127, no. 14.

44. For the gift to Meira, see AHN, Códices, 114B (Timbro de Meira), fol. 42. For the cession of Pantón, repeated with her daughter in 1197, see Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Santa María de Ferreiras de Pantón, ed. José Ignacio Fernández de Viana y Vieites (Lugo, 1994), p. 57–58; AHN, Códices, 114B, fol. 335v.


49. For the gifts of Count Froila Ramírez and Urraca González in 1182, see Barquero Goñi, ‘Los Hospitalleros en el reino de León’, p. 550–52. Count Froila made another gift in 1184: AHN, Órdenes Militares/San Juan Castilla, carp. 574, no. 15. The date of the gift of Count Gómez may be read at 1184 or 1187: AHN, Órdenes Militares/San Juan Castilla, legajo 89, no. 194.
the Hospitallers in 1186, and may have been instrumental in his sister's settlement of a conflict with Meira in 1189.\footnote{50}

If a web of noble patronage brought craftsmen from Meira to Sarria and Incio in the last quarter of the twelfth century, the artistic bonds that linked Meira, Sarria, the Hospitallers' church at Incio, and surrounding churches cast light on how the Cistercians reshaped local artistic traditions, and how local craftsmen responded to their work. Adored bicornate lions, for example, decorate two capitals at Incio and one on the chancel arch of San Salvador de Vilar de Sarria (Fig. 12).\footnote{51} The latter bears a broad rectangular abacus with geometric decoration, like several early capitals at Meira (Fig. 6). Further, two capitals at Vilar de Sarria exhibit tall, superposed leaves that cling to the base and remain unadorned. These typically Cistercian capitals confirm the debt to Meira where such pieces were introduced at the east end and dominated the nave.

Though popular elsewhere in Europe, adored bicornate lions are rare enough in Galicia to warrant attributing their isolated appearance at Incio and Sarria, like that of chevron, to the foreign craftsmen of Meira. A local source may have encouraged adoption of the motif: bicornate lions were carved at San Martín de Mondoñedo, an ancient monastery and the seat of the diocese of Mondoñedo until the twelfth century.\footnote{52} Craftsmen from Meira certainly had ties with Mondoñedo; the characteristic palmette capitals of the abbey were reproduced in the new cathedral begun in the early thirteenth century. It is possible, however, that earlier ties between Mondoñedo and Incio suggested the use of the bicornate lions. The sculptors of San Martín de Mondoñedo worked at the beginning of the twelfth century when widely scattered projects in Galicia depended on itinerant craftsmen. They contributed to the decoration of the church of Rebolán in Tui, and the style of a relief of the crucifixion unearthed at Incio itself hints at their participation in an earlier project there.\footnote{53} The legacy of their work in the district may well have supplied immediate models for the bicornate lions carved at Incio and Vilar de Sarria two generations later, and their association with the most venerable monastic traditions of Galicia would have recommended their acceptance.\footnote{54}


51. The motif recurs at Froiole and Bande, and it persisted in Sarria, reappearing on the Gothic portal of San Salvador de Sarria alongside the tympanum derived from Meira.


This is necessarily speculative, but these craftsmen did look critically at the contemporary decoration of churches in the Compostelan tradition. The apse of the nunnery of Ferreira de Pantón is one of the most lavishly carved monuments of that tradition in Galicia.\(^{55}\) It was built between 1158 and 1175 under the patronage of Countess Fronilde Fernández who gave the nunnery to Meira in 1175.\(^{56}\) Plans for a crossing tower were abandoned and the spare, single-cell nave and simple west doorway must have followed the acceptance of Cistercian norms. Countess Elvira Osóriz was one of the lay proprietors of the convent, so it is no surprise that the builders of her church at Incio reproduced the design of a capital used at Pantón (Fig. 13). Nonetheless, the craftsmen at Incio bowed to Cistercian taste, devising a more sober version of the capital with volutes pegged to the leaves below (Fig. 14). The unruly, sprawling leaves were tamed, and the undercutting was reduced; the surface decoration of the leaves was scrubbed clean, and their thick clasps thinned to threadlike strands.

The pegged volute capital reappeared in surrounding churches with other pieces that reflected the experiences of local craftsmen who worked with those from Meira at Incio and Sarria. Among these smaller churches, those of Frío and Cervela make ample use of traditional billetted ornament on hood arches. Billetting was almost invisible at Incio, but its discreet appearance on a plinth and two corbels demonstrates that craftsmen could carve the motif with precision. In fact, its occurrence in such unorthodox settings highlights, by contrast, its absence from the expected places, surely a result of the careful scrutiny of local artistic practices by the craftsmen from Meira who oversaw the project.

The example of Hospital de Incio is a telling one because it shows how patronage and the demands of a large-scale project led foreign craftsmen from Cistercian abbeys to travel considerable distances to execute and direct important projects and share a repertory of decoration. The contribution of the Cistercians went beyond the repetition of this or that motif in local churches. At Incio, new forms like chevron made their debut, older ones like the biciporate lions were revived, and familiar ones like billets were deliberately excluded. Local craftsmen, in turn, transformed new motifs and tailored their own vocabularies to the instruc-

---


56. Countess Fronilde was widowed in 1158 (Barton, The Aristocracy, p. 297), and a 17th-century historian recorded her construction of the convent in that year (“San Salvador de Ferreyra, fábrica de la Condessa doña Froyla Fernández por la Era de 1196” (1158 AD)); Antonio de Yepes, Crónica general de la Orden de San Benito [, , , ] 7 vols (Valladolid, 1609–21), viii, p. 328.
tions of the craftsmen from Meira. A degree of uncertainty must surround these examples, for we are looking beyond clear — and simple — chains of transmission of individual motifs to catch glimpses of the discussions and decisions provoked by the new artistic vocabularies of the Cistercians and their novel approach to architectural decoration.

The complex exchanges that took place at Incio were more commonplace in central Galicia where the monasteries of Oseira and Melón anchored a densely populated district that abounded in parish churches, convents, and monasteries. Craftsmen familiar with the early decoration at Santiago had been active here since the middle of the twelfth century, and, by the end of the century, the rich sculpture of Ourenses cathedral enriched their artistic vocabulary and offered an alternative to Cistercian taste. In this environment, those churches that adhered closely to the artistic repertories of Oseira or Melón generally had special connections with those sites. Eight kilometres from Oseira, the church of Asperelo is almost wholly indebted to the abbey for its architectural ornament, but the proximity of the site accounts for this. More ambitious churches at Cameixa and Aguada owe their ties to Oseira to their status as nuclei of the monastery's estates, while the artistic relationships between Oseira and the nunnery at Dozón are a sign of the tutelage that the monastery exercised over the nuns. More often local projects, like that at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Miño, assembled craftsmen with diverse backgrounds and stimulated creative exchanges.

Some examples highlight the complexities of the interactions between the abbeys and local churches. At Melón (Fig. 15) and Oseira, clasped stems with small, turned leaves trace X patterns on each face of a notable capital which recurs in six churches (Fig. 16). These capitals are so similar — and so limited in their use — that it is plausible to attribute them to one itinerant craftsman. The buildings are geographically dispersed, and although San Clodio and Xunqueira de Espadañedo were eventually affiliated with the Cistercians, no simple pattern of

57. An inscription dates the start of construction to 1225, but it is misleading to use the late date of a minor building, so near to Oseira, to delay the date of work at Oseira itself: Bango Torviso, *Arquitectura románica en Pontevedra*, p. 100–02; Valle Pérez, *La Arquitectura cisterciense*, i, p. 147–48, n. 433.


patronage explains the artistic links. Pombeiro was a Cluniac monastery, San Xoán de Ribadavia a Hospitallers’ church, Ramirás a nunnery, and Santa Mariña de Augas Santas a pilgrimage site of local importance. What does unite the six churches is their large scale. Five have three apses and an aisled nave, an unusually complex design in the Galician countryside. These capitals always appear at the east end, in the earliest part of the church. They hint at the role of a craftsman who supervised middle-sized buildings requiring skills that only experience at a major site could offer. His intervention was crucial at the outset of a project as he assembled a local workforce. Later, he could have overseen several projects at once, travelling from one to another.

This capital is only the most conspicuous and widely copied of several with clapsed or interlacing stems at Oseira. Another (Fig. 17) recurs several times in the choir there. It attests to the role of local craftsmen, and like some sculpture at Incio, it shows how the Cistercians filtered a local vocabulary of forms. It is closely related to one (Fig. 18) in surrounding churches that accompanies boldly carved figural sculpture derived from the Compostelana tradition. Evidently, a craftsman who worked in these churches joined the project at Oseira. There, he responded to the more stringent guidelines for the church’s decoration by providing a streamlined version of a capital in his own repertory that was akin to the interlace and foliate capitals that prevailed there. The full story of these dialogues is a rich and complex one that has yet to be told: a window decorated with arcading at Melón offers a fleeting glimpse of the contribution of craftsmen from one of the most diverse sculptural workshops of central Galicia whose hallmark was the eccentric decoration lavished upon the arches of portals, windows, and chancels.

One can hardly conclude without commenting on the most important concession that the abbeys at Oseira and Melón are traditionally said to have made to local practice: their

61. Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura cisterciense, II, pl. 224, 235, 244, 277.

62. There are good examples at Taboada, Maside, Treboedo, Astureses, and Ferreira de Pantón.

63. Valle Pérez, La Arquitectura cisterciense, I, p. 225; II, pl. 693.
choirs offer ambulatories with chapels radiating from alternate bays. The design is certainly unusual in Cistercian churches of the late twelfth century, and it has been attributed to the influence of Compostela. The reality, however, is more complex. After all, the choir at Compostela had been constructed by the start of the twelfth century, yet the ambulatory with radiating chapels remained unique in the western kingdoms of Iberia for two generations.64 Besides, the churches at Melón and Oseira are so utterly foreign that one should hesitate before ascribing such a fundamental aspect of their design to local practice.

The problem is only complicated by the general assumption that the smaller and sadly mutilated choir at Melón depends on the larger one at Oseira. This has made it easier to postulate a Compostelan model, for the church at Oseira is relatively tolerant of local formulas that depart from the rigor of the Cistercian aesthetic: engaged columns ring the exterior of the choir, many windows are shafted, and, occasionally, figured capitals appear. By contrast, the church at Melón adheres more completely to the norms of Cistercian decoration, presents the more thoroughly foreign design and sculptural vocabulary, and achieves its more accomplished execution. The acutely pointed arches, the refined proportions of mouldings, the marked austerity of the carving and total exclusion of figural decoration, the rejection of shafted windows or engaged columns on the exterior of the choir, and the clearer correspondence between the well-handled corbelled supports and the ribs above them, all signal the kind of imported design one would expect in a Cistercian house that had an early

and uncontested relationship with Clairvaux. In comparison, the overall proportions of the church at Oseira seem inflated, and oddly inconsistent with the fine proportions of individual elements. The large blank wall above the hemicycle piers is jarring, and the corbelled supports — often reduced to simple capitals — are awkwardly mismatched with the vaults.

If one concedes the priority of the design of the choir at Melón, then, recognizing its thoroughly foreign features, its rigid adherence to Cistercian norms, and its direct connections with Clairvaux, one may ask whether the decision to construct an ambulatory was not loosely based on the choir of Clairvaux III. Here, we do well to recall Peter Fergusson’s observations about the design of that choir with its series of ambulatory chapels enclosed in a single semicircular wall. He argued that “the overriding intention was to provide a fitting setting for Bernard’s burial and, after canonization, for the elevation to the altars of the Cistercians’ greatest figure”.65 The choir of Clairvaux III is to be understood, then, as the effort of an Order with “a distinct internationalist outlook” to “make references to the past of Christian Antiquity” and link “Bernard [...] with the apostolic age”.66 In this context, the creative modification of that design at Melón to quote the choir at Santiago would associate the Order’s saint with one of the holiest shrines of Christendom, that of the apostle Saint James.

Department of Humanities and American Studies
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida


66. Ibid., p. 93–98.