

The survival of early christian symbols in 12th Century Spain

RUTH BARTAL*

The wide distribution of the Chrismon (or the monogram of Christ) in the monumental art of Spain and the Beam region of the eleventh to the late thirteenth centuries is an interesting phenomenon which has not escaped scholarly notice. Alain Sene, S. H. Caldwell and Constant Lacoste interpret the presentation of the Chrismon in Spain as a symbol of the Trinity, The Passion of Christ and his triumph over death¹. The study of these works is essential for an understanding of the complex religious significance of the monogram in Spanish Romanesque art. However, I shall attempt to take the inquiry a step further, and to consider why this symbol, one of the most evident in the early Christian era between the fourth and sixth centuries, lost its importance in Christian Europe, where it almost entirely disappeared, yet continued to appear in Spain in all periods with especial frequency from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.

The Chrismon signifies the Tninity, or, according to a broader interpretation, the Passion, the Victory over Death, and the Resurrection. These dogmas were sacred for all Christianity, and if their representation were the only cause of the wide occurrence of the symbol in Spanish art, it would be difficult to understand why it disappeared from other Christian countries.

* History of Art Department, Tel Aviv University

1. ALAIN SENE, Quelques remarques sur les tympans romans a chrisme en Aragón et en Navarre: Melanges offerts a Rene Crozet I Poitiers 1966, pp. 365-381; Contant Lacoste, Les Chrismes des églises Bearnaises, *Bull. de Société de Sciences Lettres et Arts de Pan.*

SUSAN HAVENS CALDWELL, Penance Baptism, Apocalypse: The Easter Context of Jaca Cathedral's West Tympanum, *Art History*, London, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1980, pp 25-40. Mrs. Caldwell adds the meanings of baptism and penitence.

The explanation proffered by Alain Sene, that the symbol was used as a substitute for the figurative representation of Christ, which would have troubled the Moslem population (accustomed to the Islamic ban of figurative representations of divinity), is hard to accept. First, the symbol appeared mainly in the areas already reconquered from the Moslems, and it is unlikely that the victorious Christians would have considered the conquered population's feeling to the extent of using a ymbol instead of a human figure. Secondly, the symbol also appears as part of figurative representations, where Christ is depicted as a man. An early example of this tendency occurs on the Puerta de las Platerías of Santiago de Compostela². Later it occurs on the tympana of Estella³ and of other churches. I would like to suggest another reason for the remarkably extensive representation of the Chrismon in Spanish art.

The Chrismon frequently occurred in Visigothic art of the sixth century, reappeared in the early period of the Reconquista in the ninth century. At the church of San Salvador de Valdedios, built by Alfonso III in 893, the remnants of the apse still display three crosses with spreading arms and the Chrismon⁴. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this symbol became especially widespread in the two kingdoms most active in the Reconquista, Aragón and Navarra, but it is also found in all other Spanish kingdoms.

In the majority of cases The Chrismon appeared on buildings associated one way or another with the royal houses, and the wars of the Reconquista. It seems to me that its frequent appearance both on church tympana on royal castles and royal tombs is an indication of political and religious processes in Spain, that emphasize the specific preoccupations of the Spanish kingdoms in their continuous involvement in the struggle of the Reconquista, as a holy war.

The history of Catholic Spain began with the Third Council of Toledo, on May 6, 589, when King Reccared rejected the Arian heresy and adopted the Catholic faith. The situation was similar to that of earlier Church councils, Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451 in which Christianity was engaged in crystallizing and establishing the principal dogmas of the faith binding on every devout Christian in conflict with the heretics who remained outside the campo of the true believers. The Chronicle of John of Biclar refers to Recarred in the Council of Toledo as Constantine: "Like Constantine among the bishops of Nicaea, the anathematized Arius and his teaching and recognized the doctrine of the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon"⁵. It was the king and not the bishop of Toledo, San Leandro, who brought about the change and perpetuated the Nicæan Creed, stating the belief in the Trinity and in the double nature of Christ as a central tenet of the Spanish Catholic faith.

2. MARCEL DURLIAT, Le "Camino Frances et la sculpture Romane", *Le Dossiers de VArchéologie*, No. 20, Jan.-Fev., p. 70.

3. Sene, p. 274.

4. HELMUT SCHLUNK, *Ars Hispaniae II Arte visigodo, Arte asturiano*, Madrid, 1947, p. 403.

5. T. MOMMSEN, *Monumenta Germaniae Histórica Chronica Minora*, Berlin 1894 reprint 1961 t. XI p. 219; J. VIVES, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano Romanos*, Barcelona Madrid MCMLXIII, pp. 107-145.

This was the first step towards the crystallization of the special concept of the Spanish Kingdom. Like Constantine, Theodosius and Marxian, the Spanish king was a worldly ruler and stood at the head of the army, but he was also a Christian prince, defender of the faith and its principles. King Sisebut, a close friend of Isidore of Seville, was also imbued with the idea of his own double mission, a mission both political and religious as a Christian king, and as a Catholic Christian, or, as P.D. King expresses it: the king's task was "to bring peace and well-being to the faithful, who dwelt in the house of the lord, and, to bring the infidels, *ad concordiam religiose pads*, and enjoy his heavenly reward"⁶. As J. Fontaine⁷ said: "Like Reccared, the New Constantine, Sisebut felt himself to be the heir of this first Christian emperor who had been bishop to those outside".

The creation of the kingdom of Leon Asturias marks the start of the Reconquista. Beginning with Pelayo's victory at Covadonga, and continuing with his heir Alfonso I the Catholic, the kings of Asturias Leon saw themselves destined to liberate Spanish soil from the Moslem occupation, basing their conceptions on the Catholic Visigothic heritage, to which the Asturias Leon monarchy considered itself the legitimate heir⁸.

The ninth century chronicles of Albelda, and Alfonso the III, and the tenth century chronicle of Sampiro⁹ describe the kings of Asturias Leon as the heirs of the Visigothic Kingdom. They adopted Visigothic coronation ceremonies, and, like the Visigoths, saw themselves not only as commanders of the army, but also as warriors of Christianity in a battle hallowed by Divine support.

In the eleventh century, in spite of the internecine wars of the Christian kingdoms and the severe antagonism between Leon, Castille, Navarre and Aragon, the ideology of the Christian ruler, defender of the Catholic faith, was the heritage of all the Spanish kings.

In 1055, Ferdinand I convened a council of bishops and magnates at Coyanza "for the restoration of Christendom". This council took place after his victory over Vermundo III of Leon at the battle of Tamarion in 1037, and a further victory over Garcia III king of Navarra at Atapuerca in 1054¹⁰.

The 12th century chronicles, the Historia Silense and the Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris¹¹, follow the same tradition and refer to Alfonso VI and Alfonso

6. P.D. KING, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1972, p. 129, quotes council of Toledo Vol. XII 3.1.

7. JACQUE FONTAINE, King Sisebut's Vita Desiderii and the Political Function of Visigothic Hagiography, in E. JAMES, *Visigothic Spain New Approaches*, Oxford, 1980, p. 97.

8. JOSEPH F. O'CALLAGHAN, *A History of Medieval Spain*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1975, pp. 168-169, p. 176; W.C. ATKINSON, *A History of Spain and Portugal*, Harmondsworth, 1970, pp. 62-79; Sir Ch. A. PETRIE, *The Spanish Royal House*, London, 1958, p. 7.

9. Chronicon Albeldense, Migne, *P.L.* 1.129, Cols. 1123-1146; G. MORENO, Las Primeras crónicas de la Reconquista, Boletín de la academia de la historia, 1.100, pp. 600-621; Chronicon Sebastiani, Migne, *P.L.*, 1.129, Cols. 1111-1124; Crónica de Alfonso, III ed., A.U. Arteta, Valencia, 1971; Crónica de Sampiro, Florez, España Sagrada, t. XIV, pp. 419-457.

10. O'Callaghan, pp. 194-195.

11. Historia Silense, Edición crítica e introducción por PEREZ DE URBEL y P.G. Ruiz ZORILLA, Madrid, 1955; *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, Edición y estudio por Sánchez Belda, Madrid, 1950; O'Callaghan, p. 226, quotes later epistles recounting that Christ himself appeared to Al-

VII as the true Christian Warriors. Their victories over the Moslems are the victories of Christianity.

Thus we see that the Spanish monarchy considered itself responsible for the performance of two chief roles: as warrior king at the head of the Reconquista, and as head of the Church, defending the principles of the Catholic faith. This dual concept persisted and was increasingly strengthened as the war of the Reconquista widened in range and the Christians won great victories over the Moslems; this war was at its height during the twelfth century¹².

The best proof of the continuing validity of this concept, and also for the fact that the immediate model of the Spanish kings was Constantine the Great, is the celebrated crosses presented by Alfonso II and Alfonso III to the Cathedral of Oviedo: the Cross of the Angels, and the Cross of Victory. The dedications on these crosses carry a clear message: "*Hoc Signo tuetur Pius, Hoc Signo Vincitur Inimicus*"¹³. This of course recalls the Constantinian motto "*Hac Vince*"¹⁴.

These crosses, set with jewels, have arms which flare toward the ends and they are copies of the famous Cross that Theodosius II erected on Golgotha¹⁵ so that not only is the dedication based on Constantine's motto, but the cross itself imitates the most venerated cross of early Christianity. This form of cross was one of the most frequent of early Christianity. It is represented on the mosaics in the apse of S. Pudenziana in Rome, in S. Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna, and on liturgical vessels. Quite often the spreading cross is replaced by the Chrismon, and vice versa; sometimes monogram and cross appear in the same composition, conveying apparently the same significance.

Like the Chrismon, the spreading cross is not a form usually found in European art after the sixth century, but in Spain it continued to be represented throughout this period, up to the twelfth century, and occurred even in the fifteenth¹⁶. The representation of the cross as a symbol of victory, both religious and political, is not a new idea, and its significance is common knowledge. However, the wide distribution and the choice of precisely this kind of cross, are distinctive of Spain art.

Alfonso in a dream and promised him victory over the enemy before his triumph at Ourique in 1139. Such descriptions recall of course Constantine's dream before the battle of the Milvian Bridge; R. BARKAY; *Self-image and Enemy Image of Christian and Muslims in Spain during the Reconquista 8th to 13th Centuries* (Unpublished thesis, will soon be published in a Spanish version), Tel Aviv University, 1979.

12. D.W. LOMAS, *The Reconquest of Spain*, London, New York, 1978, pp. 101-103.

13. HELMUT SCHLUNK, *The Crosses of Oviedo, A Contribution to the History of Jewellery*, *Art Bull.* 32, 1950, p. 94.

14. Migne, *P. L.*, Vol. 8, Col. 22-23. In a hymn from the 12th century describing the vision we read: "*In Hoc Vincas / Constantine / Crux Est Signum / Triumphale*."

A. LINDER, *The Myth of Constantine the Great in the West*, *Studi Medievali*, 1975, p. 66.

15. K.J. CONANT, *The Original Buildings at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem*, *Speculum*, XXXI, No. 1, Jan. 1956, pp. 1-48. A. GRABAR, *Martyrium II* p. 188, 202, Variorum repr. London 1972.

16. CHAUNCEY ROSS MARVI, *Two Spanish Processional Crosses*, *The Art Quarterly*, Vol. IV, 1941, pp. 179-186.

What is the connection between the historical process we have referred to, and the use of the Chrismon? In discussing this symbol which became the central emblem of a whole structure, we cannot be content with understanding the significance of the symbol at a certain period. In order to understand the reason for the wide use of the Chrismon we must consider the various meanings that accompanied it from the first, and which were immediately associated with it in the mind of the observer.

The Chrismon has the significance of a Coat of Arms. It conveys both a complicated content and a hidden meaning. The symbol's force lies in its ability to communicate in a concise form, all the meanings behind it. In Christian thought the Chrismon is associated with the golden age of Christianity, and with the most important moments in its history; it is therefore understood as a striking religious and political symbol. As we know, the monogram as a symbol existed before Constantine¹⁷, but in Christian thought it was associated with the great event —the battle at the Milvian Bridge, where Constantine overcame Maxentius, after which Christianity was declared a permitted faith of the Empire by the Edict of Milan. Eusebius related Constantine's dream before the battle and his vow *Hac Vince*, calling the Chrismon, Trophy of Salvation, Trophy of Immortality.

Carl Erdmann states the idea very clearly: "Wussten wir von Konstantin nichts anderes, als dass er in die Feldzeichen seines Heeres ein Symbol aufgenommen hat, das als Monogram Christi gedeutet wurde, so konnten wir das Wesentliche seines Lebenswerkes schon erschliessen: *das Bündnis der römischen Staats und Militärgewalt mit der christlichen Kirche*"¹⁸.

Exactly the same idea is found in the Chronicle of Alfonso the III, where the king defines the religious and political aspects of the Reconquista. In the speech attributed to Pelayo before the battle of Covadonga, he is represented as saying "Our hope is Christ, that through this little hill (i.e. Mount Aseuva), which you can see, the Salvation of Spain and the Army of the Gothic nation may be restored... We expect that His mercy will come to restore the Church, that is, the nation and the Kingdom"¹⁹. This formula was copied into the later chronicles of Najera, Bishop Pelayo, and the Silenese²⁰.

There can be no doubt that the frequent occurrence of the monogram in the early Christian period was due to the fact that it conveyed an ideological message, which was both religious and political. As a political symbol it presided over the defeat of the enemy. As a religious and royal symbol it was adopted by kings who took it on themselves to perpetuate the principle of the Christian

17. D.A.C.L., *Chrisme*, tome 3.1. p. 1482-1533.

18. C. ERDMANN, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*, Darmstadt, 1965 (repr. 1935, Stuttgart), 1977; G. HENDERSON, *Early Medieval*, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp. 201-235.

19. *Chronicon Sebastianini*, Migne P.L. t. 129 col. 1116.

Crónica de Alfonso III op. cit. p. 33.

D.W. LOMAX, *The Reconquest*, p. 40. remarks that it is unlikely that Pelayo himself said these words, "they state rather the political programme of Alfonso III".

20. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

faith. Thus it appeared on imperial objects and on liturgical vessels. The Christian emperors had the symbol impressed on medallions in remembrance of victories on the battlefield, such as the medallions of Constans, Valentinian, and Honorius²¹. The message of the emblem is clear — victory on the battlefield is obtained by the grace of God, and thus it is a symbol of the victory of Christianity.

Its appearance on liturgical vessels such as the Plate of Paternus or the Boston chalice²² or on sarcophagi representing the Resurrection in a symbolic form - expresses Christ's Passion and his victory over death²³.

In Spanish and Bearnese art the letter S is added to the original monogram. The S is usually interpreted as standing for *Jesus Hominum Salvator*, *Sol Invictus* or *Christi Passio Salus*. It thus stresses salvation by means of the Passion, where Christ was revealed in his human nature.

In Spain the monogram appears as a central emblem on church tympana on royal castles as well as on royal sarcophagi. These seem to present the main catholic tenets, which were rejected by the heretics: the belief in the Holy Trinity, the double nature of Christ and the Eucharist.

The emblem is depicted in various compositions; as an isolated motif, in an heraldic composition, and as part of a large figurative composition.

On the entrance connecting the old church of San Isidoro at Leon and the royal palace, on the entrance to the crypt of the palace of Loarre [PL 1], at Santa Maria del Pilar at Saragossa [PL 2] etc. it is represented as an isolated emblem.

In Huesca, on the three tympana of San Pedro el Viejo [PL 3] in Jaca [PL 4], in St. Engrace [PL 5] in Beam etc. the monogram is depicted in a heraldic arrangement. In Huesca and St. Engrace the monogram is inserted between two angels. In Jaca and in Santa Cruz de la Seros [PL 6] it is between two lions.

On these tympana as well as on that of Saragossa a number of flowers are shown as part of the iconographical program. S.H. Caldwell's interpretation of these flowers in Jaca, as being the symbol of Resurrection is based on the number 8²⁴, but the fact that their number varies: in Santa Cruz de la Seros there is one flower, in San Martin d'Artaiz two, in Saragossa six, indicates that the earlier interpretation of A. Canellas Lopez²⁵ should be adopted. These flowers are margaritae, which symbolize the Eucharist, as stated by Fortunatus Venantius "*Corporis agni margaritum ingens*".

21. K. WEITZMANN, *Age of Spirituality*, New York, 1979, figs. 39, 42, 43.

22. *Ibid.*, figs. 546, 543.

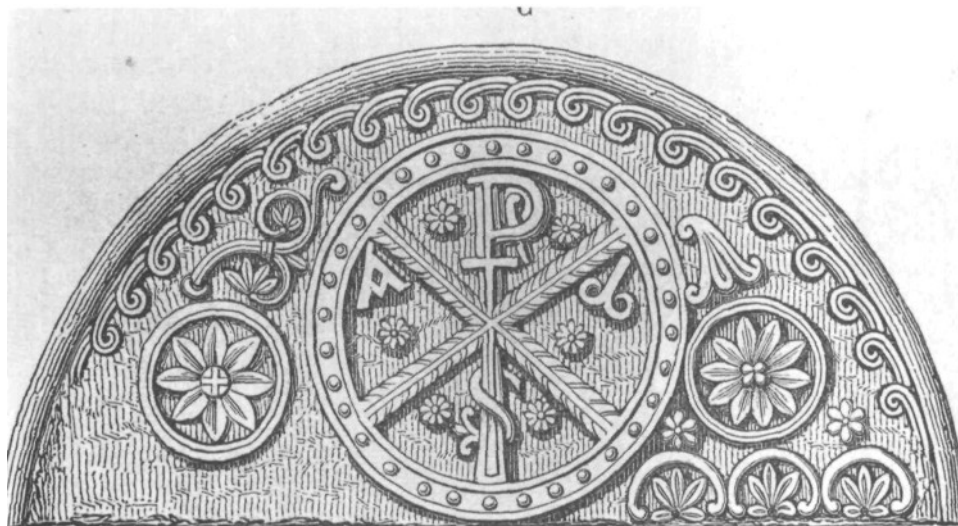
23. A. GRABAR; *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967, p. 265, figs. 295-296. The representation of the resurrection "here is a Christian derivative of the monumental Roman Trophy, symbol of victory".

24. S.H. CALDWELL, p. 23, n. 58.

25. A. CANELLAS LOPEZ, *Aragón Roman*, Zodiaque, 1971, Santa Cruz de la Seros, p. 233, Jaca, p. 159.



Pl. 1 Castillo de Loarre, entrance to the crypte (Zodiaque Aragón Roman).

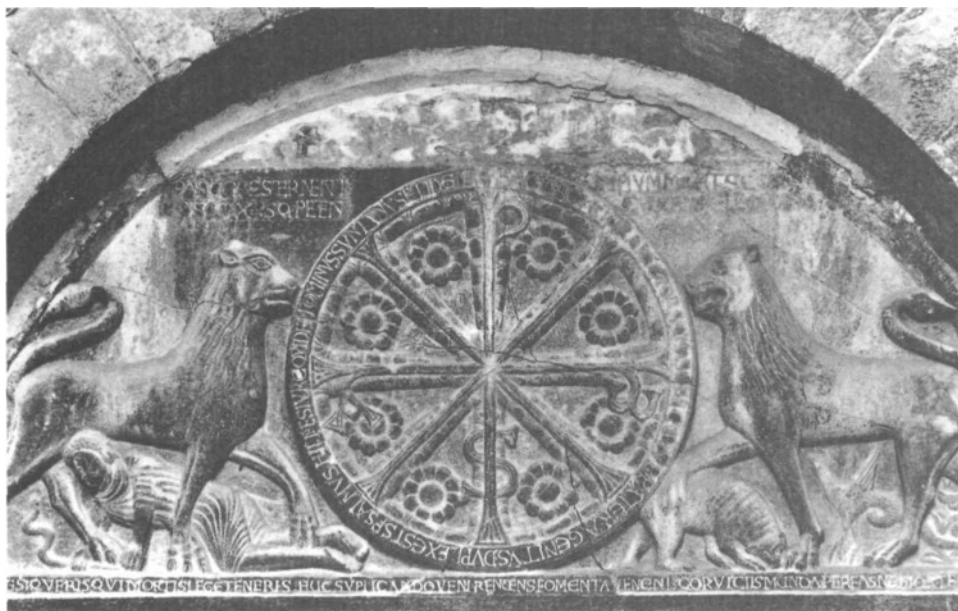


P1.2 Saragossa, Santa Maria del Pilar (Melanges d'Archeologia ed. P.CH. Cahier Paris 1874 p. 225 c).



Pl. 3 Huesca, San Pedro el Viejo: a) Northern tympanum b) tympanum of the cloister (Zodiaque Aragón Roman).

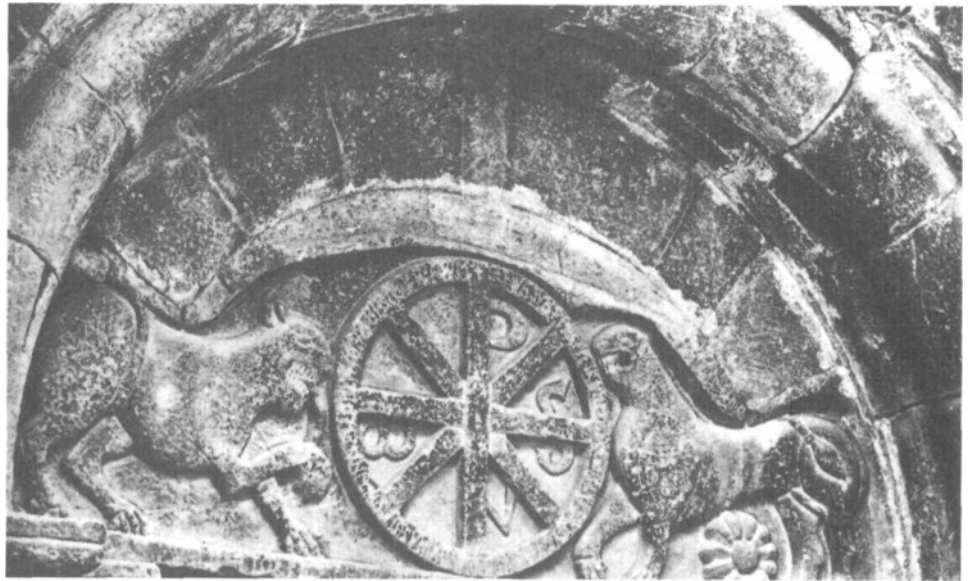
THE SURVIVAL OF EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS IN 12TH CENTURY SPAIN



Pl. 4 Jaca Cathedral, Western tympanum (photo Hirmer) (De Palol, M. Hirmer, Early Medieval Art in Spain).



Pl. 5 Ste. Engrace, Western tympanum (M. Gauthier CM.).



Pl. 6 Santa Cruz de la Seros, Santa María, Western tympanum (Aragón Roman Zodiacque).

S.H. Caldwell interprets the inscriptions in Jaca and in Santa Cruz as a reference to the Baptism and the Penance²⁶. Although her interpretation of the program of the Jaca tympanum is acceptable, that of the monogram should be reviewed.

The inscriptions included within the monograms in Jaca and Santa Cruz²⁷ emphasize the sacrament of the Eucharist and the belief in the Holy Trinity. These inscriptions should be seen as a warning against heretical thinking as well as an appeal for a return to the true Faith.

The Agnus Dei that figures in the centre of many monograms, alludes to the same Eucharistic meaning. The Chrismon between the sun and the moon, at Santo Thoma de Layana²⁸, indicates the association with the Crucifixion and thus again with the Eucharist. The addition of the hand of God in a gesture of benediction further strengthens the connection with the Holy Trinity.

The Chrismon as a part of a large figurative composition is depicted between the two tympana of Puerta de las Platerías in Santiago de Compostela.

26. The inscriptions of Santa Cruz were published by Lamperez in 1899, of Jaca, MIGUX DOLC, Tres inscripciones de la catedral de Jaca, *Pireneos* 9, 1953, pp. 421-30; also quoted by A. Canellas Lopez, Sene and Caldwell.

27. In Jaca:

HAC IN SCVLPTVRA, LECTOR, SI GNOSCERE CVRA
P PATER A GENITVS DVPLES EST SPIRITVS ALMVS
HIITRES IVRE QVIDEM DOMINUS SVNT VNVS ET IDEM.

In Santa Cruz the inscription on the monogram:

JANUA SUM PRAEPEŠ: PER ME TRANSITE, FIDELES, FONS EGO SUM VITAE: PLUS
ME QUAM VINA SITITE, VIRGINIS HOC TEMPLUM QUISQUIS PENETRARE BEA-
TUM.

28. Sene, p. 373.



Pl. 7 Estella tympanum of Northern portal, San Miguel.



Pl. 8 Oloron Ste. Marie, Western tympanum (detail) R.Bartal.

Here it seems to express the essence of the complex iconography of the façade, representing the Passion of Christ, His Temptations, The Transfiguration, etc.²⁹

In Estella [PL 7], Christ appears in Majesty, but instead of the usual codex, He holds in His hand the monogram. Mary and John stand on either side. The composition is again like that of the Crucifixion or the Last Judgement; again as in Compostela, there was an attempt to emphasize the Passion, the double nature of Christ and His Second Coming. The inscription on the mandorla expresses this idea "This image that you contemplate is not God or man, but this image that you contemplate is God and man"³⁰.

In Oloron Ste. Marie in Beam [PL 8], the monogram is depicted under the Descent from the Cross. Here again, the connection with the Eucharist is evident³¹.

The representation of the monogram as an isolated motif or as an heraldic composition repeats depictions from the early Christian era.

The monogram supported by two angels as well as that inserted between two lambs are well known motifs on early Christian sarcophagi, sometimes the flower mentioned above is also included³².

In Spain the lion replaces the lambs³³. The image of the lion as the lion of Judah and its imperial connotations were well known in 12th century Spain through the commentary of the Apocalypse of Beatus of Liebana; the inscriptions on the Jaca tympanum clearly reflect this knowledge³⁴.

The monogram between the sun and the moon also derived from early Christian imperial representations: for instance, the Barberini ivory where the victorious emperor is depicted, with Christ above him in a medallion, between the sun and the moon, supported by two angels.

Since the symbol had imperial and military as well as religious connotations, it perfectly suited the ideology of the Spanish kings, as an emblem symbolizing their double task, as warriors of the Reconquista, as standing at the head of their armies, as liberators of Spain from the heretics and as defenders of the Catholic faith and its tenets. The political and religious situation of the early Christian period continued to exist in Spain much longer than in any other European country. There was a continual struggle to uphold the principles of the Catholic faith

29. S.M. ALVAREZ, Saint Jacques de Compostelle, Les portails retrouvés de la cathédrale Romane, Le Dossier de l'Archéologie No. 20, Jan.-Fev. 1977, pp. 87-103; J. VIELLIARD, *Le Guide du Pèlerin de Saint Jacques de Compostelle*, Macon, 1969, pp. 96-105.

30. L.M. LOJENDÍO, *Navarre Romane*, Zodiaque, 1967, p. 318.

31. The Descent from the Cross as a symbol of the Eucharist, see: BERND SCHALICKE, *Die Ikonographie der Monumentalen Kreuzabnahmegruppen Des Mittelalters in Spanien* Inaugural Dissertation Berlin, 1975; E.C. PARKER, *The Descent from the Cross, Its Relation to the Extra-Liturgical "Depositio Drama"*, New York, London, 1978.

32. M. LAWRENCE, *The Sarcophagi of Ravenna*, Roma, 1972, fig. 52.

33. *Ibid.*, fig. 70. The composition of the monogram between two lions is found as well in early Christian sarcophagi, but very rarely.

34. "PARCERE STERNENTI LEO SCIT XRISTUSQUE PETENTI".

against the heretics, at first against the Arians, then the Adoptionists and of course, and principally, against the Islamic "heresy"³⁵. This battle for The Faith recalls the struggles of the Councils of Nicaea, Chalcedon Ephesos & Constantinople in which the Christian kings Constantine, Theodosius I, Marcian and Theodosius II participated. The Spanish kings perpetuated the tradition of these rulers, and adopted the symbols associated with them, and with the era considered as that of the struggle and victory of Christianity over the pagan world, and the main heresies. The artistic depictions reflect these concepts. Both the form of representation and the monuments on which the emblem was represented impart imperial associations, and present the monogram as a symbol of victory. The early Christian meaning of the Chrismon was further widened in 12th century Spain to include the principal dogmas of the Catholic faith: The Trinity, the double nature of Christ and the Eucharist. These dogmas were the main elements in the theological conflict between Christians and Moslems³⁶.

35. C.R. HAINES, *Christianity and Islam in Spain*, London, 1889, for the Adoptionists, pp. 114-136.

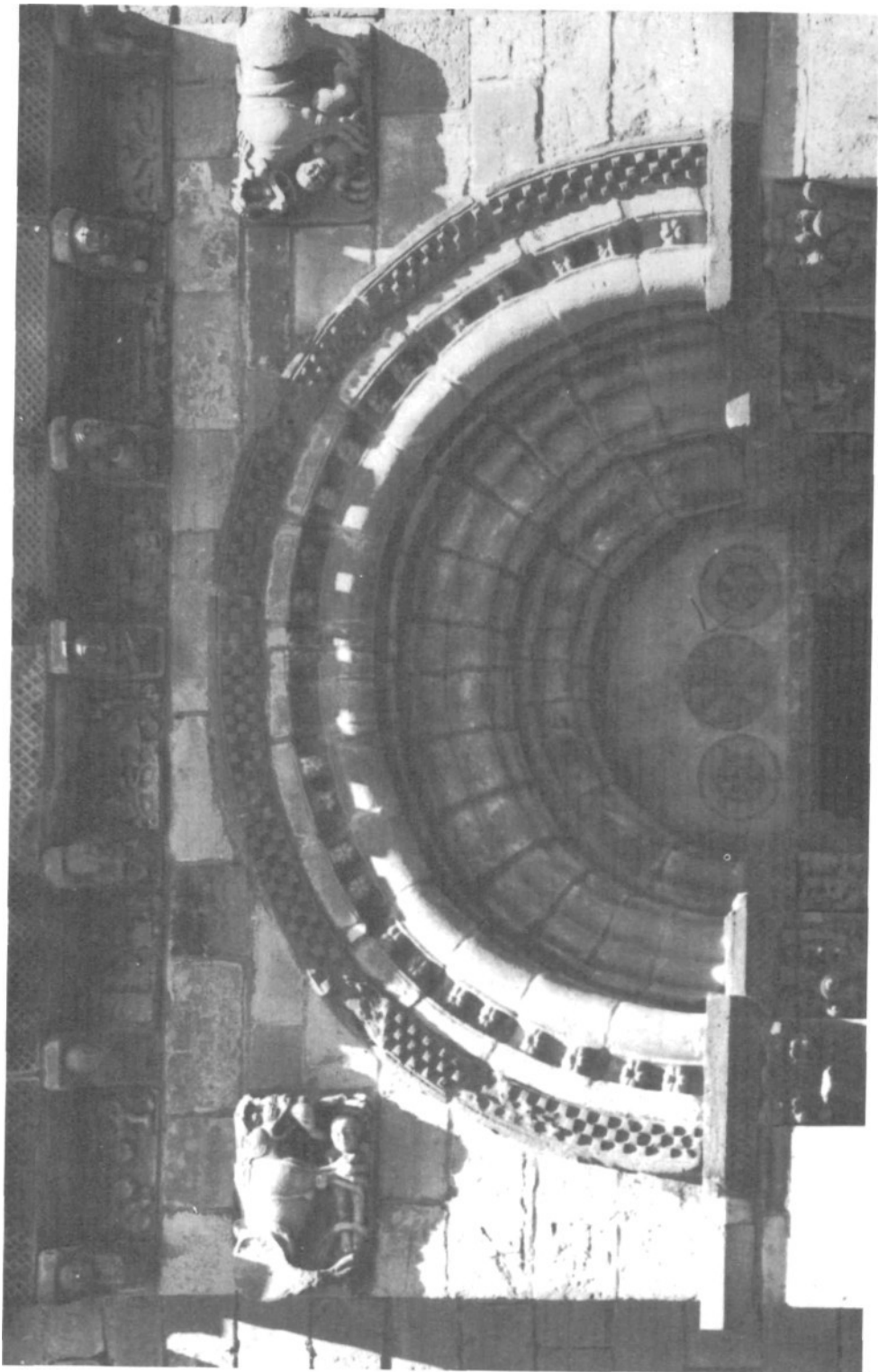
36. Migne P.L. 156, col. 689. V. Guiberti Abbatis S. Mariae de Novigeno, *Gesta Dei Per Francos* Lib. I.

Migne P.L. 189 cols. 669-670. Petris Venerabilis Abbatis Cluniac, *Contra Sectam Saracenorum*. Otto von Freising, *Chronik oder Die Geschichte Der Zwei Staaten*, übersetzt A. Schmidt Berlin 1960, pp. 510-511.



Pl. 9 Side of the Sarcophagus of Doña Sancha in the Benedictines Chapel in Jaca (Aragón Roman Zodiacque).

Pl. 10 Leyre, South Portal of the upper church.



Pl. 11 San Martín d'Artaiz.

RESUMEN

No ha escapado a la atención erudita la amplia difusión durante los siglos XII y XIII, del crismón en el arte monumental español y bearnés. A. SEÑÉ, C. LA-COSTE y S.H. CALDWELL interpretan la presencia del crismón en España en tanto que símbolo de la Trinidad, de la Pasión de Cristo y de su triunfo sobre la muerte. La autora se propone en este artículo añadir a dicho significado religioso connotaciones políticas, así como explicar la amplia aparición de dicho símbolo en el arte español cuando casi desaparece en el de otros países.

El crismón y la cruz gamada fueron símbolos constantinianos y estaban asociados, en el pensamiento cristiano, a la edad de oro de la Cristiandad, en tanto que sorprendentes símbolos religiosos y políticos. Ambos se presentaban tanto en obras religiosas como en laicas. Desde Constantino y hasta fines del siglo VI, los emperadores cristianos adoptaron el crismón como emblema que simboliza su rol de grandes defensores de la fe cristiana. En España, ese crismón, cuya forma era copia de la de principios de la era cristiana, se representó como motivo central en los tímpanos de las iglesias, en los castillos y en los sarcófagos reales. De una u otra forma, todos estos monumentos estaban asociados a las casas reales y a la Reconquista. Este fenómeno se explica si se tiene en consideración la propia imagen que de los reyes hispánicos, empezando por los visigodos del siglo VI hasta los del XII, reflejan las crónicas. Porque tanto éstos como sus antecesores Constantino, Teodosio I, Marciano y Teodosio II, se consideraban líderes mundanos y militares a la vez que defensores de la fe y de los dogmas católicos.

Los primitivos símbolos cristianos se ajustaban perfectamente a la ideología de los reyes hispánicos.