

Romanesque wooden sculpture

The Diocesan Museum of Urgell conserves a Romanesque carving of crucified Christ and eight carvings of the Virgin Mary with Child from the counties of El Pallars Sobirà and La Noguera. They are two of the most frequent worship images in all of Christian art.

In the Romanesque, the image of Jesus on the cross, which has encapsulated the meaning of the Christian faith since the fifth century, was often depicted in the form of the Christ in Majesty, with Jesus alive and clothed. However, there are also Romanesque carvings of him suffering, like the Christ of Olp.

Mary's status as the Mother of God was proclaimed in the fifth century, and thereafter it became common to depict her with the Christ Child seated on her lap or knee, that is, with Mary serving as the Throne of God. The Marian cult reached a peak in western Europe in the twelfth century, and after that images of this kind became quite common, in Catalonia as well.

Reliquary images

There are few Romanesque carvings that contain relics in Catalonia, but two of them are conserved at the Diocesan Museum of Urgell.

The relics were placed inside images as part of the ritual held with special objects meant for worship. Symbols of the presence of God or Mary inside the church were so prestigious that at times they were expressed with these rites, which were similar to the consecration of the altar. However, clearly relics were not obligatory because the majority of Romanesque and Gothic carvings still conserved never contained them.

Our Lady of Caregue Mountain is a high-quality carving in terms of both the bodily features and the clothing. The relics are housed inside a lipsanoteca or small container located in a chamber on the back. There are very few other Catalan carvings of the Virgin with chambers for relics, like the one from Lluçà at the Episcopal Museum of Vic (MEV), the one from Sant Cugat del Vallès (dated from 1218) and the Virgin of Los Remedios from in Andorra.

The Christ of Olp also has an orifice to hold relics in back. It is a very common type of Romanesque sculpture in the diocese of Urgell characterised by the advanced feature of having both of Christ's feet nailed onto the cross with just one nail instead of two. The other images of Christ with hidden-away relics conserved in Catalonia is the one called 'de 1147' at the MNAC, the one from

Lluçà or Les Planes at the MEV and the Descent from the Cross from Sant Joan de les Abadesses.