

The Legacy of Aquitaine in 12th-Century Castile and Sicily: Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Daughters as Patrons of the Arts

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Twelfth-century Romanesque art in France has been perceived as the source of inspiration for the development of major trends and regional schools of Romanesque sculpture, architecture and painting in Italy and Spain.¹ The impact of Romanesque sculpture from Normandy and Provence has been traced in Italy and reflections of the pictorial traditions of Auvergne, Languedoc and Burgundy are to be seen along the pilgrimage roads and in the sculptural programs of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.² The pilgrimage roads to Santiago de Compostela, together with the spread of the various monastic orders, have traditionally been recognized as the major channels for the transfer and transformation of art forms from one region to another. While royal patronage has also been mentioned as influential in the migration of forms, it has not been regarded as an essential component in these artistic dialogues.³ Thus, on the whole, the major influence in the migration of forms has been considered to have come from within the realm of the church rather than of the court.

I would like to contend, however, that in the second half of the 12th century royal and princely patronage did indeed play a leading and prominent role in the creation of artistic forms. Furthermore, not only did it have an essential impact on the spread of art forms from Aquitaine to Castile and Sicily, but the personal links between the royal patrons also contributed to the modes of pictorial perception. In this article I shall examine the particular royal patronage of three queens: Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine (1122-1202), who was Queen of France from 1137-1152 and Queen of England from 1154-1202; and her two daughters: Eleanor, Queen of Castile from 1170-1214; and Jeanne, Queen of Sicily from

1176-1190. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to relate to the very dramatic biographies of Eleanor of Aquitaine and of her daughters, studies of Eleanor's life and character as written by both her contemporaries and by modern historians, provide some very problematic chapters in written history.⁴ In standard history textbooks however, such as those by John L. Lamonte and others,⁵ she is mentioned only briefly, and then only as King Henry II's queen consort if at all. In other words, like other medieval and postmedieval queens, she is mentioned only when instrumental."

Eleanor of Aquitaine, however, was regarded by several of her contemporaries, so it would appear from contemporaneous chroniclers, as a patron of troubadours and of the glamorous court of Poitiers, and a great donor to the Church.⁶ Her daughter Eleanor of Castille was similarly depicted as a patron of prelates, grandees and troubadours and a great donor to the Church. The troubadour Ramon Vidal has preserved a glimpse of Eleanor of Castille: 'And when the King had summoned his many knights, rich barons and court jongleurs, then comes Queen Leonore modestly clad in a mantle of rich stuff red with a silver border wrought with golden lions. She bows to the King and near him takes her seat.'⁷ Jeanne, Queen of Sicily, in contrast, has not been mentioned in any of these contexts. We know, however, that she had a very handsome dower indeed, and that King William the Second of Sicily, her husband, had made a liberal provision for his Queen.⁸

A discussion of the Queens as patrons of the visual arts has been only rarely undertaken, and modern scholarly research has not investigated the issue systematically.⁹ This neglect might be the result of the fact that the connections between the three Plantagenet Queens, the mother and her two daughters, were mentioned by the chroniclers of their time only in regard to very short and official instances of their lives.

I shall first examine the issue of the links, personal and cultural, between the Queen Mother and her two royal daughters. Eleanor of Castille was born in 1161, as Eleanor's second daughter. She was raised in the monastery of Fontevrault - the future Pantheon of the Plantagenet dynasty where Henry the II, Richard the Lionheart and Eleanor herself were buried. When Eleanor was given in marriage to Alfonse VIII of Castille in 1173, she was escorted by her mother to Bordeaux, a most important bishopric town in Aquitaine, where according to certain chronicles the Queen Mother herself had been married in 1152 to Henry II, Leonore's father.¹⁰ From there she was accompanied by the Bishops of Toledo, Poitiers, Rouen, Agen and Bordeaux to be married in Tarazona.

From then on we hear very little about the mother-daughter relationship. However, a 13th century Spanish chronicle relates that immediately after the murder of Thomas à Becket, Leonore of Castille erected a chapel in his honor in the Cathedral of Toledo and sent for a priest from England to come and serve

there. This would appear to indicate that the young Queen of Castile identified herself with the Becket party and not with the party of the King, her father.¹¹

The most important recorded act testifying to the relationship between the two Eleanors, however, took place much later. This was the famous voyage in the year 1200 of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Castile to choose a bride for Louis the VIII (her first husband's grandson) as part of the new truce and agreement between Phillip Augustus, King of France and Eleanor's son, John Lackland. In 1199 several contemporaneous chronicles relate that the 78 year old Eleanor crossed her domains in haste and arrived at the court of Burgos, where her daughter, the mother of the house of Castile, was blessed with 11 children.¹² Eleanor of Aquitaine had been an *admirabilis astucia* - a shrewd judge of people. From the three marriageable princesses she chose Princess Blanca to be the future Queen of France. Blanca became the famous "Blanche of Castile", the mother of St. Louis. On the voyage back to France the twelve year old Blanche was escorted by Eleanor through Bordeaux until Fontevrault, where the old queen retired and the bride continued her journey with her entourage to her wedding in Rouen. This voyage of Eleanor's would appear to show that a constant relationship was maintained between her and her daughter in Castile. Moreover, if Leonore reacted so promptly to Becket's death, how must she have reacted to the later imprisonment of her mother? And what would the Castilian granddaughters have heard about their fabulous grandmother throughout their childhood? It is reasonable to assume that events of mutual interest and importance were transmitted and discussed between the respective courts of mother and daughters.

Various chronicles relate to the major voyages of Jeanne Plantagenet to Sicily: Jeanne was born in 1165 and was given in marriage to William II, King of Sicily in 1176.¹³ Her voyage from England is documented in detail. Eleanor, who at that time was imprisoned by Henry II following her unsuccessful rebellion against him with her sons in 1174, was allowed to accompany her to the Channel. Jeanne was then escorted by her father to Normandy and from there she was taken to embark from St. Gilles in Provence by Richard the Lionheart, her brother. Palermo celebrated her wedding for three days. In 1189, when she became a widow, her brother Richard, on his crusade to the Holy Land, freed her from where she was being kept hostage by Tancred the Norman. At the same time their mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, arrived, accompanying Berengara, the Spanish princess and prospective bride she had chosen for Richard, and commanded her daughter and young royal widow Joanna to escort the new bride to her wedding in Cyprus. While the chronicles give detailed descriptions of these royal voyages, they remain silent regarding any continuity of relationship between mother and daughters.¹⁴ Even today official genealogical trees and chronological tables in numerous history books present the relevant dates of the ruling kings and queens only, and fail to

note those of other members of the royal family. Is this simply an unquestioning continuation of a custom which was part of the medieval chroniclers' tradition?

I assume that continuous connections existed between the three queens just as they existed between their contemporaneous kings. However, these female relationships, unlike the complex relationships between the two kings, Richard the Lionheart and Phillip Augustus, have not been recorded in detail. I believe, however, that despite the lack of written evidence, the narrative of the non verbal pictorial arts offers effective testimony to the strong relationship between the Queen mother and her daughters.

I would like to argue that Eleanor of Aquitaine and her court left a firm impact on the visual culture of the Angevin empire, and furthermore, that her daughters were active in transferring forms and ideas from Aquitaine to their kingdoms.

I would like to contend that alongside Eleanor's patronage of literature, the impact of her court was reflected in various subjects and images of the visual culture of Aquitaine. An indication of her interest in artistic objects can be seen in the vase inscribed with the name of its first mythological owner and her own name, which she gave as a gift to the young King Louis VII of France, her first husband, which he in turn donated to Abbot Suger for the treasure of St. Denis.¹⁵ The feelings of Eleanor for this very particular object must have impressed Suger most deeply as he gave expression to it in his writings. Moreover, the vase seems to have been a gift of love by the young Eleanor to her fiancée Louis and should be regarded as such in the tradition of a woman giving an object as a sign of love to her husband. Abbot Suger wrote about the vase:

Still another vase like a pint bottle of crystal which the Queen of Aquitaine had presented to our Lord King Louis as a newly wed bride on their first voyage, and the King to us, as a tribute of great love, we offered most affectionately to the divine table for libation. We have recorded the sequence of these gifts on the vase itself after it had been adorned with gems and gold in some little verses: 'As a bride, Eleanor gave this vase to King Louis, Mitadolus to her grandfather, the King to me, and Suger to the Saints'.¹⁶

It is not clear under what conditions Louis VII gave the vase to Abbot Suger, or whether Queen Eleanor gave her consent. The fact that Suger writes about it at length, however, may point to a conflict he was trying to cover. The recording of the legendary Mitadolus as well as Eleanor's grandfather does point to her very strong family and hereditary consciousness.

Aquitainian art in Eleanor's time has been studied extensively from the end of the 19th century. Highly prominent scholars, such as René Crozet and E. R. Labande have dedicated their research to it,¹⁷ noting its characteristics in contrast

to Burgundian Romanesque art. The most prominent characteristics of Aquitanian architecture have been *inter alia* indicated as:

- West facades with blind arches, towers with open galleries, and conical roofs probably serving for burning lanterns.
- Sculptural programs with no sculpted tympanum spread across the entire facade (as in Notre Dame de Poitiers) but also on apse columns and inner capitals.
- Major motifs of cycles of Virtues and Vices. The sculpture of the Rider. Interpretations of these cycles and images have regarded the image of the Rider as the Miles Christi, whether *Constantine the Great* or a local knight.

These themes were interpreted in the 1980s by Linda Seidel as “Songs of Glory” to the Aquitanian knights, renowned crusaders and warriors in the *Reconquista*.¹⁸

The program of specific churches has not, however, been studied in connection with the particular patrons or local lords who were often buried in the same crypt of the church, as for example in the church of St. Nicolas in Civray. Other courtly themes and motifs which are abundant have also not been studied as such.¹⁹ It seems to me that much evidence for the impact of Eleanor’s court may be found in these pictorial arts. A courtly motif common in the Middle Ages in the courts of both Islam and Christian princes was that of the world of entertainers, i.e., the motif of groups of dancers. This motif is prominent in Poitou and the Saintonge. It appears on the lower part of the archivolt of the southern facade’s portal of St. Pierre in Aulnay (Fig. 1).²⁰ The dancers, kneeling in a row and dressed in embroidered blouses, are depicted as atlants supporting the upper part of the archivolt with representations of the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse. Thus the dancers are depicted simultaneously as if in performance, with their place in the hierarchy of their material existence being used to support their higher, spiritual position (Fig. 2). Very similar dancers are depicted on the two capitals on the two most western pillars, situated in the entrance to the upper church of St. Etienne in Saintes. Here the dancers are kneeling in a similar manner to those in St. Pierre in Aulnay on one capital, while on the other they are depicted moving in a dancing gesture toward each other, their hands on their backs. Vultures have been placed above these dancers, probably symbolizing the material sinful world to which they belong.²¹ The church of St. Etienne in Saintes was permanently supported by Eleanor and given specific rights.²² Very similar motifs appear on the portals of the church of Ste Radegonde in Talmont, which was also supported by the Queen. Pairs of jongleurs are depicted on the archivolt of its central portal.²³ Finally, additional courtly images can be found at St. Nicolas in Civray where on an archivolt of the left portal the profiled busts of two noblemen are turned toward the performance of an acrobat accompanied by a musician.²⁴ These motifs of dancers, jongleurs and musicians are not common in the sculptural programs of

other regions.

I believe that the impact of the court can also be traced in its particular noblewomen's fashion. The formal dress of the courtly women of Aquitaine, mainly in Poitou and Saintonge, had probably different models and forms than those of the Ile de France. In the latter, according to female images in early Gothic art of the second half of the 12th century, the gown fit tightly to the body and the sleeves too were long and narrow. In Aquitaine the style was different. While the gown was also tightly fitted to the body, the long sleeve had an attachment of an additional piece of cloth shaped like a flower opening toward the palm of the hand. This very long piece of fabric covered the whole hand and terminated toward the knee. Numerous female images in Romanesque art of Poitou and Saintonge appear in this fashion. Only some of these female images have been identified as saints or biblical figures, while the identity of others is still controversial. Were they patrons? This courtly fashion unique to the French Angevins seems to have emerged from Eleanor's court.²⁵

The building projects and pictorial programs which could have been initiated by Eleanor of Aquitaine are legion, but only a few were directly associated with her; mainly those which were carried out in the later part of her life between 1190-1204: the grand hall of the palace of the counts of Poitiers,²⁶ and a mural in the church of Ste Radegonde in Chinon. By that time Eleanor's daughters had long been established queens in their new countries. Thus it seems to me that any heritage they may have transferred to these countries must relate to an earlier period of the art of Poitou, and to Eleanor's patronage in the 1150s to the 1170s. In this period the major architectural projects in Poitiers can be regarded as the cathedral of St. Pierre and the church of Notre Dame la Grande (Fig. 3). This latter church is commonly dated to 1152, the year of Eleanor's marriage to Henri of Anjou. Eleanor and Henri were married in the cathedral, but the coincidence of date between their marriage and the foundation of Notre Dame la Grande is remarkable (Fig. 4).²⁷ The church could well have served as the palace church as to this day it is located very close to the palace. The beginning of the St. Pierre cathedral building is dated to 1162 and has been traditionally associated with Eleanor and Henri, as the stained glass window situated in the apse where Henri II and Eleanor are depicted kneeling under the Crucifixion scene as donors, is dated to the same time.²⁸

When discussing the art of Castile and its relationship to the art of Aquitaine, scholarly work is not very helpful. Similar to Aquitaine, artistic activity in Castille has also not been recorded as connected with the demands and conditions set forth by specific patrons. However, I believe that the role of Eleanor Queen of Castile as a patron of the arts must nonetheless have been eminent. Romanesque art and architecture in the latter part of the 12th century in Castile has often been

discussed and presented as an art which turned to Byzantium for its models, as reflected in the cathedrals of Zamora and Salamanca.²⁹ The architecture of the ancient cathedral of Salamanca is dated between 1151 and the first decade of the 13th century. The architecture of Zamora is probably even older, and has been dated to between 1150-1174.³⁰ The coned exterior domes (called *ciboria*) crowning the cathedral, and constituting the most prominent features of both cathedrals, have sometimes been discussed in art history literature as forms originating in Constantinople and Byzantium.³¹ Only recently, a survey by David Simon has suggested the art of Poitou as a source of inspiration for these peculiar domes.³² Such coned domes were indeed a routine form in the 12th century architecture of Poitou and Saintonge, and appear on various edifices with various functions, from the isolated Lanterns for the dead and facade towers to domestic architecture such as the kitchen edifice in the abbey of Fontevault.³³ I believe that the similarities of form between the coned towers and domes of Poitou and Saintonge (such as the coned towers of the west facade of the church of Notre Dame la Grande in Poitiers, the domed kitchen in the royal monastery of Fontevault, and the same coned forms of the ciborium domes of the cathedrals of Salamanca [Fig. 5] and Zamora [Fig. 6]), are not coincidental. Such forms, which were routine and used for ecclesiastical as well as domestic architecture in Poitou, were intensified and enhanced in the cathedrals of Castile. They were placed as autonomous crowning domes on the building exteriors, thus symbolising earthly and heavenly rule and proclaiming far and wide these earthly and heavenly links. When considering the immense symbolic meaning of the domes and their images in medieval architecture, the use of Poitevin forms for Castilian domes offers a strong indication of the intentions and attitudes of the royal patrons.

Furthermore, I would argue that the sculpture of the inner cathedral of Salamanca, attributed to "the third master", demonstrates in its motifs and execution a thorough knowledge of themes and images of Aquitanian sculpture. For example, a capital of a female head being picked at by vultures³⁴ may be compared to the same motif in numerous churches in Poitou.³⁵

In this respect, the cathedral of St. Diego in Soria should also be mentioned. This church has been noted in connection with Queen Eleanor of Castile, and the sculpted images of the Queen and King Alfonso VIII in glory are depicted in niches on both sides of the portal.³⁶ In addition, the arrangement of the sculptural program as small units on the archivolts on the portals of St. Diego in Soria (Fig. 7) on the west facade strongly recalls that of the Poitevin churches such as Poitiers, Aulnay, Saintes and others (Fig. 8).³⁷ In all these cases the Aquitanian original model is visible, albeit used in new contexts, and endowed with new, local meanings.

Jeanne Plantagenet, as noted earlier, was given in marriage to William II, the

Sicilian king, in 1176.³⁸ The most prominent building project achieved by William II was that of the royal cathedral-monastery of Monreale whose first building campaign and decoration was initiated by the King in 1169, before the arrival of young Jeanne. However, the cloister was started later, at the end of the 1170s or the beginning of the 1180s, when young Queen Jeanne was already in her twenties.³⁹ The sculptural program of the cloister has been compared to certain western sculpture such as that of the west facade of Chartres or the sculpture of St. Gilles du Guard, and it is reasonable to assume that both places were known to Jeanne of Sicily. However, no actual document exists to show her relation or contribution to the project. Several suggestions have been made as to the ties between the Sicilian and Plantagenet cultures. Rita Le Jeune has proposed that certain courtly romances were written for Jeanne of Sicily.⁴⁰ Labande demonstrated that such chronicles as those of Thomas Paclius, Dean of Notre Dame de Loches were perhaps written under hostile conditions to Jeanne's mother Eleanor of Aquitaine.⁴¹ Certain facts however shed some light on the relationship of Queen Jeanne to the contemporary visual culture. When she was taken captive by Tancred of Sicily after King William's death in 1189, her brother, Richard the Lionheart, who released her from captivity and settled her in Messina, sent messages specifying what properties belonging to his sister were to be dispatched to Messina. Among the articles specially mentioned were a gilded table more than 12 feet long, a golden chair, and a dinner service of 24 gold and silver plates and cups.⁴² This information projects some light on the relationship of the Queen to artistic objects.

I believe that the patronage of the three Queens to art and architecture should be regarded not as individual contributions, but rather as a collective enterprise of their courts. Each of the new young Queens came to her new country with a large entourage of her own clerics, courtiers and others. It would appear that in the service of the Queens these learned entourages played a major role in maintaining both personal and cultural links between the respective courts; and thus in conveying artistic trends and fashions developed in Aquitaine to Sicily and Castille.

Notes

1. Porter 1923: 44-59; Crozet 1963-64: 309-312.
2. Connant 1959: 198-200.
3. Schapiro 1977: 28-102.
4. Labande 1952-54:175-234; Richard of Devizes 1963: 58-59.
5. Lamonte 1949: 309-320, 383-385.
6. Richard 1903: II, 171-175; Richardson 1959: 193-213; Le Jeune 1954: 5-57.
7. Le Jeune, 1958: 319-337; Kelly 1950: 358.
8. Labande 1972: 1-16.

9. Greenhill 1976: 84-115.
10. Labande 1952-54: 229-230.
11. Labande 1986: 108.
12. Labande 1952-54: 230.
13. Labande 1972: 12-14.
14. Kelly 1950: 264, quoting Richard of Devizes (1963).
15. Beech 1993: 3-9.
16. Panofsky 1979: 78-79.
17. Crozet 1949: 51.
18. Seidel 1981.
19. Kanaan-Kedar 1995: 63-68.
20. Werner 1979.
21. Werner 1979: 35.
22. Labande 1952-54: 227; Richard 1903: 353.
23. Richard 1903: 353-354; Baldet n.d.: 60-84.
24. Kanaan-Kedar 1995: 66.
25. This argument forms a part of my current research.
26. Labande-Mailfert 1951: 35-43.
27. Connant 1959.
28. Auber 1849: 218-231, 339.
29. Palol and Hirmer n.d.: 128-131.
30. *Ibid.*: 128-131.
31. Connant (1959:200), however, very early pointed to the possibility of the impact of Aquitanian architecture on the cathedrals of Zamora and Salamanca.
32. Simon 1993: 188-204.
33. Crozet 1948.
34. Palol and Hirmer n.d.
35. Werner 1979: Pls. 13-14, fig. 21.
36. Palol and Hirmer n.d.
37. Werner 1979: Pls. 454-540.
38. Kelly 1950.
39. The Cathedral of Monreale.
40. Le Jeune 1958.
41. Labande 1972: 12-13; Kelly 1950: 262-264.
42. Richard of Devizes 1963: 41.

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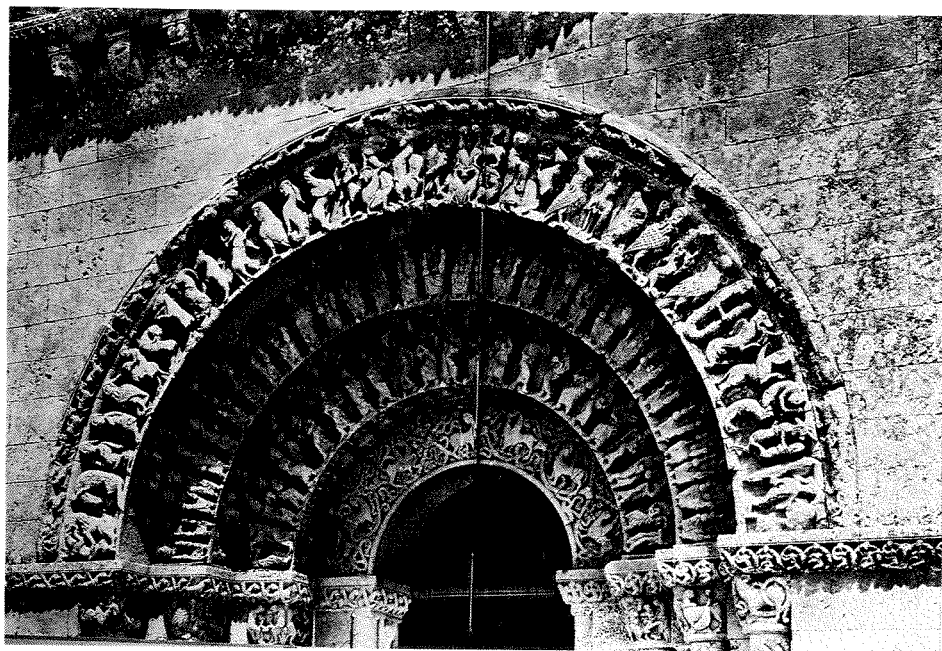


Fig. 1: St. Pierre in Aulnay, southern portal



Fig. 2: St. Pierre in Aulnay, southern portal, detail



Fig. 3: Poitiers, N. D. La Grande, west façade

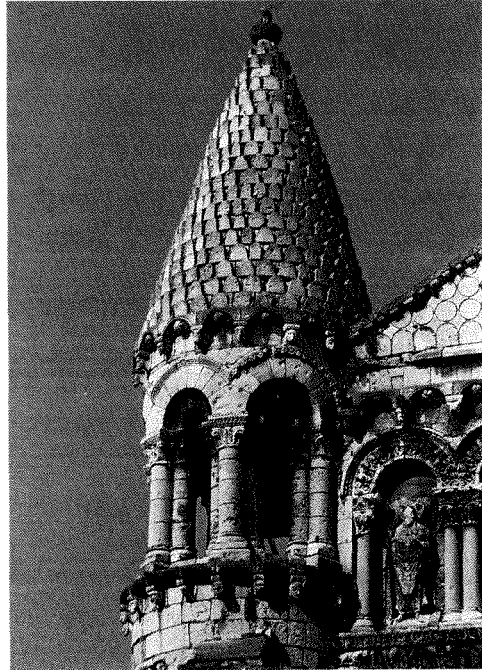


Fig. 4: Poitiers, N. D. La Grande, west façade, detail, northern tower

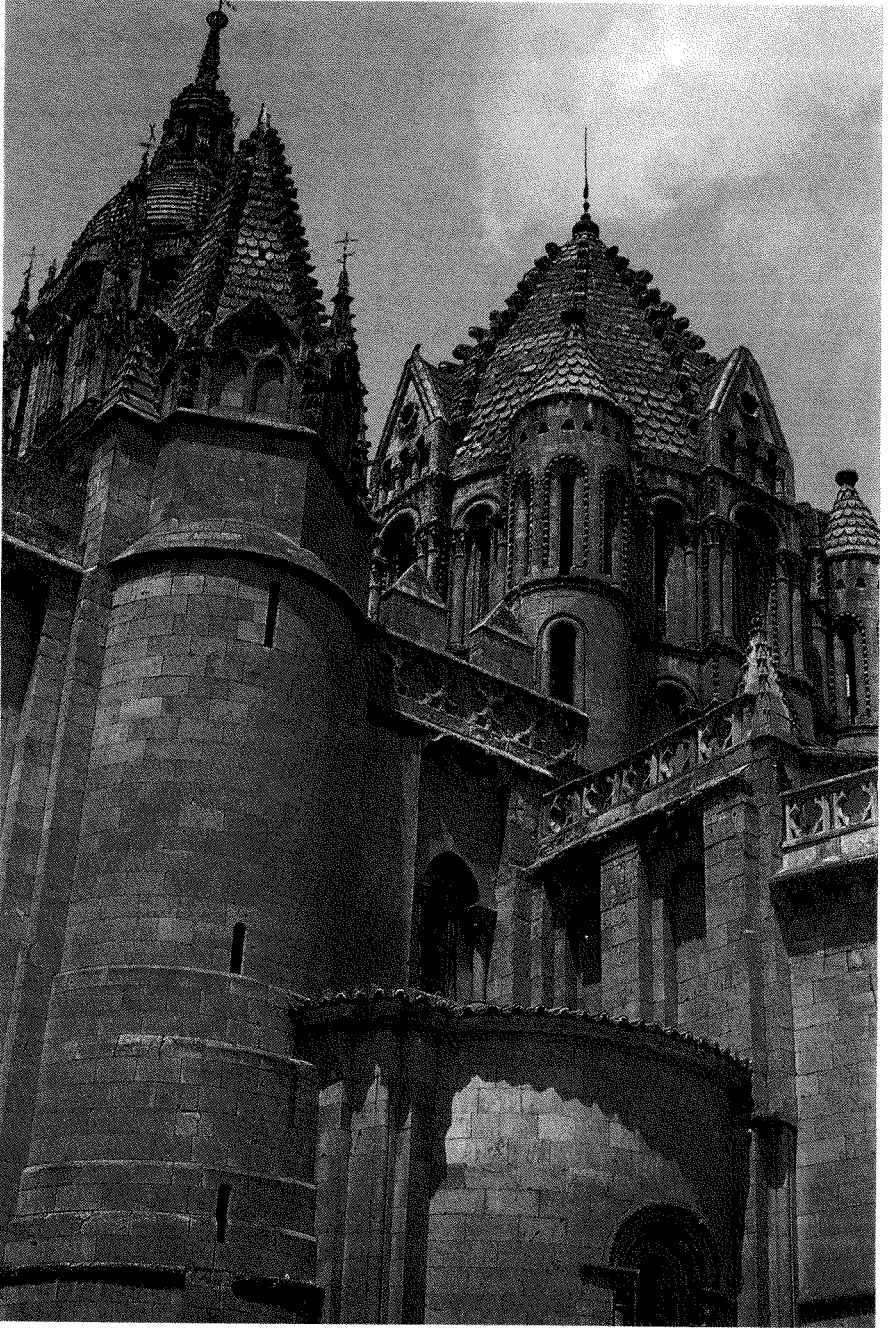


Fig. 5: Salamanca, Old Cathedral, crossing tower

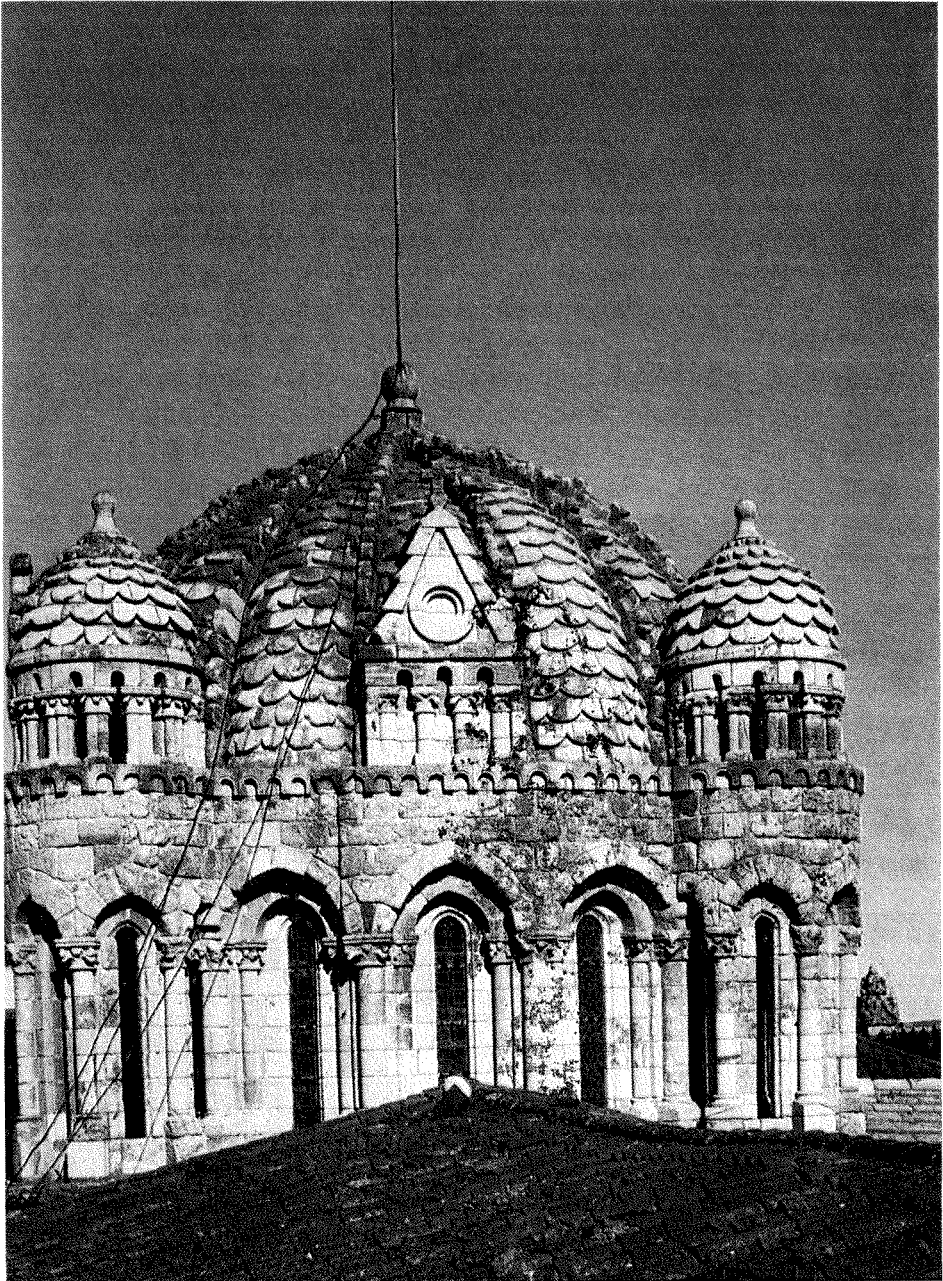


Fig. 6: Zamora, Cathedral, crossing tower, "Ciborium"

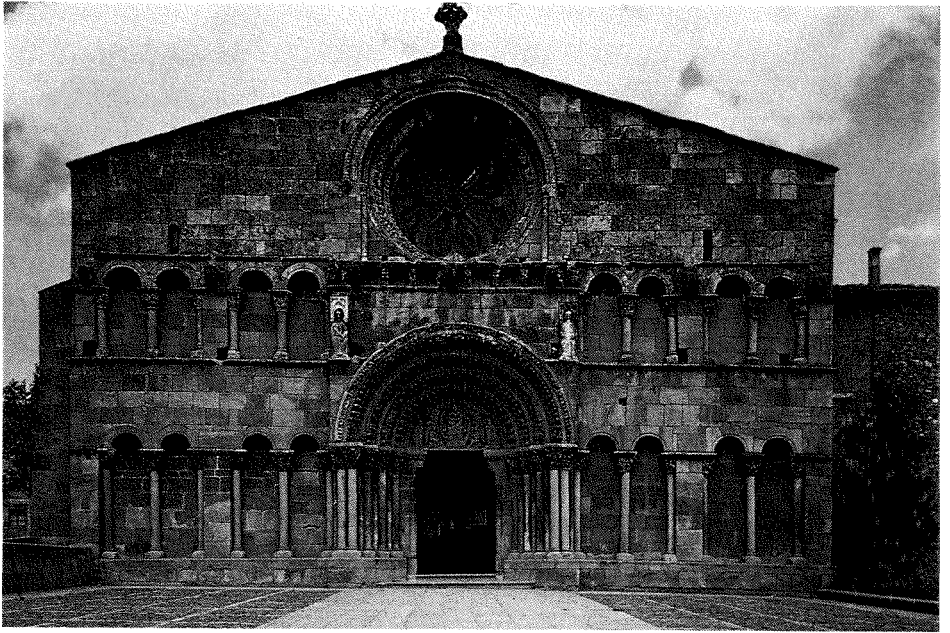


Fig. 7: Soria, Santo Domingo, west façade



Fig. 8: Soria, Santo Domingo, west façade, detail of archivolts

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MUSIC AND THEATRE