

A NOTE ON AN INSCRIPTION OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

By MEYER SCHAPIRO

FOR several years already the reading of the date inscribed on a jamb of the Puerta de las Platerias of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Plate 1) has been disputed by Spanish, French and American historians. The ligature of X and V, interpreted as fifteen, implied a reading of Era 1116 (A.D. 1078); but when interpreted as a variety of XL, the sign for forty in Visigothic script,¹ it yielded a reading of Era 1141, or A.D. 1103. The first interpretation² coincided with the tradition of the *Historia Compostelana*, a work of the twelfth century, which gives July 11, 1078 as the date of the beginning of the construction of the church.³ The other reading, proposed by Senor Gómez-Moreno, gives us, according to this eminent scholar, the date of the portal itself.⁴ Arthur Kingsley Porter⁵ accepted the latter view, and pointed to an inscription in Trobe, near Santiago, as an example of the same ligature signifying forty.⁶ But he overlooked that in Trobe the L has a horizontal lower bar, unlike the strictly vertical right bar at Santiago. There are indeed several examples of the L written as a V.⁷ But in all these instances, as I observed in an earlier article,⁸ the V is smaller than the X and clearly elevated as an appendage to the X, whereas in the inscription of Santiago the X and V are of equal height. An identical ligature of X and V appears in an inscription of 951 in S. Martin de Salas (Asturias),⁹ preceded by LXX, and hence is unequivocally a symbol of fifteen.

In a recent article in the *Antiquaries Journal*,¹⁰ Dr Walter M. Whitehill has studied carefully the documents of the construction of the cathedral and concluded that the date of July 11, 1078 inscribed on the Puerta de las Platerias "corresponds to a corner-stone ceremony, or some similar event marking the official beginning of the building," although the foundation itself may be dated about 1075.¹¹

In his new book on Spanish Romanesque art¹² and in a later comment on Dr

¹ See Agustín Millares Carlo, *Paleografía Española* (Barcelona 1929), I, 278, 279; J. Vives, 'La cifra XL nelle iscrizioni cristiane di Spagna,' *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana*, xvi (1939), 331-336.

² Already given by George Edmund Street, *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain* (London 1865), p. 143. This reading was upheld by M. Georges Gaillard, 'Notes sur la date des sculptures de Compostelle et de Léon,' *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, VI^e période, I (1929), 343-346.

³ E. Flórez, *España Sagrada* (1765), xx, pp. 137, 138.

⁴ *Catálogo Monumental de España: Provincia de León* (1906-1908) (Madrid, 1925), p. 376.

⁵ 'Atlésque Romanesque and Southern France,' *Art Bulletin*, VIII (1926), pp. 248-250.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250, n. 30; E. Hübner, *Inscriptiones Hispaniae Christianae* (1871), p. 76, no. 234.

⁷ For reproduced inscriptions, see Hübner, *Supplementum* (1900), no. 506, and Gómez-Moreno, *Iglesias Mozárabes* (Madrid, 1919), pl. CXLVII. The form is also found in manuscripts and charters, e.g., archives of the cathedral of Jaca, donation of Pedro I to Huesca (1103).

⁸ *Art Bulletin*, XII (1930), 106, n. 42.

⁹ Hübner, *Supplementum*, no. 495.

¹⁰ 'The Date of the Beginning of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela,' *The Antiquaries Journal*, xv (1935), 336-342. I have borrowed Plate I from this article.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹² *El Arte Románico Español* (Madrid, 1934), pp. 115, 116.

Whitehill's article,¹ Señor Gómez-Moreno has defended his original reading of the inscription. I agree with him that the portal is of the beginning of the twelfth century, for reasons drawn from the style of the sculptures and architecture. But insofar as his arguments rest upon an interpretation of the ligature XV as a symbol of forty, it is necessary to consider his palaeographic criteria apart from his conclusion about the age of the portal. He attributes the ligatured form to a 'desire for monumentality in the writing,' and argues that 'signs were linked only when the ligature expressed a numerical cipher; such are the successive Xes and such is the XL; consequently, it would be against the rules to read *decima sexta*, and to ensure the other reading, the A was placed above, giving XL^aI, which cannot be read otherwise than *quadragesima prima*.'² He adds that if the inscription was read as 1116 in the twelfth century, it was an error of a foreigner, the French editor of the *Historia Compostelana*.

There is only one way, it seems to me, to decide this question, and that is, to find a contemporary Spanish table with a series of consecutive numbers in which appear unmistakably the signs for fifteen, sixteen and forty. Such a series occurs in a computus in a manuscript of Isidore written in Santo Domingo de Silos in 1072³ — Paris, *Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. Acq. latin 2169*, fol. 10^v (Plate 2). Here the reader can see plainly enough the difference between the signs for fifteen, sixteen, and forty in Spain at this period, and judge for himself the intention behind the number inscribed in Santiago. The V is linked with the X in the numbers from sixteen to nineteen, contrary to the rule presumed by Señor Gómez-Moreno. The XVI of the computus corresponds exactly to the inscription on the portal. The letter A above the date simply marks the ordinal character of the number (*sedecima*).⁴

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

¹ 'Sobre nuestro arte románico,' *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, xi (1935), 200.

² *Ibid.*

³ On the text, provenance and date of this manuscript, see Léopold Delisle, *Mélanges de paléographie et de bibliographie* (Paris, 1880), 103 ff. I am indebted to Dr Whitehill for obtaining the photograph of this page for me.

⁴ Since this was written, I have found in an eighteenth century Spanish treatise on paleography a table of Visigothic numerals which clearly distinguishes the ligatures of XV and XL as signs for fifteen and forty; Andres Merino, *Escuela de leer letras cursivas antiguas y modernas desde la entrada de los godos en España hasta nuestros tiempos* (Madrid, 1780), p. 91, Lam. 9, no. 2 (tabla de numerales gothicos).



PLATE I

Inscription on portal of South Transept, Santiago Cathedral.

