Santa Eulalia de Bóveda
The underground monument at Santa Eulalia de Bóveda is a unique example in all western Europe of a building with architectural and ornamental models more usual in the classical eastern Mediterranean. Visitors find themselves face to face with a robust and original front embellished with mysterious reliefs and once he has gone through the opening under what is possibly the oldest horseshoe arch in the Iberian Peninsula, if not in all Europe, he will be surprised and feel full of admiration for the wall paintings, which are highly realistic and fill the inside of the monument with colour.

The monument was discovered by José María Penado, the parish priest, but it did not come to light until 1926 when the Artistic and Historical Monument Committee of Lugo found out about its existence. Luis López-Martí directed the excavation work to recover this jewel of cultural heritage in Galicia so everybody can enjoy it. Apart from the obligatory tasks of conservation and restoration, a road had to be built to provide access to the site. It was declared a National Monument in 1931 and an Asset of Cultural Interest in 1985.

There is no doubt about how extraordinary the discovery was but it is a completely different matter to determine basic questions such as when and what it was built for. Paradoxically, the more the excavation process advanced, the more questions arose about the origins and use of the building and various theories were suggested, all very different: a pagan temple for worshipping pagan deities, a Roman building for Christian worship, a Roman building used as a Priscillian church, a Roman building devoted to the nymphs and a Visigothic church. Some of these opinions are still held and could even be complementary if there were more than one cultural phase at the building. This has generally been accepted since the 1950's: a nymph shrine dating back to the 4th century B.C., a health centre devoted to the nymphs or to any other pagan god and...
Funeral stele reused as a step.

Published by Martínez Morás in 1927 when the inside of the monument had not been cleared up. This photo makes us doubt that the pillars by the pond are in their original place, given that, as can be seen, they were located on the higher levels of the filling material.

Later Christianised, especially after Chamoso Lamas discovered the pool under some flagstones in the centre of the main hall. This new proof was complemented by a fragment of a Roman altar possibly left as a votive offering for a cure. This also reinforced the theory of those who saw two cripples making their suffering evident on a relief which can be found on the north wall of the atrium at the entrance.

Helmut Schlunk's proposal, according to which the building was used for funerals, is also most interesting. This German researcher also found similarities in the motifs present in the paintings at Bóveda and pre-Romanic Asturian art, a reflection of the clear influence of the Classical world on the iconography programme in the kingdom of Asturias. Unfortunately, as a consequence of the poor choice of conservation and restoration criteria in the 1950's and 60's, examples of one of the pictorial motifs from the central area of the vault have all been lost.

The enigmatic nature of the building has been justified to a large extent as a consequence of the lack of information about the interventions carried out on the monument, especially in the years just after its discovery. But as time went by numerous interventions were carried out and very few results published. In fact, non-original structures and elements are only recently being distinguished.

Santa Eulalia de Bóveda is without doubt a good reason to be amazed once again at the legacy of the ancient world, to show our commitment to future generations for its conservation and an excellent incentive to keep going deeper into the knowledge of the life and concerns of our ancestors.