

ELIZABETH VALDEZ DEL ALAMO, *PALACE OF THE MIND. THE CLOISTER OF SILOS AND SPANISH SCULPTURE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY*, TURNHOUT, BREPOLS, 2012. ISBN: 978-2-503-51711-7.

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It is fair to say that no other medieval cloister has been served by a comparably extended examination as Silos's is in this volume. It was years in the making and its five hundred pages and a bibliography approaching a thousand entries are witness to that fact. While the site is deserving of such a study, the reader is alerted to a more personal inspiration early on: "As will be clear, Schapiro, my teacher, provided the model for the present study of Silos." References in the text to Schapiro's brilliant essay "From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos" are ubiquitous, and virtually no claim made there is denied endorsement by our author. This may pull one up short: Schapiro visited Silos for four days eighty-five years before the publication of *Palace of the Mind*: "In 1927 I was a guest of the monks at Santo Domingo de Silos. Much of my article was conceived then and it was written long before it was published in 1939." At the least the failure to advance further casts art history in a somewhat dismal light. Is there, then, a compelling reason to read *Palace of the Mind*?

If one is looking for an ardent defense of Schapiro's conclusions, yes. This is a book that reflects decades of diligent review not only of the Silos bibliography, but the historiography of "Romanesque" as it is linked to the Spanish theater. If, however, the reader is looking for something approaching a state of the question that exposes with a reasoned evaluation of the evidence, pro and con, for different positions taken by serious scholars on seminal issues, no. Eight decades of attention have failed, for Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo at least, to call into question through a rehearsal of the counter arguments traditional opinion over such seminal issues as the identity of the church dedicated in 1088 or the date the cloister was begun.

To serve as an example of how the author addresses a contentious issue, let us look at the founding saint's tomb and epitaph, which is accorded a privileged status. Valdez informs the reader that the burial of Domingo in the cloister turned it into a "cultic site in which the architectural and religious structures are intertwined...The cloister space was imbued with the saint's presence and was considered as much a relic as the manuscripts and liturgical objects made during his abbacy. The first burial site in the cloister is still venerated; the pavement has been left open to display the original sarcophagus, carved into the living rock." Domingo died in 1073, and was removed from the cloister three years later for a publically accessible shrine on the north side of the

church that had been built or restored by him. An epitaph carved on the cloister arcade capitals slightly to the west of the submerged tomb is assumed by her to confirm the location of the original burial.

Was it in fact there? There is in the Silensian monk Grimaldus's *Vita* of Santo Domingo composed sometime between 1088 and 1109 a reference to the original burial site: "... his most sacred body was interred with great honor within the cloister of the monks, before the gates of the church..." The reference to the door is not included in the passage quoted in *Palace of the Mind*. The only door communicating with the church from the cloister was that denominated San Miguel. In the NE corner of the cloister, it communicated directly from the dormitory and chapter house to the choir of the lower church. It is, however, some fifteen meters from the grave assumed by Valdez – indeed almost everyone – to be the original. The conclusion drawn by José Luis Senra in an article apparently too late to have been taken into account makes a pertinent observation:

Si nos atenemos a la referida noticia de la hagiografía, plenamente coherente con el ceremonial funerario de los monasterios, el santo habría sido enterrado inicialmente ante las puertas de la iglesia. La puerta jerárquicamente más importante para el monje era la que comunicaba el coro con el claustro, en Silos la de San Miguel, no en vano allí se enterraron los sucesores de Domingo (Fortunio en 1106; Nuño en 1109). Y muy probablemente allí habría sido enterrado él en 1073 ya que era el área ortodoxa, próxima a la cabecera. No tiene lógica alguna la vinculación de un enterramiento solemne como el realizado al morir Domingo con un sepulcro ubicado a ras de suelo, en el centro del pasillo claustral y en una zona ajena [18m] por completo a la contigüidad con puerta alguna. Por todo ello, la inscripción del cimacio debe corresponderse con un registro de la memoria del antiguo epitafio que probablemente en el siglo XIV fue utilizado para recargar el contenido del recinto claustral asociándolo a un sepulcro hallado bajo el pavimento."<sup>1</sup>With this location next to the San Miguel portal the layout would reprise coincidentally the plan established in the eleventh century at Cluny II for the abbatial cemetery.

Although it appears on the early plans and was assumed by Marius Férotin to be the door referred to in the *Vita*, Valdez does not mention the San Miguel door. Without introducing any evidence for it –nor does it appear on the plan made for the book– she takes for granted that there was a portal opening off the nave of the lower church opposite the epitaph: "The viewer who entered the cloister's north gallery from the church nave not only had direct access to the saint's original burial place at the center of the gallery, but could also see the Deposition from the Cross and the Burial-Resurrection

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<sup>1</sup> Senra Gabriel y Galán, José Luis, "El monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos y la secuencia temporal de una singular arquitectura ornamentada," (*Siete maravillas del románico español*, Aguilar de Campoo, 2009, pp. 195-225, at 221).

in the same sequence as the biblical story...(136).” In fact, the Deposition would be seen from the side some 15 meters to the left at the end of the north gallery. The Burial-Resurrection relief would call for a walk of that distance and a turn of the NE corner. But these reliefs would face abbatial burials next to the San Miguel door and be the logical choice of subjects for the abbatial pantheon. By adding that “Frequent users of the nave door would have included laity privileged to enter the cloister in addition to their monastic hosts...” she adopts and builds on a contentious claim initiated by Schapiro and endorsed by Karl Werckmeister, namely, that the cloister’s embellishment was designed with lay access in mind.

The carved epitaph is based on a fuller version in the Grimaldus *Vita* commonly taken to reflect the epitaph composed for Domingo’s grave in 1073. Schapiro knew the paleography did not allow such an early date for the carved epitaph and moved it to around 1100, a date endorsed by Valdez. As with manuscripts, paleography is far less reliable in dating than ornament and figure style, and to limit it to around 1100 definitively does not sufficiently acknowledge that fact. In any case, the author tells the reader that a paleographer who in the 1988 symposium assigned the epitaph to the middle of the twelfth century, moved it back to the last quarter of the eleventh century in the 2003 conference. That is true, but Valdez fails to inform the reader that in the same Acts of the 2003 conference, in a paper not included in her bibliography, another Spanish paleographer assigned the epitaph to the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup>

A date later than 1100 for the inscribed epitaph and for the sculpture of the cloister is implied by the inscription atop the Deposition relief. It is the first verse of a poem of eight lines, the content of which dwells on the Crucifixion and its relation to the eucharist. Schapiro suspected the verse and longer poem were composed in all likelihood by the great poet Hildebert of Lavardin [†1132-1133] or one of his contemporaries in the early twelfth-century cathedral schools of France, and this attribution was endorsed in an article written by Peter Scott Brown.<sup>3</sup> The earliest, firmly datable copy of the verse is contained in an Italian Sacramentary produced for the dedication of a church in 1113. Brown reasonably concluded:

Though it is possible that the carving of the Deposition nearly coincided with the composition of the poem, it is more likely that this was not the case. In any event, the evidence supplied by the inscription and its numerous counterparts and cousins suggests a date of not earlier than ca. 1110 and in all likelihood after ca. 1120.

<sup>2</sup> M. E. Martín López, “Las inscripciones medievales del monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos,” *Silos. Un milenio*, II, Burgos, 2003, 469-481, at 474-475.

<sup>3</sup> “The Verse Inscription from the Deposition Relief at Santo Domingo de Silos: Word, Image and Act in Medieval Art”, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, I (2009), pp. 87-111.

Valdez questioned this conclusion, stating that Brown “overlooks the fact the poem does not appear at Silos, merely a similar verse that could have served as a precedent for the more fully developed poem (97).”

Acceptance of a date a mere two decades later than the author’s preferred one would scarcely undermine the essence of the Silensian history she embraces. It might, however, diminish the idea of an uninterrupted cult that is crucial to the “sanctification” of Silos. An open grave visible beneath a grating and covered by a Gothic cenotaph serves to mark the spot for visitors today. There are many ancient burials beneath the area occupied by Domingo’s church and the cloister. Why the one designated as Domingo’s was elected is not known.

As for the identity of the church whose altars were dedicated by eminent visitors in 1088, the question most debated by scholars in the past thirty years, Valdez agrees with Schapiro that it was the upper church. It is a question integrally linked in her reconstruction to that of the date of the cloister. Since Schapiro’s interest in Silos did not directly involve an analysis of the building, Valdez depends on the study offered by Isidro Bango at the 1988 symposium, according to which the upper church was the one dedicated in 1088. It would have been, then, a precocious accomplishment in terms of style, all the moreso for a site less prosperous than neighboring, royally sponsored, monasteries like Arlanza and Oña. Although not much attention is paid in her book to the relative resources of Silos, she nevertheless concludes that “the years most favorable for construction in Silos had occurred during Domingo’s and Fortunius’s abbacies, particularly during the first decades of Alfonso VI’s reign.” (202) In the very next paragraph, however, Valdez exposes through an enumeration of gifts and elevated status the fact that that it was in the reign of Joannes (bef. 1109 – 1143) that Silos came into its own. The first royal visit, by Alfonso VII, took place during the tenure of Joannes.

Attribution of the upper church to Johannes’s reign would challenge Schapiro’s belief that the cloister was in progress before 1100, but the evidence for an upper church realized by 1088 consists of problematic propositions. The key to clinching the question in favor of the upper church’s priority was seemingly provided by Bango’s discovery that the axis of the upper church deviated from that of the lower church: “In Bango’s view, as with Whitehill’s, the fact that the chapter house in the east cloister gallery was perpendicular to the new church means that the east gallery was configured to conform to the angle of the church. Therefore, the Romanesque chevet was built before the actual cloister.” This conclusion can be flipped, however: what would rule out the conclusion that the deviation of the church was related to the still earlier deviation of the east gallery of the cloister? Likewise, if, as she concludes, the new apses were a response to the reform of the liturgy, the same can be said for the three semicircular apses of the lower church, which were sealed off when the upper one was constructed. In their altars coins of Alfonso VI commemorating his taking of Toledo (1085) were discovered.

The Bango/Valdez history of the upper church inherited from Whitehill's generation the belief that the transepts were added to that chevet somewhat later than the original east end. In support for this Baltasar Díaz's statement in the *Memoriae Silenses* is cited: "Postea vero, sed quando ignoratur, addita est pars usque ad capellam novam S.P.N Dominici et in alia parte Boreali aequalis portio; sic que remansit crux perfecta protota ecclesia superiori et inferiori. " When in the forties of the last century the removal of plaster on the south transept's eastern interior wall revealed a regular vertical seam rising from the floor just inside its entrance into the actual church, it was taken as confirmation of Díaz's claim. It conveniently provided a reason for the fact that the doorway from the cloister to the church through the transept displayed capitals that dated unarguably to the twelfth century, a fact potentially undermining the argument that the upper church was finished by 1088. The possibility that Díaz's remark can be read simply as an acknowledgement that the transepted upper church was added to the lower at some unknown date is not entertained, nor is the possibility that the vertical seam was the inevitable result of the shearing off of the earlier church when the new one was erected in the eighteenth century. It is not the place here to explore in detail the question of the upper church, but several studies that apparently appeared too late for Valdez do so.<sup>4</sup>As she aptly states, Silos's cloister has been a "lightening rod in the debate about the development of monumental sculpture during the eleventh and twelfth centuries." While the earliest opinions are passed in review, the more recent, even if cited and included in the bibliography, are seldom critically analyzed. As she sums up, "Schapiro adding new evidence on the basis of stylistic and iconographic details discussed below, specified the *terminus* 1080-1109. Most contemporary scholars, including Werckmeister, Yarza, Bango, and myself maintain a range close to Schapiro's dates." The authors she uses to support her views completed their studies on Silos in the 1980s and early '90s; it would have been useful to address the contributions of scholars like Senra and Gerardo Boto, whose dissertations of 1996 and 1998, respectively, have been followed up by multiple publications on the monastery and its decoation.

While one cannot question Valdez's sincere belief that the positions espoused by her mentor were sound, readers deserve to hear the voice of the "loyal opposition." Despite their challenge to the picture of Silos that Schapiro presented, these differing interpretations never involve devaluation of the cloister as a monument. At the risk of undermining the reader's confidence in the objectivity of this reviewer, it seems none the less pertinent in this context that the longest article (*Art Bulletin* 2003) dedicated to Schapiro's take on Silos is alluded to once in a footnote: "John Williams contributes to the debate by questioning the status of Silos in the Middle Ages and by labeling Schapiro a 'formalist'."

<sup>4</sup> Including the aforementioned study by Senra and his "Between Rupture and Continuity: Romanesque Sculpture at the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos," in *Current Directions in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Sculpture Studies*, ed. R. Maxwell and K. Ambrose, Turnhout, 2010, 141-167, along with J. M. Merino de Cáceres and María Reynolds Alvarez, "Recomposición gráfica del antiguo monasterio de Silos," in *Actas, XII Congreso internacional de expresión gráfica arquitectónica*, Madrid, 2008, 1 -17.

In sum, this long-awaited large-format book displays more than 300 images that beautifully illustrate the reasons so many scholars have been drawn to work on Silos. One cannot help but think, however, that the site would have been better served by a measured analysis of research in recent decades than a return to Schapiro.