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## **THIRD ARCHAEOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF A VANISHED CHURCH: VILA-REAL, 1417-1464**

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## Resum

En aquest text s'intenten explicar les primeres fases de l'obra de l'església de Sant Jaume de Vila-real, concretament en el període 1417-1464. Es reprenen els estudis anteriors de J. M. Doñate (1981), A. Zaragoza i M. Gómez-Ferrer (2007), es documenten nous mestres i problemes i es desfà l'equívoc que, en bona mesura a partir de la documentació d'aquest edifici, identificava les figures dels mestres d'obra Pere Compte i Pere de Campos

### **Paraules clau:**

arquitectura gòtica, Corona d'Aragó Medieval, Vila-real, Pere Compte

## Abstract

In this text, we attempt to describe the initial phases of the construction of the parish church of Sant Jaume in Vila-real, specifically in the period of 1417-1464. The previous studies of J. M. Doñate (1981), A. Zaragoza and M. Gómez-Ferrer (2007) are resumed, and new master builders and problems are documented. In addition, an error that occurred in the analysis of the building's documentation identifying the master masons Pere Compte and Pere de Campos as the same person is amended.

### **Keywords:**

Gothic Architecture, Medieval Crown of Aragon, Vila-real, Pere Compte

Some forty years ago, a pioneering article about the Gothic church in Vila-real appeared in the pages of the *BSCC*. It was signed by the renowned archivist José María Doñate (1981) and began to cover a gap in our knowledge that may never be completely filled, since the disappearance of the medieval temple to make way for its 18<sup>th</sup> century replacement will forever deprive us of the possibility of directly analysing the 15<sup>th</sup> century structure.<sup>1</sup> However, Doñate's study was a very solid contribution, far surpassing those of previous authors, and it inserted the parish of Sant Jaume, albeit somewhat timidly, within the history of Valencian Gothic architecture. Despite being based entirely on written documents, it was titled *Retrato arqueológico de una iglesia desaparecida* (An Archaeological Portrait of a Vanished Church). The archivist understood archaeology to be the study of ancient monuments, but, above all, as the analysis of things lost and invisible that can nevertheless be brought to light again.

Twenty-six years later, in a monographic volume on the activity of master builder Pere Compte, Arturo Zaragoza and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer (2007: 154-158 and associated doc.) resumed the study of the construction process of the church, in a necessarily more concise way.<sup>2</sup> In addition to adding new information to that published by Doñate, and offering a more nuanced reading of previously known documents, these authors did something that seems very important to me. They highlighted and contextualised the key role played by the master builders who were involved in the construction of the church during the 15<sup>th</sup> century: «Antoni Dalmau, Joan de Caritat, Joan de Xulbe, Jaume Pérez, Francesc Baldomar and Pere Compte, at one time or another, had something to say regarding the church».<sup>3</sup> By doing this, they also definitively put the building on the map of medieval Valencian architecture; restoring some, if not all, of the rights that had been denied to it by its physical disappearance and documentary obscurity.<sup>4</sup> This “second portrait”, therefore, served to establish the profile of the church even more deeply.

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1. For information on the modern-era church, see TRAVER 1909: 277-291; BAUTISTA 1996-1997; GIL 2004: 344-349.

2. Part of their study is advanced in GÓMEZ-FERRER 1997-1998.

3. In the original Spanish: «Antoni Dalmau, Joan de Caritat, Joan de Xulbe, Jaume Pérez, Francesc Baldomar o Pere Compte, en un momento u otro, tuvieron algo que decir con respecto a la iglesia».

4. In the last thirty years, much has been written, and well written, regarding medieval Valencian architecture. See the individual panoramic visions, from different points of view, in Zaragoza 2000; Serra 2011 and 2012. Regarding construction in the specific context of Vila-real, see Aparici 1996: passim, especially 49-60 and 66-67.

Just as the fourteenth-century church was built over a previously existing structure, the third portrait I am offering here is built on the two preceding ones. First of all, it aims to be a recognition of the work of these precursors: hence the choice of the title, despite the fact that this work is based, like its predecessors, on documentary evidence rather than material remains. But secondly, it must necessarily be a review in which new nuances and ideas are raised and in which clarifications and certain informative contributions are made. The aim is to achieve a slightly clearer image of the missing monument and to show that it is an exemplary case of a Gothic church that replaced a previous temple. To this end, I will limit myself to its genesis and the construction of the chevet and the first aisle, conditioned by the restrictions imposed by the currently available documentation and the context of pandemic in which the study was written.

### **A parish church like the one in Castelló (1417-1418)**

Although the documents do not state it explicitly, the authorities of Vila-real must have witnessed with envy the rise of the church of Santa Maria de Castelló. Work on the latter church began between 1403 and 1409, while work on the church in Vila-real was initiated around 1417. In addition, both constructions must be framed in terms of a common problem, which we could define as “from old work/new work”. This was a very common approach applied to large-scale construction projects in the late Middle Ages, as well as in the early modern period.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond financial and technical issues and problems relating to materials, the construction processes of churches built on previously-existing churches could present highly complex challenges, due to the pre-existing architecture and the need to occupy public, and often also private, space in order to build the extensions. Notwithstanding, we could say that a classic or standard process came into existence in order to carry out this type of construction work. At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and even the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the work on new Gothic construction would begin with the chevet, which enveloped the apse of the original church, usually Romanesque or even older, and which was replaced section by section. We could say that, in this way, the past was gradually replaced by the present, with the aim of reaching into the future. While not straying too far from our cultural context, we may recall that, in Catalonia, this process occurred in the construction of many notable churches, including a number of cathedrals, such as those in Girona, Barcelona, Tortosa and Elne. In the latter, construction of the new chevet was started on two occasions, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, but was never completed, so even today we can observe

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5. This expression is taken from DOMENGE 2012, which is a good example of a study of the process of replacing an older construction with a newer one. For details regarding the preparations needed to begin construction work, see BERNARDI 2010.

the rows of the perimeter walls of the Gothic structure beginning to encircle the Romanesque original.<sup>6</sup>

In the Kingdom of Valencia, this procedure was also common, despite the fact that, in chronological terms, it did not involve the disappearance of Romanesque architecture in favour of Gothic structures. In this case, what tended to happen is that buildings with cross vaults, even when they consisted of one nave with side chapels rather than three naves, replaced churches of the type that historians have dubbed “reconquest” in style, that is, simple, functional churches built with diaphragm arches and two-sided roofs, especially during the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. A paradigmatic example of this can be found in Sant Mateu del Maestrat where, as in Elne, evidence of these transformations can still be clearly observed: only a section of the entrance remains of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century building, including the door with its sculptural decoration, while the nave and chevet were replaced by a spectacular 14<sup>th</sup> century construction, which, due to the economic crisis of the mid-fifteenth century, was left unfinished. The contrast between the small gallery of western side and the large Gothic nave underlines the sheer audacity of the transformation.<sup>7</sup>

A little further south, in the region of La Plana, these processes may have arrived a little later, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In Castelló, there was a church that, in 1403, was considered small and «*sotib*», that is to say, of little value, over which the Council decided to build a more «beautiful one, such that it would honour Our Lord and this community».<sup>8</sup> With this dual aim (to pay tribute to God and to give prestige to the municipality) in 1409, the authorities of Castelló sent Guillem Joan, who had been appointed administrator of the works, to Valencia. Joan had to get Pere Balaguer, who was at that time the most important master builder in Valencia, to determine what type of construction was required, but when faced with his refusal to travel, Guillem Joan was forced to take on the services of another stonemason. He selected Miquel Garcia, who was then working on the Valdecrist monastery and had very good references, both from Balaguer and from a third architect, Pere Bonarès. In collaboration with the latter, Garcia projected Castelló’s new work, and he did so using the structures of the old church. But it seems that it was Master Garcia alone who, with only a few absences to attend to other business, directed the works

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6. It is worth pointing out that there were many exceptions to this procedure, which we refer to here as the “classical” process. Instead of completely replacing a single-nave building, side aisles or chapels were sometimes added, leaving the old nave standing. The total replacement of the old church was another option, but following procedures different from the one mentioned, such as building the new church in another location more or less close to the original structure. These other building systems were used to construct Sant Llorenç de Lleida (with added lateral naves), and the Barcelona parish churches of Santa Maria del Mar and Sants Just i Pastor (where the new church was constructed in a nearby location). See, among others, LLADONOSA 1972; BORAU 2003: 370-392; VIDAL, FUMANAL, DURAN 2021.

7. Regarding Sant Mateu del Maestrat, see ZARAGOZÁ 2005; on “reconquest” churches and, in general, diaphragm arch architecture in this geographical context, ZARAGOZÁ 2003: *passim*.

8. In the original Catalan: «bell, e tal que sie honor de Nostre Senyor e de aquesta comunitat».

at Castelló de la Plana. The work was carried out without major setbacks until the church was ready to hold liturgical services. Around 1416, on the recommendation of another important master builder from Valencia, Joan del Poyo, a temporary wooden enclosure was put up around the chevet, while the construction of the nave was being carried out, at least until well into the 1430s. The church was definitively consecrated in 1594.<sup>9</sup>

At that time (1417) the authorities of Vila-real expressed their desire to expand the old temple, which, according to Viciano (1884: 334), had been standing since 1298. As we mentioned above, the original structure must have had naves made up of diaphragm arches and a two-sided roof; we do not know if it had a plain chevet or a more complex structure. These simple churches were sometimes rebuilt with side chapels covered with a vault, while their wooden trusses could be replaced by stone or brick crosses. But the structures with diaphragm arches could also be completely renovated, as happened in Castelló and Vila-real. In this sense, Doñate (1981: 123) warned that, in 1417, «a master builder whose name is not on record requests the first rights for 15 years to build the chevet, that is, the apse of the church».<sup>10</sup> While, with this information, it could already be deduced that this architect was Miquel Garcia, some hitherto unknown documents certify it: the attempt to start work in Vila-real was taken very seriously and, apart from the conversations that took place with him in Castelló,<sup>11</sup> the architect travelled to the town on two occasions «to see and inspect the church of the nearby town, which they wanted to have work done on, and to decorate the said church». Likewise, he made a trip «to the quarry, with the cart driver».<sup>12</sup> The documentation also shows that the local council appointed administrators for the construction work (Bartomeu Galceran and Marco de Calacit), and paid for two hundred and one *sous* in «tools for the purpose of said work, this is, a lever, picks, stone cutter's hammers and other things».<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, in the period 1417-1418, Vila-real had already begun preparations to build a church to replace the previous one. The floor plans had been laid out, the site had been inspected, tools had been acquired, the acquisition of construction materials had been planned through visits to the quarry, and the digging may have already begun on the foundations around the old apse and at least the wall perimeter had already been marked out. But perhaps the most important thing of all is that

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9. Regarding the parish church of Castelló de la Plana, see PEYRAT 1894; SANZ DE BREMOND 1947; TRAVER 1958: 228-249; MONSONÍS 1997. On the remodeling of the temple in the modern era, see GIL 2004: 278-281 and, regarding its ornamentation, see the documentation collected by OLUCHA 2011.

10. In the original Spanish: «un maestro de obras cuyo nombre no consta pide los derechos de la primicia a 15 años para obrar *lo cap*, es decir, el ábside de la iglesia».

11. Arxiu Municipal de Vila-real (AMVlr), 243, f. 30v (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc. IV) and f. 32r.

12. AMVlr, 243, f. 44v. In the original Catalan: «a la pedrera ab lo carreter».

13. AMVlr, 243, f. 47r. In the original Catalan: «ferramentes e artelleries a obs de la dita obra, ço és, un perpal, pichs, scodes e altres».

the master builder and, implicitly, the model had already been chosen: was it the desire to emulate Castelló that prompted the local authorities of Vila-Real to make the decision to build a new church? The municipal agreements of that year are missing and, therefore, we are unable to confirm this hypothesis on a documentary basis, if indeed the idea was ever expressed explicitly. Despite this, the notion does seem entirely probable. The medieval practice of taking an already completed work as a model prevailed; this was a very common practice in the visual arts, as well as in architecture.<sup>14</sup> With the intention of ensuring the success of the enterprise, a master builder who had worked nearby for a decade and had demonstrated his executive ability was chosen. In addition, Santa Maria de Castelló was also chosen as a model, either to match it or, indeed, to surpass it. The choice was logical, but the work did not prosper, and, for now, we do not know why.

### A new attempt in two consecutive stages

In 1441, Pere Mateu, an architect from the city of Valencia, came to Vila-real «to see the work that said town wanted on the chevet of the church». In addition to making the trip; he «drew and painted the chevet» and even travelled with a representative of the town to nearby Onda «to see the work on the church».<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the 1440s, therefore, renovation of the church of Sant Jaume, which in 1438 was still being extended with the addition of a private chapel,<sup>16</sup> was once again being considered [AMVlr, 19, f. 13 v. (ed. Doñate 1981: doc. V)], in this case, under the command of a master builder from Valencia who paid an inspection visit to Onda.

Unfortunately, the “*notaments*” or municipal agreements of Vila-Real for that year have not been preserved and we are unable to ascertain the details of the operation. The payments refer to a meeting of the Council held on 7 April 1441, but the minutes are missing: we dispose of those of 1439-1440 and 1442-1443, but not those of 1440-1441. Despite this information gap, it is clear that the project was resumed, and that attention was now focused on the capital of the kingdom. The reference to Onda, on the other hand, is less clear, since the documented visit to the building site must refer to the main church, which was practically destroyed in a fire in 1467 and later replaced by a Baroque building; in other words, this is a very little-known building.<sup>17</sup> What kind of interesting work was being carried out there in 1441 before

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14. Many examples of this in the Catalan-Aragonese geographical context can be found in DOMENGE, VIDAL 2013 and 2017.

15. AMVlr, 253, f. 12v, 13r (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc. VI).

16. AMVlr, 19, f. 13v (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc. V).

17. The fire is described in the *Crònica i dietari del capellà d'Alfons el Magnànim* (Chronicle and diary of the priest of Alfonso the Magnanimous) (Rodrigo 2011: 32 5) (Here I wish to thank Professor V. Garcia Edo for the clarification). For information regarding modern era churches replacing medieval ones, see Gil 2004: 327-329.

the works started at the parish church of Sant Jaume? We do not know. In fact, it would have been more logical if the visit had been to the church of Santa Margalida, also known as *de la Sang* since it is another “reconquest” temple, like the one in Vila-real at that time, and if the city council of Onda had wanted to replace it or had been replacing it precisely in this chronology, it would have been a parallel process to those of Castelló and Vila-real, and for that very reason, it would have been quite reasonable for them to share their experiences and knowledge. But that does not seem to be the case, since the 13<sup>th</sup> century church still stands in Onda.

Having traced the outline, visited a work in progress and studied the architectural problem, Pere Mateu did not undertake the construction work in Vila-real. We do not know the details nor the motivations that frustrated the enterprise. Shortly before the deals with Mateu were struck, in the summer of 1440, Antoni Dalmau, the master builder of the cathedral of Valencia, and Simó Bonfill, another stonemason from that same city, had taken charge of the work on the wayside cross of the Raval de Sant Miquel and Santa Llúcia.<sup>18</sup> Was this work the reason why the Vila-real officials ended up commissioning the team made up of Dalmau and Bonfill or was it the other way around and did those master masons take on the construction of the wayside cross because they already had the intention of building the new parish church? We have no way of knowing, but the fact is that this work had put the town authorities in contact with the Valencian architects before they took care of renovating the parish church, which is what they ended up doing once Mateu disappeared from the municipal documentation of Vila-real. During the spring of 1442, the two builders travelled from Valencia to La Plana «to see the work on the chevet of the church of said town, and draw and paint it»,<sup>19</sup> an expression equivalent to the one used in the documents referring to Pere Mateu and Miquel Garcia. In addition, with the two builders in the same room, the Council deliberated on the price of the work and agreed to assign 12,600 *sous* to it.<sup>20</sup>

On this occasion, the work progressed rapidly and, apparently, smoothly. In January 1443, the «master builders of the chevet of the church» were working in the town,<sup>21</sup> as the councillors had commissioned them to build «five tiles and one small, iron pole”, in addition to «four needles to be used to finish the clock».<sup>22</sup> According to a document from the Chapter Archives of Valencia made public by A. Zaragoza

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18. AMVlr, 253, f. 13v, 14r-v (ed. DOÑATE 1966, n. 10).

19. In the original Catalan: «per veu-re la obra del cap de la ecclésia de la dita vila, e traçar e pintar aquella».

20. Council meeting of 28 May 1442, AMVlr, 21, f. 5v (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc. VII); ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 155. This fact was advanced by TRAVER 1909: 263.

21. In the original Catalan: «mestres de la obra del cap de la ecclésia»

22. Council meeting of 11 January 1441, AMVlr, 21, f. 23r (cit. APARICI 1986: 167). In the original Catalan: «cinch ragolles e I perpalet de ferre» and «quatre agulles e o vergues qui foren dels ferres del guarniment del seny».



and M. Gómez Ferrer (2007: 250), the architectural structure was apparently completed as early as December 1443.<sup>23</sup> For that reason, in the following years, efforts were focused on decorating it: throughout 1446, rods and pulleys were bought in Valencia to hang decorative fabrics and the painter Nadal Renau was in charge of creating the “painted curtains, made to ennoble the chevet of the church».<sup>24</sup> In all probability, the altarpiece that Llorenç Saragossà had painted around 1375 for the old temple was reused for the high altar, and this work would not be relocated until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Paolo de San Leocadio left his mark on the town.<sup>25</sup>

What was the appearance of this chevet, which was built in the 1440s? We cannot know for sure. In any case, the damage to some properties linked to the old temple suggests that, as is quite logical, it was a wider and higher structure than its predecessor and enveloped the old building.<sup>26</sup> This also suggests that it was necessary to carry on with the work as soon as possible. As we will see below, the important difference in height between the new and old structure raised doubts and problems, as it did everywhere these construction processes took place.<sup>27</sup> The documents that refer to the first section of the nave raise another question regarding the chevet, though we cannot answer it with any degree of certainty: with what technique and with what material was it covered? The most likely answer is with a tile vault.

### The first gallery: an accursed work

Although for some years there is no news about the work on the church, the will to undertake its first section certainly existed. Doñate (1981: doc. IX and X) states that, on December 22, 1457, Joan de Caritat, a French builder related to Antoni Dalmau, took charge of «the aisle following the chevet of the church» and the sacristy.<sup>28</sup> This is attested in a previous document, from May of the same year, according to which the authorities of Castelló had allowed the officials in Vila-real to cut stone in their municipal area. However, it is very likely that the prospecting to start the building work began earlier. According to the documents from 1446 regarding the decoration of the chevet, it was necessary to “ennoble” the church, since that meant beautifying and dignifying the town. In line with that aim, it would not have been considered

23. Chapter Archives of Valencia, Sig. 1480 (ed. ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: p. 250).

24. AMVlr, 254, f. 19r (purchase of poles and painted curtains) and 23r (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc.VIII) (painting of curtains). In the original Catalan: «cortines de pinzell que són estades fetes per ennobrir lo cap de la esgleya».

25. These altarpieces were documented by TRAVER 1909: 265; DOÑATE 1958 and 1959.

26. AMVlr, 254, f. 20r.

27. For example, in the cathedral of Tortosa, the concern of the canons and the city for the stability of the new nave, together with the small Romanesque nave, is recorded in documents dating from 1463 and 1483, according to VIDAL 2002: 175 and 2005: 409.

28. In the original Catalan: “the aisle following the chevet of the church”.

honourable to leave an oversized chevet in relation to the nave for many years: that would have to be a purely provisional situation. In view of the above, it must be taken into account that, in 1455, although work was not yet being carried out on the nave of the building, work had begun on the church's silver cross, following a design that had been sent to Valencia, concretely to the workshop of the silversmith Berenguer Alegre, while, at the same time, Master Tomàs, a skilled scribe, created two processions for the church. As often happens, architecture and the making of liturgical objects progressed almost in parallel.<sup>29</sup>

In the same way, in 1440, Antoni Dalmau and Simó Bonfill, just before taking charge of the chevet of the parish church, appeared in the Vila-real documents making a wayside cross, and, in April and September of 1456, it is recorded that the mason Pere de Savoia was making the capital of a wayside cross: he was, in fact, completing the work that the aforementioned Dalmau and Bonfill had begun fifteen years earlier.<sup>30</sup> Recently, this mason (Pere de Savoia) has been identified with Pere Garçó of Savoia, the chief master builder of Tortosa cathedral from 1459, who was also active in the construction of Montalegre monastery: Master Pere was therefore an important builder (VIDAL, in press). In La Plana, was he limited to carving «the button» of a pre-existing cross, or perhaps his visit also served to carry out a visit to the parish church of Sant Jaume? Could that have even been the motivation for his stay in the town, since it occurred at the very same moment the work was to be continued? We cannot know since we have no documentary evidence that Pere Garçó had carried out work of this nature. But neither can we rule it out, since a few months after this mention of his visit to the town we find that another big name in 14<sup>th</sup> century Valencian architecture came to inspect the church: in March 1457, Francesc Baldomar came to inspect «the works or the nave that has to be constructed in our church».<sup>31</sup> It seems obvious, therefore, that there was the intention to continue the project before Joan de Caritat took control of it in December 1457, and the status of the architects whose presence was documented in the town on these dates makes it clear that it was intended to be a work of some standing.

The document published by Doñate (1981: doc. X) according to which the town of Castelló ceded stone for the construction of the Vila-real church came from the Castelló municipal archive and had been donated by another meritorious

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29. The documentation on the making of the silver cross, made known only partially by Doñate 1969, is very interesting, and includes the payment of five sous to a messenger named Joan Igual “per portar la forma de la creu a València, per ço si-s porie fer de tal forma com la mostra ere (“to bring the shape of the cross to Valencia, so that it could be made in such a way as the sample was”). Documents on these matters appear in AMVlr, 261, f. 14v, 15r, 17r; 262, f. 15r; 263, f. 10r, 13r, 17v, n. 263.65, n. 263.68, 263.85; 24, f. 26r-v.

30. For more information regarding wayside crosses, see DOÑATE 1966: n. 11; ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ FERRER: 154-156.

31. AMVlr, 262, f. 15v.

archivist, Lluís Revest. The documentary sources in Vila-real confirm this fact and add others: the search for stone not only took place in Castelló, but also in Onda and Llocneta.<sup>32</sup> Speaking of medieval construction in the town, Aparici (1996: 56) had already drawn attention to the fact that «the town did not have its own quarry for stone extraction», and for that reason it was necessary to ask for permission from the surrounding towns. The need to obtain construction material was finally resolved, and, nine months after the visits by Baldomar, Joan de Caritat began work on «the first nave after the chevet of the church of the said town, with the sacristy and choir of the priests»,<sup>33</sup> for a price of 7700 *sous*, of which he had been paid 2,556 *sous* and 3 *diners* by 1458.<sup>34</sup>

In April of the following year (1459), Joan de Xulbi, the master of Tortosa cathedral, also travelled to Vila-real «to see and inspect the new work on the nave of the church that was in progress under master Johan de Caritat».<sup>35</sup> These historical reports do not explain why these inspections were carried out, but it seems clear that the building work was ongoing and that, as was customary, it was a matter of consulting a prestigious master on an issue that, as it did not appear detailed in the documents, evades us now.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the various visits that are documented in the following years (1460 and 1461) are related to a problem that arose suddenly: Joan de Xulbi died shortly after having made his inspection of the church of Sant Jaume, as did the master builder in charge of the project, Joan de Caritat. A payment made in 1460 indicates that he and his guarantors were paid 1,229 *sous* and six *diners*, which must be added to the 2,556 *sous* and 3 *diners* that he had been paid two years earlier. However, as we mentioned earlier, the master builder had died some time the previous year.<sup>37</sup>

While he lived, Joan de Caritat did manage to leave some traces of his activities in the town, since he did not limit himself to working on the church, but did other jobs, working specifically on the Bridge of the Royal Way of Valencia, the Bridge of *la Sequiola* and the *Sequia Roja*.<sup>38</sup> But in January 1460, the Council had to agree that master builders should be sought to assess the work on the first section of the nave of the church, both the part already built by the deceased master builder, «whom

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32. AMVlr, 263, f. 5r (licence to quarry stone in Castellón), f. 7v (licence to quarry stone in Onda), n. 263.66 (licence to quarry stone granted by Pedro d'Urrea, a noble of Llocneta).

33. In the original Catalan: “la primera navada aprés lo cap de la ecclésia de la dita vila, ab la secrestia e cor dels preveres”.

34. AMVlr, 263, f. 7v (ed. DOÑATE 1981: doc. X), n. 263.105, n. 263.126.

35. ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 156. The documents in AMVlr, 264, f. 7v and n. 264.60. In the original Catalan: “per veure e regonèxer la obra nova de la navada de la església que tenia a estall mestre Johan de Caritat”.

36. On the issue of architectural inspections in the medieval Crown of Aragon, see DOMENGE, VIDAL 2017.

37. AMVlr, 264, f. 22v, n. 265.45.

38. AMVlr, 263, 14v, n. 263.90 264, f. 12r.

God forgives» and what remained to be done. At the same time, it was agreed to collect the amounts left as guarantee. The problem was that, as was perhaps more common than we tend to imagine, the work had been paid by the piece. In other words, it had been commissioned in the same way as the chevet of the church: for a fixed price, an agreed amount. Although one cannot generalize, master builders tried to get paid by the day, thereby ensuring themselves a regular salary for the duration of the project, while the promoters usually preferred to establish a fixed price per project, since this allowed them to set clear deadline and lock in the costs.<sup>39</sup>

The master builders who were commissioned with the valuation of the work were Jaume Pérez, a stonemason from Valencia, on behalf of the town, and Joan de Sogorb, of the same profession, on the part of the guarantors, named Joan Borrada and Mateu Tolsa. Despite the fact that we do not have written minutes for that occasion - the Council's notes certify that they existed, and this must also have been more common than we suspect - we can deduct from the municipal documentation what the experts concluded that Joan de Caritat had done three quarters of the work and that only the last quarter of the work remained to be completed. According to the guarantors, however, the master builder had worked for a value that exceeded by 22 *lliures* the price that had been agreed, while, in accordance with the opinion of the Council, he had been paid more than what corresponded to the work he had done and, consequently, it was requested that the guarantors return the excess amount. Notwithstanding these problems, the project had to be finished. Therefore, in March 1460, it was decided that the work was to be entrusted to the master builder Pere de Campos. He was to be paid 200 florins of Valencian royal currency for what remained to be built, with the exception of the painting of the bosses, among a few other minor elements.<sup>40</sup>

Jaume Pérez and Joan de Sogorb exceeded their duties and did not limit themselves to assessing the value of what had been done and what remained to be built. From a municipal agreement of May 1460, we can deduce that they also warned the Council that the large «*tou*», that is, the large hole, the large expanse of empty space, that there was between the chevet and the nave that was being built, on the one hand, and the pre-existing church, on the other, could be «very dangerous and perilous»,<sup>41</sup> to the point that the new church, which was covered «with odd tiles and plaster», could «weaken and deteriorate» in the future.<sup>42</sup> These technical challenges meant that «for the *laguiy* - that is, the injury or disturbance - and major expenses

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39. A very clear case of this type of negotiation can be seen in the construction of the water mills at Xerta-Tivenys weir, in the 1560s. SEE VIDAL 2010.

40. AMVlr, 24, f. 22v, 24v, 25r-26r, 28r; 264, f. 16v, 17r, 18r, 22v, n. 264.45, n. 264.53, n. 264.55, n. 264.56, n. 264.66, n. 264.68. Campos' mastership was documented in TRAVER 1909: 263 and ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 156 and doc. A.7.

41. In the original Catalan: «molt dapnós e perilós»

42. In the original Catalan: «“de rajola senar ab aljepz”, “fluxar” and “venir a menys”».

involved in said work», Master Campos was offered twelve additional florins, apart from the 200 that had been agreed upon in the contract.<sup>43</sup>

This short document, which was drawn up by the notary of the Vila-real Council in a hasty and somewhat confusing manner, is of great interest and helps us to understand more vividly the difficulties that arose when choosing to replace small churches with larger works in the same location. The text, which was written, let us remember, in May 1460, also tells us something about the material used to cover the new building: tiles. In fact, the document only refers to the part that Pere de Campos had to build, that is to say, to the first section of the nave, but it is very likely that this architectural decision was made considering what had already been done in the presbytery, which had been erected twenty years earlier. And it is also logical to think that in the continuation of the works, twenty years later, the same decision was made. In the kingdom of Valencia, it was common to build vaults made of bricks rather than stone.<sup>44</sup>

With the inspections done, the tug-of-war with the guarantors underway and the appointment of Pere de Campos as master builder, it must have seemed to the Vila-real authorities that the problems to be overcome to complete the first bay of the church had ended. But it was not to be. And for us the difficulties are not over either since, once again, we are missing the municipal agreements that would provide us a better understanding of what occurred in 1460 and 1461, especially if we take into account that the municipal ledgers do not follow a strict chronological order, preventing us from tracing a completely certain sequence of events.

Be that as it may, the documented payments indicate that, on August 17, 1460, Joan d'Alcanyís, town foreman, agreed with the Council that he would finish the first vault for 95 *lliures*.<sup>45</sup> Pere de Campos, therefore, seems to have abandoned the work, at the outset we do not know at what moment or for what reason. As for Joan d'Alcanyís, in October 1460, it was also necessary to seek him out in Valencia to show him an order from the governor ordering him to take charge of the project once again.<sup>46</sup> In March 1461, history was repeating itself yet again, and the Council sent messengers to Joan d'Alcanyís and “Master Baldonamar”, whom Arturo Zaragoza and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer identified, I think correctly, as Francesc Baldomar, in Valencia in order to speak with them «about the work on the church».<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to understand what could have happened for there to be so much back and forth, so many discussions and, ultimately, so many problems. It is certain that the construction difficulties, added to the interests of the master builders and the

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43. AMVlr, 24, f. 28r.

44. For more information regarding tile vaults in the kingdom of Valencia, see, among others, ZARAGOZÁ 2003: *passim* and 2012.

45. AMVlr, 265, f. 8v-9r (ed. DOÑATE, doc. XI).

46. AMVlr, 265, f. 11v, 16r.

47. AMVlr, 265, f. 18v (cit. ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 250).

financial wranglings, turned the completion of this first bay into an unappealing undertaking.

In case the Gordian knot was not already tied in a complicated enough way, some ledger entries that are found later in the same memorial book of the local representative Joan Blasco - that is, documents that appear after the entries of 1460 and 1461 that we have just mentioned, but which, in my opinion, refer to payments related to work that had been carried out much earlier, indicate that in 1460, perhaps before the summer, he had gone to seek out Pere de Campos in Vilafermosa, so that he could resume work on the church, a job that had been commissioned that same spring (from 1460).

Unfortunately, in this annotation there is a blank space and the date of the municipal agreement to which the payment is related is not indicated, as is often the case.<sup>48</sup> If all the disbursements recorded in the book of the trustee Blasco of 1461 had been made at the time of writing that, then my dating would be wrong, but I believe it to be correct since an even later entry in the same register indicates that, in a meeting of the Council in September 1460, and here the date is clearly noted, it had been agreed to act «against the wife and heirs of Master Pere de Campos, deceased» (Fig. 1) in 1461, therefore, he could not have been working in Vilafermosa.<sup>49</sup>

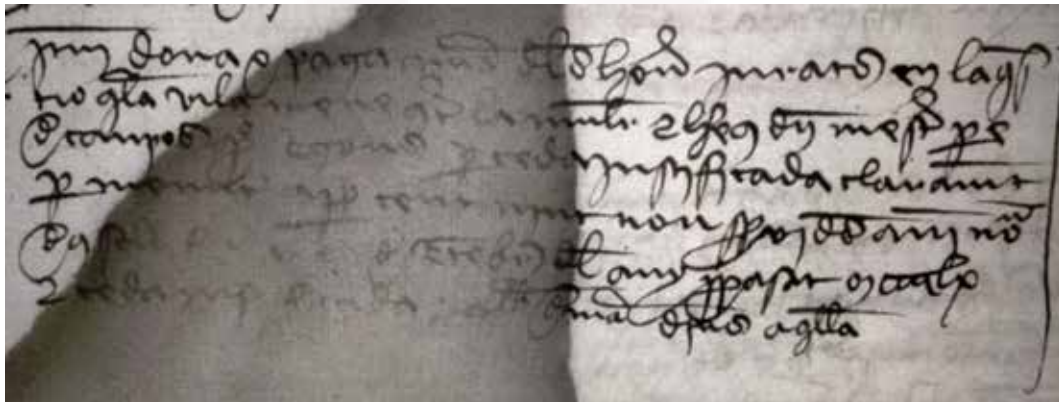


Figure 1. AMVlr, 265, f. 18r.

To summarize this very dark affair in a few lines, and if the sequence I propose is correct, things would have gone as follows: Campos would have taken charge of the work at the end of the winter of 1460, following the death of Joan de Caritat; he would have left it to go – perhaps among other places – to Vilafermosa just before the summer and would have died during this time. Therefore, in August 1460, a

48. AMVlr, 265, f. 16v. ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER: 156, 250 and doc. A.9 date the document to April 1461, and this is probably the date on which the entry was recorded. However, as mentioned, the heading refers to a past municipal agreement, but when writing the date, the notary left a blank space. In my opinion, this meeting of the Council must have taken place in the late spring or summer of 1460.

49. AMVlr, 265, f. 18r. In the original Catalan: “contra la muler e hereus d'en mestre Pere de Campos, quòndam”

new master was chosen, namely Joan d'Alcanyís, who would also have abandoned the work halfway through but who, finally, after the injunctions of October 1460 and March 1461, was forced to resume and conclude it.

We could therefore say that the work on the first bay of the Church of Sant Jaume was cursed: both the master who had begun to build it and his replacement died in the attempt, joining one of its first inspectors, Joan de Xulbi, in the afterlife. Joan Alcanyís, whether voluntarily or by obligation, completed the work before April 1464, when the Council agreed to pay him 372 sous.<sup>50</sup> After this date, silence falls once again on the work on the church: in the ledgers, only mechanical repairs appear and, just after the structural work on the nave was finished, a work linked to the liturgical furniture is documented. This is an invoice by the carpenters Joan Cortès, who also died while working on the project, and Andreu Vallès.<sup>51</sup> The next episode in the story of the construction of the church does not begin until the 1480s, when the team led by Pere Compte took charge of its completion.<sup>52</sup>

## A final note: Pere de Campos is not Pere Compte

The report of September 1460 according to which Pere de Campos had died, if it is accurate, has a series of implications that should be of interest beyond the construction process of the church in Vila-real. The fact is that the document in which this death is mentioned does not specify that the deceased is the stonemason in charge of the works on the church. However, it does clearly seem to refer to him, since he is the only mason by the name of Pere de Campos who appears in the municipal documentation of Vila-real in this chronology and, moreover, his death helps to explain the rapid interchange of master masons from 1460 to 1461.

If we accept that as fact, the implication is that, if Campos died in 1460, he cannot be the same person as Pere Compte, the master «very subtle in the art of stone» as described in the *Crònica i dietari del capellà d'Alfons el Magnànim* (RODRIGO 2011: 134), who dominated the world of construction in the kingdom of Valencia during the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century until his death in 1506, a master who often directed works at a distance and who was in charge of completing the work on Sant Jaume de Vila-real from 1480, as we have said.

The hypothesis that Campos could be the same person as Compte, had been raised by Arturo Zaragoza and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer (2007: *passim*, especially 42-44) in their study on the architect from Girona. It must be said that their hypothesis was based on a series of very solid arguments, which, to a large extent, I share. Des-

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50. AMVlr, 26, f. 28r (cit. APARICI 1996: 150).

51. AMVlr, 267, f. 6v, 7r.

52. TRAVER 1909: 264; DOÑATE 1981: 125-127 and related documents; APARICI 1996: *passim*; ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 157-158 and related documents.

pite this, given the circumstances, it will be necessary to give them another reading or develop them in another way.<sup>53</sup> Based on this possibility, Victòria Almuni (2007: passim, especially 486-488), held that Pere Compte was the master mason who had signed a contract as master of the cathedral of Tortosa in the autumn of 1459, since, at that very moment, Pere de Campos, the Valencian master mason who immediately afterwards took charge of the works in Vila-real, had done so.

The theory, then, had become an axiom. All in all, reluctance had been expressed, both actively and, above all, passively, to accept that all the documents in which Pere Compte, Pere de Campos and Pere Gironès, another possible alias, appear, referred to the same person. No one doubts, of course, the extraordinary breadth or the unusual quality of Compte's architectural production. It is simply necessary to continue revising, or at least refining, certain ideas regarding his activity.

In fact, based on another document from Vila-real, this time linked to the works on the dam, the possibility has been raised that Compte "returned" to being in charge of the work on the cathedral in Tortosa in 1478, following the death of Pere Garçó (c. 1476).<sup>54</sup> Certainly, the document may say "master builder of the see of Tortosa" or the "master builder of the see of Valencia" (Fig. 2), since after the indication of the name of the architect - unmistakably it is Pere Compte - there there is a rewritten word, upon which the doubt may arise: on which cathedral was this stonemason directing the building work? Having read and re-read the document, it seems to me that the annotation considers him to be the master builder of the cathedral of Valencia, a position he held since 1477, and not of Tortosa, a position he may never have held before 1490<sup>55</sup> I may, of course, be mistaken, both in this reading and in the interpretation of the death of Pere de Campos. My error could be the seed of another paper.

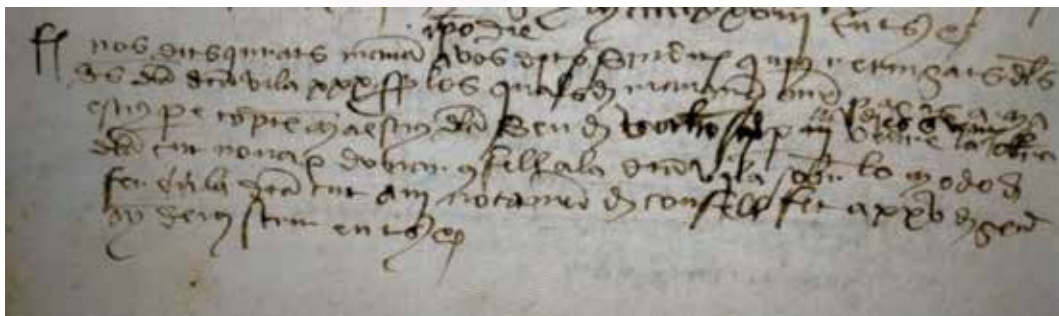


Figure 2. AMVlr, 34, f. 28v

53. In addition to the arguments they present, these authors make public a document from 1488 (ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: doc. B.8) in which the defunct Petrus del Campo confirms the existence of a 12-year-old son, named Francesc, with the silversmith Ausias Manresa. Logically, then, an architect with that name was alive at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In my opinion, it should be interpreted that this Peter is the son of the mason who died in 1460, and that Francesc must have been his grandson.

54. ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 157 and doc. A. 26 (AMVlr, 34, f. 28v).

55. Regarding his mastership in Valencia, see ZARAGOZÁ, GÓMEZ-FERRER 2007: 70-75; the mastership at Tortosa was documented for the first time in VIDAL 2005.



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