

**Doron Bauer**

**Reused Roman Sarcophagi and the Emergence of Romanesque Sculpture  
in Northern Spain**

Already in the 1970s, Serafín Moralejo observed that the figures on a capital in Jaca cathedral showing the Sacrifice of Isaac were clearly modeled after the imagery of a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Roman sarcophagus from Santa Maria de Husillos depicting the Orestes myth. Since Moralejo, the crucial impact of the *Husillos Sarcophagus* as well as other Roman sculptures on Romanesque sculpture along the Camino de Santiago has been further demonstrated. For art historians, the choice to rely on classical models has passed as self-evident. At the moment of the revival of sculpture in the West, "insecure" carvers lacking experience and an ongoing tradition in the plastic arts could only look back and imitate Roman vestiges. The Vasarian paradigm of classical sculpture's aesthetic supremacy has been projected somewhat anachronistically on the High Middle Ages in Iberia. In this paper, I examine the influence of Roman sculpture on variety of media in the region, not just sculpture. I demonstrate that the workshop's choice to resort to classical imagery was rooted not in aesthetic values per se but in the manner in which Roman sculpture was reused in medieval northern Iberia, particularly in relation to medieval social practices of entombment. Since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, members of the royal families in northern Iberia sought to be buried in reused Roman sarcophagi. The idiosyncratic symbolical values that emerged out of this practice pushed the Romanesque carvers of Jaca, Frómista and León to accept Roman vestiges as models without necessarily understanding their historical significance.