

CODEX OF THE MONASTERY OF SAN PEDRO DE CARDEÑA

HISTORICAL NOTE

The following five paragraphs are a quotation from the internet site <http://www.finns-books.com/cardena.htm>. (Available from Finns Books is a facsimile edition of Codex of the Monastery of San Pedro de Cardeña which contains the Commentary on St. John the Evangelist's Revelation by the monk Beatus of Liébana.[circa 776 A.D.])

In the eighth century, the greater part of the Iberian Peninsula was invaded and ruled by Arabs. Christian religious and lay people migrated north into the mountains and set up safe havens for their culture and religion. They took relics, books and other significant objects with them. In the northern mountains of Spain, the migrants met with the Visigoths who ruled with severity. The Visigoths, like most other Christian kingdoms at the time, followed the calendar of the Consular Era. This calendar indicated that the end of the ninth century corresponded with the end of the millennium according to Christ. And, according to Saint John the Evangelist's Revelations, the end of the millennium would bring the Final Judgement and the coming of the Lamb. Fear and awe filled the minds of Christians as they began to contemplate the coming of the end of the world as they knew it.

As the monasteries in the north grew in size and power, they posed a threat to the already weakened See of Toledo on the Spanish meseta. This factor, along with the continuous Arabic incursions and the vision of an impending end of the world described by St. John, paints a picture of the historical milieu in which the monk, Beatus of Liébana, sat down and wrote his commentary on the Apocalypse. He contemplated

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the destiny of the Christian church on the Iberian Peninsula and the final salvation of his people in the event of the Apocalypse predicted by St. John the Evangelist. He affirms his faith in the authority of the Saints and the grace of God all Mighty.

Beatus wrote his commentaries in a monastery in the region called Liébana in the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain (circa 776 A.D.). In a sense, his original text became a best seller of the middle ages. Scribes, fascinated with the notion of the Apocalypse, copied the text and illuminated the pages over a period of 3 centuries (from the 10th to the 13th centuries.) These illuminated copies became known by the name and place of the monk who wrote the original text, "Beatus of Liébana." The text is basically the same in most of the copies. However, the iconography has evolved over time. Today, 22 of the original illuminated copies exist and are dispersed throughout the libraries of the world. To study all of the Beatus is to study the transition of illumination during the Middle Ages on the Iberian Peninsula.

The Beatus of Liébana codex of the Monastery of San Pedro de Cardena was copied in the 12th century (1175-1185). The style of lettering is Carolinian gothic. In 1871, the manuscript was donated in poor condition to the National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid. Several pages had been removed and were eventually relocated in the Metropolitan Museum of New York and the private collection of Francisco de Zabálburu.

The text of the codex is a commentary on St. John the Evangelist's Revelations, written by the monk, Beatus, in the mountainous region in northern Spain called Liébana. St. John's Revelations predicted that the Saviour would come at the turn of the millennium bringing salvation to the pious and destruction by fire and floods to the unfaithful. Beatus wrote

his commentaries on the Apocalypse to affirm his faith in the Christian Saints on the eve of what most Christians believe would be the coming of the end of the world as they knew it.

TEXT AND COMMENTARY ON REV 13:18

ᾠδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. ὁ ἔχων νοῦν
 ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου,
 ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν,
 καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ.

This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding
 calculate the number of the beast,
 for it is the number of a person.
 Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

J. Massyngberde Ford (*Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. 1975, p. 216), citing H. A. Sanders, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 (1918), 95–99, quoted the commentary of Beatus on Rev 13:18 as follows:

“This is wisdom; he who has understanding let him count the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man,” *that is, of Christ whose name the beast takes for himself . . .*, (italics added)

The most obvious name which the Christ and the beast shared in common with a numerical equivalent of 666 would have been *sôter*, which had antithetical meanings, depending on whether the *sôter* was a Greek word or a Hebrew word. The

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Greek σωτηρ “saviour” (as in Luke 2:11 σωτῆρ ὅς ἐστιν Χριστὸς κύριος “a savior who is Christ, the Lord”) would be transliterated in Hebrew and Aramaic as סוּתַר (= *swtr* = *sôtēr*). In Hebrew the ס (s) = 60, the ו (w/ô) = 6, the ת (t) = 400, and the ר (r) = 200, which all together equal 666.

The Hebrew and Aramaic word סוּתַר (= *swtr* = *sôtēr*), in contrast to the Greek word transliterated into Hebrew using these same letters means “destroyer” or “one who tears down” (Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli*. . . [New York:Putnams, 1903] 1022). The Arabic *šatar* “to offend, abuse, revile” and *šatîr* “knave, rogue” (J. G. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary* [Beirut: Catholic Press] 351). Therefore, 666 can be a numeric code for “savior” —when based upon the Greek loanword σωτηρ (*sôtēr*)— or 666 can be a numeric code for “destroyer” when based upon the Hebrew/Aramaic סוּתַר (= *swtr* = *sôtēr*).

The phrase “It is the number of a man” (ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν) would have been in Hebrew מִסְפַּר אִישׁ הוּא (*mispar ʾiš hûʾ*) or מִסְפַּר אָדָם הוּא (*mispar ʾādām hûʾ*). Were it the latter phrase with אָדָם (*ʾādām* / Adam), the phrase could also mean (1) “it is the number of a ruler/provost” or (2) “it is the number of a peacemaker, reconciler, exemplar.”

Thus, Beatus’ commentary, “[*it is the mark/number of*] *Christ whose name the beast takes for himself*” indicates the hidden wordplay which required some intellectual skill to recognize that Christ’s title סוּתַר / σωτηρ / *swtr* “Savior” (being one way to indicate 666) was transformed to be the name and mark of the beast called סוּתַר / σωτηρ / *swtr* “Destroyer.”