A GUIDE TO THE

CAVES OF ALTAMIRA

AND THE

TOWN OF SANTILLANA DEL MAR

(PROVINCE OF SANTANDER, SPAIN)

SECOND EDITION

PUBLISHED BY THE
«JUNTA PROTECTORA DE LA CUEVA DE ALTAMIRA»
MADRID, 1935

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THE CAVES OF ALTAMIRA

The two Caves of Altamira, situated 20 miles to the West of Santander and 4 1/2 miles to the North West of the station of Torrelavega on the Santander-Oviedo line, lie in the Municipal district of Santillana del Mar, between Torrelavega and Comillas, in the Province of Santander. Both caves lie on high ground of limestone formation a mile and a half to the South West of the town of Santillana, which was once the capital of Eastern Asturias and the interesting monuments of which are described in the second part of this Guide (page 29).

The itinerary from Santander to Santillana will be found on page 43, followed by a map.

I

THE MAIN CAVE CONTAINING PREHISTORIC PAINTINGS

The cave in prehistoric times.

The Cave of Altamira, like all caves formed in limestone strata, was fashioned by Nature, whose only tools were the drops of rain-water that filtered through, year after year and century after century. Percolating through the crevices of the surface, the water gradually reacher the lower layers and, by dissolving the lime contained in the rocks, altered both their chemical and physical nature. In this very slow process of dissolution the fissures widened, channels in the limestone beds were opened up and grew into cavities. Thus the cave was formed and, once communication had been established with the outside world, it was ready to serve as a refuge for wild beasts, and finally for man.

When prehistoric man first set foot inside the cave, the conditions in which those remote ancestors of ours lived were very different from those

of the present day. The whole of our continent was at that time in the grip of an ice age (in geological terms, the last glaciation of the quaternary period). The North of Europe lay buried beneath a thick mantle of ice, and from the Alps and Pyrenees gigantic glaciers spread down, rendering those mountain ranges quite impassable. At that time also the high crags of the Cantabrian Range, the *Picos de Europa* and *Picos de Cornión*, sent great rivers of ice down their mountain slopes and a narrow strip of coastline alone provided hospitable conditions for the early Cantabrians.

This picture of a land of brief and cold summers and interminable winters would be incomplete without a mention of certain mammals driven to these latitudes by the Northern ice, the mammoth or woolly elephant standing twelve feet high; the woolly rhinoceros; and the reindeer of Greenland. The woods, mainly composed of pine and beech, provided food and shelter for deer, including the giant stag; the marmot, wild boar, mountain goat and chamois. Over the grasslands stretching between the patches of dense forest roamed great herds of wild horse, wild cattle and bison akin to those still existing in North America. Hard on their heels, in ceaseless watch, followed the cave-lion, the cave-hyaena and the cave-bear; and all around prowled the wolf and the lynx. In their midst lived Man.

In that remote age, which may be reckoned at

twenty thousand years before Christ, man was ignorant both of agriculture and the art of domesticating animals. He did not know how to make use of metals nor had he any skill in polishing stone. His stone implements and weapons he fashioned by chipping them with other stones; he showed extraordinary skill, however, in contriving implements for certain purposes from the bones, horns and antlers of animals slain in the chase.

Prehistoric man was first and last a hunter. As such, he had no fixed abode, but lived the uneasy life of a nomad, staying here a while, and there a while, as Nature itself provided; his sojourn would be prolonged if game were abundant, or shortened if it were scarce, when he would resume his wanderings in search of animal food.

On the occasion of one of these great hunting raids along the Cantabrian coast prehistoric man would strike upon the Cave of Altamira, to which he would return repeatedly in search of refuge or rest, appropriating to his use the hall lying next the entrance. We may imagine the small horde of hunters seeking shelter from rain and cold and settling down in the gloomy cavern, where they would set fire to heaped-up branches so as to warm themselves, roast their meat and cook their vegetables, and ward off wild animals at night.

There also they made their implements, hewn mainly from flint and quartzite. Among the deposits laid down in thick layers are found knives,

scrapers and other like utensils, all admirably suited for flaying and cutting up dead animals, the tendons and long hair of which were used for sewing. It is surprising to note the extraordinary skill with which man gave a finely pointed shape to pieces of quartzite intended for spear or arrow heads.

Numerous implements of bone or antler have also been found. The first stage in their manufacture was the separation of a rough splinter, which was then fashioned into the shape of a point, a bodkin, a spatula, etc., and lastly polished. The finely pointed needles of that remote age are so perfect as to be comparable with the steel needles of our time,

Nor is there any doubt that prehistoric man knew how to work in wood; and specimens of his adornments have come down to us in the shape of teeth or perforated shells, or small discs of bone or stone with decorative stripes. These were most likely amulets or protective talismans. The frequent occurrence of dyes, particulary ochre, furnishes ground for the belief that these men of prehistoric age painted their face or body.

All these materials have been found in profusion in the hall of the Altamira Cave, whence they have been removed to the Museum established in the keeper's house (1).

(1) For the guidance of the specialist it should be mentioned that the deposits in the Cave of Altamira cover two periods. The deeper level is of the Upper

These specimens were obtained from the clay layers of the floor, where they lay mixed with ashes, charcoal, pieces of stone and burnt or broken bones of animals. The fact that these bones are mainly of bison, common stag and wild horse shows that these were the animals chiefly hunted by primitive man. The simplest method of catching bison or wild horses would be by means of concealed pits, made across their habitual tracks and covered with grass or foliage. Large bags might also be secured by beating game, the animals being driven towards gulleys or precipices and there shot down with bows and arrows or killed in some other more or less cruel fashion. Akin to this form of the chase was that of ruthless persecution; a group of hunters would round up the chosen game, especially the pregnant females and young or wounded animals, and, driving them towards unfavourable ground, would harry them until they dropped from sheer exhaustion.

An important complement of meat food was vegetable sustenance in the shape of berrics and other wild fruits, seeds and mushrooms. The inhabitants

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Solutrean, containing pointed implements shaped like laurel leaves with a concave base, and shouldered points, frequently with a lateral fang. The upper level contains remains of the ancient Magdalenian culture, such as numerous worked bones, some chieftain's staves or magicians' wands, and shoulder-blades with engravings of animals, mainly hinds.

of Altamira would frequently cross over to the seashore, only a few miles away, and bring back great quantities of shellfish, particulary limpets, for their womenfolk, children and old men; this is shown by the abundance of shells found in the cave. Nor are the vertebrae of fish, especially salmon and trout, lacking.

The most interesting point of all, however, is that these cave-dwellers had a feeling for art. Many of the implements above-mentioned are adorned with designs of great variety, such as zigzag lines, triangles or stripes, arranged with a certain symmetry. More curious are a number of shoulder-blades of stag, on which marvellously lifelike outlines of animals, mainly hinds, were engraved with flint tools. Some of these engravings are real artistic creations, and it is not surprising that their authors should have conceived the idea of attempting works of an even loftier kind. These are the paintings with which fossil man embellished the interior of the cave, and that have made Altamira famous throughout the world. They form the subject of a later chapter.

The glacial period alluded to above had not yet come to an end, nor had the present geological age begun, when a catastrophe befell the cave of Altamira. The roof covering the front half of the hall fell in, leaving the primitive cave-dwelling in ruins. The entrance thereby became obstructed and remained so for thousands of years, with the

result that Altamira was hidden from human knowledge until its rediscovery fifty years ago. To that fortunate accident we owe the fact that the contents of the cave, both deposits and paintings, have come down to us intact and well-preserved (1).

The rediscovery of the cave in 1868.

In the year 1868 a man of the neighbourhood who had gone out to shoot, by accident discovered the entrance to the cave, which, owing to the collapse of the roof, had lain hidden for thousands of years; his dog happening to be trapped among the rocks whilst pursuing some vermin, several of the

(1) The specialist should also note that the surroundings of Altamira, though not the famous cave itself, were visited by primitive man at a far earlier time. This is shown by the fact that a considerable quantity of stone implements has recently been found in the diluvial clay whiwh covers a large part of the surface of the rock around the main cave. These implements, which are also on view in the Museum near by, are hewn mainly from hard quarzite; and among them are rough hand-axes, generally shaped on the upper surface only, with a rounded-off base and transverse edge. They were probably attached to wooden clubs for use and appear, in other deposits of the region, associated with remains of ancient elephant and Merck's rhinoceros, which shows that a warm climate of an African type reigned in the North of Spain in that earlier, *interglacial*, age.

fallen boulders had to be removed for its release, and so the old entrance was opened up.

The interior of the hall, however, was strewn with debris of rock, so that in the ensuing years few people ever took shelter there from rain or cold. In 1875 the cave was first explored by Don Marcelino S. de Sautuola (1831-1888). It was then known by the name of *Cueva de Juan Mortero*, a name soon abandoned for that of *Cueva de Altamira*, from the property on which it is situated. Nor could there be a happier designation, for the spot offers a splendid panorama. To the South rise the majestic mountains of the Cantabrian Range; to the West the sharp *Picos de Europa*, clothed almost throughout the year in dazzling snow; to the North stretches a dark blue band of sea; and to the North East lie the rolling hills surrounding Santander.

Sautuola, a pioneer of prehistoric studies in Spain, renewed his explorations; and in 1879 his little daughter, who frequently accompanied him on his visits to the cave, penetrated by the light of a candle into the deep recess or chamber that opens out behind the hall and there, with a shrill cry of *Toros!*, called his attention to the animal pictures on the ceiling and walls. Sautuola, as is shown by his report of the discovery published in 1880 under the title *Breves apuntes sobre algunos objetos prehistóricos de la provincia de Santander* (Brief notice of some prehistoric objects found in

Entrance to the Cave of Altamira and memorial to M. de Sautuola

Marcelino S. de Sautuola (1831-1888)

Cave of Altamira. Partial view of the Hall of Paintings

Cave of Altamira. Painting of a Hind
(Direct photograph by Prof. H. Obermaier)

the Province of Santander), realized at once the great value and extraordinary antiquity of the wonderful polychrome frescoes. At first, it must be confessed, this unexpected discovery met with doubt and scorn. Regardless of the striking artistic value of the work, a number of learned Spaniards and Frenchmen attributed it merely to the hand of modern shepherds; in so doing, they lost sight of the fact that many of the paintings represent bison, an animal that disappeared from Spain long ago and could only have been painted in an age when it lived in these latitudes, that is to say, during the last glacial period.

Soon, however, Sautuola's thesis found champions in Spain, foremost among whom was Don Juan Vilanova y Piera, a professor of the Central University; but, unfortunately both Sautuola and Vilanova died before justice was done to their ideas. A simple monument, erected by the Athenaeum of Santander over the entrance to the cave in 1921, now perpetuates the discovery and identification by Sautuola of these rock paintings of Early Man.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a number of caves with paintings or engravings on their walls were discovered in the South of France; such are the *Grotte de la Mouthe* (1895), Pair-non-Pair (1897), Les Combarelles (1901), Font de Gaume (1901). As these paintings also represent animals that disappeared thousands of years ago, their authenticity was no longer open to doubt.

Sautuola's memory was rehabilitated and his discovery honoured the more by the fact that in none of the seventy pictorial caves hitherto found in the South of France and North of Spain does the art of rock painting stand out in such vivid beauty as at Altamira. The paintings of this cave were studied and carefully copied in 1902 by Emile Cartailhac and Henri Breuil, and in 1906 under the auspices of the Prince of Monaco appeared the lavishy illustrated volume *La Caverne d'Altamira à Santillane, près Santander (Espagne)* (1).

Thenceforward the fame of the cave has grown, as has the number of visitors attracted to it, of whom foreigners form a large part. Its very fame, however, entailed certain duties. It was necessary to provide access to the cave and facilities to enable tourists, artists and scientists to contemplate and study the paintings at greater ease. Even more urgent was the need for ensuring the safety of the

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(1) That work is out of print and its place has been taken by a fresh great monograph on the cave composed by professors H. Breuil (Paris) and H. Obermaier (Madrid) with a prologue by the Duke of Berwick and Alba. Published at Madrid in 1935 under the title: *The Cave of Altamira at Santillana del Mar, Spain*, this is now the standard work on the history and paintings of the cave. On 53 plates it gives exact reproductions in colours of the paintings, together with numerous direct photographs, and deals at length with the archaeological finds made in the hall of the cave and the problems of the age and evolution of cave-wall painting in general.

cave and preservation of the paintings. According to the testimony of aged inhabitants of the countryside, a few years prior to the rediscovery of the cave quarrying had been carried on above its very roof. The blasting operations, traces of which are still visible, led to the formation of cracks, through which water percolated into the interior to the imminent danger of the prehistoric paintings and of the cave itself, which threatened to collapse in 1925.

The Duke of Alba generously and promptly came to the rescue, and under his chairmanship a Committee styled *Junta Protectora de la Cueva de Altamira* was formed, whose labours have justified its name. After purchase of the site on which the cave stands, a massive containing wall was built to support the ceiling of the entrance hall; a coat of cement was applied externally to this ceiling; and the fissures in the rock were filled up with cement mortar. A few years later, a second supporting wall was built further inside (gallery D of the plan). Thanks to this timely intervention a monument that is unique of its kind has been preserved for Spain and the civilised world in general.

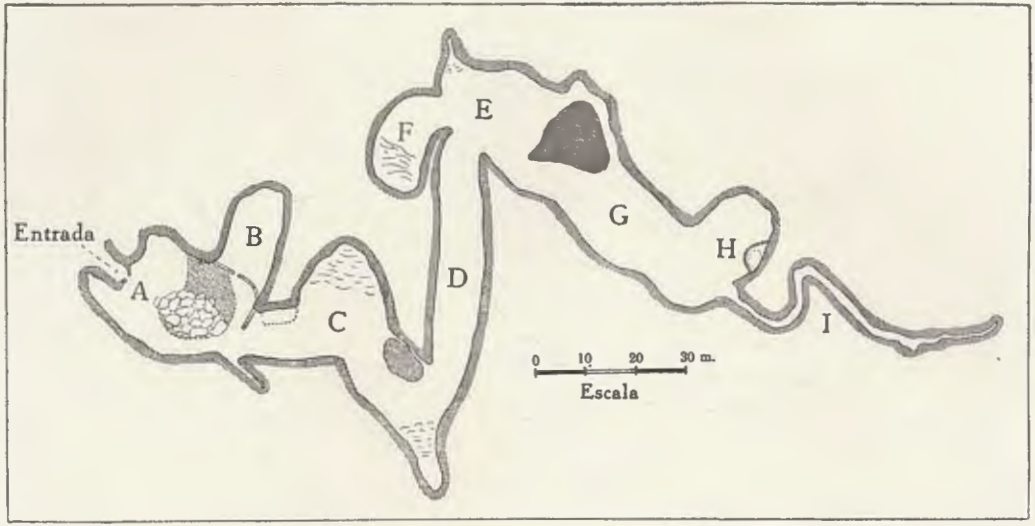
At the instance of the Committee Professor H. Obermaier also conducted a systematic research in 1925 and 1926 into the deposits underlying the entrance hall. In 1928 a motor road was built from Santillana del Mar to the cave; communications inside the latter were improved; and a deeper, cir-

cular, path cut around the *Hall of the Paintings*. The acetylene lamps, the use of which was objectionable in every respect, were replaced by electric reflectors; and, finally, near the entrance to the cave a building was erected which serves as a dwelling for the keeper and as a Museum containing a small but highly instructive collection of prehistoric objects.

A visit to the cave.

The guide will now lead the way into the cave, the entrance to which faces the Northwest and the total length of which is about 270 metres. The entrance hall (marked A on the plan), which formed the dwelling-place of prehistoric man and now is shut off to a great part by the massive wall built to support the roof, has first to be crossed.

After a few moments a second wall is reached, through which a door leads into the most interesting part of the cave, the so-called *Hall of the Paintings* (marked B on the plan). Approximately rectangular in shape, it measures 18 metres in length by 8 or 9 in width and is very low, the height falling from 2 metres at the entrance to 1,70 metres in the centre and 1,10 at the end. The relative lowness of the ceiling explains why it was chosen by the prehistoric artists as a suitable spot for their work. Recently a circular path has been cut



Plan of the Cave of Altamira

to allow the visitor to inspect the hall at his ease and view the work from a better angle.

A glance, on entering the hall, is sufficient to show that most of the works of art consist of *paintings*. The materials used for colouring were charcoal for the darker tones, and ochre for the shades of yellow, red, reddish brown and earth brown. These were generally crushed and prepared in a liquid form; and animal grease was probably used as a vehicle. The prehistoric artists traced the lines and applied the splashes of colour on their rock canvasses with the aid of brushes or the like, thus producing veritable *oil paintings*, which adhered strongly to the stone surface and, having become slightly fossilized, have remained in an admirable state of preservation. Occasional use was made of finely pointed pieces of ochre as pencils. Often the surface is seen to have been carefully prepared in part by washing or scraping, so as to obtain greater perfection of outline and softer shading of the painting. Many of the figures are partly engraved, and often the outlines and more pronounced features, such as eyes, ears, horns, snout, feet and hoofs, were first traced on the stone, either very lightly or strongly. Flint tools were used for these engravings, which would serve as a rough sketch of the picture to be produced.

As regards the execution of the paintings, there are several variants. The figures which are merely outlined, as well as the plain figures in uniform

colour and the ones painted in shades of one and the same colour, are all somewhat older. The culminating point was reached in the polychrome paintings, which are a triumph of pictorial and plastic effect, and they are also the most recent.

It happens also at Altamira that engravings or paintings are laid directly one upon another in a curious medley; this renders the older drawings particularly difficult to recognize, and some have even been obliterated. In addition there is the damage done to the polychrome paintings, by infiltration in the course of centuries, and by the misguided curiosity of visitors in the last forty years, when supervision was lacking.

The animal most frequently represented is the bison, which is shown lying at rest, stretching itself, or standing. The wild horse also occurs, as well as a hind and two wild boars. All are figures of exquisite perfection revealing an extraordinary aesthetic sense in the artists. Theirs was a sensorial and realistic art, which depicted its subjects as Nature provided them and, in so doing, reached maturity, for here two great problems in art, those of space and movement, are seen to be solved.

The more important paintings are distributed over the left half of the chamber, as seen from the entrance; those lying on the right hand are of slight interest, and badly preserved.

A glance at the roof of the cave shows a number of striking natural protuberances and, on cla-

ser inspection, it will be seen that they were used repentedly by the care artists to produce their masterpieces. As prehistoric man lay resting from his raids in sight of these bosses of rock, he would not unnaturally conceive the idea of making use of their plastic effect so as to enhance and render more lifelike the figures of bison he painted there. To this artistic play of fancy some of the finest figures owe their origin; the bosses, accentuated by colouring, heighten the relief of the body, to which the artist skilfully added head, feet and tail. As the salients of the rock recall forms of bodies at rest, almost all the animals are showen in an attitude of repose, with their head on a level with the ground and legs drawn close to the body.

Three classic figures of bison in relief deserve special mention; they may be seen, from the beginning of the circular path, grouped on the ceiling and measure respectively 1,45 metres, 1,40 metres and 1,50 metres in length.

Further to the left on the ceiling are the following note worthy paintings:

A wild boar, shown running (1,60 metres); rather faint.

A headless bison (1,50 metres).

A bison standing (1,50 metres). The artist has availed himself of a natural rounding-off of the rock to impart a particularly striking efect to the region of the shoulders.

A bison in the act of stretching itself (1,90 me-

tres); here also the artist has turned the configuration of the stone roof to good use.

A bison lying at rest (1,90 metres). This is one of the finest things at Altamira. The head is turned backwards; the horns, eyes, ears and snout are exquisitely outlined in light red and the skilful treatment of the thighs and legs adds to the life-like appearance of the figure.

A wild horse (1,60 metres), with a finely shaped head. The lower part of the body down to the feet is obliterated. Within this figure is another slightly older drawing in light red, showing the outline of a hind or colt.

A wild boar (1,45 metres), underneath which appears an older drawing also of a boar, the feet of which are still discernible.

A fine figure of a hind (2,20 metres). Beneath the head is the image of a small bison in black.

Towards the middle of the ceiling near the circular path are further figures of bison, two of which may be specially mentioned here. One represents a bison standing erect (1,60 metres), of which the head is extraordinarily expressive. The other, just behind, is 1,50 metres long. The body is reddish brown with a large patch of intense black; the head, painted mainly in black, has an almost devilish aspect.

Here ends the visit to the *Hall of the Paintings*, which has been aptly termed the *Sixtine Chapel of Prehistoric Art*. Few spots in the world can make so deep and lasting an impression on the mind of

Cave of Altamira. Painting of a bison
(Direct photograph by Prof. H. Obermaier)

Cave of Altamira. Painting of a bison
(From a copy by Prof. H. Breuil)

Altamira. The Cave discovered in 1928
(A view of the interior)

Altamira. Keeper's house and Museum

the visitor. From the roof the hall these paintings, conceived in the imagination and drawn by the hand of the cave-dwellers of fifteen to twenty thousand years ago, seem to look down upon us in astonishment. No less astonishment is felt by the spectator, who perceives that artistic perfection had been achieved in that remote age, and, comparing it with the vaunted progress and civilization of to-day realizes that the material aspect of life alone has changed. As he gazes at the paintings of Altamira, he is struck with awe by the aesthetic sense and realism of this primitive people, whom he had imagined as living in a state of abject barbarism.

The inspection of the cave may be continued through picturesque galleries and chambers, which, however, contain but few of the engravings and paintings of prehistoric man. After the chamber B, we reach the large hall C containing a small recess covered with red figures in the shape of ladders, which undoubtedly had a magical meaning.

The long passage D, with some engravings and paintings of bison in black, leads to the majestic hall E. The roof, some 18 metres wide, is flat, thus providing a natural solution of the problem of architectural balance. A little lower down to the left lies room F, on the right wall of which is a fine painting of a black bison. A gallery G branches out from E to the chamber H, where the excursion through the cave ends; for the passage I, besides being impracticable, contains nothing of interest.

II

THE SECOND CAVE, DISCOVERED IN 1928

In order to provide easier means of access to Altamira, a motor road from Santillana del Mar was built in 1928. The stone for the road was quarried from a spot about 110 yards distant from the entrance to the famous cave, and this led to the accidental discovery of a fresh cave remarkable for the perfection and beauty of its stalactites.

The second cave is formed of one vast hall some 88 yards in length and of a width varying up to 22 yards. The horizontal roof shows many cracks, but Nature herself has seen to the repairs by filling up the fissures in the rock with a bluish calcite forming countless pendants hanging from the roof like thin icicles. The floor, in its turn, is covered with stalagmites either in the shape of single protuberances and slender columns or forming groups resembling fantastic ruins of mediaeval castles.

Thus adorned, the cave is a marvellous sight. The stalactites, like crystal threads, reflect the

light and break it up into all the colours of the rainbow. At other spots the walls are an immaculate white, and the stalactites hang down like the flies in theatrical scenery. In the innermost and finest part of the cavern the columns of stalagmites, some blackish, others yellow or white, stand as thick as a wood as they grow upwards in search of the delicate stalactites slowly reaching down to meet them.

This wonderful subterranean palace was wrought in the course of centuries by drops of water. Trickling through the overlying rock, they decomposed the limestone owing to the carbon dioxide they carried in solution. The water dripping from the stalactites contains bicarbonate of calcium and, on evaporating, deposits limestone of extraordinary whiteness and purity.

About twenty yards from the entrance a skeleton was found. The skull lay upside down as if the individual to whom it belonged had died with the face to the ground. This human being, who lived in an age that is indeterminable but certainly prehistoric, was trapped in the cave when a fall of rock blocked up the entrance. The skeleton is now on view at the Museum in the keeper's house.

Hugo Obermaier,
Professor at the University of Madrid.

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SANTILLANA DEL MAR

Many are the towns of Spain that by the traces they bear of a glorious past, their splendid buildings or old-world charm are worthy of becoming centres of pilgrimage for the devotees of Spanish tradition. Few provide within so small a compass such a wealth of artistic interest as the town af Santillana del Mar.

Its pleasing name, the Romanesque flavour of which is in such perfect keeping with the ancestral character of its streets, at once calls to mind two outstanding literary figures, one imaginary and the other real,—the famous *pícaro*, the tale of whose adventures has spread the name of the town throughout the wide world, and the great nobleman, brave soldier yet exquisite poet who adorned the Court of King Juan II.

Santillana, however, even had it not been the imaginary home of Gil Blas, nor given its name to the marquisate of the author of the *Serranillas*, would yet have claim enough to live in the annals of art and figure in the pages of history.

Its origin, like that of so many illustrious towns, is lost in obscurity, and we only know that in remote times there stood on a neighbouring site a city of the name of Planes, near which, at some

undetermined date, a monastery was founded in honour of St. Juliana, the martyr of Nicomedia. Some authors claim that her body was removed from Italy to Planes at the time of the Lombard invasion in the sixth century, when in all probability the monastery was founded. The ancient name of the town still prevailed in the tenth century, and that of Santa Juliana was only applied to the religious foundation. By the eleventh century, however, the monastery had so grown in importance as to gather the lay population around it, and thenceforward the corrupted name of the martyr saint (Santa Juliana, Sancta Illana, Santillana) was given to the town and to the whole Western part of the province, which then and for a long time afterwards was known as the *Asturias de Santillana.*

The Benedictine monastery of ancient Planes was famous both for its wealth and the privileges conferred upon it by the Counts and Kings of Castile, privileges that culminated in 1209 when Alfonso VIII, in giving a charter to the town, placed it under the lordship of the Abbot and Chapter of what had grown to be a Collegiate Church. Not for long did the Abbots remain in peaceful possession of their domain, for when, in the fourteenth century, the King of Castile gave the lordship over a number of the vales of Asturias de Santillana to the House of La Vega, this powerful family laid claim to the town as well, quarrelled with the

House of the Tagles

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

Town Hall

Foto Pacheco

Abbot, and soon the streets of Santillana were running with the blood of partizans. King Juan II gave the final blow to the Abbot's power by granting the title of Marquis of Santillana to Don Iñigo López de Mendoza, whose extraordinary gifts gave it lasting fame. The soldier-poet hastened to take possession of his marquisate and, though he met with stubborn resistance on the part of the *montañeses* —«stout men, well versed in the art of fighting on foot, as behoves mountaineers», according to Fernando del Pulgar—, he finally succeeded in having his claim to the overlordship recognized on the famous field of Revolgo, but not without having often found himself in dire distress and danger.

In this atmosphere of continuous fighting the city grew in the Middle Ages and took that grim, forbidding aspect still noticeable in its buildings, such as the *torronas* or keeps, whose age-stained walls recall the days when, in the words of Menéndez Pelayo, «men fought from tower to tower and from house to house... and the only form of justice known was that administered by each with his own hand».

The stormy times of the Middle Ages were followed, however, by days of greater peace and prosperity in Cantabria. Passion cooled down and the commoner could exchange pike and arquebus for the ploughshare and the scythe; the hidalgo, richer in titles than estate, enjoy peacefully his meagre

revenues; friars and canons, their prayers no longer disturbed by the clash of arms and shout of battlecries, chant their Gregorian song, though still careful punctually to collect their tithes and tributes; younger sons found in New Spain and Peru a wide field in which to pursue fortune, free from all irksome restraint... Old manors were restored and new mansions arose, lacking maybe the very rudiments of comfort, but ever emblazoned with the coat of arms in stone proudly displaying its supporters, nymphs, helmet, waving plume and arrogant motto.

Houses dating from that epoch (the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) prevail in Santillana and have left a typical imprint upon the town; intermingled with them are buildings of earlier centuries, the whole combining to form a picture of singular charm.

Thus, the traveller who passes through the streets of Santillana, finds within a short space a compendium of the civil architecture of the region in its diverse epochs, from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, so much so that a notice might be put up at the entrance to the town labelling it *Architectural Museum*.

The historic *Campo de Revolgo* is perhaps the best spot from which to start on a pilgrimage through the quiet streets, in which life beats to the slow measure of bygone days. The gnarled trunks of the trees are in keeping with the time-

House of the Borgias

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

Merino Tower

Foto Cevallós (Santander)

worn aspect of the surrounding buildings. To the left, as if withdrawn from urban life, stands the *Casa de los Tagles*, a noble building typical of the eighteenth century with its double arched entrance, iron balconies, splendid coat of arms and verandah placed, according to a scheme that is rare but not unique, on the second floor.

Following the road towards the town, we pass on the left some insignificant modern buildings and on the right the *Regina Coeli* Convent, founded by Alonso Velarde in the latter years of the sixteenth century.

Entering by the only street available in this direction, we come first to the mansion of the Marquises of Casa Mena, an eighteenth century building of severe but elegant lines, spoilt in part by the lack of eaves that formerly gave the necessary finish. Adjoining the mansion, a small building in ashlar, with pointed arch on the ground floor and lintelled windows, is a typical fifteenth century house of the region.

Opposite stands a building of the same epoch as the mansion, and similar in design; the eagle pierced by an arrow on its shield shows it to have belonged to the noble family of Villa.

A little further on the street divides, and we take the left branch, named Juan Infante. Short as it is, it contains several interesting houses, particularly the so-called *House of the Eagle* on the left, with an exquisitely carved shield, and on the

right, the ancient home of the Barreda family, now occupied by the *Parador de Gil Blas.*

We have now reached the admirable *plaza*, where the interest aroused at our first steps through the streets is greatly enhanced. The buildings enclosing the irregularly shaped place differ greatly in age, but all are old enough for the differences to be lost in an apparent unity.

On the left is the Town Hall, built in the severe style of Herrera that prevailed in this region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; hard by are several picturesque old buildings. Opposite the street of Juan Infante stands the tower of the Borgia family, a most interesting building of the fifteenth century, which marks the transition from the warlike days of the Middle Ages to more peaceful modern times. A spacious pointed arch affords entrance to the portico, which has lateral openings communicating, on the one side with the street, and on the other, with the portico of the adjoining house; on the first story are three curtailed arches, of which the central one was filled in and those on either side were opened up at some later date; on the second story are two smaller arches. A narrow cornice and gargoyles in the form of cannon complete the external aspect of this tower. Joined to the rear of this building is another of a slightly later date, remarkable for its inner courtyard, a somewhat rare feature in the architecture of the region.

Street of Las Lindas

Foto Fuertes (Santander)

House of the Marquis of Santillana

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

On the right stands the massive Merino Tower, hoary with age as befits the oldest lay building in Santillana. Its dour, forbidding aspect furnishes evidence of the life led by the Northern hidalgos in the thirteenth century, from which time it dates. The large-stoned pointed arch has been cut open in modern times to afford a wider entrance. On the first story the double-arched window with its stone seat on the inside would be the only opening by which the dwellers of the keep could look out in times of truce. A wider opening on the second story gave access to the scaffold that in case of alarm was raised at that height, for which purpose the wall was provided with projecting stones to hold the beams. The tower was crowned by a flat running wall with battlements that have since been filled in.

Turning to the right through the narrow street of Las Lindas we come to a reproduction of the old tower, whose twin windows with pointed arches and projecting machicolations savouring strongly of the Gothic indicate the fourteenth century as the date of its erection.

We now pass on to the Calle del Cantón, in which the house believed, on but slight authority, to be that of the Marquis of Santillana, attracts attention by its elegant simplicity. A pointed arch on the ground floor, four lintelled windows framed in Gothic moulding, alternating with sculptured coats of arms, and great overhanging eaves render

the façade typical of fifteenth century houses of the *Montaña*. The timber and ironwork is modern but copied from old models so as to harmonise with the rest.

A little further on is the so-called *Casa de los hombrones*, which derives its name from the two lusty supporters depicted on its shield.

The House of Cossío, standing a little lower down, also displays a handsome shield overhung by wide eaves.

Here the street widens and affords a fine perspective, closed in the background by the main façade of the Collegiate Church, a handsome, well-proportioned building, of unmistakable Romanesque origin, notwithstanding the many mutilations and incongruous additions it has suffered in the course of time.

Before reaching the entrance steps we should notice on the left the old Abbot's House, bearing among later features traces of Gothic on some of the windows.

An entrance divided into several semi-circular arches, from some of which the carved decoration characteristic of the style has disappeared as a result of careless restoration; remains of roughly hewn sculptures, loosely set in the wall; a pediment in the neoclassic style and a graceful row of arches of comparatively modern date; a small Romanesque steeple of circular design with a twin arched window; a massive square steeple over the end of

House of the Velardes

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

Façade of the Collegiate Church

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

the church, and another in two parts above the transept, relieved by windows and blind arcades, —such are the outstanding features of the façade of the historic church.

Going round the sacristy built in the style of Herrera against the transversal nave, we find ourselves in front of the apse, the purity of whose lines is enhanced by the vigorous contrast of the arches over its windows.

Before entering the church a glance may be cast at the home of the Velarde family that stands near by, a sixteenth century building of importance with typical stepped gables, pinnacles, gargoyles, bucket towers at the angles, double-arched doorway, semi-circular balcony windows, and —a feature that is strange in this part of Spain— the plateresque adornment of one the openings.

The church, formerly a collegiate and now a parish church, was of old a famous Benedictine abbey. The monastery, according to the Rev. Father Flórez, was founded in the sixth century, though it is not mentioned in documents until the ninth. The church standing to-day is not so old, nor is it likely that it contains any traces of work dating further back than the twelfth century.

The present building, therefore, is of Romanesque style, that severe and hardy Romanesque that struck such deep roots in Spanish soil. It is composed of three naves with a transept, three semi-circular apses and a square steeple over the

end. The pillars are designed in the form of a cross with the columns grouped on the four faces and not on the angles, whence it may be inferred that originally there was no rib vaulting.

Of the early vaulting only the quadripartite divisions of the apses, the barrels of the transversal nave and the ribbed dome standing over the transept remain; all the rest is ribbed Gothic. The columns have simple bases standing on a high pedestal and finely sculptured capitals.

In the centre of the church is the tomb of Santa Juliana, bearing a roughly hewn effigy of the Saint. The relics, however, are not kept there, as they were transferred to the presbytery in 1453 by order of the celebrated bishop of Burgos Don Alonso de Cartagena.

The main altar, the rich silver frontal of which is a fine example of baroque workmanship, has a beautiful Gothic Retablo of the late fifteenth century, with excellent paintings. On the socle are four figures carved in relief with ingenuous realism representing the Evangelists.

Behind the frontal a curious Romanesque sculpture of the figures of four saints is conserved, which may have belonged to some old Retablo.

At the entrance to the left aisle is a fine coloured carving in wood representing Christ on the Cross, dating from the seventeenth century.

The cloister, situated on the North side of the church, is a beautiful example of its style. From

Apse of the Collegiate Church

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

Cloister of the Collegiate Church

Foto Cevallos (Santander)

a continuous base rise coupled shafts with large capitals of great variety and artistic value, illustrating many of the subjects dear to Romanesque taste, such as religious scenes, incidents of the chase, designs derived from the flora of the region, fantastic animals, or formed simply of filaments interwoven in complicated combinations.

All of them bear witness to the supreme skill and wealth of imagination of the medieval sculptors, whose strange fancies have left so many riddles yet awaiting interpretation. We may content ourselves with admiring the beauty of their work and leave to others eager to discover a hidden meaning in each symbol, the task of solving their enigmas and making their mysteries known to the world at large.

Elias Ortiz de la Torre,
Architect

(Madrid)

ITINERARY AND VISIT TO THE CAVES

Santillana del Mar lies at a distance of an hour's easy run *by motor car* from Santander along the excellent Oviedo high road via Puente Arce and Barreda. The distance is 20 miles, or slightly more if the high road be followed through Torrelavega as far as Puente de San Miguel (see map).

A very convenient way of visiting the caves and Santillana is afforded by the motor service running daily throughout a great part of the year from Santander.

To reach Santillana del Mar *by rail*, the early train on the Santander-Oviedo line (Cantabrian Railways) should be taken, which arrives at Torrelavega at 9 a. m. There the motorbus running to Comillas awaits the train and reaches Santillana at 10 o'clock.

The Cave of Altamira lies a mile and a half to the South West of Santillana on ground rising

gently to a height of 260 feet. The guide, who speaks French, lives close to the cave in the Museum-house, where tickes for entrance to the cave are issued.

A visit to the caves lasts about an hour.


MAR CANTÁBRICO
Santandér
Suances
Puente Arce
Santillana del Mar
Comillas
Cuevas de Altamira
Barreda
Torrelavega
Puente San Miguel
Oviedo
Caves of Altamira
Road
Railway

Map of Route

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