An important cycle of frescoes once covering the walls of the church of San Quirce de Pedret have received considerable notice in recent years. Some of them are now in the museum at Solsona, and others have been installed in the Museum of Catalan Art in Barcelona. Other frescoes surely by the same artist, called the Master of Pedret, were discovered in two small churches, San Juan de Tredós and Santa María de Esterri de Aneu in what is known as the Valley of the River Noguera Pallaresa.

Some years ago one of the best-preserved and most beautiful of these frescoes, the enthroned Virgin and Child originally in Tredós, measuring ten and a half feet in height, was purchased for The Cloisters with funds provided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Subsequently a collector wrote from Switzerland that he knew of two contiguous sections that with the Cloisters Virgin and Child had originally formed the decoration for the semi-dome of the central apse at Tredós. All three pieces have now been assembled on a flat panel (see next page), which has been placed on the east wall of the Romanesque Hall at The Cloisters. For the time being it does not seem desirable to attempt to reconstruct the original apse for which these frescoes were painted in the early decades of the twelfth century, probably about 1130. As far as we have now been able to determine, the only other surviving parts of the apse decoration are some fragmentary geometric borders from three windows.

The apse from the church of Santa María de Esterri de Aneu in Barcelona (p. 187) shows the same arrangement of the enthroned Virgin and Child in a mandorla, with the adoring Magi, Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar, bringing gifts, and the archangels Gabriel and Michael, bearing standards, are identified in our frescoes by inscriptions. Gabriel holds in his right hand a scroll inscribed POSTULACIUS (the postulant).

Like the other surviving Catalan frescoes, ours came from a comparatively small building; those from the great centers have long since disappeared. These impressive paintings may bring to mind the more grandiose mosaic cycles in Sicily, at Monreale, Palermo, and Cefalú, or those in Turkey and Greece. Although the Pedret Master at Tredós has followed the traditional Byzantine and Italo-Byzantine style and iconography, he has infused his work with a freshness and freedom usually lacking in more rigidly stereotyped and conventionalized renderings, which seem stilted and stolid by comparison.

The present-day interest in Catalan frescoes began at the turn of the century when their existence was pointed out by a few scholars, especially Mossen Josep Gudiol i Cunill, Curator of the Episcopal Museum at Vich. His well-illustrated volumes Els Pintors; La Pintura Mural (Barcelona, 1927), particularly part i of the first volume, Els Primitius, laid the foundations for the later studies of Walter W. S. Cook and Gudiol’s nephew, José Gudiol y Ricart, in whose Pintura e Imaginería románicas (Ars Hispaniae, vi, Madrid, 1950) we find a study of the Pedret Master and his works. Included as figure 37 is a detail of Caspar and Balthasar that has made it possible for us to corroborate the fact that the Cloisters frescoes came from Tredós. The first mention of the frescoes at Pedret appeared in 1889, when Josep Puiggari published some notes and a drawing in the Revista l’Avenc.

Beginning in 1906, Joseph Pijoan was unyielding in his efforts to discover and publish many additional frescoes in the small Catalan churches. He prevailed upon the Junta of the Museums of Barcelona to bring these paintings, many of them concealed behind later altars, to the attention of the public. At first the museum officials were content with life-size copies. But in 1919, when, according to the Barcelona Museum catalogue,
Fresco of the Virgin and Child enthroned and enclosed in a mandorla, with the Three Kings and the archangels Michael and Gabriel. By the Pedret Master. Originally the decoration of the central apse of San Juan de Tredós, probably painted about 1130. In the Romanesque Hall at The Cloisters
Fresco from the apse of the church of Santa María de Esterrí de Aneu, by the Pedret Master, showing a similar arrangement of enthroned Virgin, kings, and archangels. In the Museum of Catalan Art, Barcelona.
LEFT: Detail of the heads of two of the kings in the fresco on page 186. ABOVE: Head of Saint John the Evangelist, detail of a fresco by the Pedret Master, formerly in the church of San Pedro del Burgel. In the Museum of Catalan Art, Barcelona
Head of the Virgin in the fresco on page 186
Detail of the Child in the fresco on page 186
Removing frescoes from a church in Bohí for the Barcelona Museum
a group of Italian technicians wanted to remove many of the original Catalan frescoes from Spain, arrangements were made with them and the local bishop to have the frescoes set up in the Barcelona Museum. During the civil war in Spain some of them were taken to France by Joaquin Folch y Torres and exhibited for a time at Maisons-Laffitte near Paris. With the return of normal conditions the frescoes and other works of art were returned, and in recent years, under the guidance of Juan Ainaud de Lasarte, continued improvements and additions have been made to the Barcelona collections.

The process of removing frescoes from old walls begins with the cleaning of the surface of the fresco; then canvas or some other cloth is applied to the surface with a paste that binds the fresco more closely to it than to the wall. The canvas and fresco are then cut (see illustrations) and the fresco loosened from the wall with a knife or spatula and rolled. A layer of canvas is attached to the back of the fresco, and the protecting canvas on the front is removed with a solvent which affects neither the fresco nor the paste of the lining canvas. The canvas with the fresco on the front is then ready for mounting in one of various ways, often being kept on a stretcher as in the case of a painting on canvas.

The Tredós frescoes have recently been put together so that they could be shown in the exhibition of early Spanish medieval art from public and private collections in America. This exhibition was held at The Cloisters in honor of Professor Walter Cook, who, like the late A. Kingsley Porter and Professor Chandler Post, has contributed so much valuable information to students and museum people in his indefatigable efforts that Americans might better know and appreciate Spanish art. The undaunted enthusiasm of these scholars for so many years has greatly encouraged the growth of The Cloisters and other American collections. The superb apse from Santa María del Mur and two of the fresco panels from San Baudelio de Berlanga were acquired in New York for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts many years ago. In 1930 the Metropolitan Museum secured the two monumental animal frescoes formerly in the ruined Chapter House at Arlanza near Burgos. The Tredós frescoes, representing the best traditions of the figure style, are worthy companions and will enable The Cloisters to give a better understanding of the monumental decorations originally covering the walls of Romanesque churches.