The Apse from San Martín at Fuentidueña

In planning for The Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had enabled The Metropolitan Museum of Art to acquire a number of architectural elements which were to be incorporated in the fabric of the building. This new structure had been under study and construction for about eight years when it was opened to the public on May 14, 1938, as a gift from Mr. Rockefeller.

In 1935 Mr. Rockefeller returned from Europe with a portfolio of miscellaneous photographs and plans given to him by a Paris agent. Mr. Rockefeller explained that he was acting only as “a messenger” in delivering the parcel of prospective purchases. He said that we could do as we might wish with the contents, but I was urged to return the portfolio itself to its owner. This was the first of many ambassador-without-portfolio missions to Europe to locate an apse that was described by the agent as French and that “could be purchased for The Cloisters.” It developed that this was not a French monument but an apse from the church of San Martín at Fuentidueña, north of Madrid, in the province of Segovia. We later learned that in 1931 it had been classified as a Spanish National Monument. A thorough investigation of the situation gave little hope that the apse could be purchased.

One day twelve years later, and after the Spanish Civil War, a Spanish art dealer asked if we had ever heard of the apse at Fuentidueña. It had never been illustrated in Spanish books, but A. Kingsley Porter, the Harvard professor so well known for his rediscovery of the art of Romanesque Spain, had in 1928 reproduced two of the sculptured figures in his Spanish Romanesque Sculpture. Our first visit to the once flourishing walled town, in a romantic and desolate region, rekindled the desire to acquire the apse so that it could be an integral part of The Cloisters building complex. A difficult campaign ensued, which was not resolved until 1961 as a fait accompli.

Many problems confronted us. Church and State each claimed ownership and jurisdiction in all matters concerning the apse, which had stood without a roof for centuries and was suffering deterioration through the years. Within the crumbling walls a modern cemetery used by the citi-

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ON THE COVER: The Fuentidueña Apse, installed at The Cloisters, as a loan from Spain

FRONTISPICE: The third window capital on the outside of the apse
zens of Fuentidueña presented further difficulties. A case had to be made to both the ecclesiastical and civil authorities demonstrating that it was for the better interest of Spain and America that the apse be conserved in New York at The Cloisters. It would be preserved under new roofs from the destruction of time and the weather, for the enjoyment and instruction of a million or more visitors a year. Our Spanish colleagues were sympathetic, in particular Don Francisco Javier Sánchez-Cantón (now Director of the Prado), and Don Manuel Gómez-Moreno, the Director General of Fine Arts when the apse was declared a National Monument. The late Sr. Gallego Búrin, Director General of Fine Arts at the time of the actual negotiations, deferred the decision to the Minister of National Education, Sr. Ruiz Giménez. No one wanted to offend the townspeople, and they might be reluctant to lose a monument to which they had been accustomed. The art authorities must also look with favor on our project. The successor to the Minister of Education, Don Jesús Rubio, promised to lend the full weight of his office, provided the government authorities involved could be assured that the townspeople and the art authorities really were in agreement. The mayor of Fuentidueña consulted his some two hundred constituents, assuring them that the cemetery would be improved and that the New York museum had promised to enable the Spanish authorities to reinforce their parish church of San Miguel and to rebuild its tower and other sections which might fall at any time. The Bishop of Segovia was enthusiastic and in full accord, provided he could secure favorable instructions from the Holy See. They were forthcoming without delay. The fine arts Academy of San Fernando and the Academy of History voted their approval with only a few dissenting voices. Finally in 1957 the Council of Ministers sanctioned Sr. Rubio’s request. Simultaneously, The Metropolitan Museum of Art undertook to:

1. Acquire and deposit six fresco panels from San Baudelio de Berlanga in the Prado as a long-term loan (two scenes from the chase, the bear, the elephant, the decorative panel with eagles, and the warrior with shield).

2. Pay the expenses of making carefully measured drawings and forms, marking the items, taking down, packing and preparing for shipment the stones of the apse at Fuentidueña.

3. Provide the Bishop of Segovia with funds for the reconstruction of San Miguel at Fuentidueña and such other necessities as the Bishop might deem desirable.

4. Provide the Ayuntamiento of Fuentidueña with funds for the improvement of the cemetery and/or such other purposes as the Ayuntamiento of Fuentidueña deemed proper.

5. Pay for the shipment of the apse to the United States and erect it at The Cloisters as a loan of the Spanish government, to be clearly indicated as such with an appropriate plaque. The Museum was to build a roof over the apse, treat damaged stonework for the best preservation possible, and where deemed preferable replace exterior carved portions of the stonework with replicas and preserve the originals under cover.

Where the arguments of the art historians did not suffice, we were helped by the understanding and diplomacy of government officials. Ambassador Don José M. de Areilza, Count of Motrico, in Washington, and successively the United States Ambassadors Lincoln McVeagh, James Dunn, and John Lodge in Madrid, gave guidance and encouragement. Don Alberto Martín Artañó, formerly Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, John T. Reid, United States Cultural Attaché, and his untiring deputy Robert D. Barton, Assistant Cultural Attaché, for six years participated actively in the exchange proceedings. The official Spanish government architect, Don Alejandro Ferrant, made carefully measured drawings showing every stone. With great love for the old stones and utmost care, assisted by a group of local workers, he helped Carmen Gómez-Moreno, As-

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sistant Curator of the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters, prepare the shipment for New York.

When we were planning The Cloisters, we estimated that there would probably be an average of no more than 200,000 visitors per annum; the attendance last year exceeded one million. The new addition, with the apse placed at the end of a seventy-foot chapel, adds eight percent to the exhibition area of The Cloisters. It will now be possible to have concerts and perhaps plays in this, the largest room at The Cloisters. As the chapel adjoins the Romanesque Hall at the north and connects by two small doors with the Saint-Guilhem Cloister, the normal flow of visitors will not be impeded by occasional special activities.

The new sections of the chapel match the Romanesque parts of The Cloisters, and the rampart walks around the cobblestoned courtyard are now made more accessible by the extension around the exterior of the Fuentidueña apse. Our basic policy of making the modern structure simple and in keeping with the materials and texture of the antique elements has been maintained.

Mr. Rockefeller contributed all the necessary funds for the transaction and was consulted through the years. Roland L. Redmond, President of the Museum, and Geoffrey Lawford of the architectural firm of Brown, Lawford and Forbes visited the site and were receptive to the enthusiasm of our staff that has made this undertaking an eminently rewarding accomplishment.

James J. Rorimer, Director