

The “Other” Typographic Models. The Case of Galician Typography as Identity Assertion

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The aim of this investigation is to analyze a reference model in the world of typography creation which has not followed traditional guidelines associated with mechanical printing and printing presses but has been developed in a local environment, and has ties with the arts such as architecture, craft production, stonemasonry, drawing and illustration. Despite the fact that this model has often been placed in the background, unnoticed by typography’s “official history”, it has played an important role in generating local identities, advocating political ideas and cultural demands. This *modus operandi* can be found in regions or countries where there has been no typographic tradition or whose typographic design has been imported from other countries. This case study will analyze this so-called “Galician typography or letter”, a medieval letter which has links to stonemasonry guilds that appeared during the 20th century Galician graphic design scene. This Galician letter was “canonized” by Galician nationalist artists and intellectuals, as an identity-generating and vindicating vehicle which had a strong political component.

The “Other” Models in Typographic Traditions

There are several different definitions of the concept of typography but undoubtedly they have one element in common, they were all conceived as a rational solution to solve communication problems through mechanical text reproduction. This definition alludes to an interchangeable system of signs and characters whose distribution, based on a series of established codes, permits the printing of text. This concept of reproduction by mechanical means has traditionally been used ever since the invention of the printing press, contrasting former types of reproduction such as hand written or artisanal means. Until the 20th century, typography was unavoidably limited to typesetting for printing; however, with the gradual dematerialization of these types, there was a necessity for a more contemporary redefinition. At the present day, the conception of typography would be more accurately defined as a written visual manifestation by means of a predesigned alphabet system used by any current technology.

All throughout history, people have been searching for mechanisms and alternatives for generating typographic solutions outside of the traditional printing press world. These alternative mechanisms make up what we could call parallel histories of typography, which have a common “profane” origin outside of the printing guild world, and use a wide variety of processes, materials and techniques. Their creators come from professional fields like architecture, craftsmanship, engineering, drawing or illustration... These alternative mechanisms were occasionally created due to concrete and technical necessities and in other occasions they came about as an individual expression in the search for a graphic identity. We refer to lettering whose transmission methods throughout the years have been based on precise and technical indications and measurements, that appeared in signage systems, painted signs, carvings and inscriptions on diverse materials, stencils, illustrations used for corporate identities arising from the need to differentiate from leading companies as we know them today. In this respect, this concept of typography does not fit in a rational system per se but adapts to a more or less reproducible pattern, to a certain willingness of standardization and formal coherences.

Galician Typography

The object of this case study, “Galician typography or letter”, is directly related to the identity of its people and acquires special relevance during the period between 1870 and 1914 when the mass production of national symbols was presented as a means to construct new convention as well as new social and political alliances, according to British historian E. J. Hobsbawm in his book *The Invention of Tradition* (HOBSBAWM; RANGER, 2002). It is in this setting that symbolic languages begin to forge, catering to irrational sentiments and passions, which not only show a current social and political interest but also respond to the people’s rooted realities that need to explore their own identity with pride and determination. From this “the formation of a self-awareness” (Ramón Villares) arises, and which later will be reflected within Galicia’s graphic design and typography. A “canonization” of a politically-charged Galician typeface emerges, which vindicates Galicia’s identity due to the intentional and vindicating use of typographic forms by Galician nationalist artists and intellectuals.

A good part of the mason's marks (Fig.1) and lapidary signs that are found in Galicia demonstrate a recognizable written base, marked by different factors that play in their confection: the hand that writes or carves, the material or medium used for carving graphic signs, the tool used for carving and the chiseling tool's mark, which determines its ductus, form and weight.



Fig. 1 Mason's marks in Castelo de Pambre (Lugo – Spain).

Epigraphy, a science directly related to paleography and used to study written monuments or so-called inscriptions, determines the origin, evolution, changes as well as variations of these inscriptions and establishes a relationship between the manuscripts/texts, the time and place according to Marín Martínez in his work “Paleografía y diplomática” (MARÍN MARTINEZ, 1998). Galicia is rich with these inscriptions, especially during the Middle Ages, Galicia's golden age due to an economic and cultural boom owing to the European pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

During this period, Visigothic script, which is one of the so called national scripts according to the history of paleography and is considered the Spanish national script, had an important presence in the northwestern half of Spain. When focusing on epigraphy and Galicia, we can find a large number of references, the Portal of Glory in Santiago de Compostela (Fig. 2) being the most relevant. The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela's western entrance, the Portal of Glory is considered the most important Romanesque sculpture masterpiece. This historic sculptural piece located in the pilgrimage center situates Galicia at the summit of spirituality, culture and power of a period, a time of Galicia's greatest splendor. Vicente Gracia Lobo called this inscription “Renown, meaning, promotional” (GARCÍA LOBO, 1999: 151–190), because the author, Maestro Mateo, considered by many to be the greatest artist of the 12th century, who “directed the work from its foundations” (LÓPEZ FERREIRO, 1975), engraved the constructions' start date, and more importantly, his name on the gate to commemorate its completion.

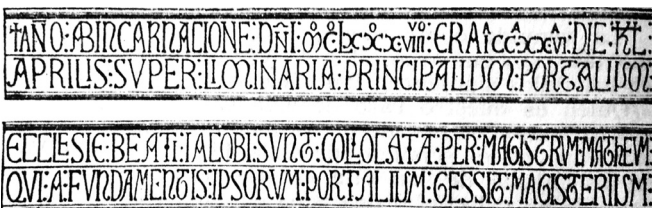


Fig. 2 Pórtico de la Gloria (Portal of Glory), Santiago de Compostela.

As we have mentioned before, there are many examples of epigraphs in Galicia, such as the Portal of Paradise of the Cathedral of Ourense and an infinite number of churches like Santa Columba in Rianxo (A Coruña), birth place of the Galician intellect Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao, a church where he drew its epigraph as well as its heraldry. Castelao was a Galician intellect and reference of Galician nationalism in the early 20th century. Even though he was a doctor by trade he developed different facets as a painter, drawer, actor and comedian. He is considered one of the key figures of Galician culture of the 20th century.

With all this historic, artistic, and cultural baggage, Castelao along with other intellects of the time would rescue and reinterpret these epigraphic forms. The intentional and conscious use of these epigraphic forms, which ranged from bar and tavern signs to political publishing products, slowly began to represent a Galician identity that would be established in a good part of the Galician public imaginary.

It is precisely in newspapers and magazines at the end of the 19th century till the beginning of the 20th century where these typographic forms would appear. If we go back to the end of the 19th century we could find the first use of Galician typography printed on the magazine cover of *Galicia Dipmática, revista de archivos, bibliotecas, historia, arqueología, heraldica, literatura, ciencias y artes* (1882), which was owned by Bernardo Barreiro de Vázquez Varela and whose modernist influenced and decoratively drawn typography was attributed to Manuel Mirás y Álvarez. This publication becomes especially important after knowing that Bernardo Barreiro, archivist of Santiago, Republican Party activist, secretary of Santiago de Compostela Revolutionary Committee and founder of Centro Gallego in Buenos Aires, is considered the precursor to Castelao's investigations on stone crosses. These investigations were collected and published in 1950 in Buenos Aires in the book *As cruces de pedra na Galiza por Castelao* (RODRÍGUEZ CASTELAO, 1950), a book whose header is illustrated with this Galician typography.

The nationalist newspaper *A Nosa Terra* (Fig. 3), a Galician newspaper founded in 1947 as a vehicle of expression for the “As Irmandades da Fala” and Galician Nationalist Party in which almost all nationalist intellects participated (Vicente Risco, Ramón and Antón Villar Ponte, Castelao, Cabanillas, Losada Diéguez, Carballo Calero, Otero Pedraio...) also used these typographic forms and had a clear political intention. From the 25th edition in July 1917, its header was designed by Castelao. According to graphic designer Pepe Barrio: “Behind the design of *A Nosa Terra*'s logotype there is an artist committed to his country, there is an intellectual that not only wants to transmit prestige but looks for signs of identity” (BARRO, 2015: 54).

The magazine *Nós Boletín Mensual da Cultura Galega* (Fig. 4) (CARBALLO-CALERO, 2011) is the first magazine to be written in Galician, published from 1920 to 1936, through which its pro-

A·NOSA·TERRA

Fig. 3 Header of *A Nosa Terra* (1947). Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao.

moters, Grupo Nós (Risco, Castelao, Cuevillas, Losada, Otero Pedrayo, Noguerol, etc), who were determined to incorporate Galicia in modernity, carried out their primordial objective: the defense of Galician culture and the pledge to define the identity of its people by delving into the deep roots of its history and immersing into its language as well as its culture, replanting Galician problems from rational and cosmopolitan perspectives. Castelao assumes the artistic direction of *Nós*, which uses a clear identity promoting typography in its header. In the header of Galician nationalist newspaper *Galicia, Diario de Vigo* (1922–1925) (BERAMENDI, Justo, 2016), Castelao started an overview process of this typeface dropping the modernist decoration, which was fruit of his contact with historical avant-gardes (RODRIGUEZ CASTELAO, 1977). There are many graphic samples that we can find of the use of this typography by Castelao and almost every one of them is tied to institutions, publications, or actions related to nationalism. Hence we can find several examples like the “Irmandade Nacionalista Galega’s” seal, a group that Castelao belonged to and whose seal he designed, as well as some book covers, for example the extraordinary cover designed in 1925, which the Museum of Pontevedra conserves. This Galician typography also appears in the symbols of the Philharmonic Society of Pontevedra of 1925, the Choral Society of Pontevedra (1926) as well as the Seminar of Galician Studies (1933).



Fig. 4 Header of *Nós* (1920–1936). Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao.

After these first incursions, a group of intellectuals and artists with Galician nationalist ties adopt these typographic forms as an identity-vindicating vehicle, which sinks their roots into the most indigenous elements. Castelao’s contemporaries also began to design variants of this typography. Painter Carlos Sobrino used it in Santiago de Compostela’s 1926 tourism poster and Camilo Díaz Baliño in several other posters, like in *El Cebreiro* in 1929, Santiago de Compostela’s 1932 festival posters or Ruada Choir’s 1931 program. These are simplified versions that leave behind modernist influences to construct an almost sans-serif typeface.

Subsequently, there are many more variants of this typography in painter Unbano Lugrís’ work; for example in Restaurante Fornos’ cavern (A Coruña), the oldest in the city (1951), in the eight pieces done

in Malpica’s Casa del Pescador (1956) and in the Arrumbambaya Tavern’s advertisement published in *Vida Gallega* in April of 1959.

During the second half of the 20th century, starting from the 1960s, the before mentioned model of Galician typography goes through a second phase driven by intellectuals Luis Seoane and Isaac Díaz Pardo, from exile in Argentina at first but later in Galicia, at the Laboratorio De Formas (Río VÁZQUEZ, 2014: 30–41) and Sargadelos ceramic company. Isaac began to manage the Cerámicas do Castro (Fig. 5) artistic, industrial and technical project in 1948. However Isaac decided to move to Argentina, where he would meet up with Luis Seoane and a group of friends which he had met before with his father (DÍAZ, 2006), due to difficulties such as pressure from the regime, the cancelation of several exhibitions, and competition from German kaolin exportation company Rosenthal, who was considered the best in Europe and who decided to set up camp in the Sargadelos region. Isaac made his first trip to Celtia, Porcelanas de Magdalena, a company started by Núñez Balboa in 1957 that used the aforementioned typography (as we can see in the pottery and Celtia S.A.’s documents in 1960), to study the possibilities of an industrial project. It was not merely a company to produce and reproduce industrial objects but, according to Sargadelos’ promotional brochure, “it had to collect the works and documents of Castelao’s revolutionary Galician art movement for its study and dissemination, it had to promote and divulge the study of Galicia’s contemporary history, it had to recover the image that Sargadelos had; it had to improve the image and communication and, in general, it had to carry out and support any type of investigation that focused on Galicia” (SEOANE; DÍAZ, 1987).



Fig. 5 Cerámicas do Castro. Symbol. Isaac Díaz Pardo.

Isaac Díaz Pardo along with his team of artists and designers would revolutionize this typography by introducing an infinite amount of variants which constructed an independent and recognizable graphic identity, which was ahead of the times when it came to creating personalized typographies for companies’ and institutions’ corporate identities. Publishing house Edicións do Castro, Cerámicas do Castro and de Sargadelos, the Instituto Galego de Información, the Laboratorio Geolóxico de Laxe, the Seminario de Estudos Galegos and the Museo Carlos Maside worked in collaboration with the Laboratorio de Formas, all of which were using (and still use today) these Galician typographic variants in their logotypes, signs, packaging, book and magazine covers, posters and publications (Fig. 6). When we look at Sargadelo’s typefaces we can see coherent forms with Laboratorio de Forma’s political and cultural intentions: to recover Galicia’s rich heritage and impoverished cultural activity through the study of the forms constructed in the past and those that still exist today. Just like The Laboratorio de Formas’ manifesto explains, “our goal is to find these forgotten forms that survived cen-

turies, and in these inherited remnants, the signs of a system of self-expression” (SEOANE; DÍAZ PARDO, (1970). These typographies made an important contribution in the political and cultural resistance during Franco’s dictatorship, which was characterized as a persecution of Galician identity, culture and language.

DEPARTAMENTOS
5,6,7,8,11 € 12

Fig. 6 Signage system for IGI (Instituto Galego da Información). Isaac Díaz Pardo.

Conclusions: Formal and Conceptual Galician Typography Characteristics

There were many different variants of what we call Galician typography, however, a series of common formal and conceptual characteristics exist, making it recognizable. Just like in other similar cases, for example, the Basque and Danish, these typographies were developed in small geographic areas, linked to a native and minority language, like in Galicia’s case, and were removed from centers of influence. Its ductus distances itself from classic models based on calligraphy and was more influenced by chiseling tools used in lapidary writing and later on by painting and drawing tools. Its reproduction and transmission methods are based on drawing, blueprints, diagrams and indications using low-tech solutions like templates and stencils. Most fonts are created for a specific function, which are generally unique and personalized and are not available on classic printing presses (hot metal typesetting or photocomposition). There are not any planned typographic families and their alphabet is often incomplete. Therefore their creators are not associated with the printing press guild, but are more often than not artists, drawers, illustrators or artisans without any formal training. This is the reason why this typography is developed in a field where there is a fine line between art and design. We can find Galician typography’s formal references in the forms of nature, in petroglyphs and in epigraphy. Avant-garde influenced modular geometric forms with little optical adjustments prevail. These typographies generally have big counters and wide joints where strokes meet. Some terminals, like the diagonal stroke of the letter R, are helical while others like T and E have traces of Medieval writing.

In some letters, like the capital A, there is a characteristic cross stroke at its apex and it has a bent crossbar. These characteristics along with a smooth geometry give this typography a humanistic character despite its modularity. Another recognizable characteristic is the frequent use of ligatures, which depending on the context, have a double function. On one hand, there is a clear expressive intention in ligatures that leads to very pronounced formal variations, often reducing the size of several characters, deforming them to fit into a word in an extreme kerning.

On the other hand, these adjustments have a functional intention that permits the saving of space, especially with text in signs, posters or logotypes where space is very limited. We can see that this practice is a strategy to alleviate the lack of an existing planned typographic family that has different variants and which also permits different font styles, for example, bold and heavy. The reproduction methods, like stone carving at first, painting and drawing later on, encourage improvisation (Fig. 7).

These formal singularities repeat themselves using a recognizable pattern despite the fact that the Galician typography period has stretched out through time and has seen a great diversity of protagonists.

CASTELAO

Fig. 7 Discretionary ligatures.

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