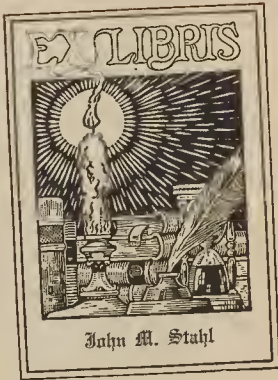
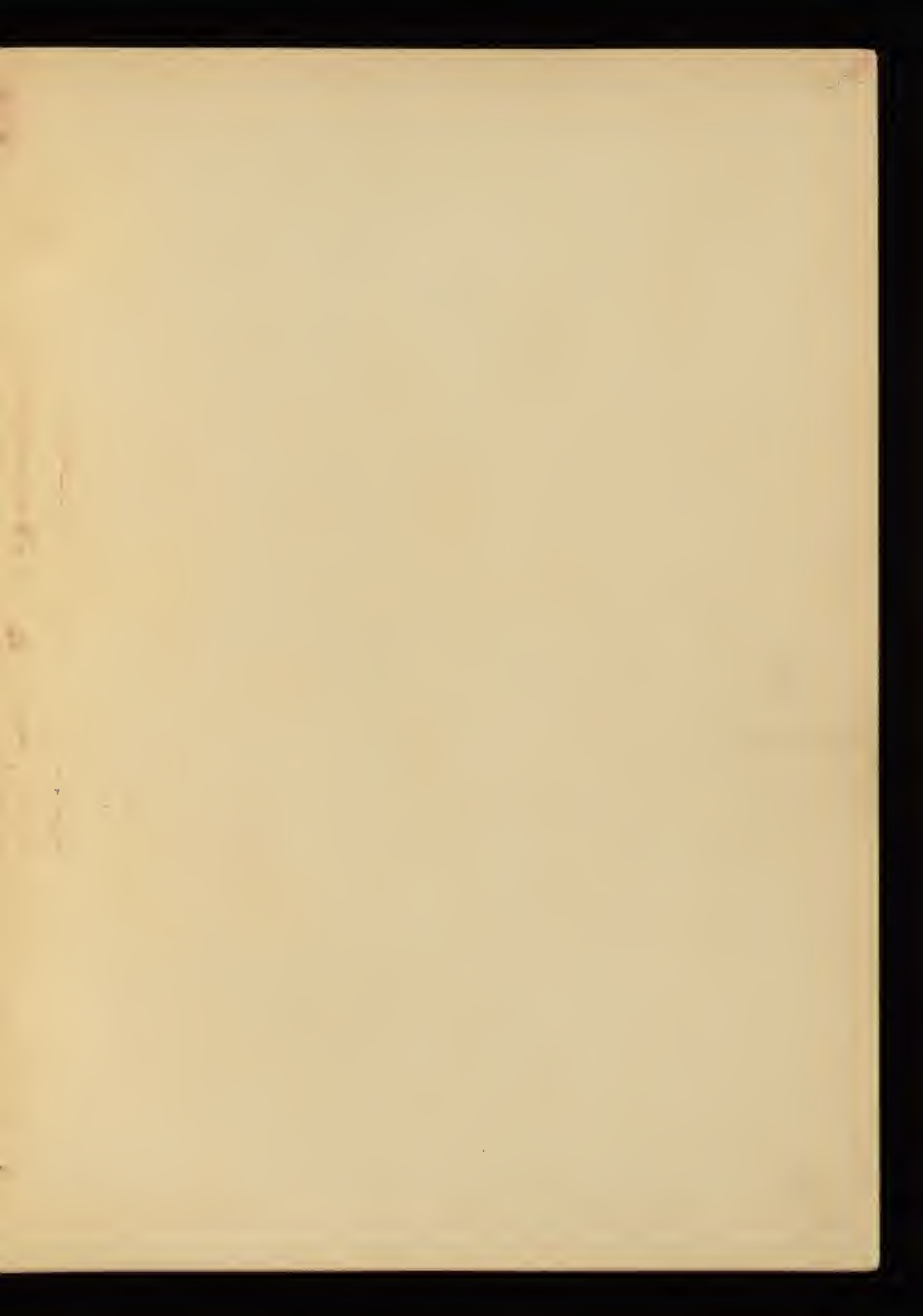
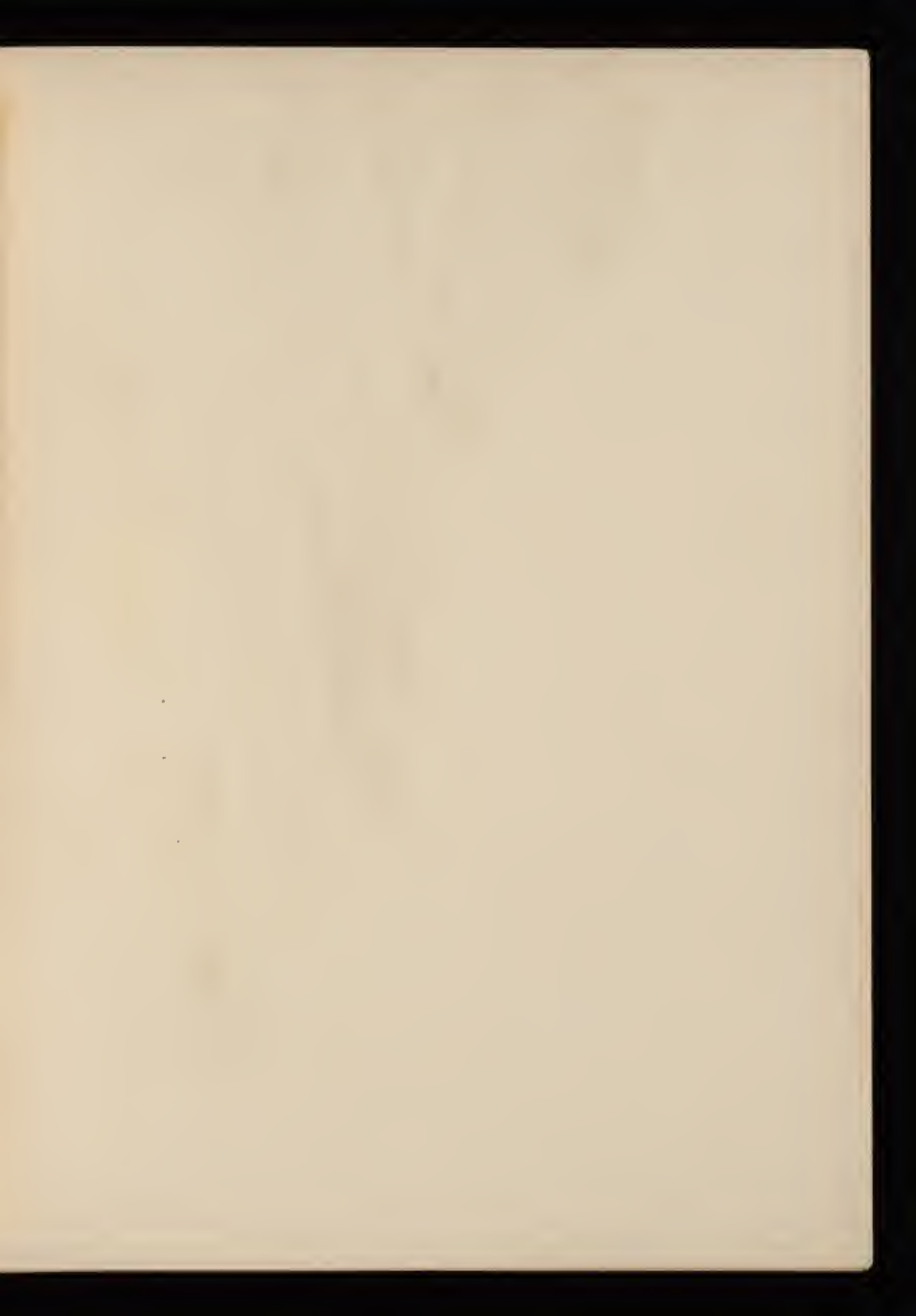


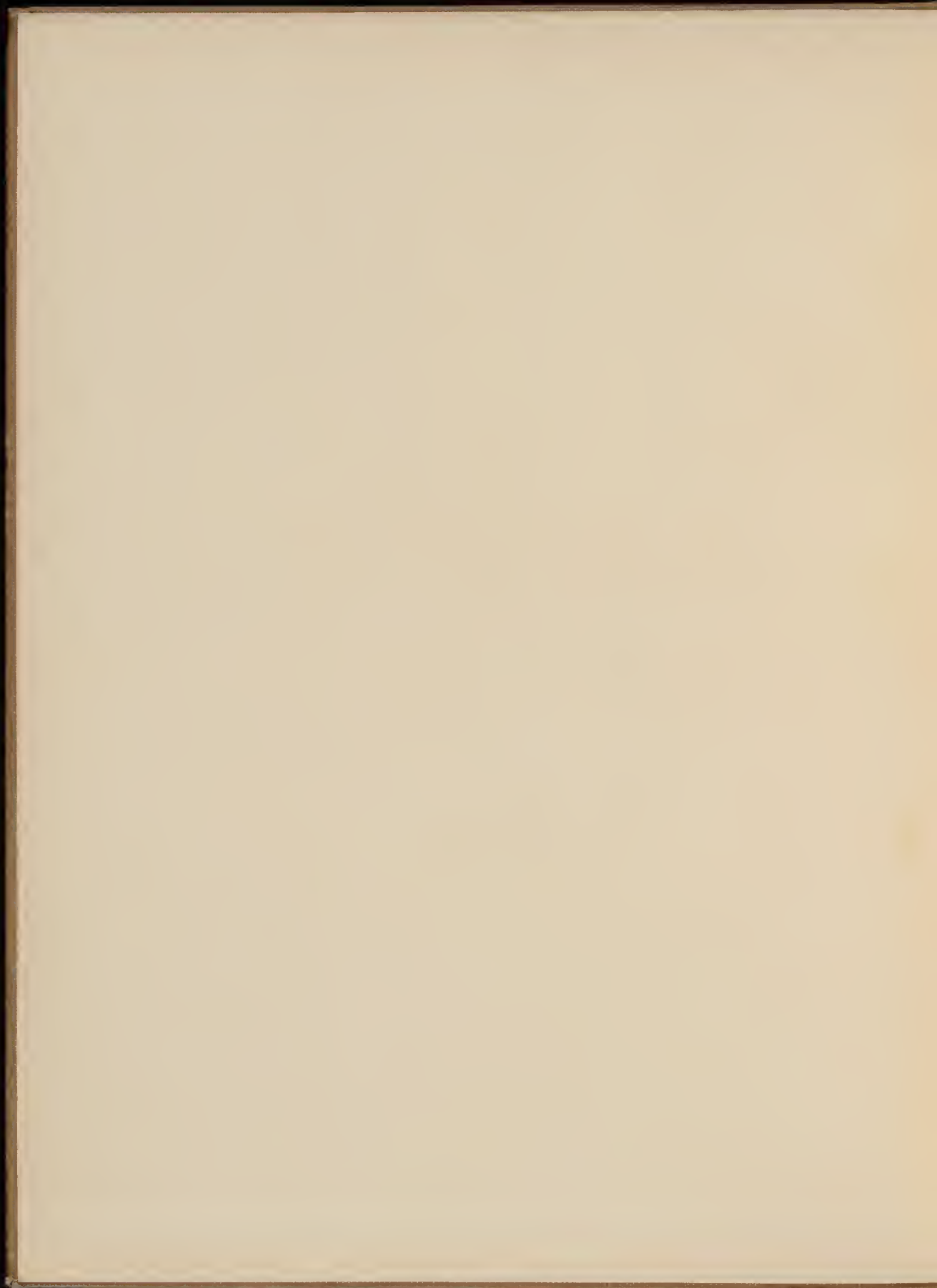
REJERÍA OF THE
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REJERÍA OF THE SPANISH
RENAISSANCE

CENTRAL MOTIF OF THE COLOSSAL IRON REJA OF THE
ROYAL CHAPEL AT GRANADA SHOWING THE ESCUTCHEONS OF
THE CATHOLIC KINGS WHO LIE ENTOMBED THERE AND OF THEIR
GRANDSON CHARLES V WHO ORDERED THIS EMBELLISHMENT
THE REJERO WAS ONE MASTRE BARTOLOME
OF JAEN WHO EXECUTED IT BETWEEN THE YEARS 1518 & 1523
AND WHOSE NAME IS ON THE FRIEZE



REJERÍA
OF THE
SPANISH RENAISSANCE

A COLLECTION OF
PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEASURED DRAWINGS
WITH DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

BY
ARTHUR BYNE
AND
MILDRED STAPLEY



NEW YORK
1914

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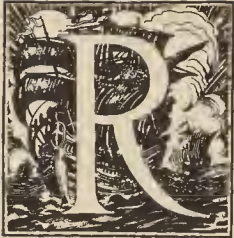
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No. 87



BURGOS
DOORWAY IN THE MONASTERY OF LAS HUELGAS

INTRODUCTION



RENAISSANCE Architecture in Spain could not be fully appreciated without examining the towering wrought-iron grilles, or Rejas, of the period. These exhibit a domination over the stubborn material never attained elsewhere. The Spanish iron-worker became a veritable magician; he made the heaviest of metals seem mere gossamer; he turned the cheapest into something priceless. Not only did he surpass the limits of his material, but he converted the Reja,¹ which had hitherto been nothing more than an architectonic accessory, into a colossal creation that ceased to be tributary to its surroundings and stood *per se* as a monumental achievement.

In it the national elation produced by the Fall of Granada and the Discovery of the New World fixed itself most distinctively as it sought expression in art. The indomitable Spanish temper began to revel in the task of taming iron. The small screens which, all through Christianized Spain, had always been the accustomed means of separating chapels from the body of the church

¹ Pronounced: Ray'-hah.

no longer sufficed. Something splendid was demanded; and to secure this more magnificent Reja, the matter was often given out to competition. On such an occasion the rejero, who was generally a sculptor and architect as well, would travel a great distance to submit his designs to the cathedral chapter.

Thus, being a focusing of circumstances purely national, the Renaissance Reja is a more interesting and valuable study than Spanish Gothic productions in iron; these, while all too little known, present but few variations from Gothic work elsewhere in Europe; the Reja, on the contrary, is unmatched, unapproached even, by any other country.

It has been regretted by writers on the art of Italy that, during those inspired centuries when she was producing the Renaissance, iron-beating was not a more popular craft—that the world has thereby missed glorious works. Let the world, then, turn to that other and less exploited Peninsula of Southern Europe; for surely not even Italy at her happiest moment could have surpassed Spain's superb Rejas.







BARCELONA CATHEDRAL.
DETAIL OF CLOISTER REJA (EARLY XIV CENTURY).

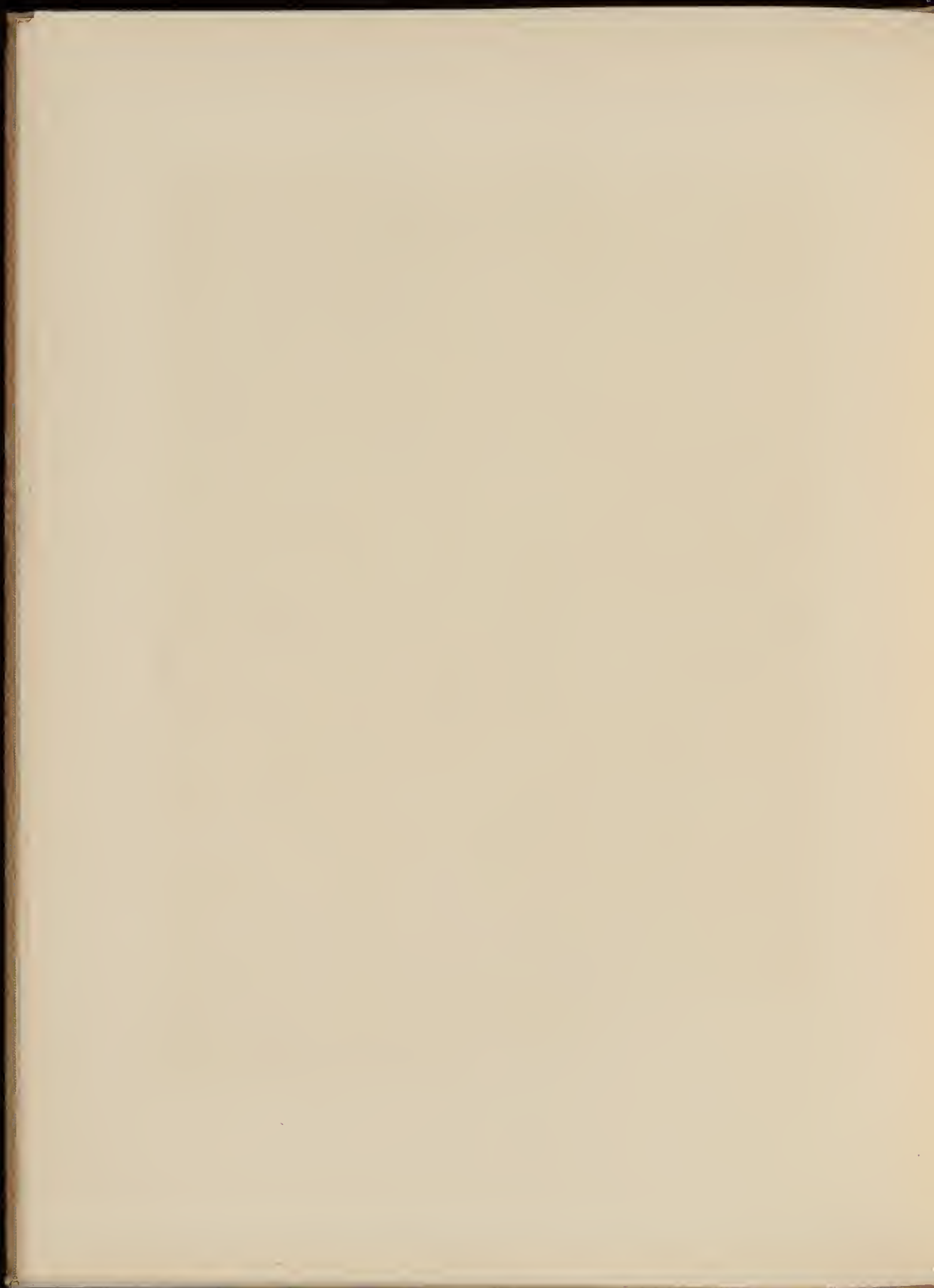
PAMPLONA CATHEDRAL.
DETAIL OF CLOISTER REJA (EARLY XIII CENTURY).

REJERÍA OF THE SPANISH RENAISSANCE



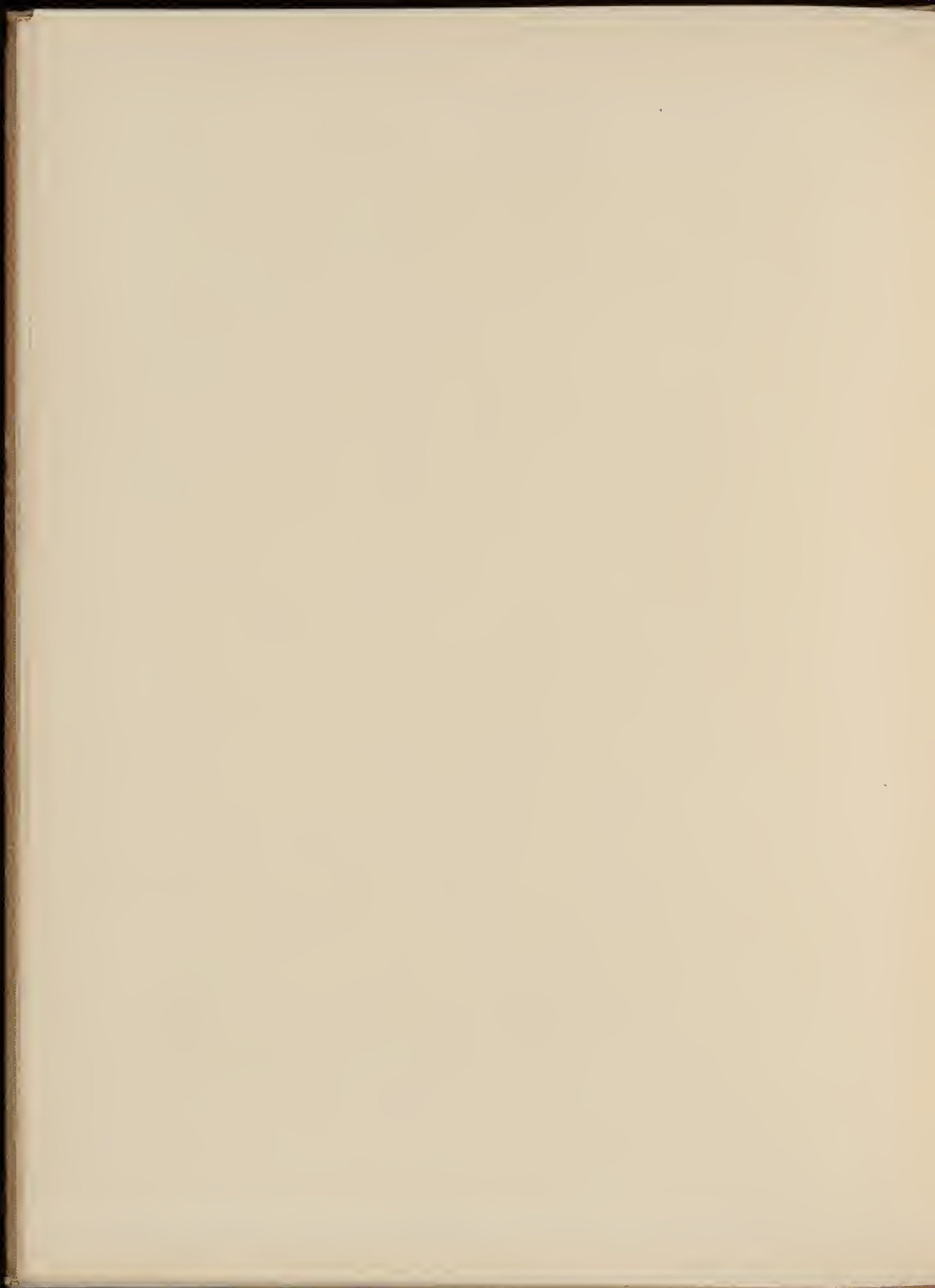
THE high altar of Christian temples, supplied as it was from the beginning with rich furnishings, necessitated some adequate enclosure—one that would protect the sacred treasures and at the same time leave them visible to worshipers outside. Iron, strong, plentiful, and capable of being wrought in open patterns, was the obvious choice. The screens fashioned out of it are known in Spain as Rejas.

In Romanesque churches, where the earliest Rejas must be sought, the separate units are an endless number of C-shaped scrolls. These are riveted into a rich arabesque—a design common to medieval Navarre, Catalonia, and the adjacent Roussillon, which was then part of Spain. Pamplona Cathedral contains one of the finest of the type (Plate I), made, according to tradition, from Moorish chains captured by the Navarrese at the Battle of Las Navas in 1212. The style, while beautiful, was comparatively short-lived; for early in the XV Century, or perhaps sooner, ironworkers seem to have decided that a suc-



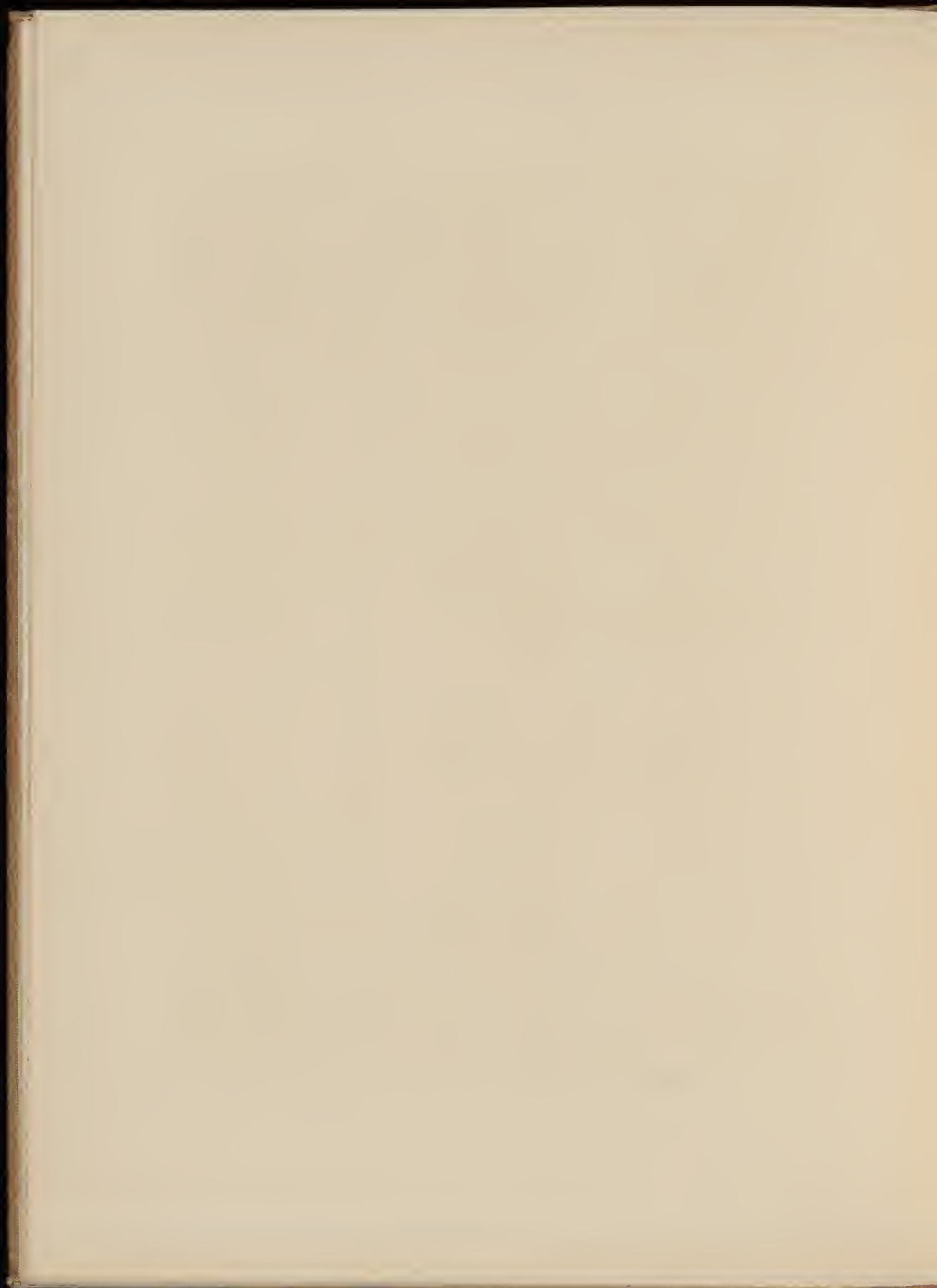


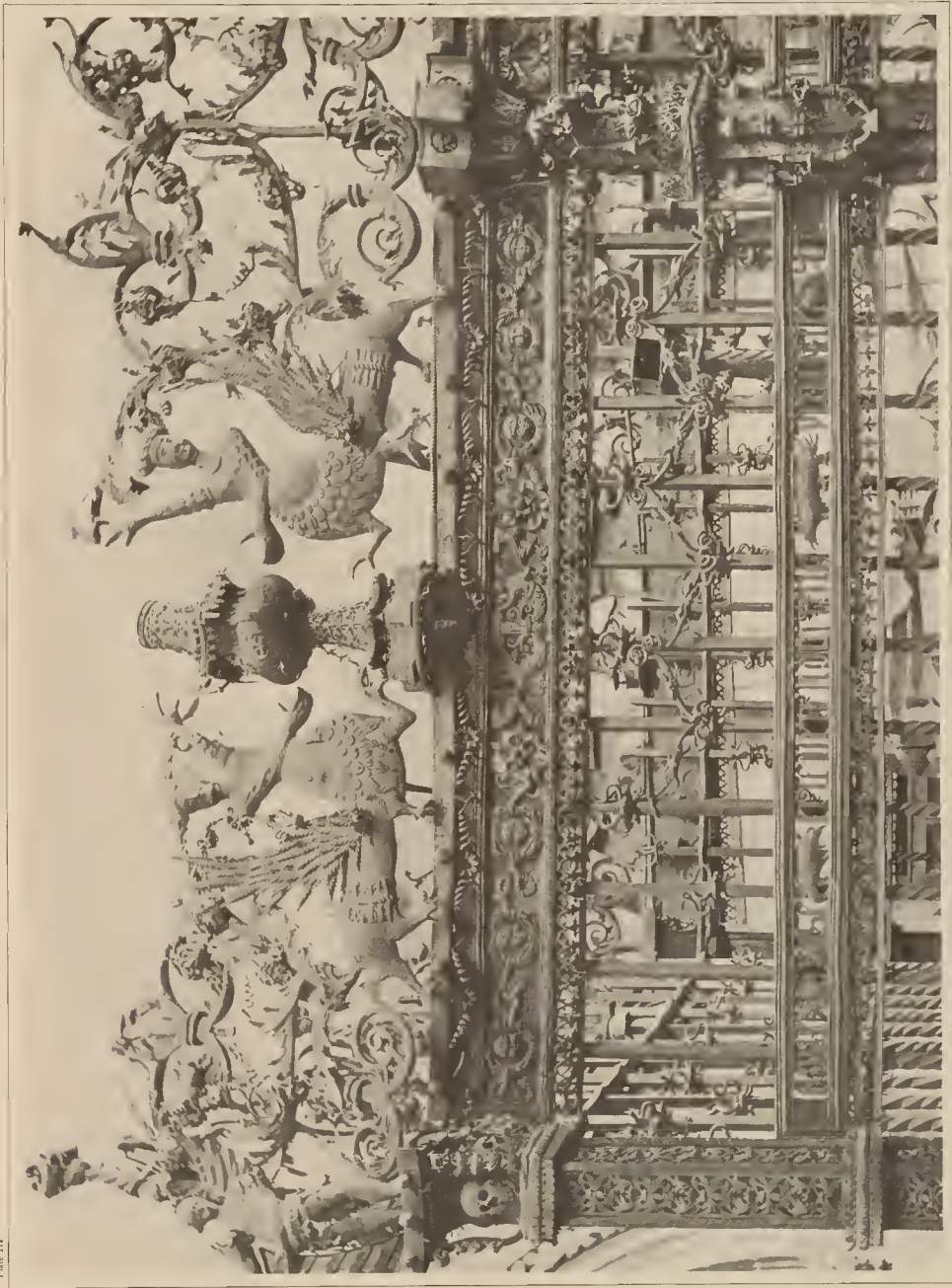
BARCELONA CATHEDRAL
REJA IN THE CLOISTER (XIV CENTURY)



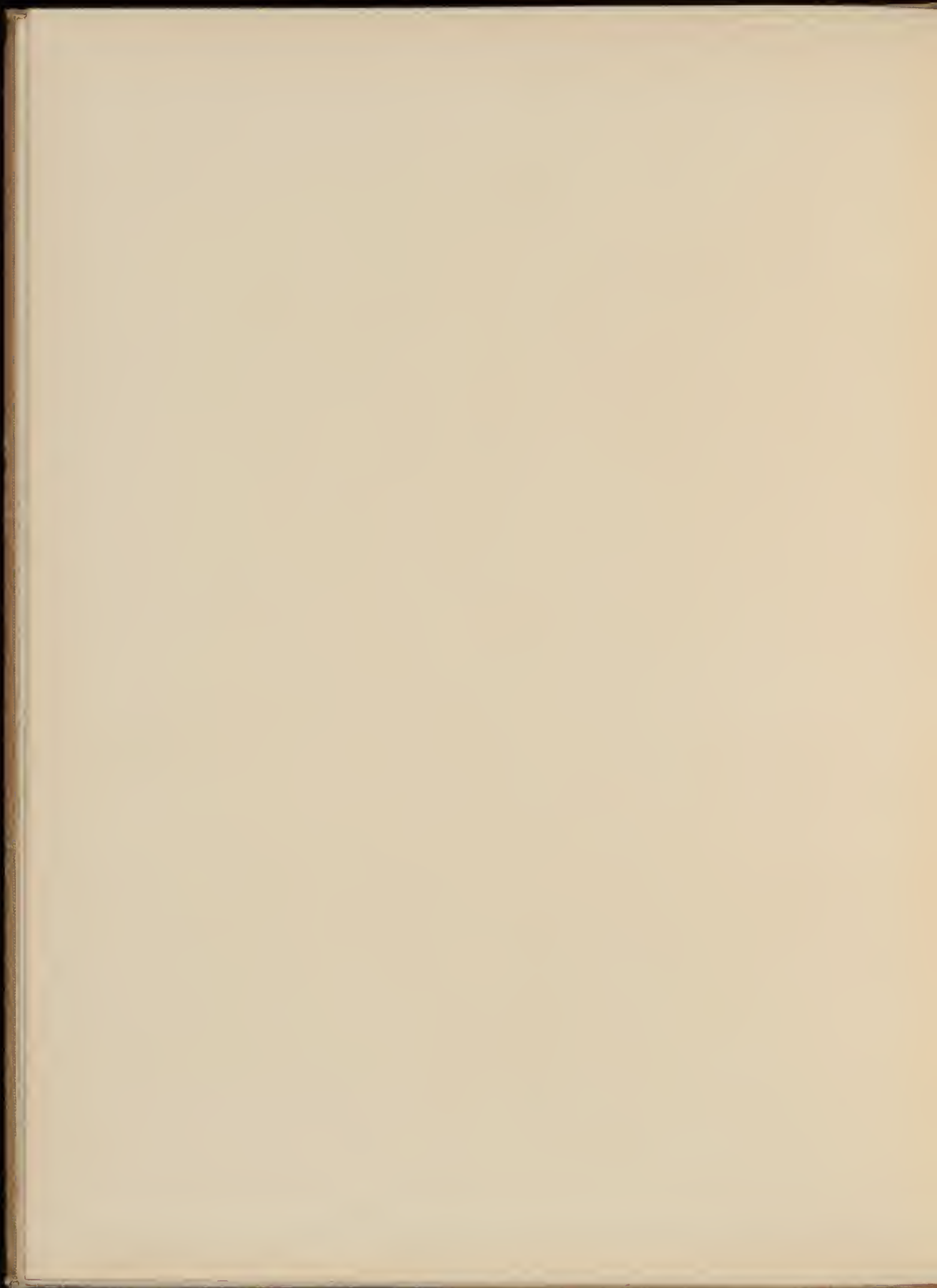
cession of spaced vertical bars strengthened by a few horizontal members would answer their purpose better than scrolls. This bar type soon became the accepted convention and was well established in Spain before the initiation of the period we are to discuss. Its increase of transparency is instantly evident (Plate II); likewise the increase of structurability and dignity in the mere verticality itself. The new design by its very nature precluded ornamentation from the body of the Reja and left it to be concentrated in cresting and lock, with horizontal structural members remaining strictly utilitarian. But by degrees this austerity vanished and embellishment began to creep in everywhere; the severe succession of tall plain uprights was modified by twisting them or splitting and opening them out into hearts or trefoils, as in the Sigüenza examples (Plates IV, V, and VI); the preëminently utilitarian aspect of horizontals gave way before adornment which converted them into elaborate broad bands that divided the composition into tiers; the cresting, to keep its dominating part as the principal display point, grew extraordinarily rich. Meanwhile the lock, that pride of Gothic artisans, was dwindling into inconspicuousness.

Of the various features undergoing elaboration the one which expanded most while still in the Gothic period was the cresting. In an early Barcelona example (Plate II) a simple floral arrangement finishes off the composition; but the later and more ambitious Gothic worker tried figures, hammering them up out of the solid when small, or embossing two reverse sheets and riveting these together to form the round when large. His success emboldened him to try those rich effects which mark





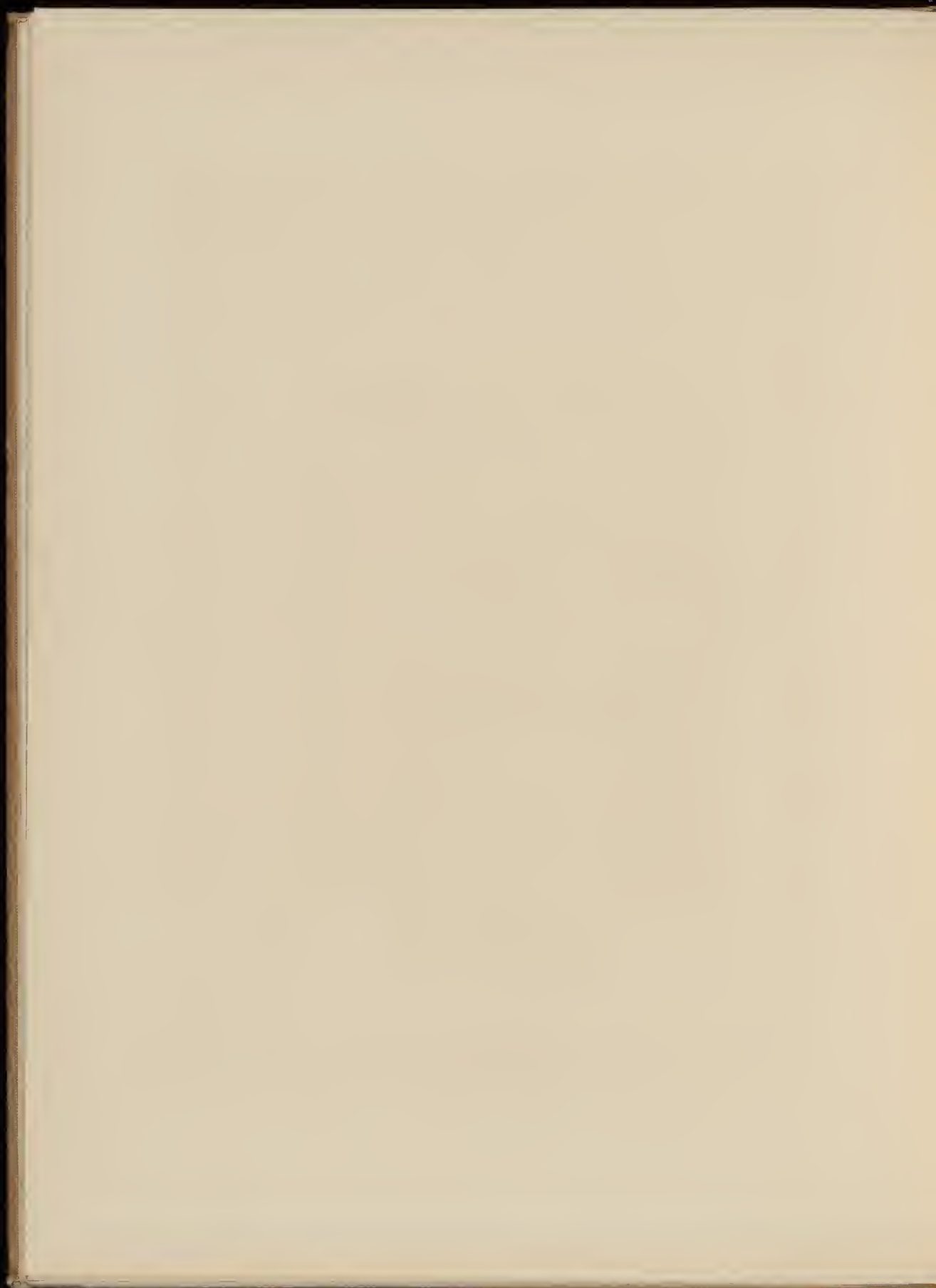
SALAMANCA OLD CATHEDRAL
DETAIL OF REJA AROUND THE ANAYA MONUMENT (ABOUT 1437)



the Gotico-florido period. Salamanca's Cathedral Vieja offers a small but surpassing example of the style in the Anaya grille (Plate III), than which a more exuberant assemblage of pagan figures, candelabra, and Gothic scrolls could hardly be imagined. This cresting, like the frieze below it, is a foretaste of Renaissance, but utterly unsubdued to that Renaissance sense of design which prevailed in the following century.

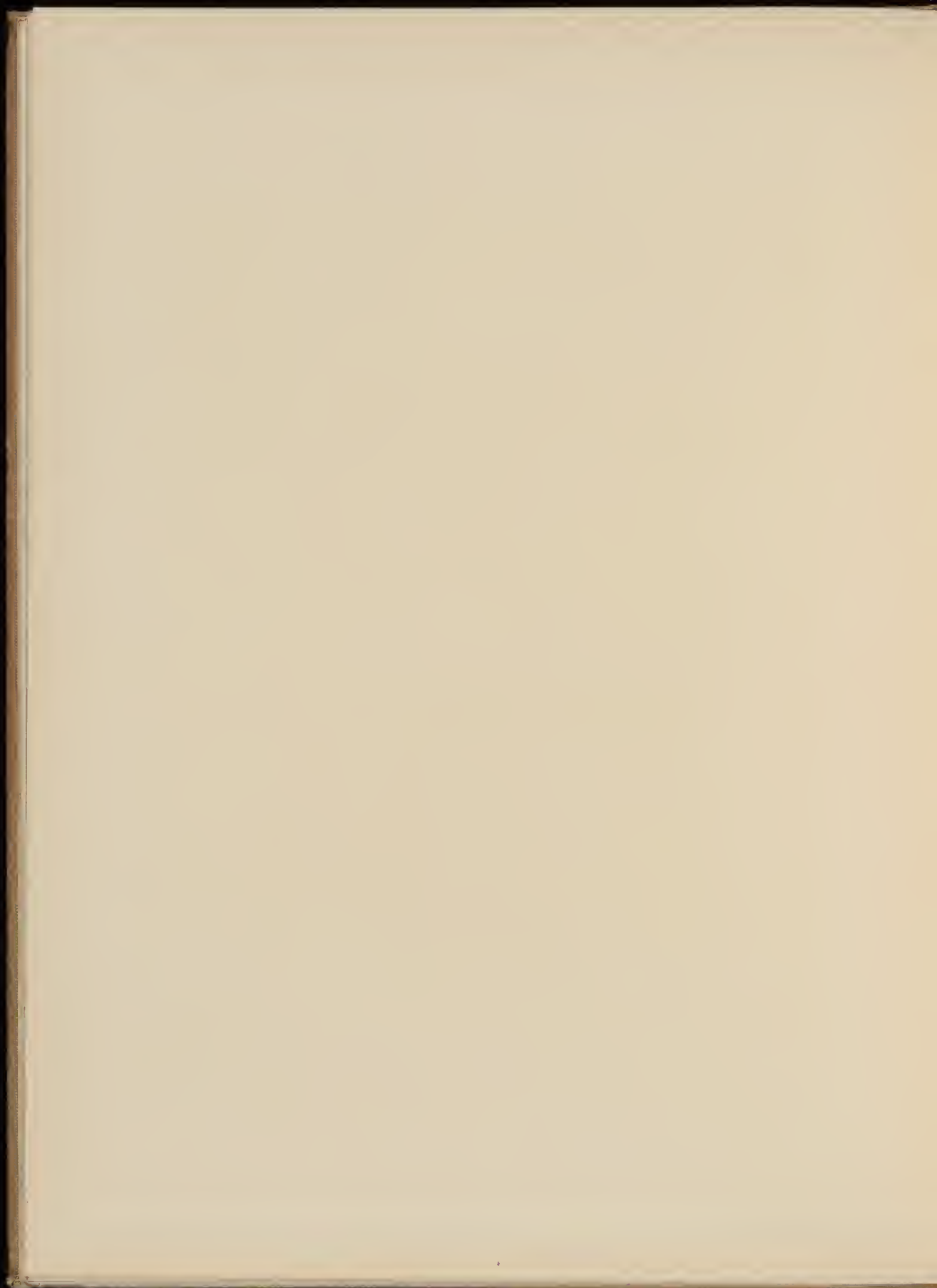
With this slight survey of Gothic work the story of the loftier and more imposing Renaissance Reja may commence. It came, naturally, with the introduction of "the Italian taste" in architecture; that is to say, at the close of the XV Century, when prosperity was running riot in Spain. But the new Reja, unlike the new architecture, has no Italian prototype; for "in Italy," to quote a great authority on old ironwork, "the reverence for ancient precedent practically excluded the use of decorative iron-work in architecture." Spanish architects, less conversant with ancient precedent, continued to turn to iron whenever they wanted a protective grating, making this as beautiful as they could according to the new ideas, till they had it speaking in their cathedrals with amazing force.

At no point in the transition from Gothic to Renaissance do the new ideas intrude awkwardly. They came almost imperceptibly, affecting first the ornamentation, as may be seen in the Sigüenza examples, which are comprised of the usual series of Gothic twisted uprights but with Renaissance decoration creeping shyly over the surface. How the decoration emerged from this shyness and attained an amazing efflorescence is illustrated in Plate XVI, where we see a glorious Renaissance cresting piercing



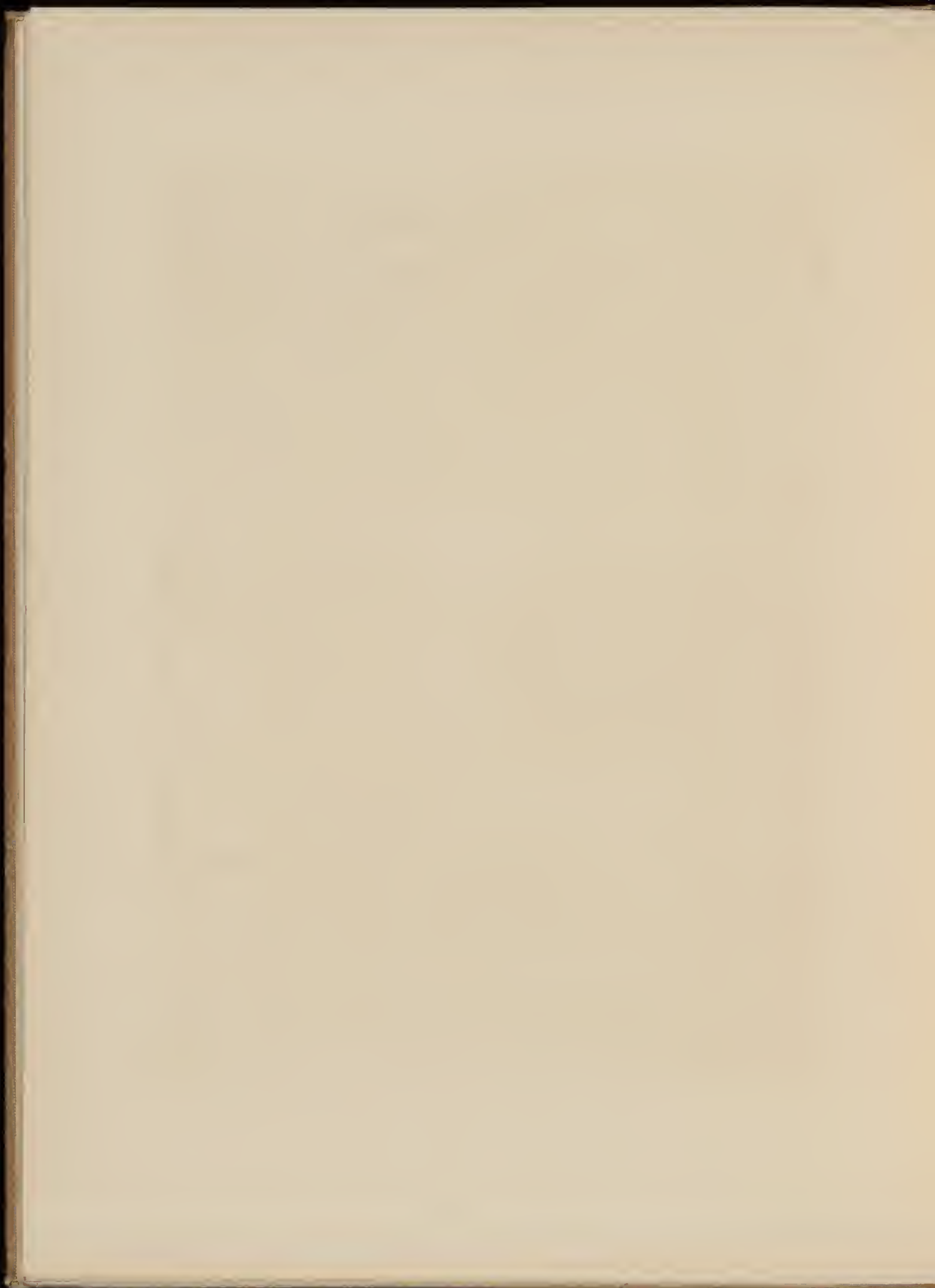


SIGÜENZA CATHEDRAL
CLOISTER REJA (ABOUT 1507)



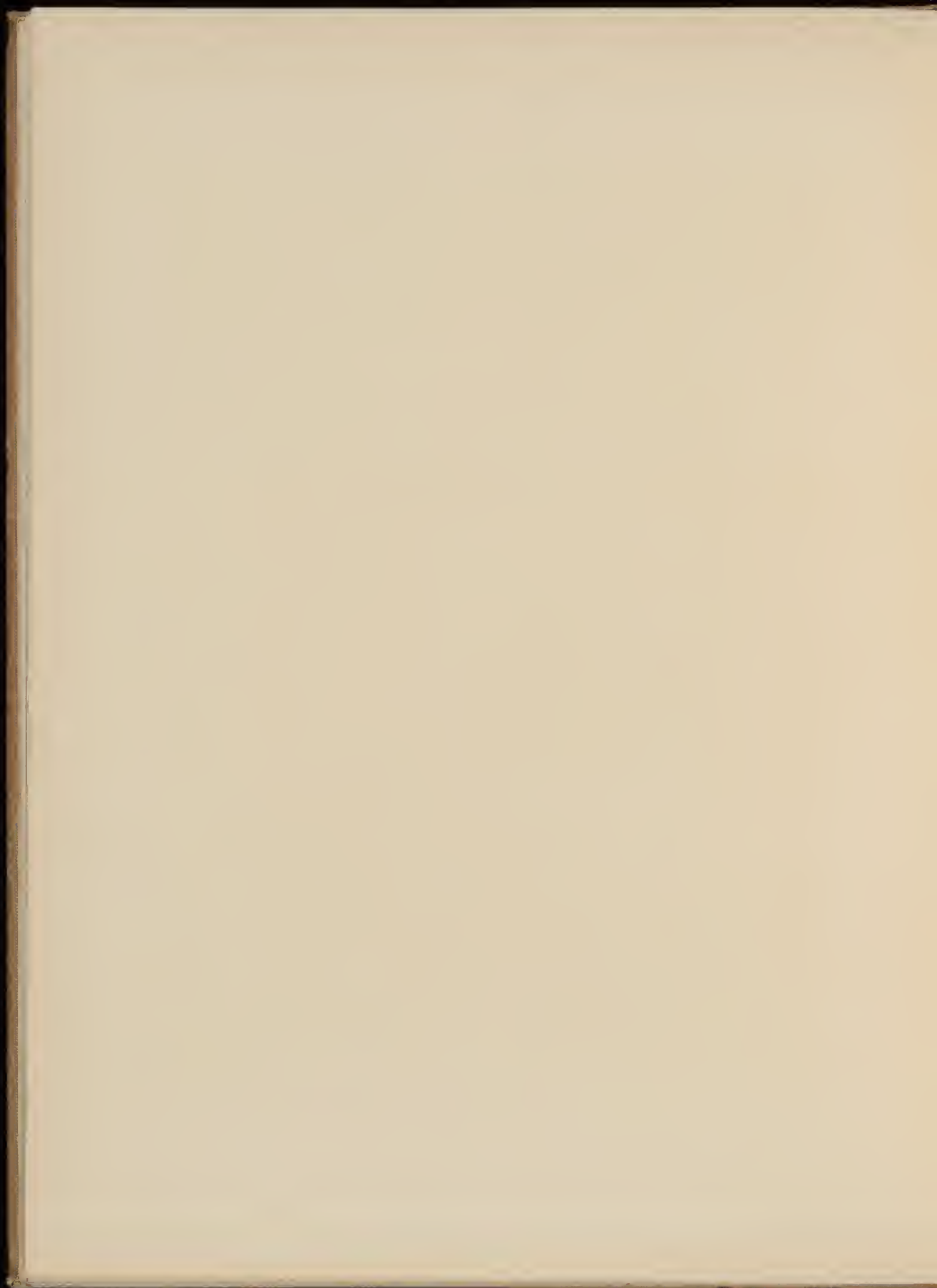
the gloom of Sevilla Cathedral at a height of some thirty feet. Below this burst of new forms the old Gothic twisted bars still hold their own. This is not a specially early specimen (1519) and much less architectonic than others of its day; but it is Sancho Muñoz's interpretation of Renaissance—to preserve the Gothic impressiveness that came from a repetition of twisted uprights and to assemble all the variety his fertile brain could devise in a sumptuous crowning decoration of kings, prophets, Renaissance scrolls and exaggerated candelabra. These last, surmounting the big supporting members below, carry the eye from the ground up in a way which makes the whole composition seem even loftier than it is.

Cresting, as we see here and in the Granada example (Plate XIX), had reached great development before the bar itself succumbed to new treatment. The process which slowly banished the tall Gothic bar may be described as follows: first, the breaking up of its assertive verticality by means of accentuated horizontal members; next, the selecting of a certain few bars, usually at the ends of the Reja or at each side of the central opening, for special variation into a tentative Renaissance pilaster (Plate V)—very tentative indeed, since it was generally but three or four inches square. Nevertheless it asserts the designer's independence of expression in breaking away from the succession of similar units that had been the earlier worker's creed; while the attenuated little Corinthian capital that frequently surmounted the new-born pilaster invited the use of chisel and file in its execution—a further departure from the Gothic method of hammering up. The last stage in the making over of bars was to



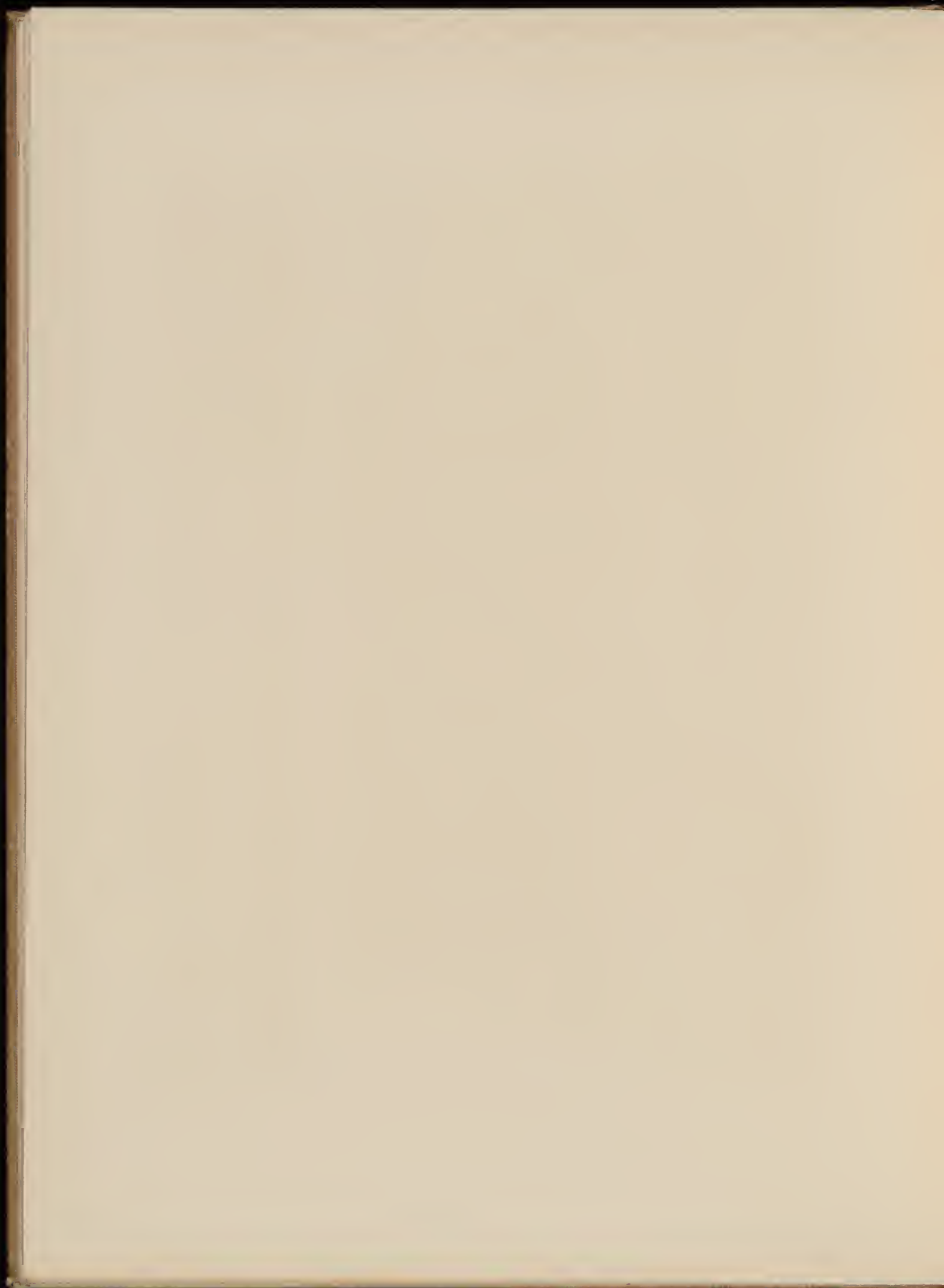


SIGÜENZA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE CHAPEL OF SANTA LIBRADA (EARLY XVI CENTURY)



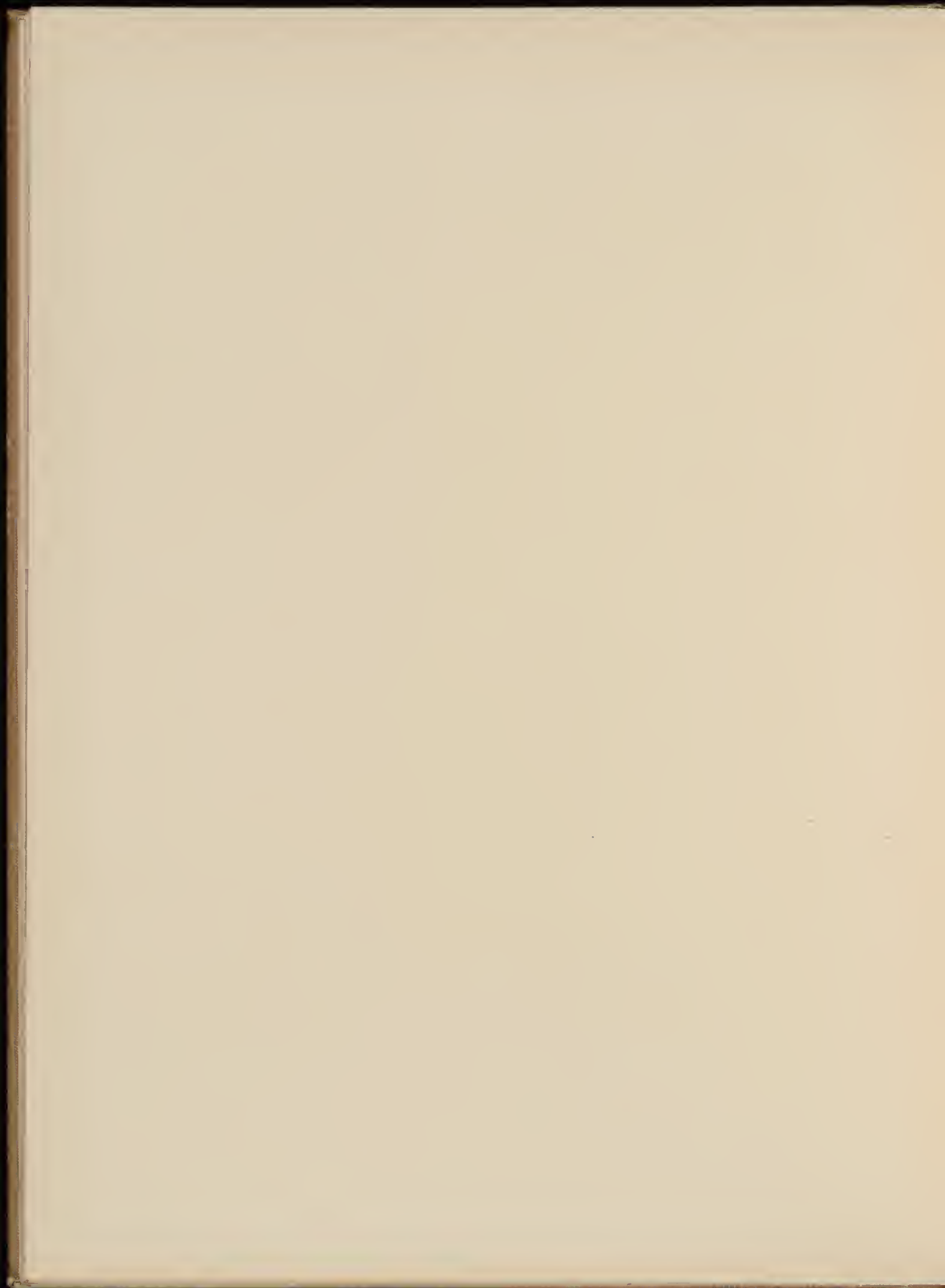
convert them into full-fledged Renaissance spindled balusters, as seen in all the latest examples.

For developing this light and graceful spindle form in iron Spain alone deserves the credit, Italy having no prototype to show for it except the relatively stunted stone baluster succeeding the solid parapet of Gothic balconies and staircases. The baluster, on being brought into the service of the rejero, assumed new and undreamed of height, as in Plate VIII, where we see it extending through three towering stages. Its making was extremely difficult. To secure its ever varying diameter the ironworker had to hammer and weld together an infinite number of short bits of metal, each slightly thicker than the last. What this meant even a modern who has tried to make a spindle can hardly realize; for the ready-rolled metal he uses was unknown to the XVI-Century worker, who had to beat his every feature out of coarse ingots delivered to him direct from the old blasts. But that greater labor of his has been rewarded: those myriads of blows so strengthened the molecular adhesion of the iron that it has remained intact, even in thin embossed plates, after four hundred years' exposure to all the extremes of Spanish climate. Our more easily executed modern work may rust, crack, even pulverize in the ironworker's lifetime. Besides the great muscular effort of welding together so many short lengths, the spindle required infinite skill and patience to avoid a ragged, unsightly joining. Add to all this the continued shaping to secure symmetry, and the introduction of foliage wrought and carved out of the solid and then gilded (Plate XI), and one will see what a veritable *tour de force* was





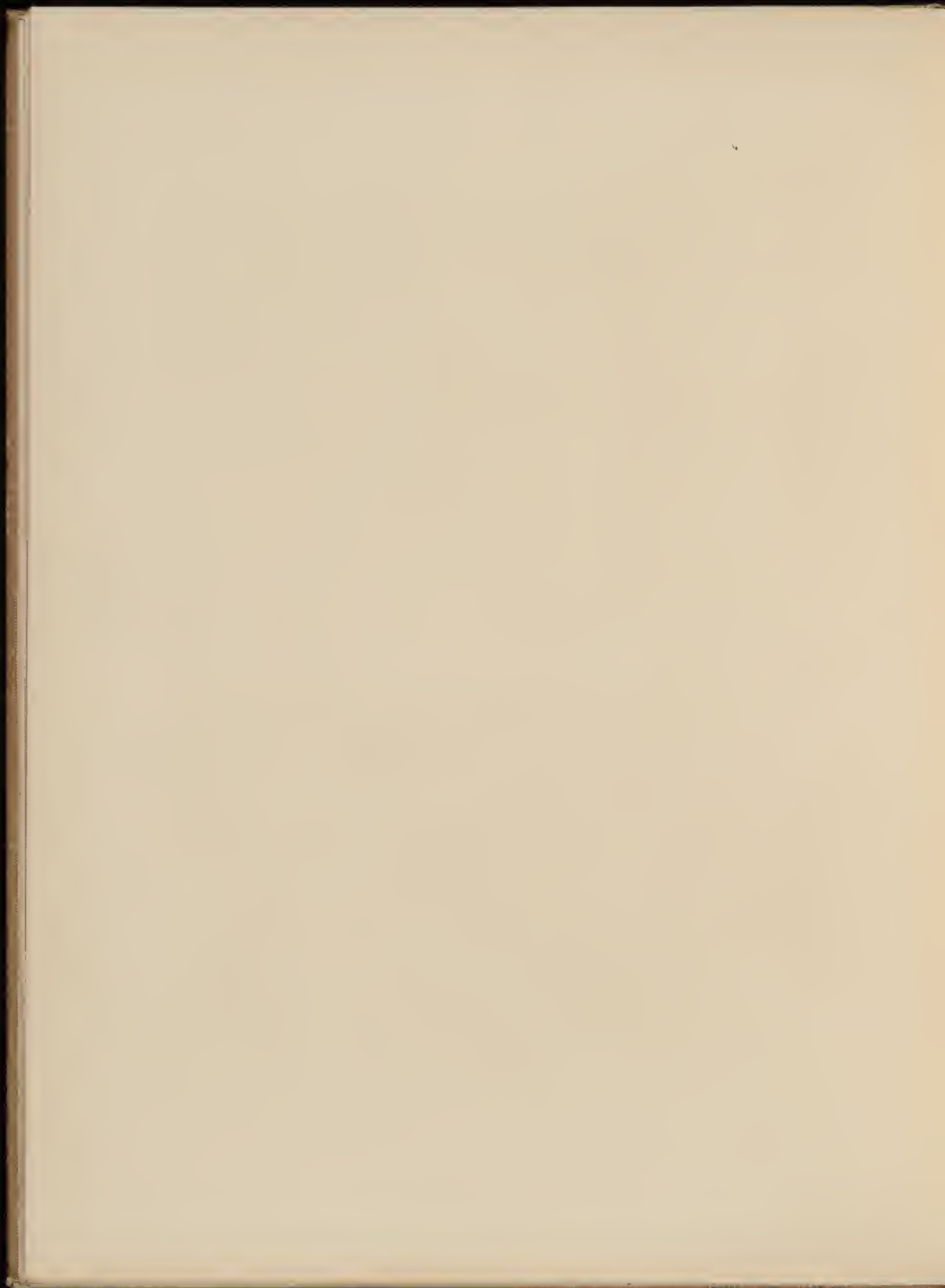
SIGÜENZA CATHEDRAL
CLOISTER REJA (ABOUT 1507)



this distinctly Renaissance feature. It is the antithesis of the old-time Gothic bar, where the marks of the mallet show with charming frankness, as in the Barcelona detail of Plate I.

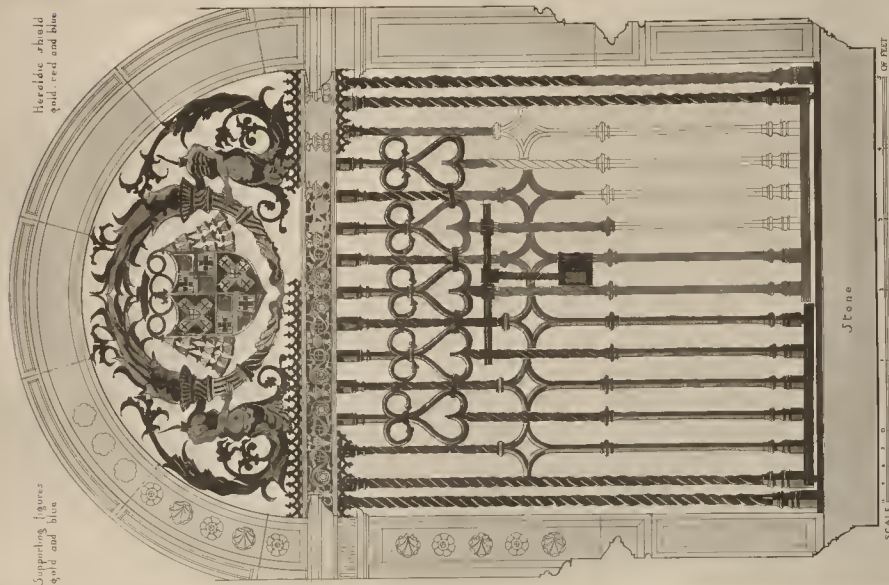
With the use of spindles "in ranks and rows, literally in thousands," the attenuated pilaster emerged from its previous inconspicuousness and took on the imposing massiveness illustrated in the detail from Granada (Plate XXI). Though only a simulated massiveness (for the huge pilaster was in reality a stout wooden beam covered with iron plates) its proportions emphasized the general architectural character of the whole. The embossing of its metal sheath shows how, if the artisan were not actually a silversmith, he was at least far more conversant with the art of working silver than with the vanishing methods of early blacksmithing. This is again apparent in the introduction of many finely modeled medallion portraits in repoussé, and even large compositions by the same process, as in Plate XV, from Sevilla. It was the versatility, too, of the man trained in many crafts that brought heraldic ornament into such prominence in ironwork. Gotico-florido had adopted the use, in a rather blunt way, of armorial bearings; Renaissance artists, quick to catch any happy suggestion, turned heraldry into a *leitmotif*, as it were;—the theme of the Reja, the only break in a succession of lofty verticals—and made it splendid with gold and color (*vide* Frontispiece).

As for the human figure, which, after the spindle, may be considered the Renaissance worker's most distinctive contribution to Reja-making, it now became nearly life size, and was used with a profusion that may possibly be accounted for as a



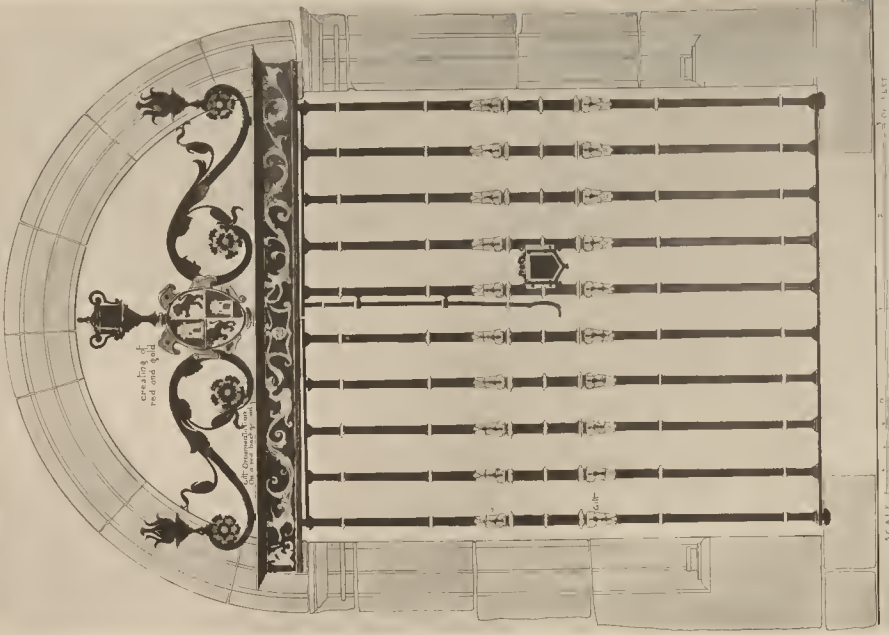
Supporting figures
gold and blue

Heraldic shield
gold, red and blue

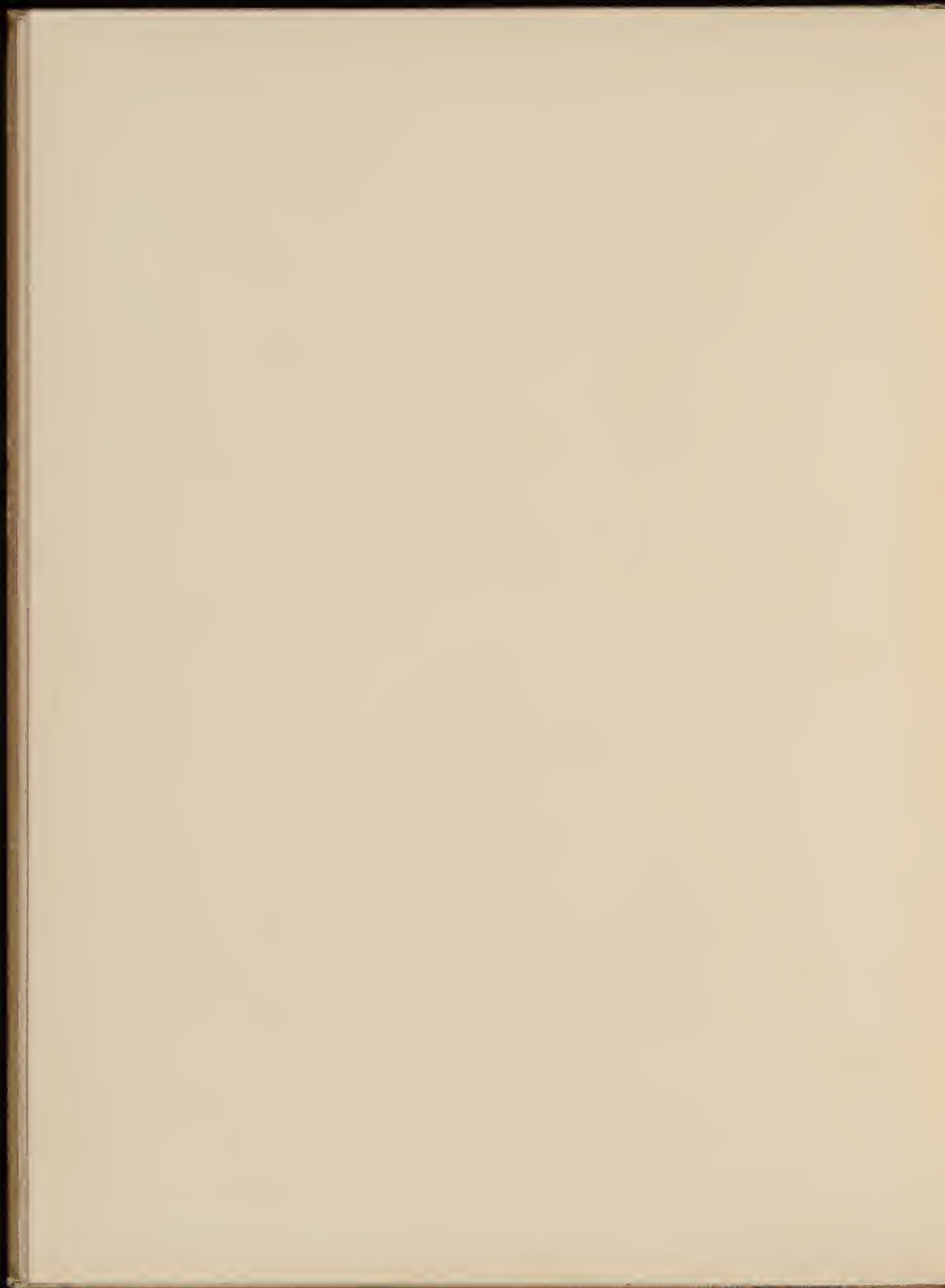


SIGÜENZA CATHEDRAL : A REJA IN THE CLOISTER

Escudo de
rojo y azul



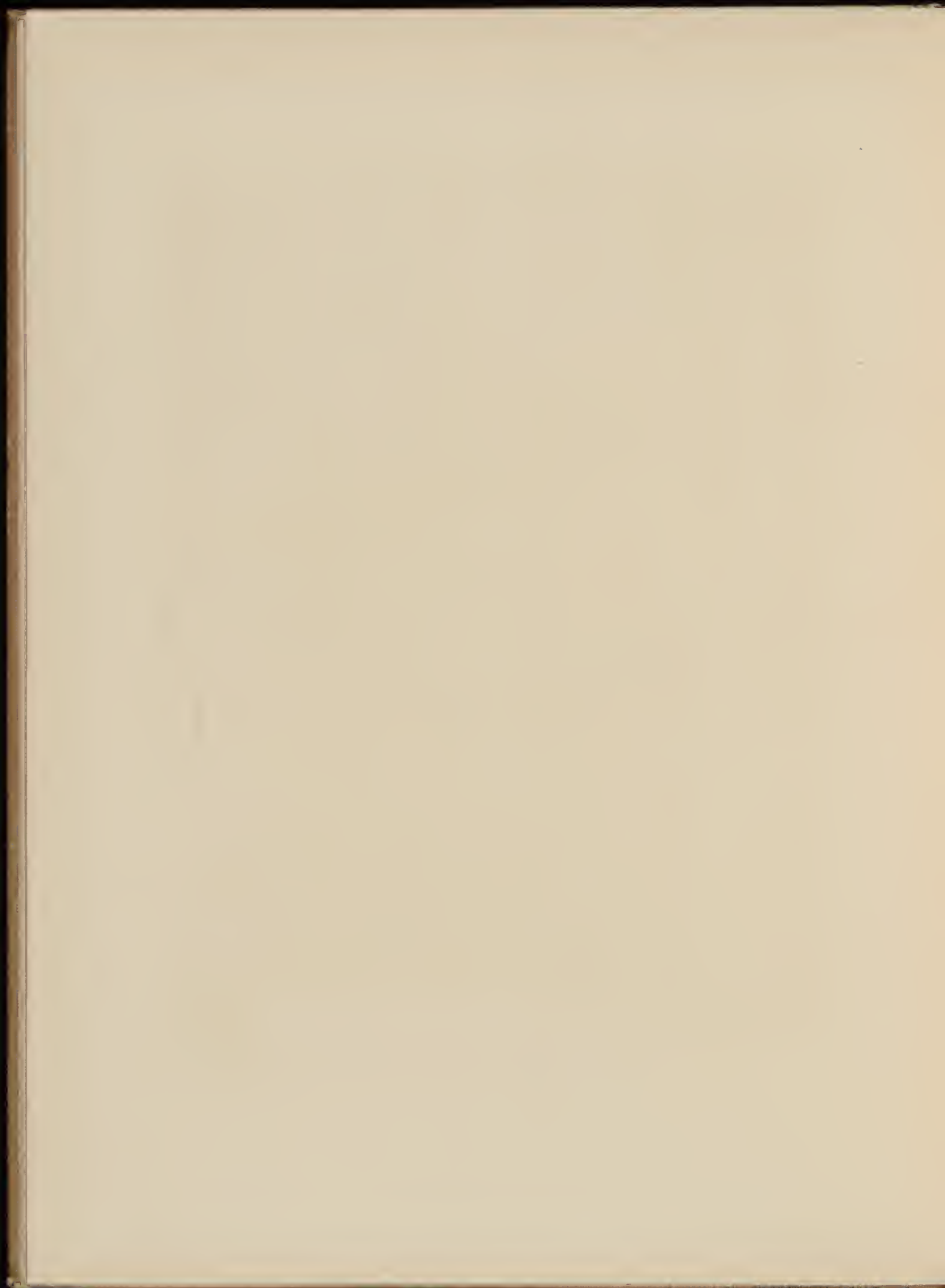
BURGOS : A REJA IN THE MONASTERY OF LAS HUELGAS



reaction against the Moorish ban on human presentment in art. The intrepid rejero did not hesitate to group his personages into historical and biblical compositions. Plate XIX shows thirty or more scriptural figures in the cresting of the marvelous Granada Reja, posed in a variety of attitudes and as facilely executed as if they had been clay and Maestre Bartolomé a modeler. Such an achievement confuses all one's previous ideas of stubborn as opposed to plastic materials.

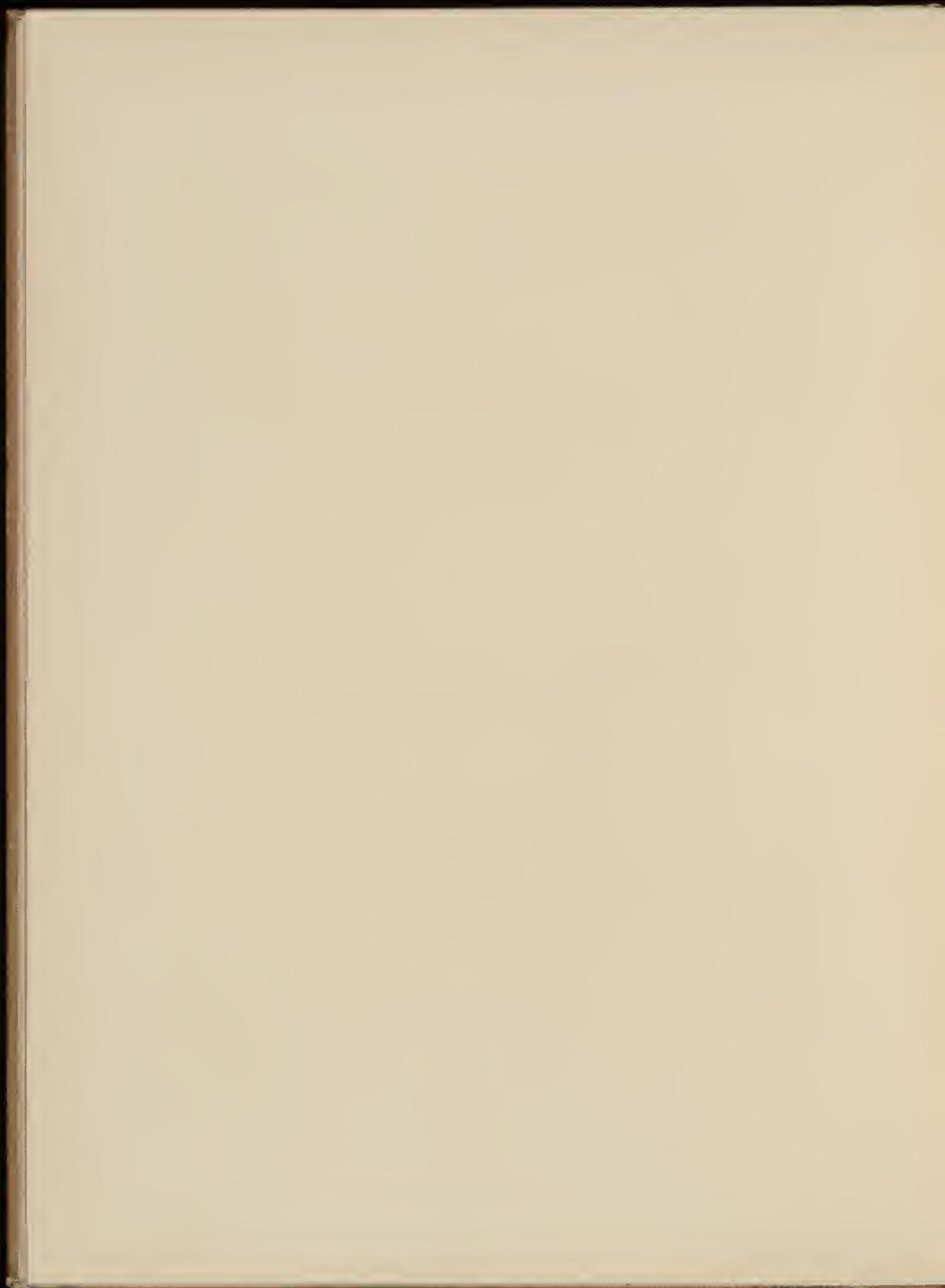
Here then, with pilasters and spindles in the structure, and all legitimate Italian motifs along with the Spanish blazon in the ornament, are the chief elements that went to the rearing of the Renaissance Reja. To have used them almost invariably in the right place and in the right proportions, proves the XVI-Century rejero an artist of the highest rank.

About the time that Renaissance was in full swing a change in the interior arrangement of Spanish churches was decided upon that gave great impetus to Reja-making. It had already been stimulated by the extended use of Rejas in the side chapels as well as in the capilla mayor; for these smaller shrines, as the Peninsula was gradually reconquered from Mohammedanism and the religious zeal of the victors became a veritable contagion, grew to be storehouses of an amazing quantity of extravagant offerings that required worthy protection. But the circumstance most contributory to the extraordinary proportions and corresponding splendor of Spanish Rejas was the change referred to above—the removal, in the early XVI Century, of the priests' choir from the east end into the nave of the cathedral. This



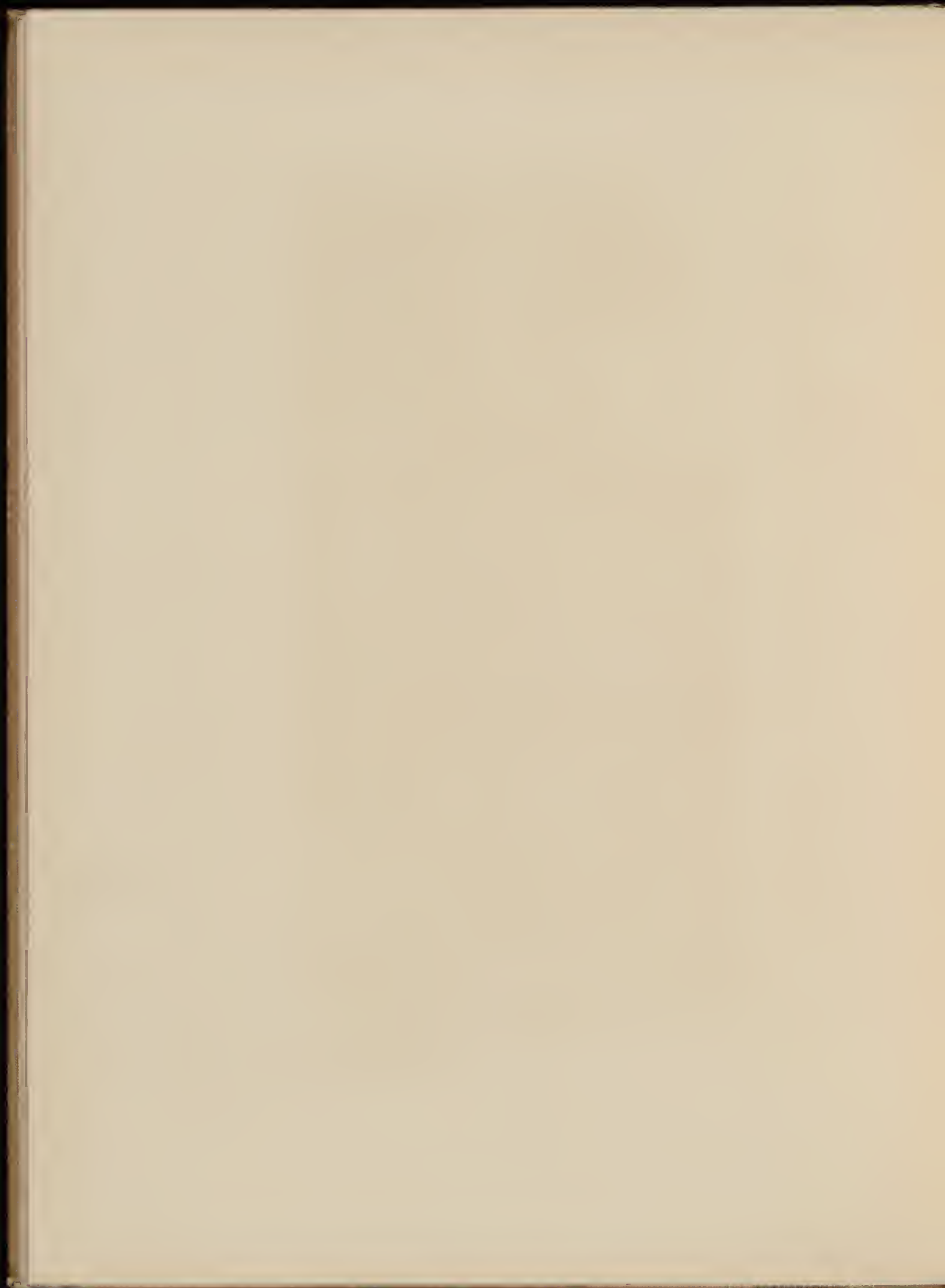


SIGÜENZA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE HIGH ALTAR



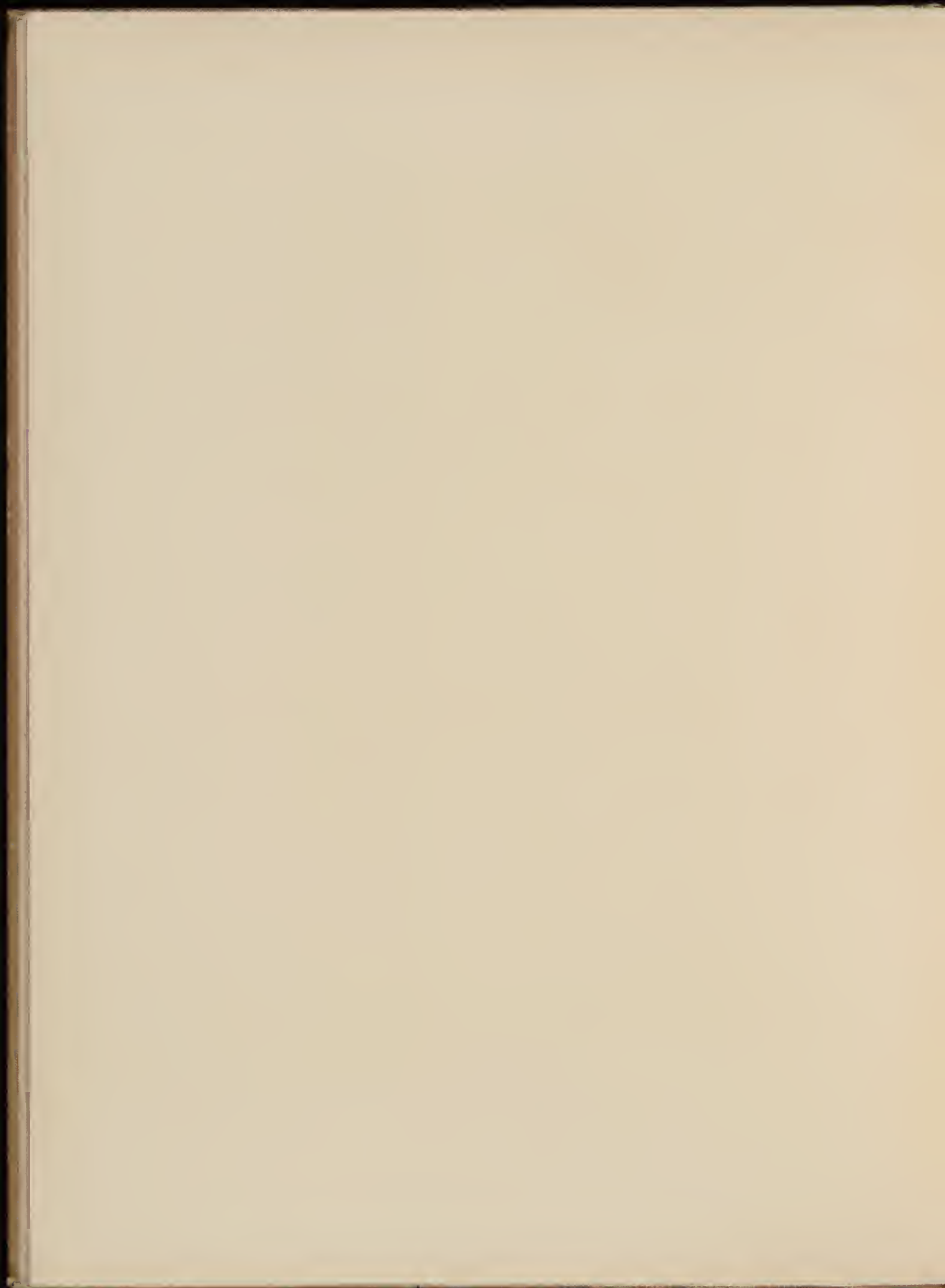
coro then faced the altar mayor; like it, it was generally enclosed on three sides by masonry and screened on the fourth by a Reja; and this Reja, being opposite that of the altar, had to be equally grand. So grand, in truth, did they both become that we learn of the Cortes protesting against their enormous cost. Liturgical and not architectural considerations placed the coro in the nave, which it blocks up in a way that lamentably reduces the æsthetic value of space and proportion; but the change, in creating demand for a second lofty screen, offered a stupendous opportunity to the rejero. He had already discovered in enclosing the altar that iron is most appropriately used when on a grand scale; two monumental Rejas, face to face, harmonious in design and dimensions, and separated only by the width of the transept, invited him to perform transcendent feats.

The point to which the architecturalizing of the Spanish Reja was carried from this time on is amazing. By this is not meant the forcing of iron into classic forms and proportions in emulation of stone architecture, as was tried in England during the XVIII-Century classic revival, but the expressing of conventionalized forms and symbolism in a manner compatible with the material, along with a design more assertively architectonic. Giving shape to iron was studied as it had never been studied before. Unfortunately the names of those who made it the vehicle of such high artistic expression are mostly unknown. Spain had no Vasari. While this painstaking biographer was recording of the Italian who made the Strozzi lanterns that "he was without an equal in the past and probably not to be excelled in the future," since in these lanterns are to be seen "cornices, columns,

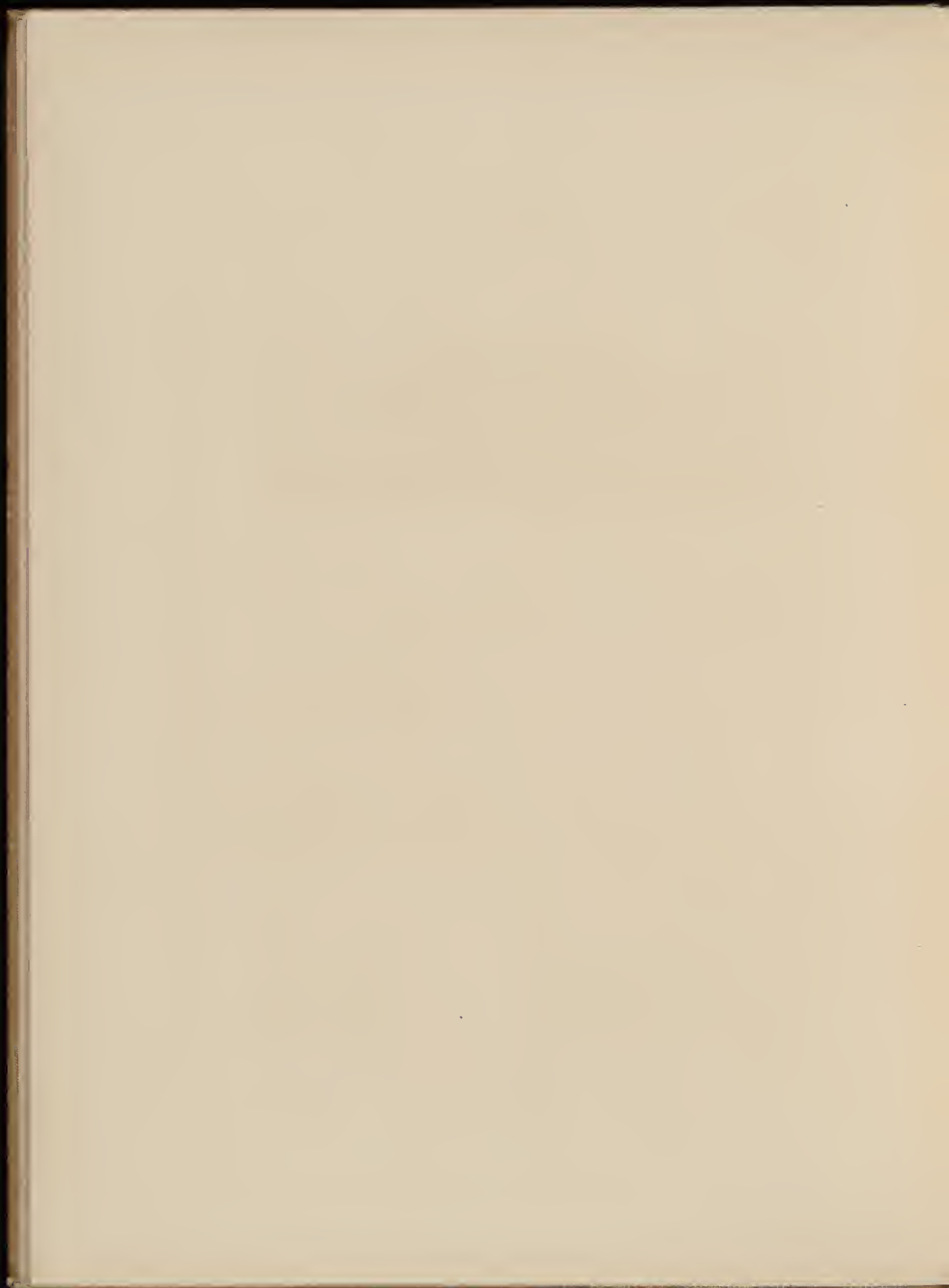




GRANADA CATHEDRAL
SIDE REJA IN ROYAL CHAPEL

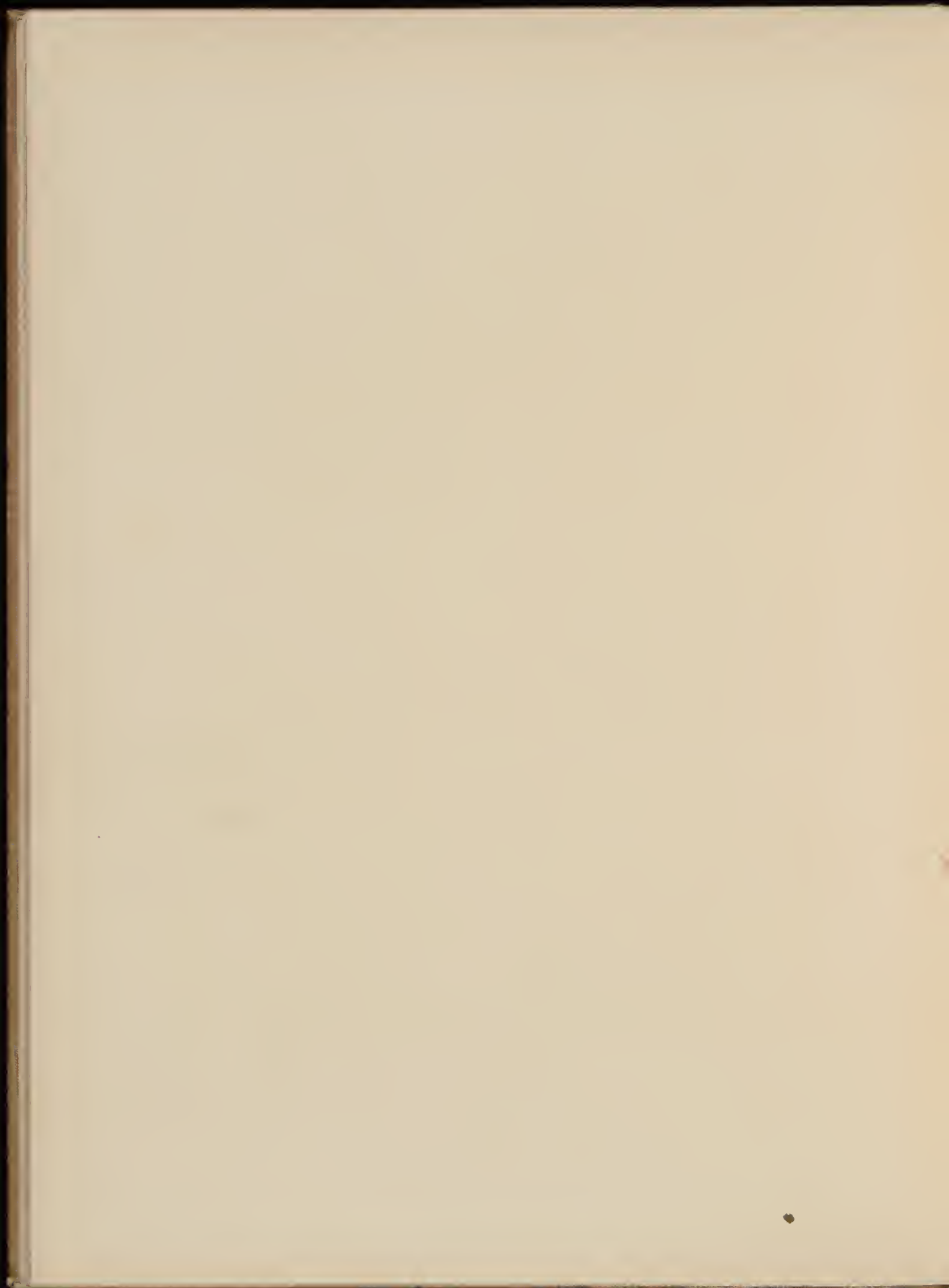


and capitals in iron constructed with the most surprising and masterly skill; no modern artificer having executed works in iron so large and so difficult"—while Vasari was writing this of the Italian Nicolo Grosso, Spain was producing, and had already produced, nameless, unrecorded artists who had created works in iron which dwarf the beautiful Strozzi lanterns into insignificance. Señor Gestoso y Perez, in his "Diccionario de los Artífices Sevillanos," has unearthed a few names. Scanning these, one finds that rejeros were often silversmiths, armorers, and architects as well. Even without many data on the matter, any critic would feel that they were artists of broad training. The Rejas to the Constable's Chapel in Burgos (Plate XXIII) and to the choirs in Toledo and Palencia (Plates XXIV and XXVI) announce instantly that they must have been designed by men who knew architecture. To analyze but one—that of Toledo: how apparent is its breadth of architectural treatment side by side with the fineness of silversmithery—beautifully expressed constructiveness paramount, exquisite ornament subservient (the very combination which that greatest of silversmiths, Benvenuto Cellini, lacked when he turned sculptor)! How thoroughly our Spaniard understood the orders, not slavishly copying them from stone, but studying and adapting them to expression in iron! How utterly he refined their proportions without sacrificing the inherent massiveness of his material! And how skilfully he then covered the surface with precisely the sort of ornament that would create enough play of light and shade to bring out the fleeting, mysterious color of iron! The gracefully wrought colonnettes here are solid; and when one realizes that they are thirteen feet high,





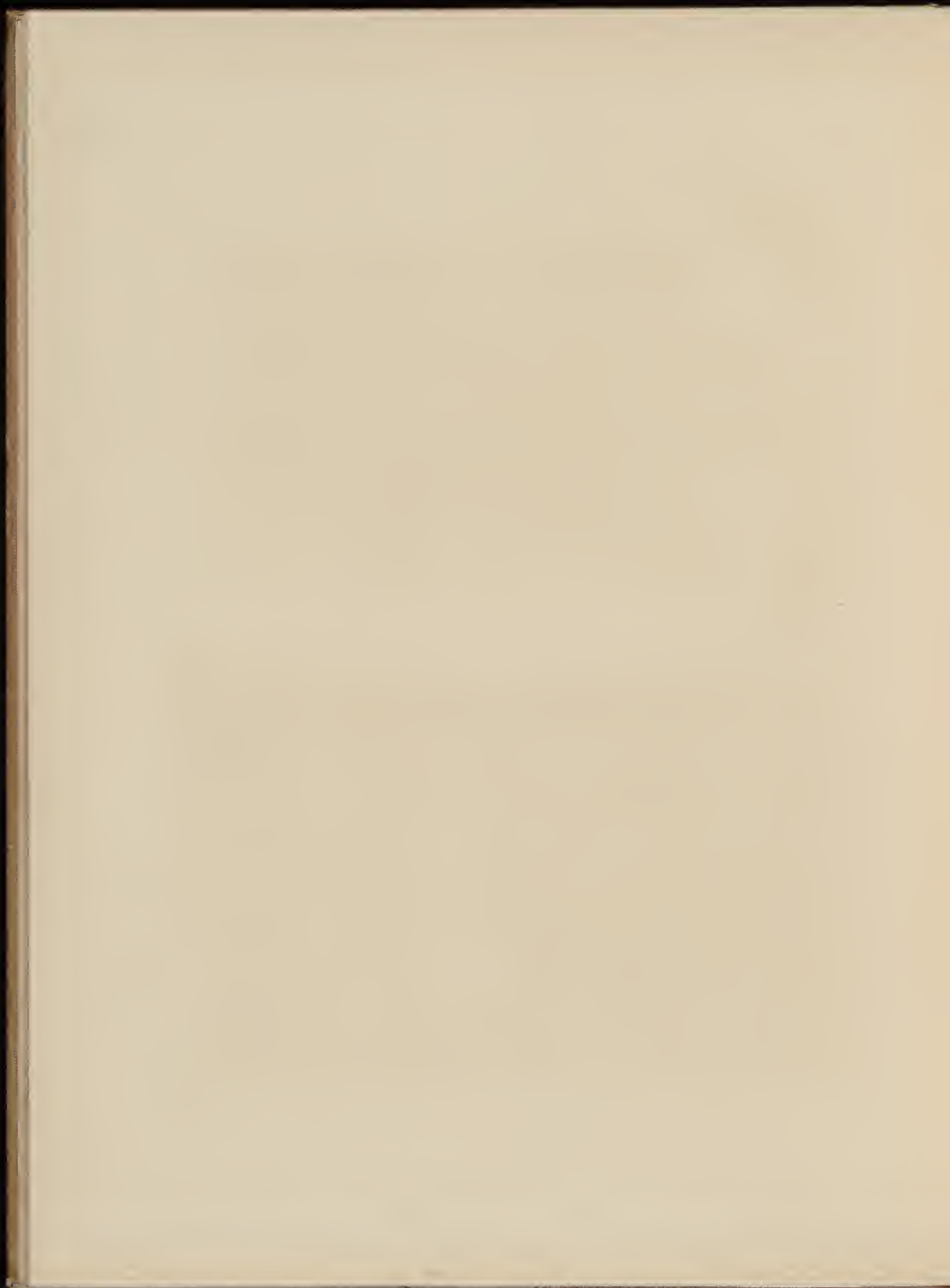
SEGOVIA · CATHEDRAL · REJA · IN · A · SIDE · CHAPEL



with a diameter of from three to eight inches, one feels that the Italian who fashioned the Strozzi lanterns did not utter the last word in Renaissance ironwork.

This Reja is the creation of Domingo de Céspedes—El Maestro Domingo. The cathedral chapter had given it out to competition along with the Reja of the capilla mayor and the pulpits, and most of the renowned smiths of the day assembled in Madrid in 1540 to submit their designs. Cardinal Tavera, advised by the architect Alonzo de Covarrubias, was the judge, and awarded the coro to El Maestro Domingo and the capilla mayor to Francisco de Villalpando. In Domingo's contract, made in 1540, he engaged to keep to the total sum of five thousand ducats, provided the gold and silver for the plating were supplied him. The date 1548 in the cresting tells when the work was completed. The opposite Reja, Villalpando's, was finished the same year. Their making kept a tribe of smiths toiling for nearly ten years, and their cost was over a million reales—"more" wrote an old Spaniard "than had they been made of founded silver."

It is generally asserted (and is true of other countries) that with the initiation of the Renaissance artistic ironwork commenced to decline—that the naïve Gothic period with its more primitive methods and its genuine blacksmithing was the zenith of the art. The charm of Gothic cannot be denied. Produced, as it was, by feverish, powerful blows delivered during the brief moment that the mass was glowing hot, it is a sort of solidified impressionism and appeals accordingly. This medieval spontaneity, it is true, eluded the more sophisticated Renaissance

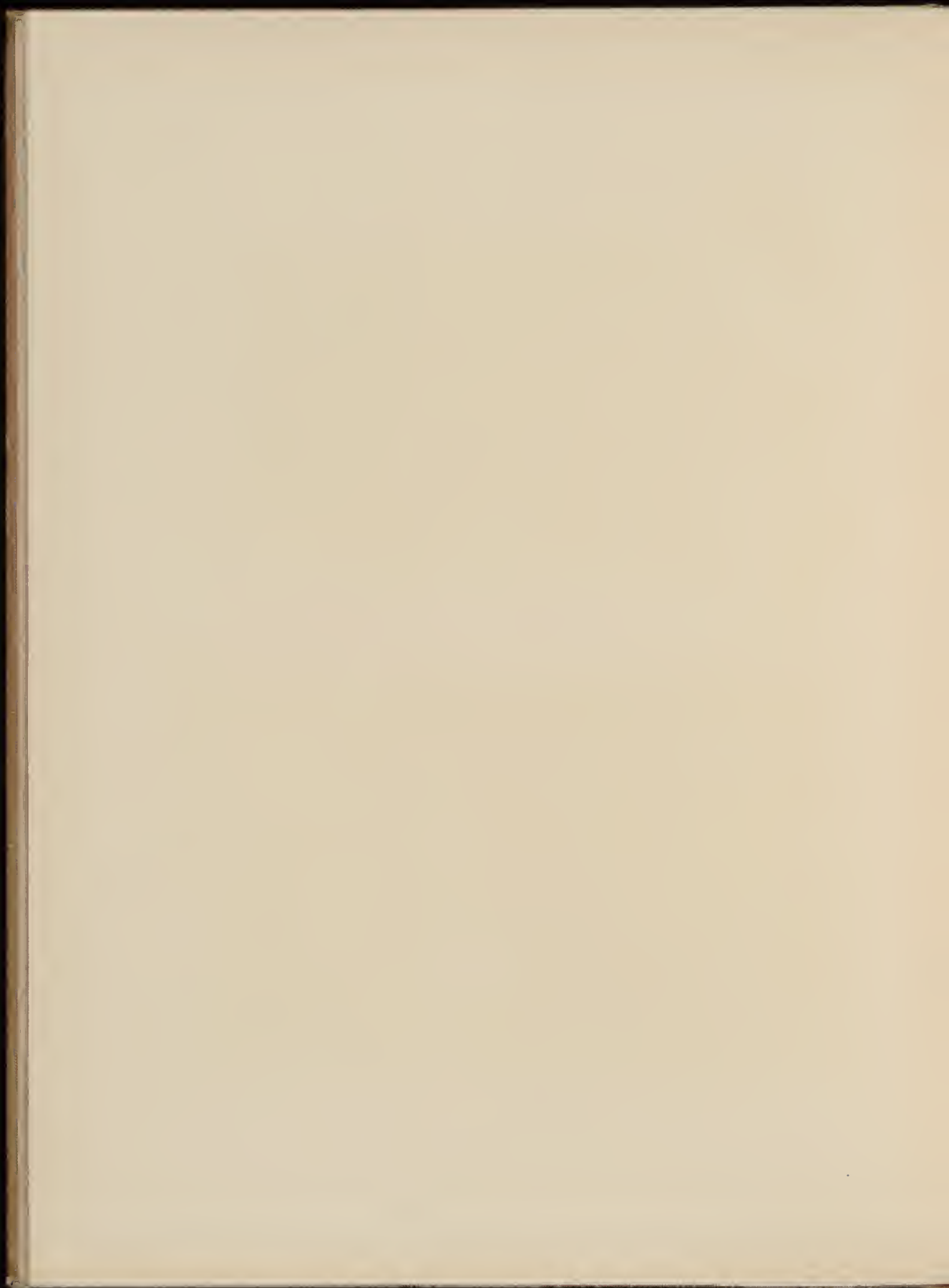




SALAMANCA
DOORWAY OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



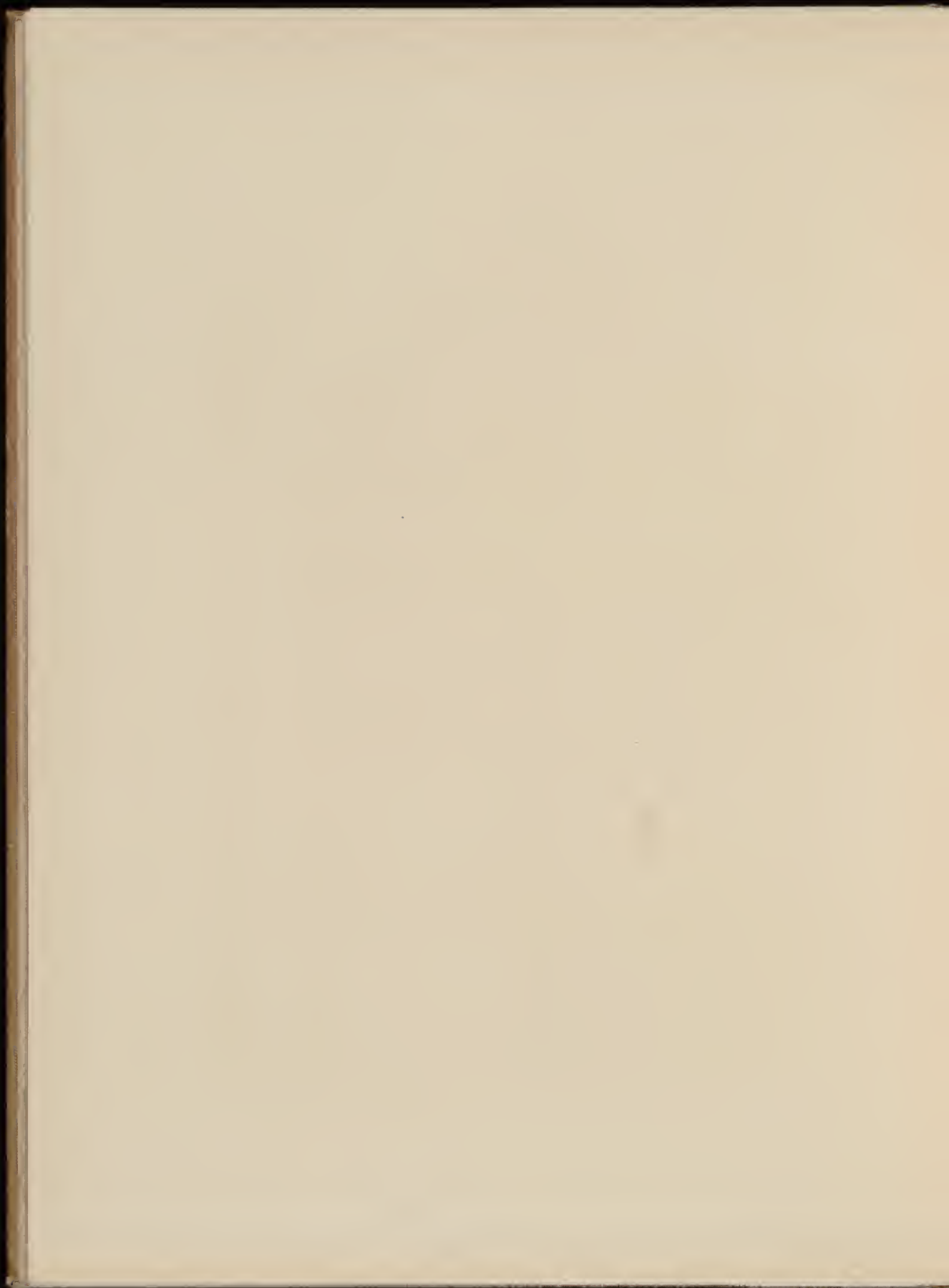
SEVILLA
WINDOW IN THE CASA DE PILATOS

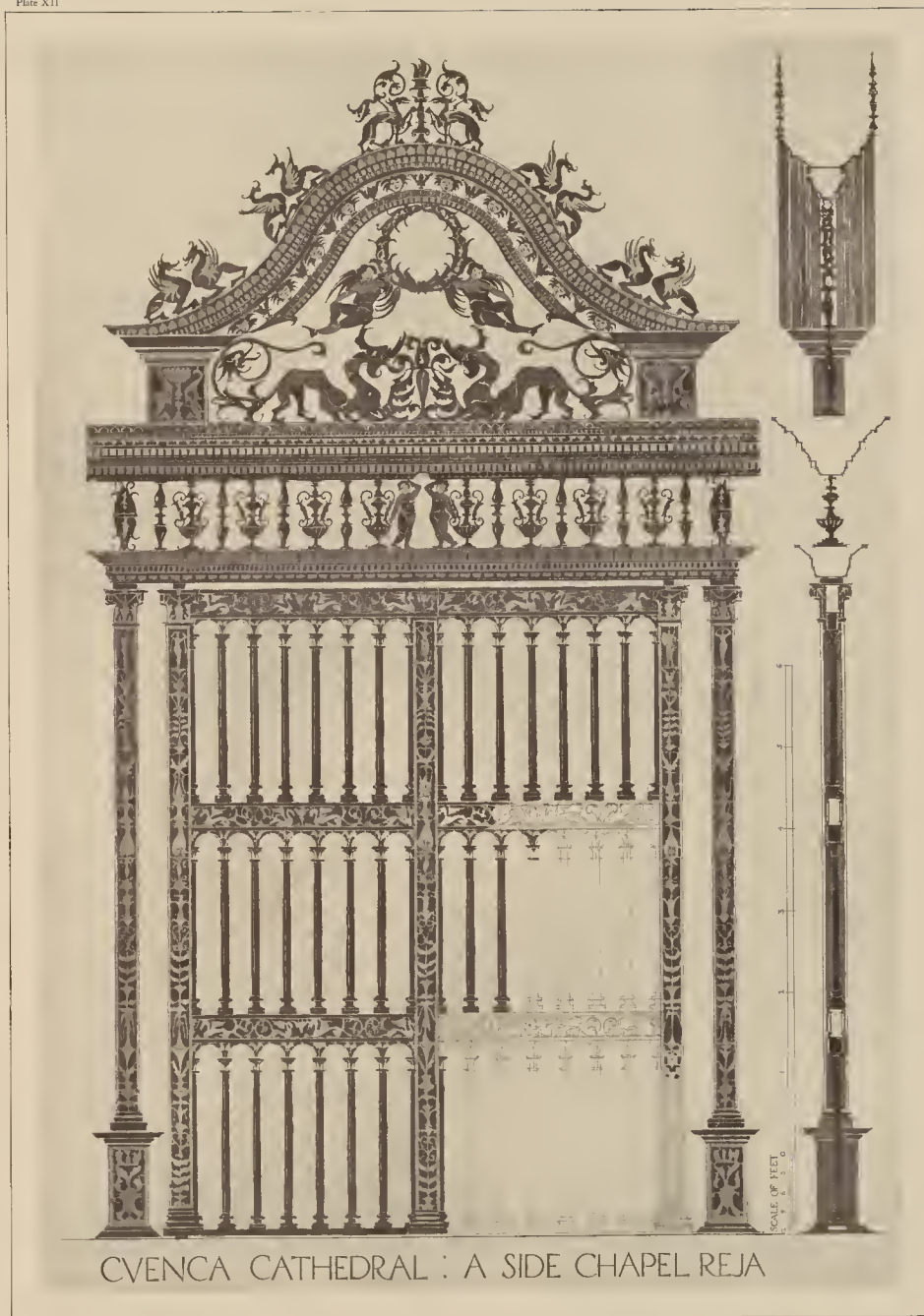


worker; but not the medieval craftsmanship. This he retained and added to by his command of newer processes and his greater knowledge of design till he had reduced the mightiest of all metals to an obedience that would have been unbelievable to his predecessors. That he compensated in full for what he may have lost cannot be denied by even the most ardent Gothicist.

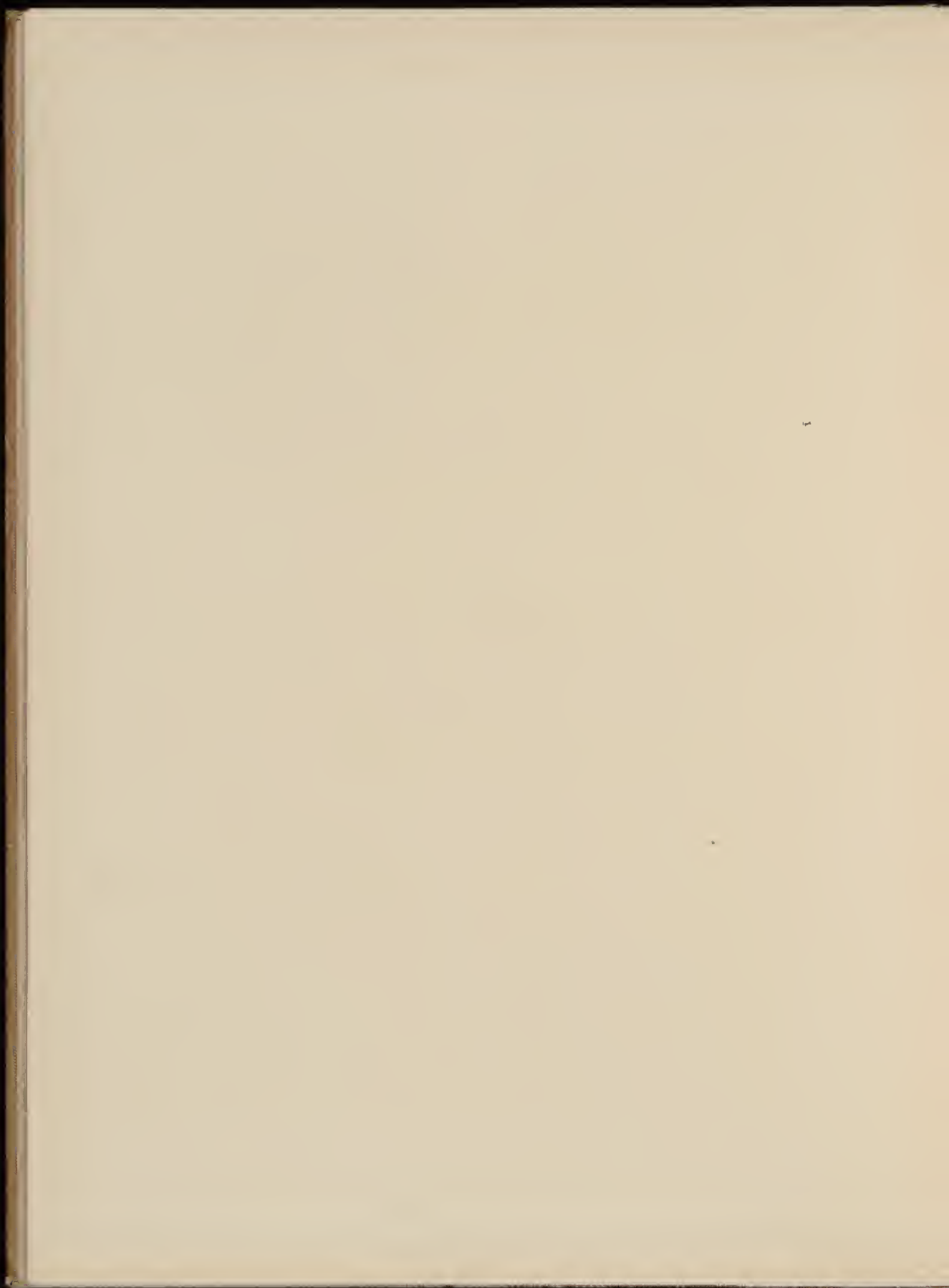
One of the great charms of these Rejas is that, although all produced within the space of a century—that is, almost simultaneously—they never took on a “standardized” aspect. This fact is borne in with fullest force when one proceeds to measure and draw them; then is seen the distinctive treatment both in the design and execution of the ornament; acanthus scrolls, for instance, are never produced twice alike, but always exhibit the local peculiarity of the rejero. The men of Cuenca, a great center, seem never to have tried to impose their ideas on the men of Segovia when the two found themselves working side by side. Even in the case of the two great screens made to stand facing each other in Sevilla Cathedral, the one by a man of Salamanca, the other by a man of Cuenca, while the artists seem to have conferred solicitously together as to proportions and general style, their execution remains purely personal.

The lover of Renaissance rejería is saved the saddening survey of its decadence. While the art was at its height Spain's material prosperity declined to a degree that stopped costly Rejamaking. Latest in date of the Rejas shown is the one from Plasencia (Plate XIII), made in 1604. This is undeniably in good taste; nothing about it stamps it as decadent; yet much forecasts a decline—a criticism justified by the lack of variety in



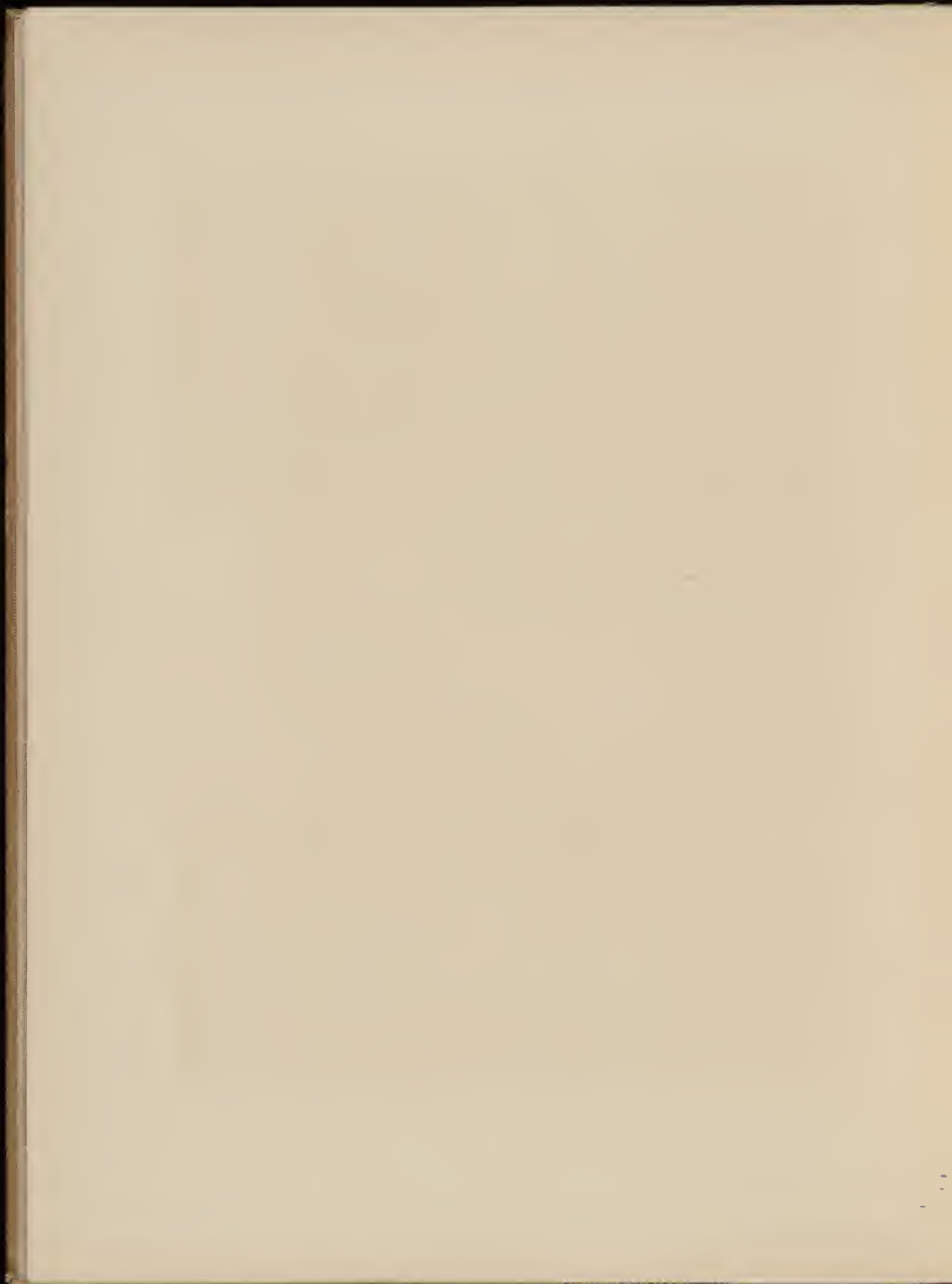


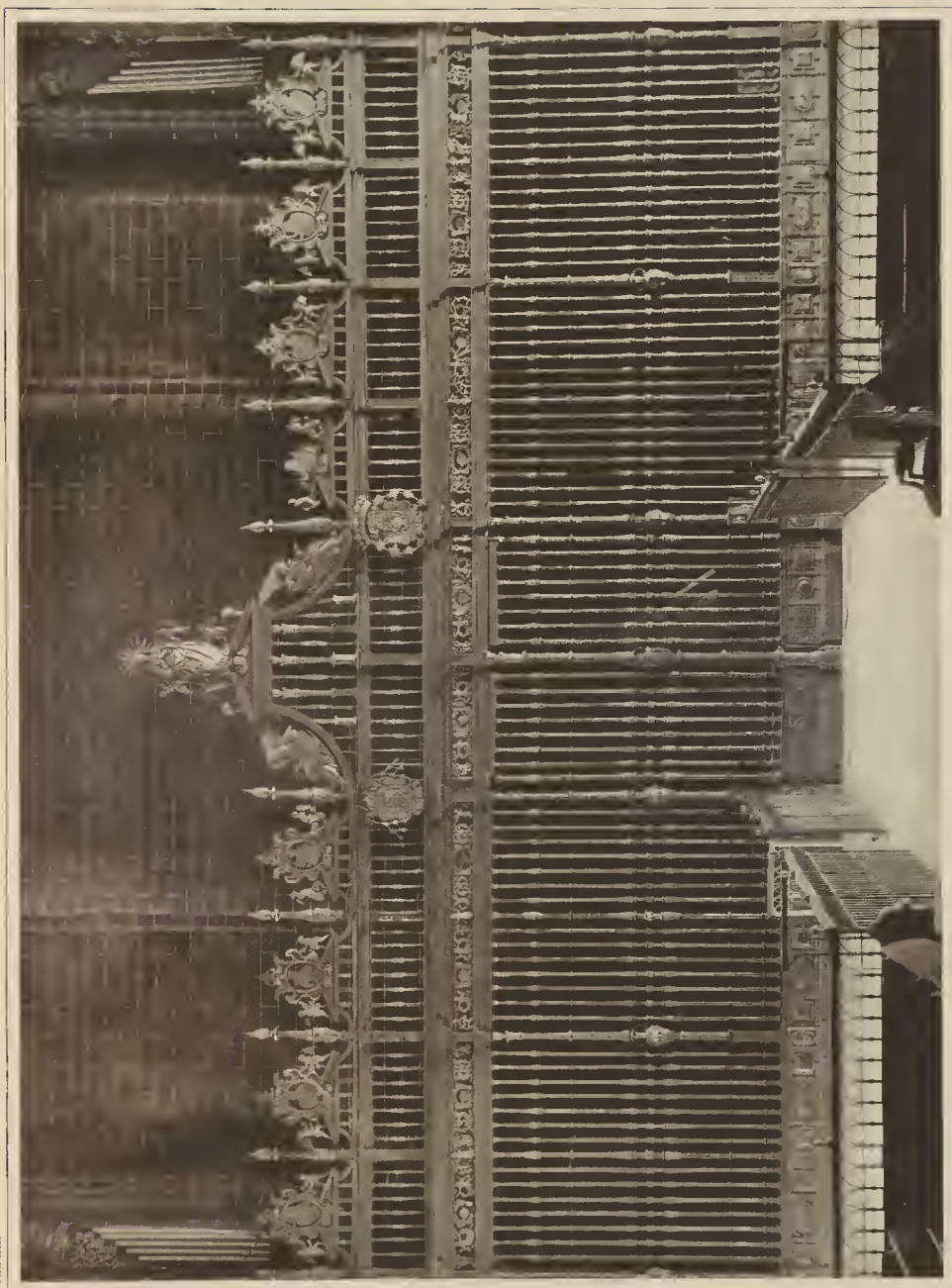
CVENCA CATHEDRAL : A SIDE CHAPEL REJA



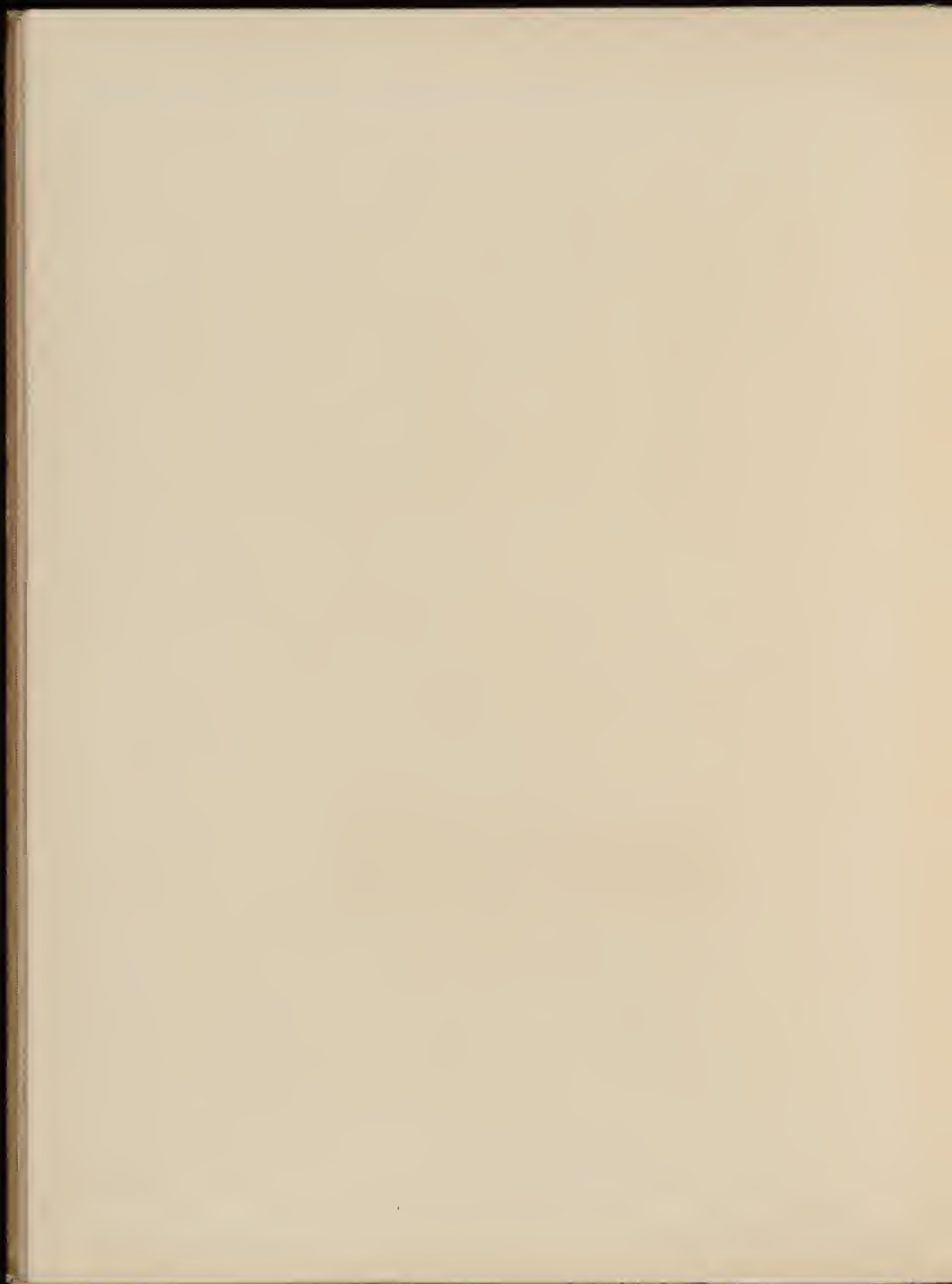
its motifs and even more noticeably by the abundant use of severe architectural mouldings and bands which are merely uninspired imitations of stone—too closely foreshadowing modern cast work. In other words, this XVII-Century example begins to lack that precious, indefinable, intimate something called “touch”; yet it is still a stately, dignified production, far removed from inferiority.

In the first decades of the XIX Century Spain was invaded by French armies and overrun by her own revolutionists. After each of these social disturbances she found herself artistically poorer. Priceless works of art were carried out of the country as loot by French soldiers or destroyed or stolen by Spanish Liberals. Then, when a quasi-peace had been restored to the long-suffering land, the greatest despoiler of all—the foreign dealer—appeared. But the imperious Reja stood secure from the ravages of them all, conscious of the massiveness that made removal in whole or part well-nigh impossible, and of the inherent indestructibility that mocked the fury of enraged mobs. A vast number of Rejas therefore still remain in Spain in the very surroundings for which their builders designed them. Furthermore, being unsusceptible to tampering and remodeling by later well-meaning but uninspired generations, they announce eloquently and accurately for all time the artistic conceptions of their creator. More of them than could be examined in a year's diligent searching await the lover of beautiful ironwork. Indeed, a year's time could be given to what was produced in Sevilla alone in the first quarter of the XVI Century.



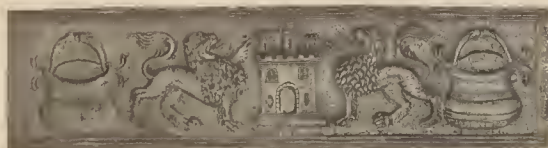


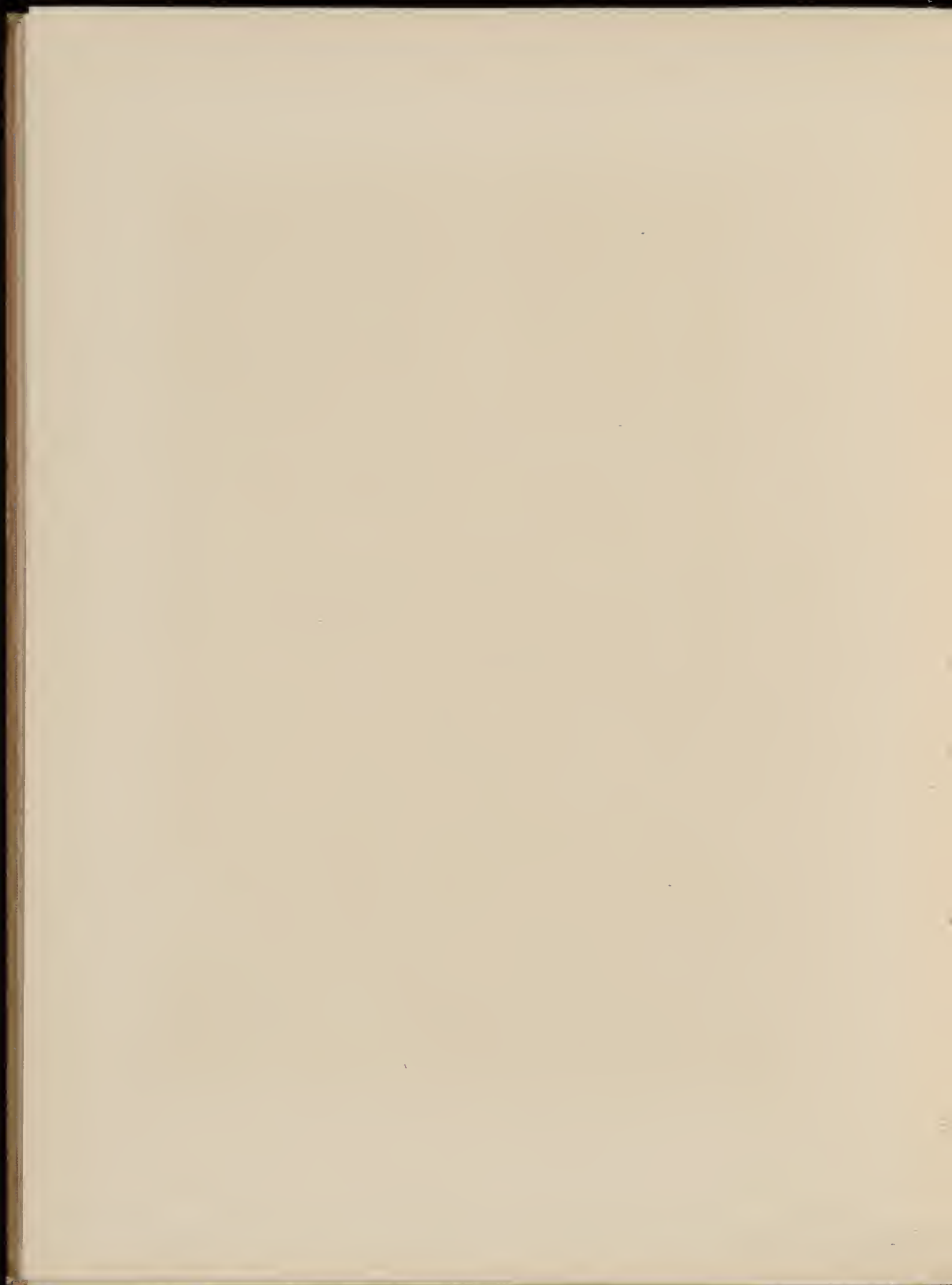
PLASENCIA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE CORO (1664)

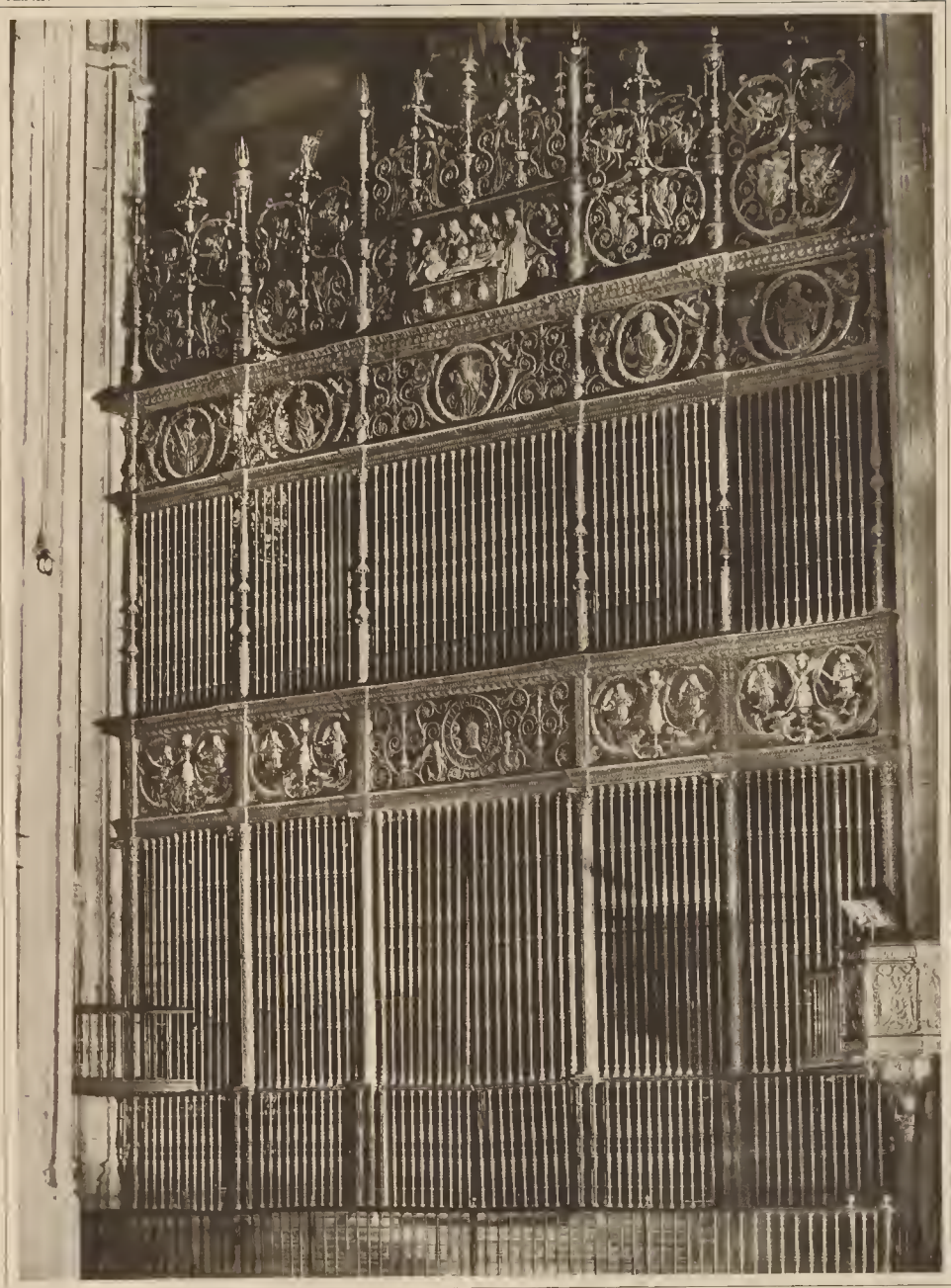


Among the larger cities, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Toledo, Sevilla, Burgos, Granada, Cordova, contain brilliant examples of ironwork; but a number of towns remoter and little heard of to-day are equally rich. Sigüenza, a primitive place that has lain dead and forgotten since the XVI Century, possesses at least a half dozen excellent pieces. Cuenca, still farther from the beaten track, produced renowned rejeros who not only traveled afar to work in larger cities, but filled their native place with superb specimens that rank with the best in the land. El Burgo de Osma, Avila, Palencia, Guadalupe, Oviedo, Tortosa, swell a list of less known places that would richly repay a connoisseur's visit.

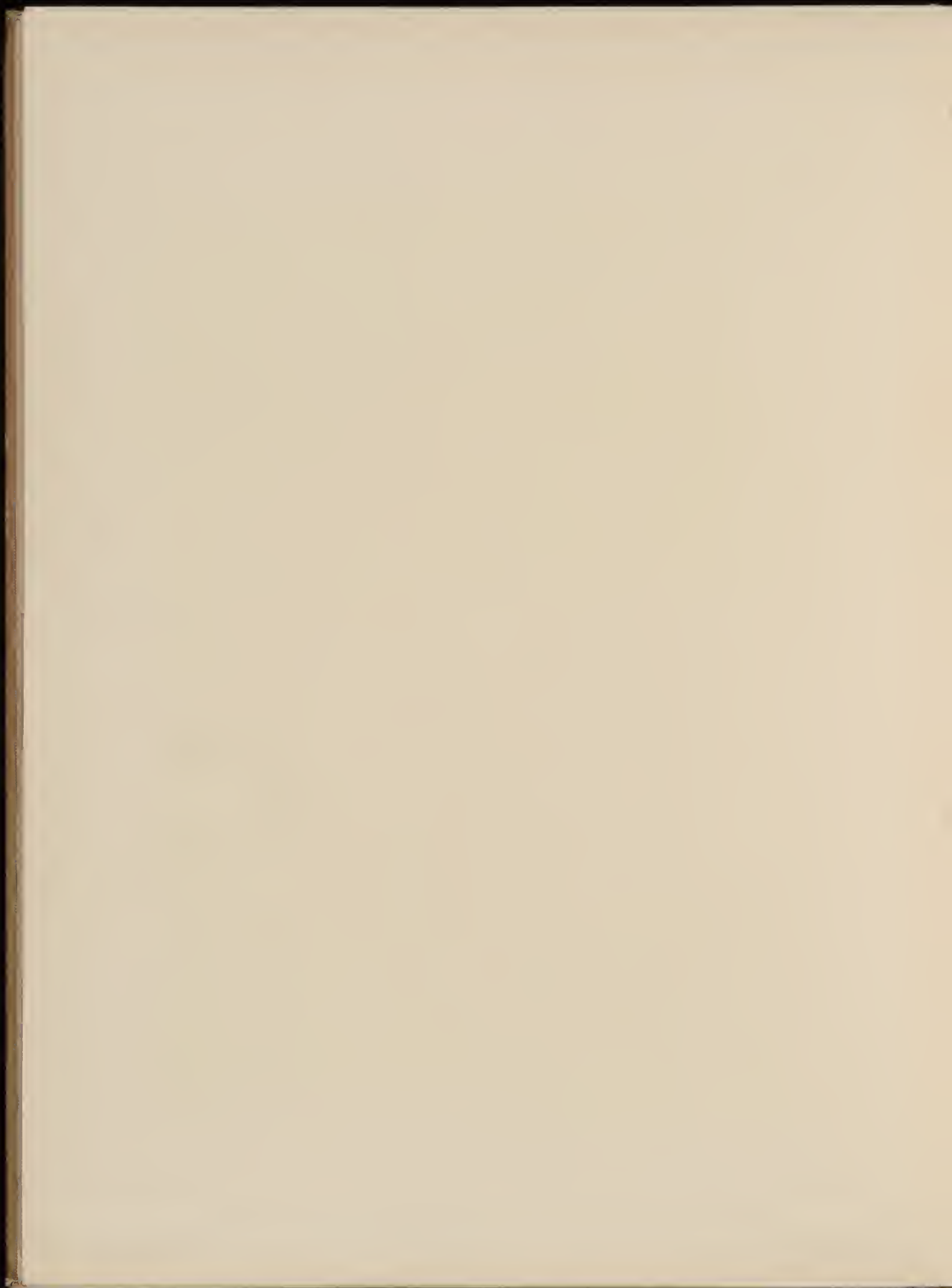
What the rejero accomplished was almost superhuman. It reflected the unprecedented wealth and prosperity of Spain at home and the glorious deeds of her Conquistadores abroad. Nothing less than this national expansion could have produced these Titanic feats in ironwork for future ages to marvel at, but never hope to emulate.







SEVILLA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE HIGH ALTAR (1518-33)

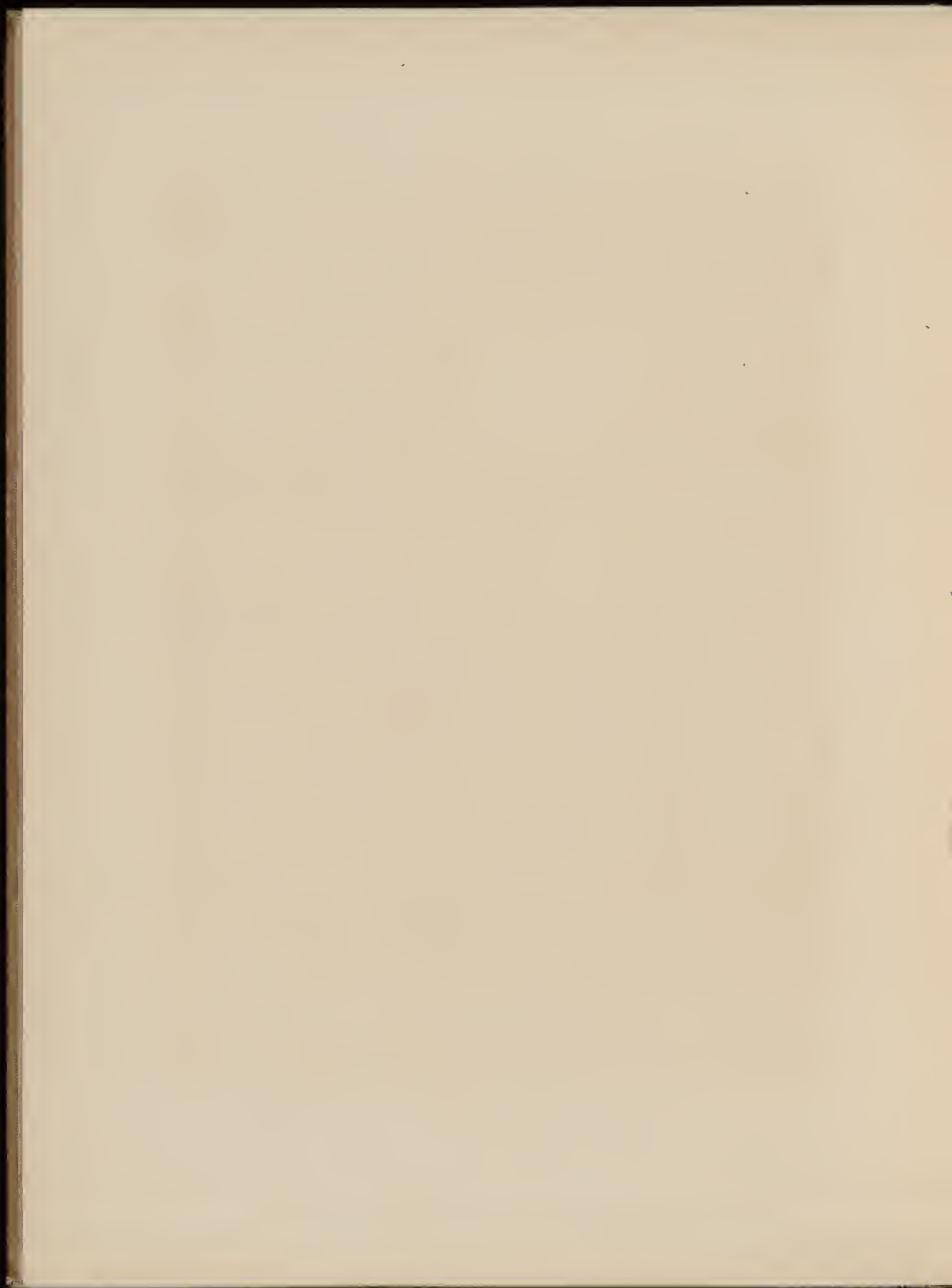


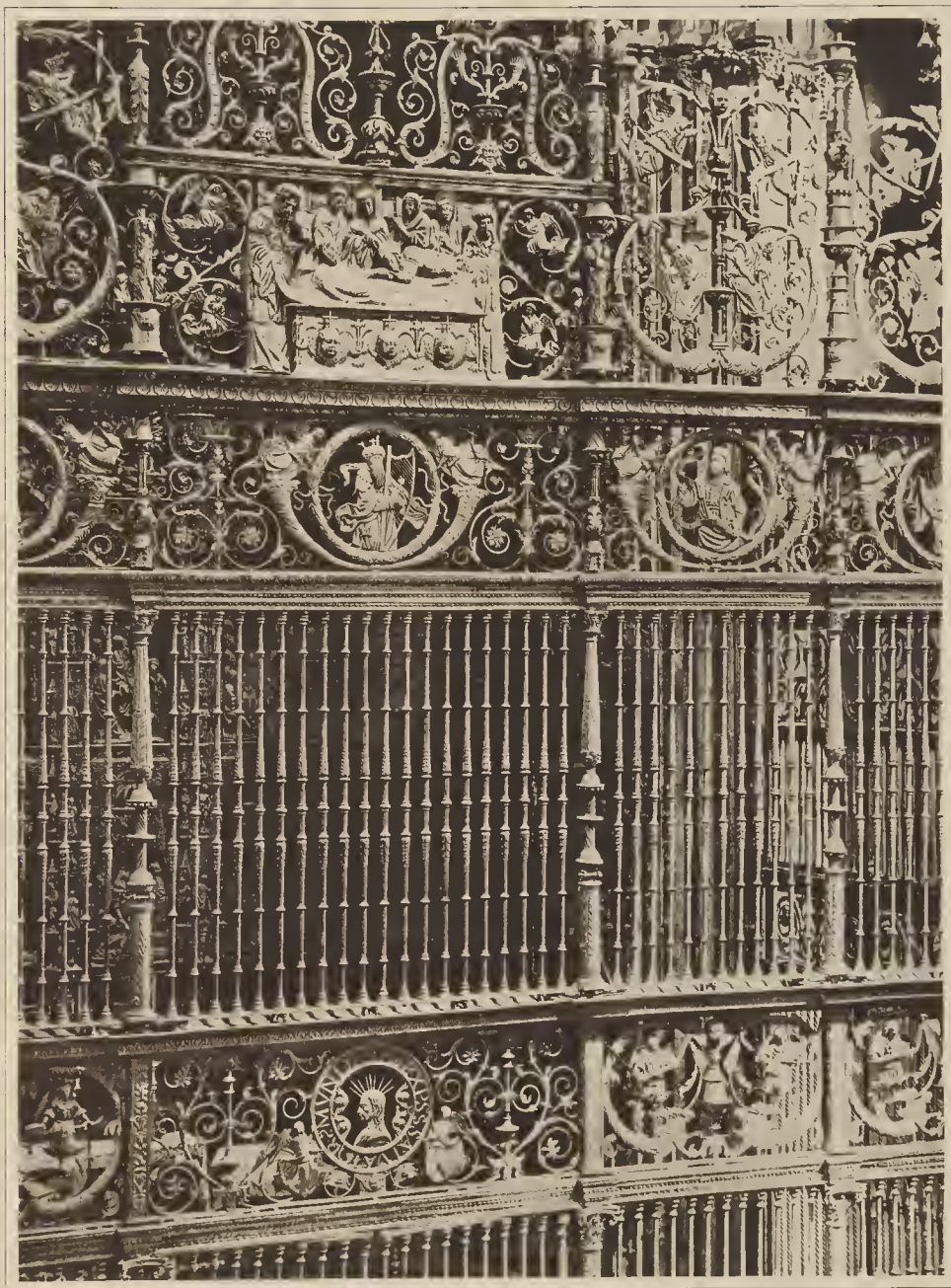
SEVILLA CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CAPILLA MAYOR OR HIGH ALTAR

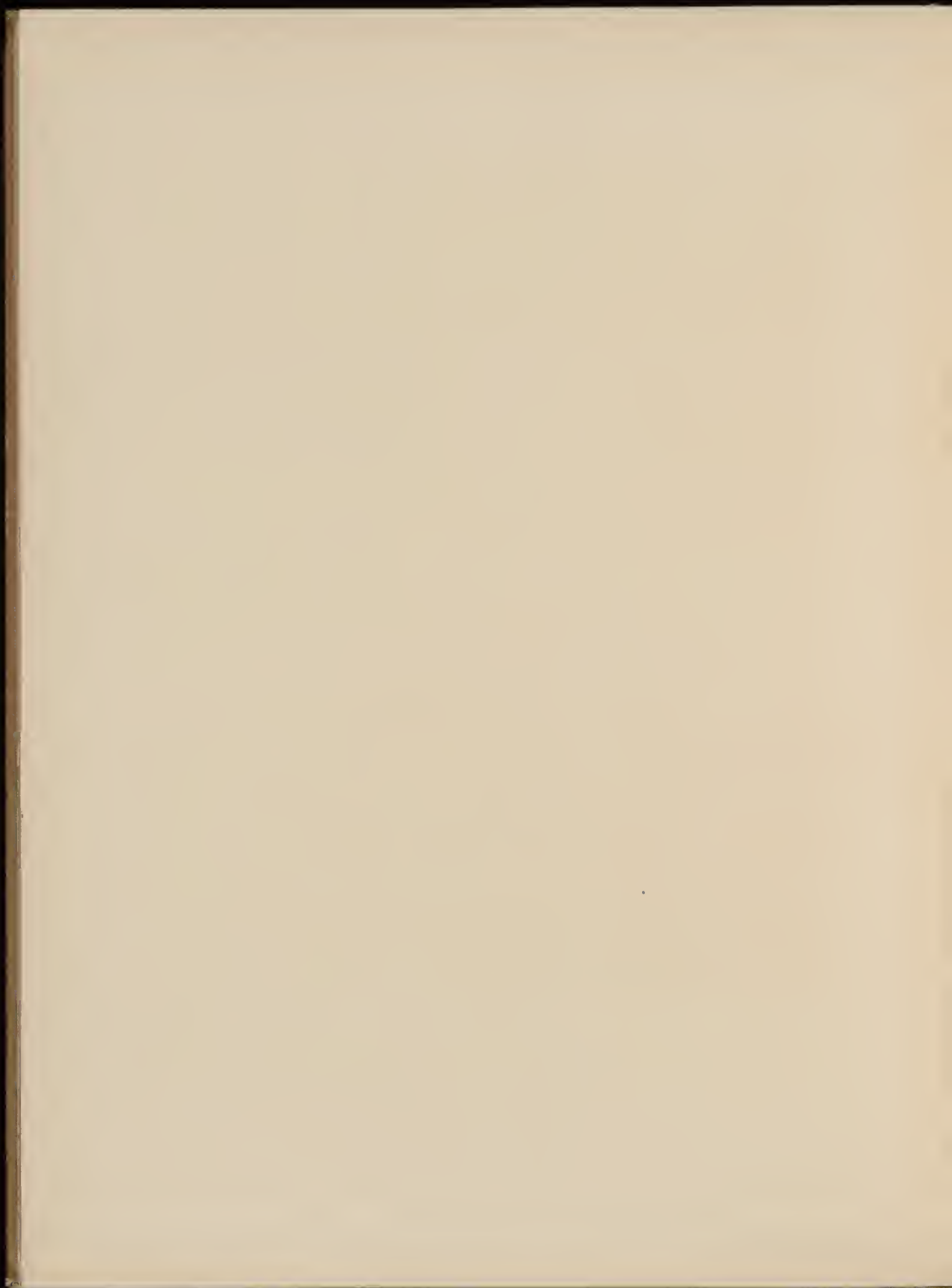
THIS Reja and that of the coro facing it are both mighty Plateresque erections. They are two of the largest in Spain, and, being lavishly gilt, are indescribably sumptuous seen glittering in the dim light of the cathedral, like some vast bits of gold lace heavy enough to stand of themselves on edge. The one under consideration was wrought by the celebrated Friar, Francisco de Salamanca, who produced it between 1518 and 1533, having previously gained much experience by making a beautiful late-Gothic screen for the Monastery of Miraflores outside of Burgos and another for the Monastery of Guadalupe in Estremadura.

In the present instance the composition is divided horizontally by elaborate open-work friezes into two stages and cresting; and vertically by columns into five bays, the central one being widest to accommodate the grand double gates opening to the altar. All the Friar's uprights are spindled (though at the very moment Sancho Muñez opposite was fashioning twisted bars) and five of these spindles, where access is provided to the superb pulpit on either side, are almost





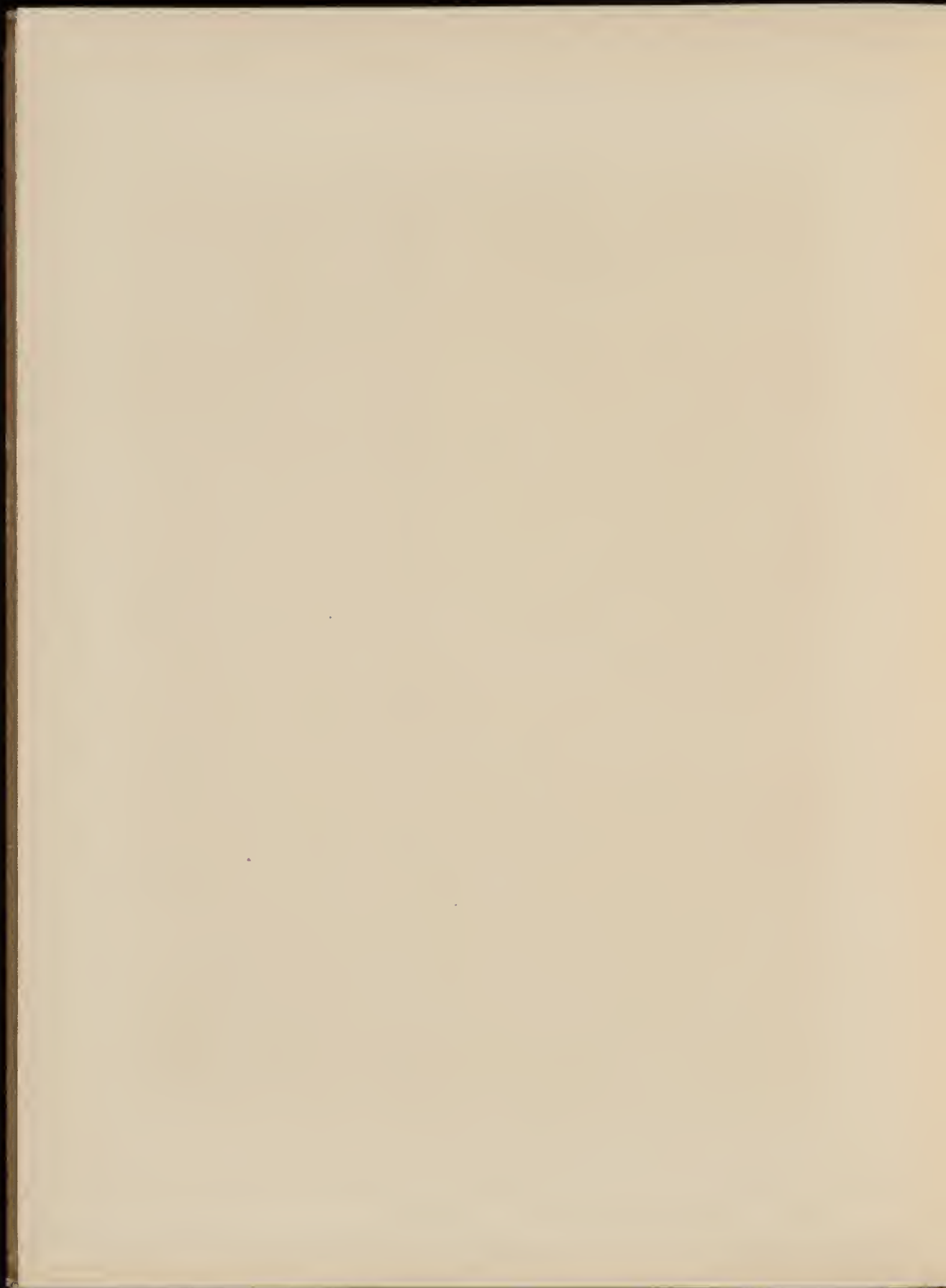
SEVILLA CATHEDRAL
EMBOSSED PANEL IN THE CRESTING OF THE HIGH ALTAR REJA

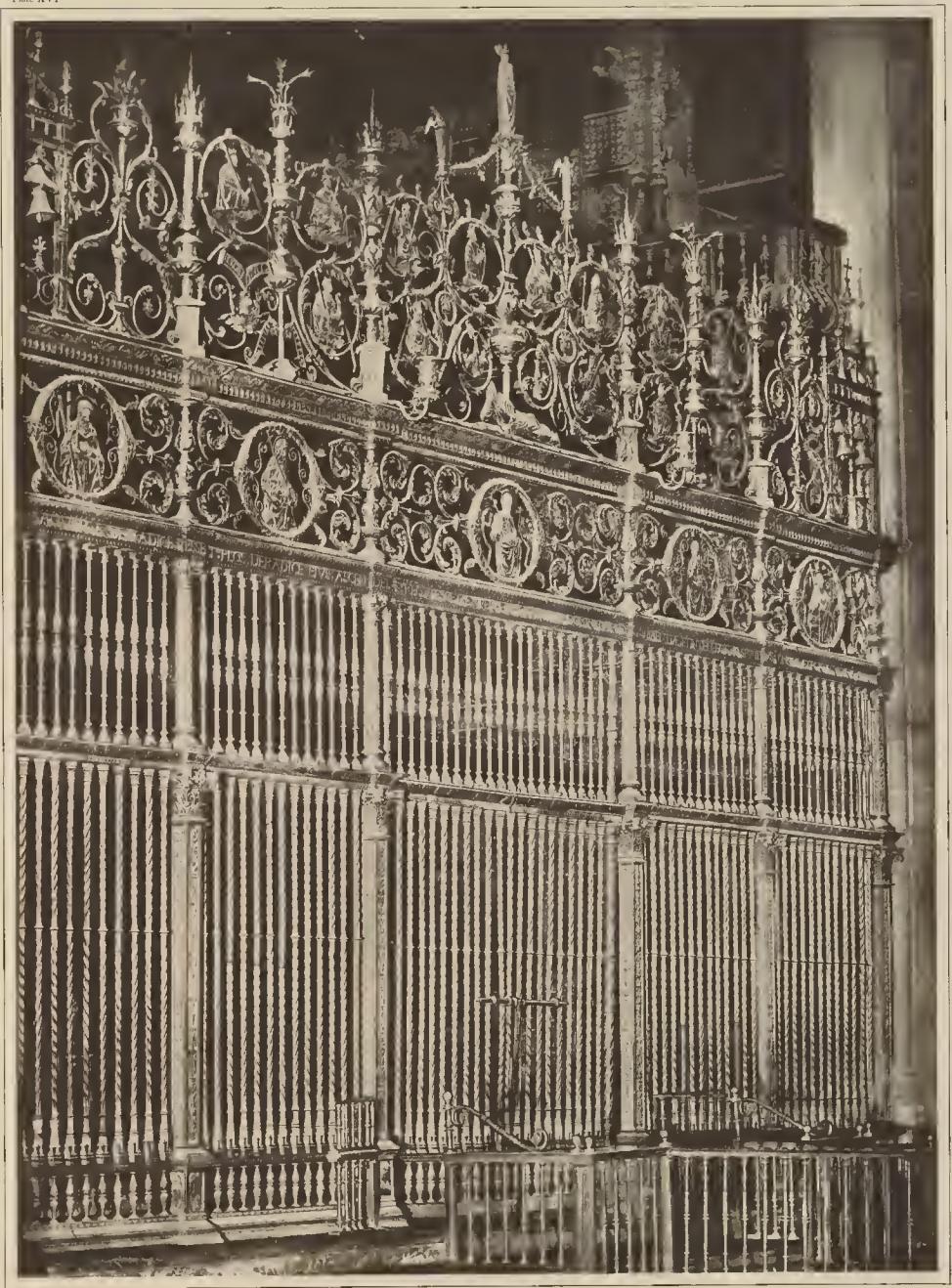


invisibly hinged into a subsidiary door. Both friezes are remarkable achievements, the upper one especially with its finely modeled medallions and arabesques; but the surpassing portion is the cresting, which abounds with angelic figures within scrolls, and is made loftier by tall candelabra in line with the columns below. In addition is the magnificent embossed panel, an "Entombment" (Plate XV), forming the central motif and offering a solidity which contrasts effectively with the openness of the rest of the crest.

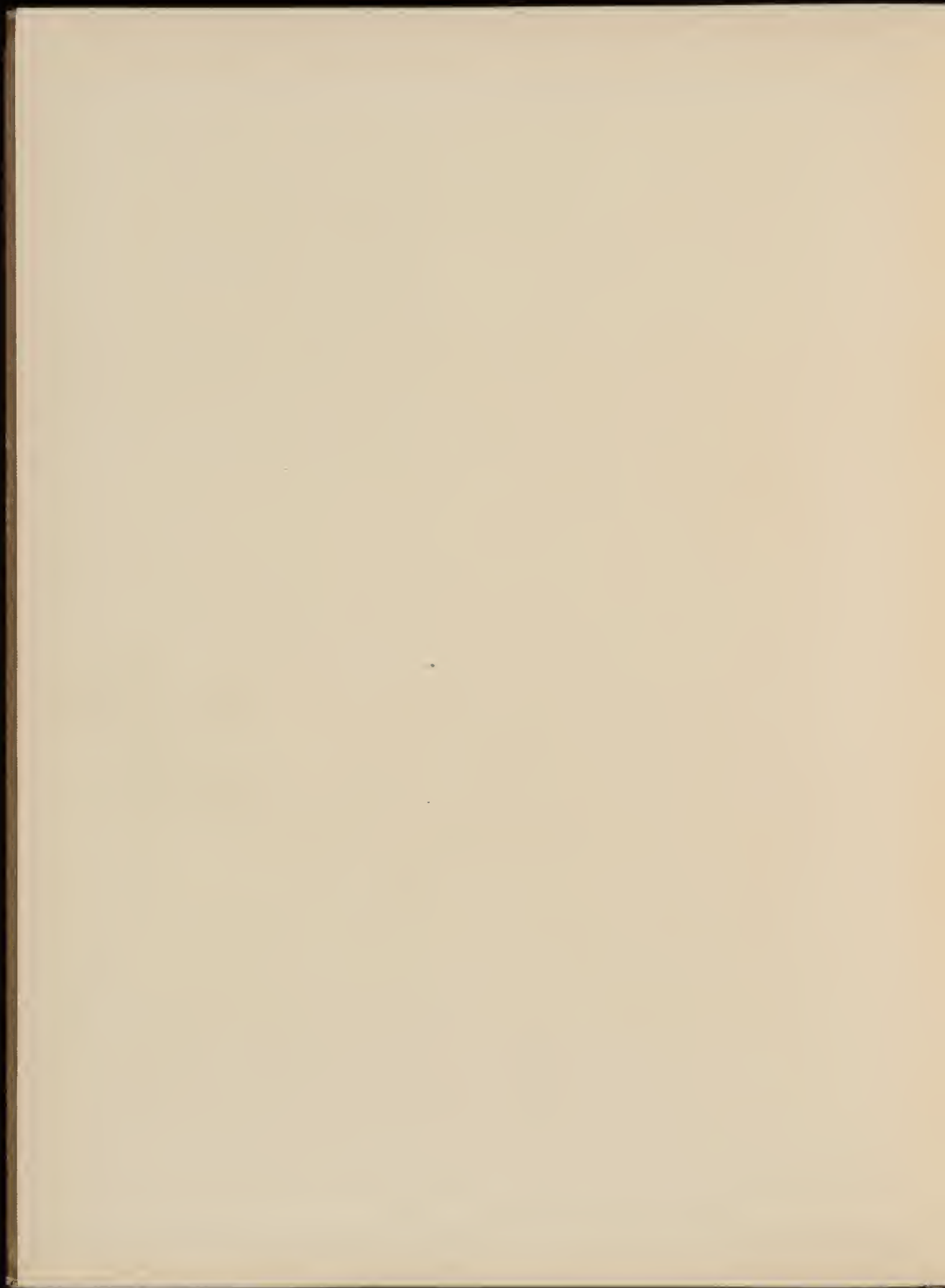
While there is no one feature here that one could claim as Gothic, many are reminiscent of Gothic. The two decorative bands, for instance, would never have been made of equal height by a consummate Renaissance worker. Yet the ensemble is nevertheless Renaissance and proves that the hard-working Friar had turned to good account every opportunity that had come his way of learning to use the new style.

Ceán Bermudez has unearthed some facts concerning this Dominican; among others, that his many virtues were praised by the canons, that he willingly accepted from time to time "a bushel of corn" in lieu of ducats, and that he found time, with all his Reja-making, to repair the great clock of the Giralda and to devise an ingenious alarm apparatus to rouse the Cathedral bell-ringer betimes. He was still at his labors in Sevilla as late as the year 1547, and is supposed to have worked meanwhile for the Cathedral and the University of his native city, Salamanca. The finely wrought pulpits on either side of the Sevilla Reja are also from his hand.





SEVILLA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE CORO (1519)

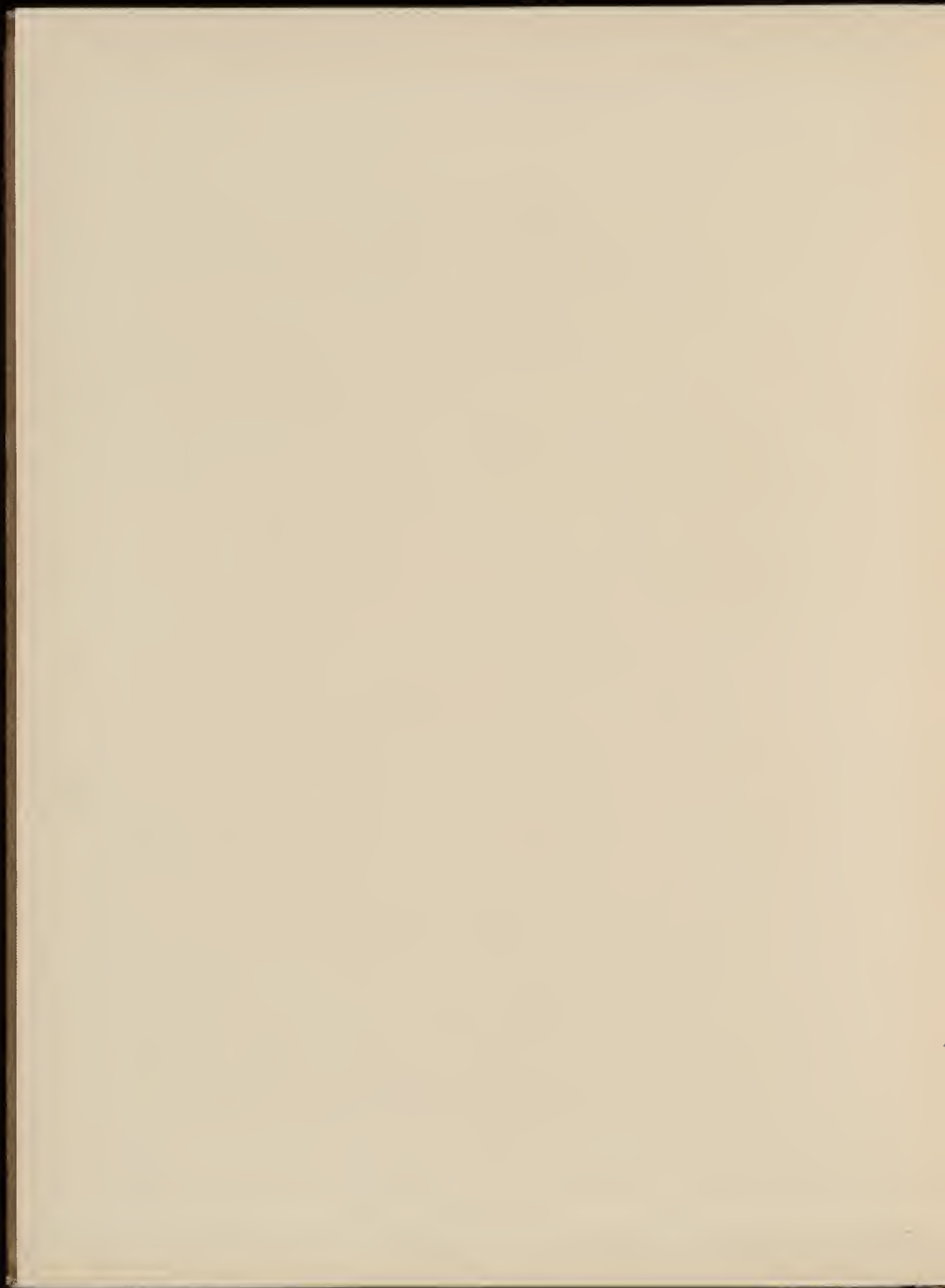


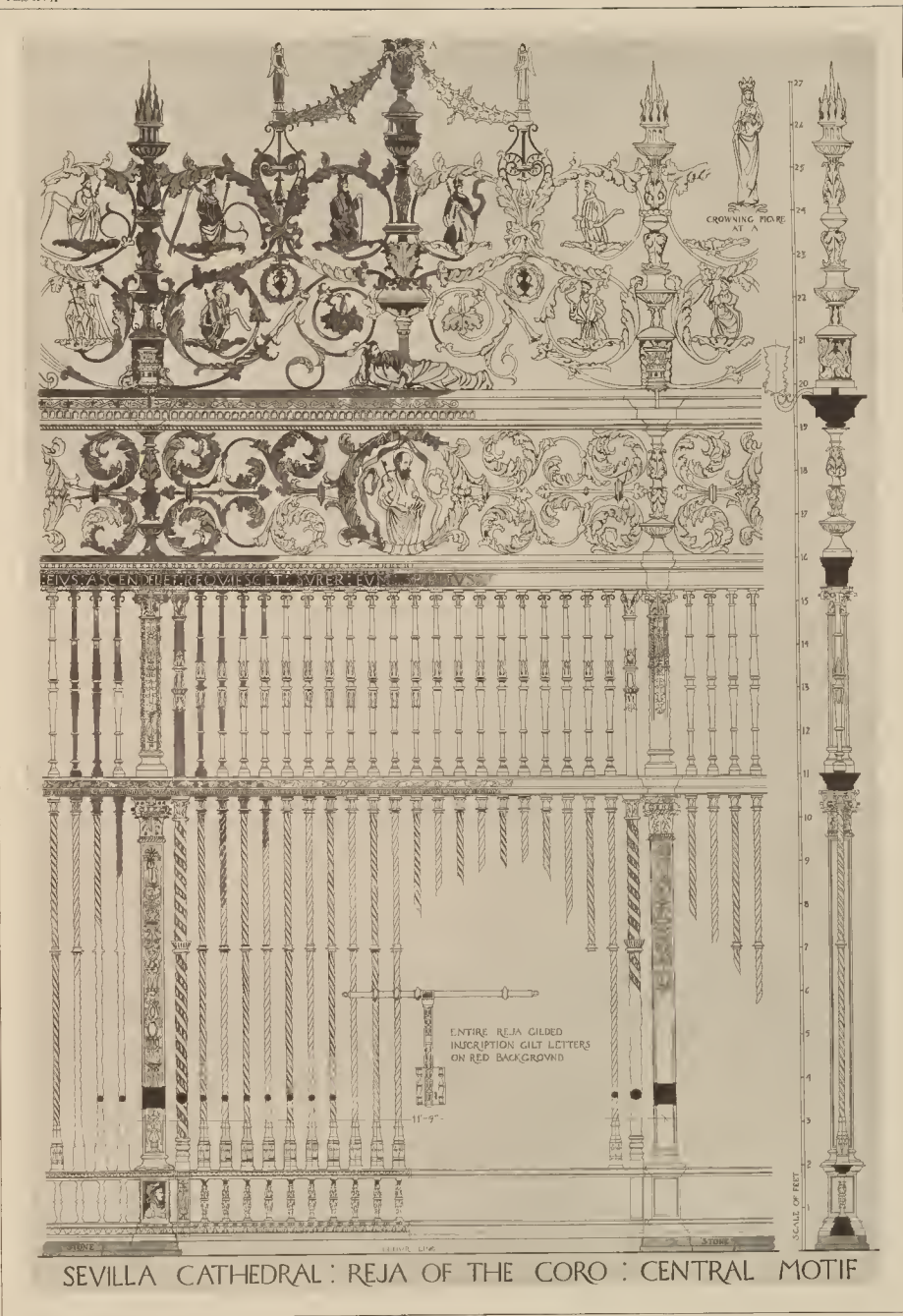
SEVILLA CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CORO

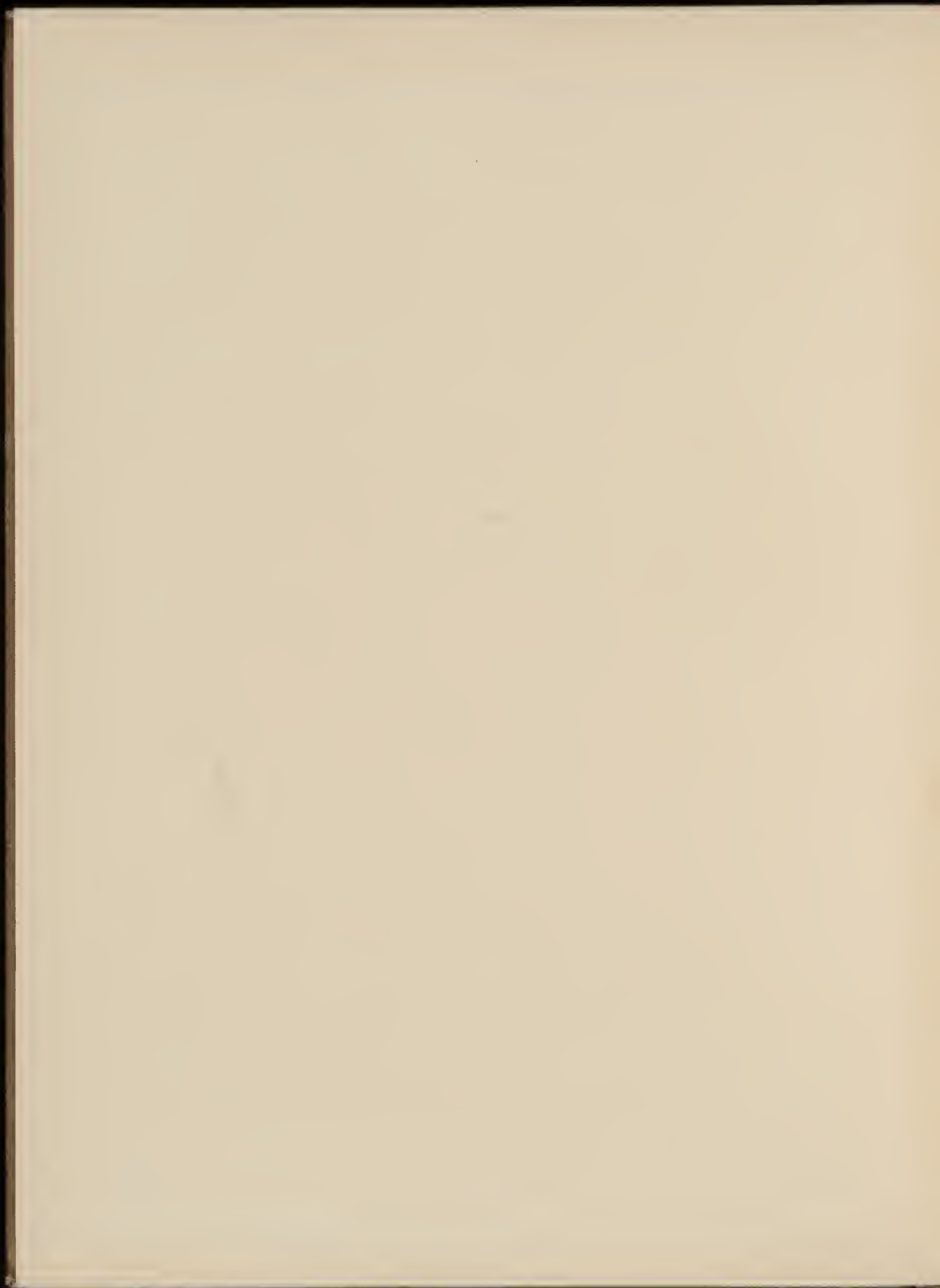
AMONG the ironworkers who enriched Sevilla Cathedral in the early XVI Century was Sancho Muñez, whom the chapter summoned from Cuenca. Cuenca in that day must have been a busy center of ironcraft, for we learn that Sancho, when the ecclesiastics had approved his design for the coro, returned to his native town to select artisans who could help him execute it. The following year, 1518, he made the lateral screens for the capilla mayor, which are very handsome, and in 1519 started on the one for the coro. That he worked in sympathy with his fellow rejero of the capilla mayor is evident from the general harmony of their productions. The actual proportions vary in accordance with the natural tradition that the main chapel should have the grander Reja; but the feeling of both shows a studied agreement.

In the Reja we are considering the lower portion, or body, is composed of twisted Gothic bars surmounted by a tier of short Renaissance spindles. As may be seen in Detail Plate XVII, the twists are of two different alternating sections, each

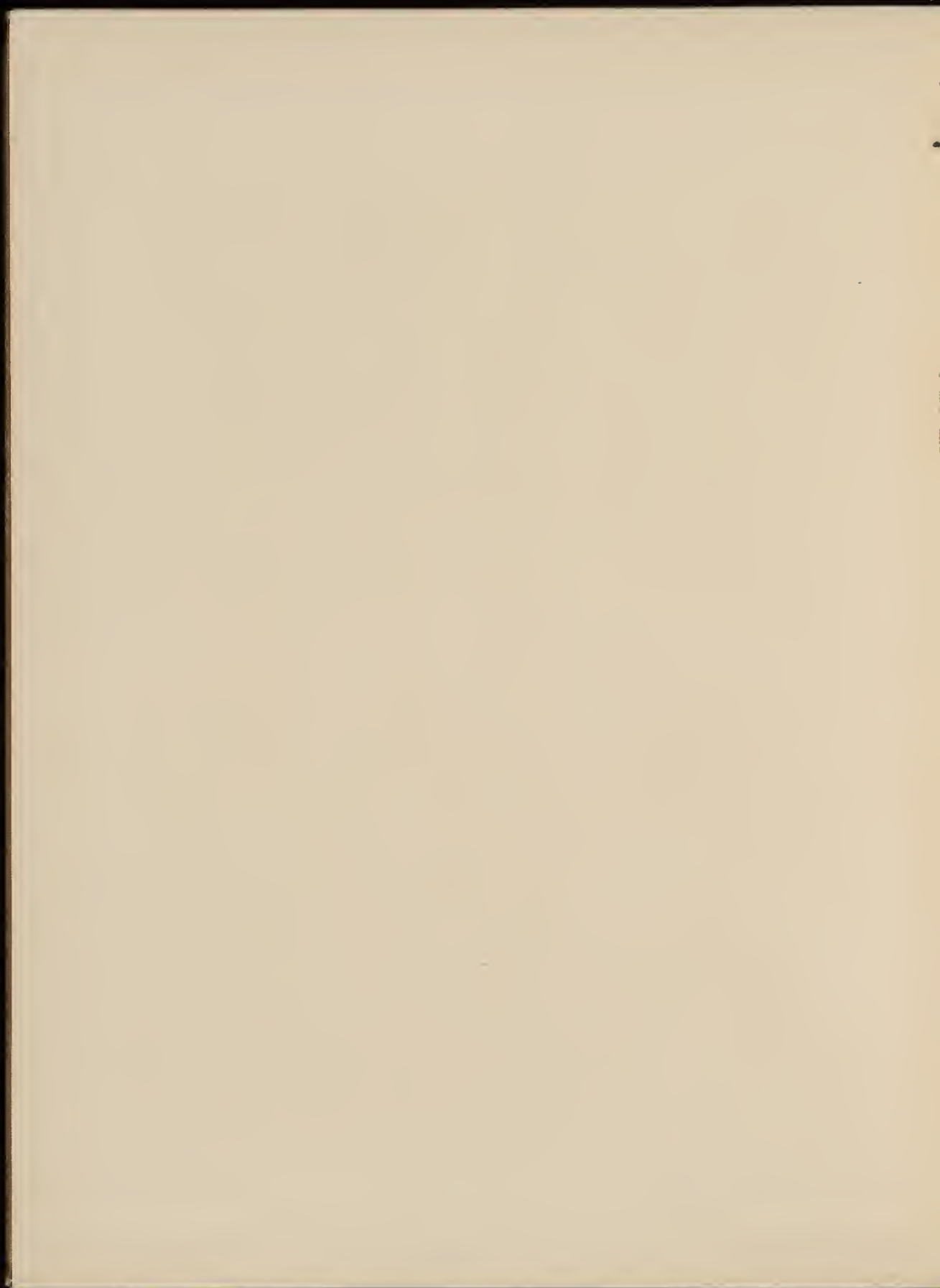


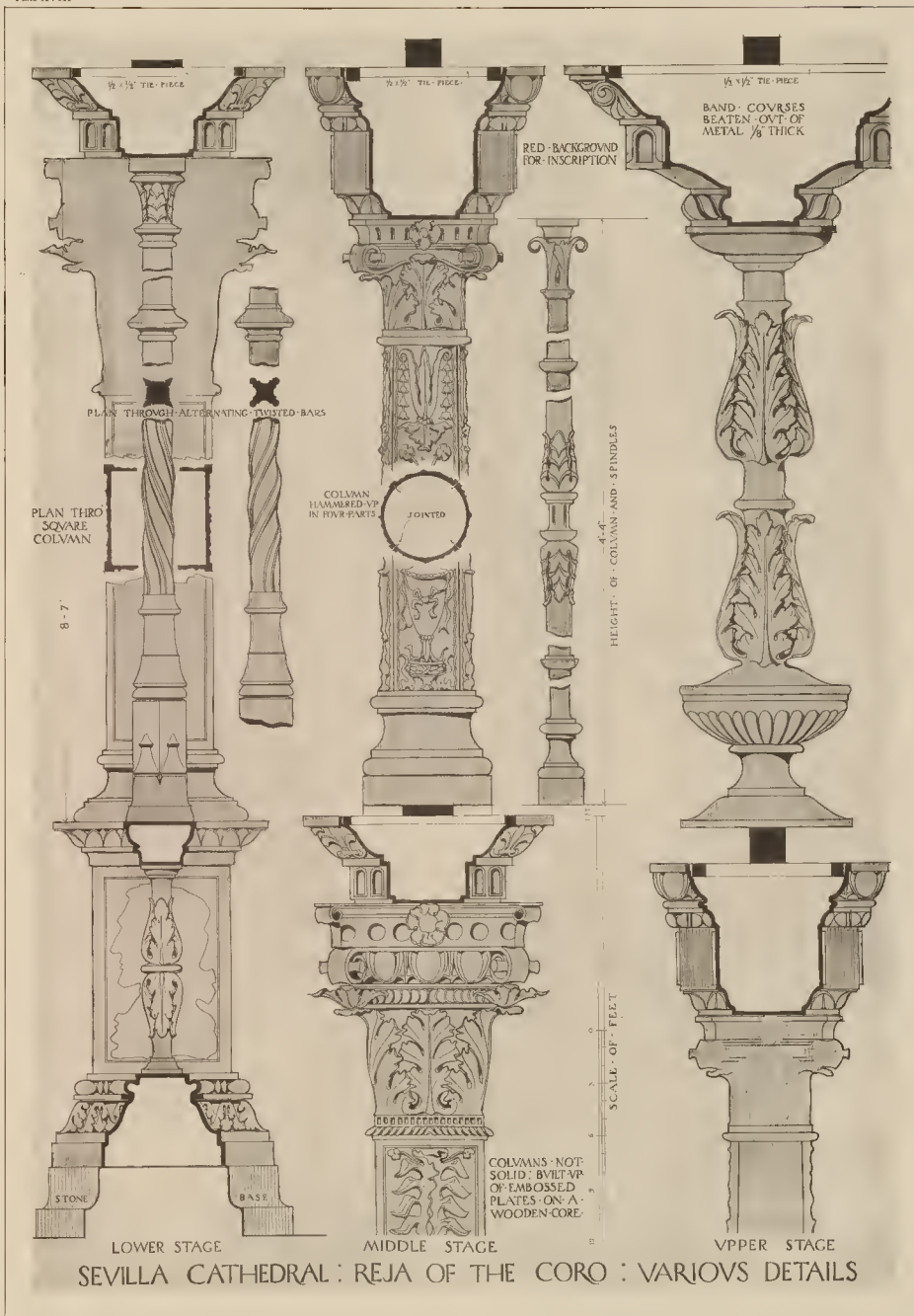


SEVILLA CATHEDRAL : REJA OF THE CORO : CENTRAL MOTIF



spiraling towards the other. This portion is divided vertically into five bays by six-inch-square pilasters, these being the usual wooden core covered by an exquisitely embossed sheathing of iron. The beautiful Corinthian capitals crowning them, though only thirteen inches high, are most intricately conceived—not along the lines of stone Corinthian, but as a truly wrought-iron interpretation. The delicately twisted volutes, for instance, are not, as in modern examples, hammered and pounded out of a block of metal, but are twisted out of a tongue-shaped piece and allowed to roll themselves naturally like the sheet of parchment which, tradition tells us, first inspired the form. Horizontal courses and cornices are beaten out of sheet metal just as the pilaster sheath is, making a lavish display of the embosser's skill. For all sheathing the metal is only one-sixteenth of an inch thick, kept rigid by transverse tie-pieces one-half inch square. The band course crowning the balusters (which is anomalous to the architrave of the entablature in architecture) contains a gilt inscription effectively backgrounded by red. Above comes the frieze, three feet high, comprising medallion heads of five Apostles; then a heavily moulded and fretted cornice, and surmounting this the most resplendent portion of all—a cresting representing the tree of Jesse. Each of its dignified personages is framed in a circle of foliation, and the whole design is divided vertically by towering candelabra which form a natural termination to the structural members below. A facetious innovation introduced here, and one with a practical purpose, is the bell frame at either end. These little features are charming in





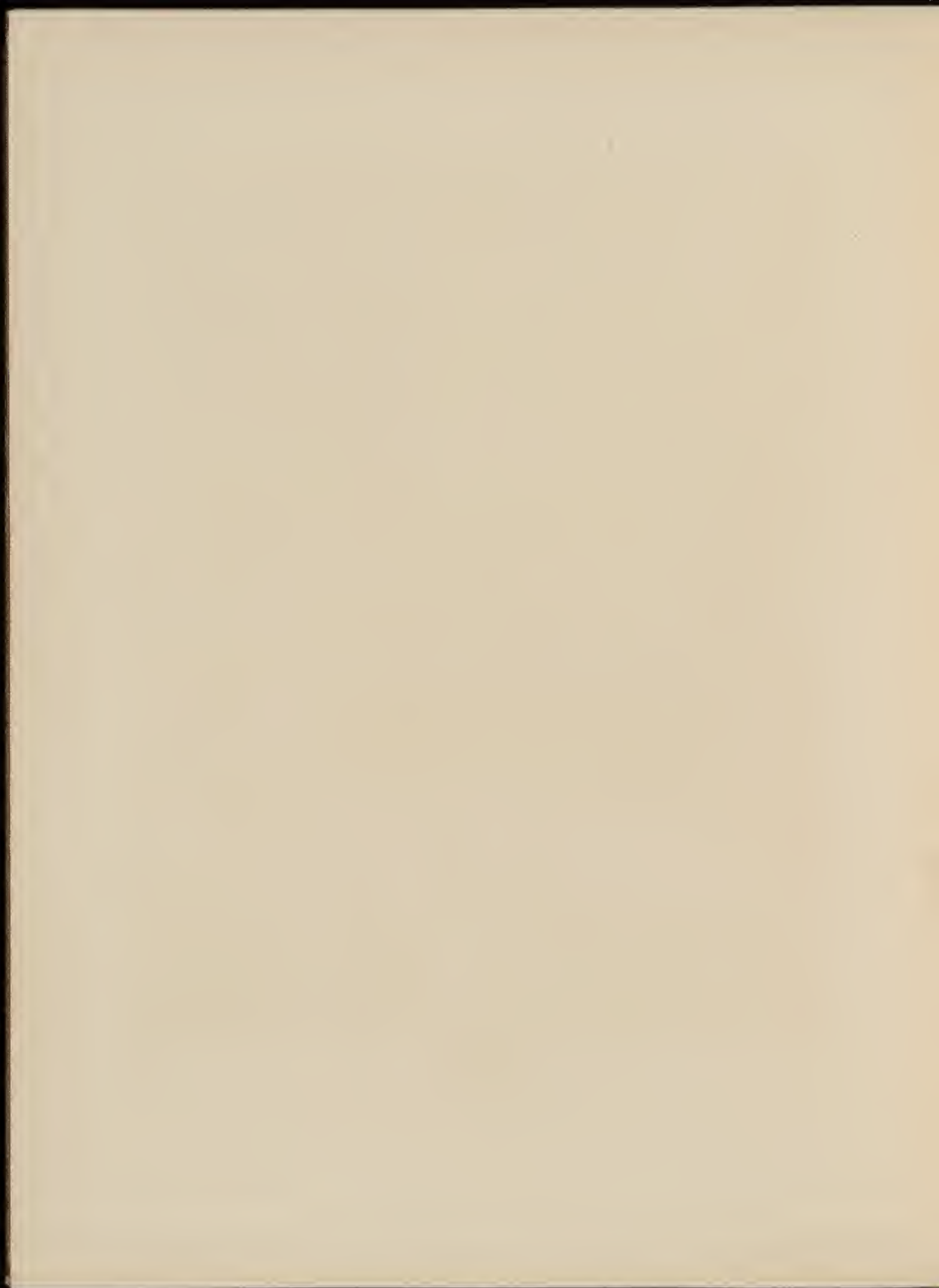
SEVILLA CATHEDRAL : REJA OF THE CORO : VARIOUS DETAILS



design and execution, and have a certain value as a substantial end-motif to such a highly imaginative cresting.

It is on record that Sancho Muñez, while engaged on this masterpiece, "lived in the house of Canon Martin Navarro, to whom the Chapter regularly paid his board"; further, that he was to receive "two hundred gold ducats a year provided he took no longer than one and one-half years for gilding and all." That such a colossal and varied creation, beaten up out of raw ingots, could be finished in the stipulated time is a strain on modern credulity; but as one Spanish writer records that it was, we must accept it and acknowledge that the feat could never be repeated in our own day.







GRANADA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE ROYAL CHAPEL (1523)



GRANADA CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CAPILLA REAL

WITHIN this Royal Chapel are buried Spain's great sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, for whose resting-place no accessory could be too magnificent. Maestre Bartolomé of Jaén, appreciating this, created a *chef-d'œuvre* of Renaissance ironwork to screen their tombs from the main part of the chapel. It is the most sumptuous of all Spain's Rejas, and as a stupendous undertaking nothing comparable to its cresting has been attempted elsewhere.

Two solid unpierced friezes divide the composition horizontally into three diminishing stages of thirteen, seven, and five feet respectively. In the first of these stages the tall twisted bars break into quatrefoils and masques; in the next into leafwork and cherubim; and in the third into leafwork alone. Vertically the screen is divided into five parts by square columns superbly embossed, and further adorned in the two upper tiers by statuettes and canopies. The embossed plates, hardly over a sixteenth of an inch thick, are applied to a core of oak—oak having been usually preferred to iron in these





GRANADA CATHEDRAL
MIDDLE STAGE OF ROYAL REJA (1533)





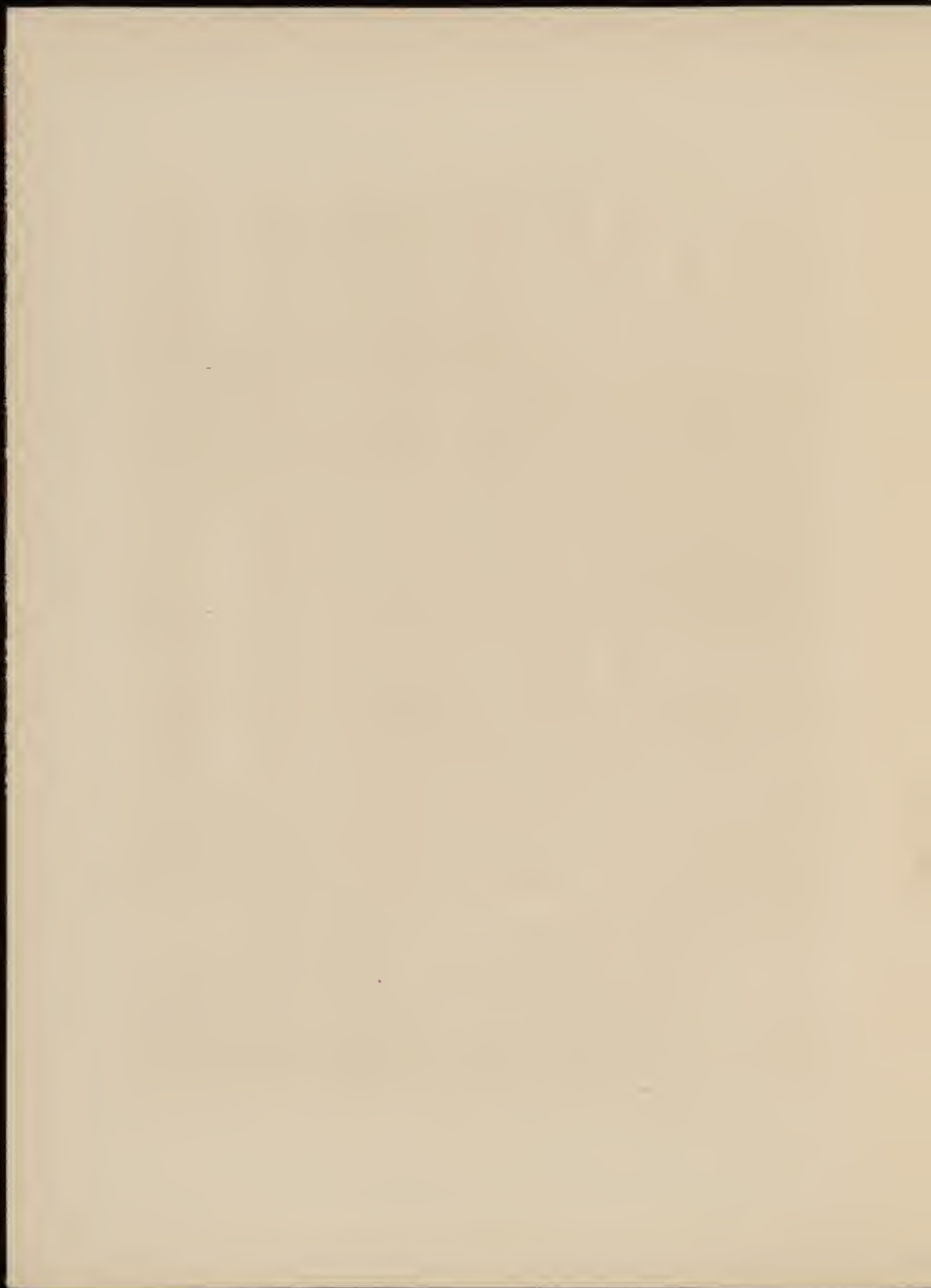
GRANADA CATHEDRAL
LOWEST STAGE OF ROYAL REJA (1523)



structural members, as it permitted the ornamental sheath to be riveted directly to the core, thus securing that excellent alignment still to be seen in most of the old Rejas.

How thoroughly Bartolomé understood color decoration in ironwork may be seen in the escutcheon over the door; for here, in contrast to those examples in other countries where the entire screen is painted, color is confined to the blazon (*vide* Frontispiece), where, in reproducing the original, its use is certainly legitimate. This panel may be called the bravura piece of heraldic ironwork in Spain—the arms of the Catholic Kings who sleep beyond and the eagle of their Hapsburg grandson, Charles V. But this portion, remarkable though it is, pales beside the splendid cresting, which is made up of ten Biblical scenes containing over thirty figures more than half life size and beaten in the round. A veritable story-telling picture this, composed as freely in iron as the frescoist would have proceeded in covering a given wall space. Neither to the structural uprights below nor to the rinceaux above do these figures bear any relation; that is, effect is obtained by sheer size and quantity, by the amazing feat of assembling in one motif some thirty iron statues over half life size. Done as it is with great animation and yet maintaining a profound dignity, the picture surpasses all one's previous conceptions of the possibilities of iron. The cresting is finished off by a conventional arrangement of lofty candelabra connected by rich arabesques, making altogether a colossal and noble monument to the fame of the obscure citizen of Jaén who made it.

Than this, that he came from Jaén in Northern Andalucía,



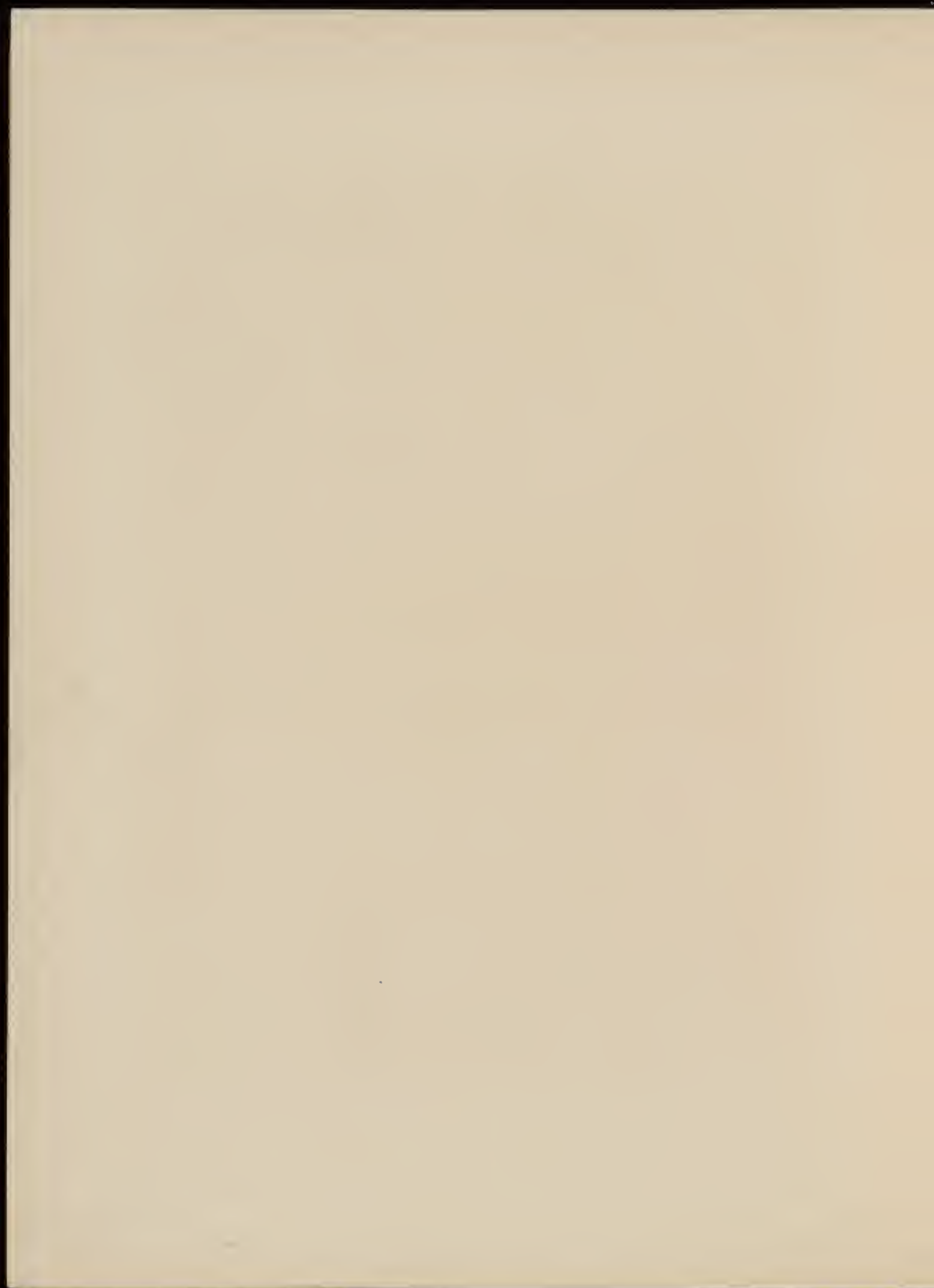


GRANADA CATHEDRAL
DETAIL OF BASE OF ROYAL REJA (1523)



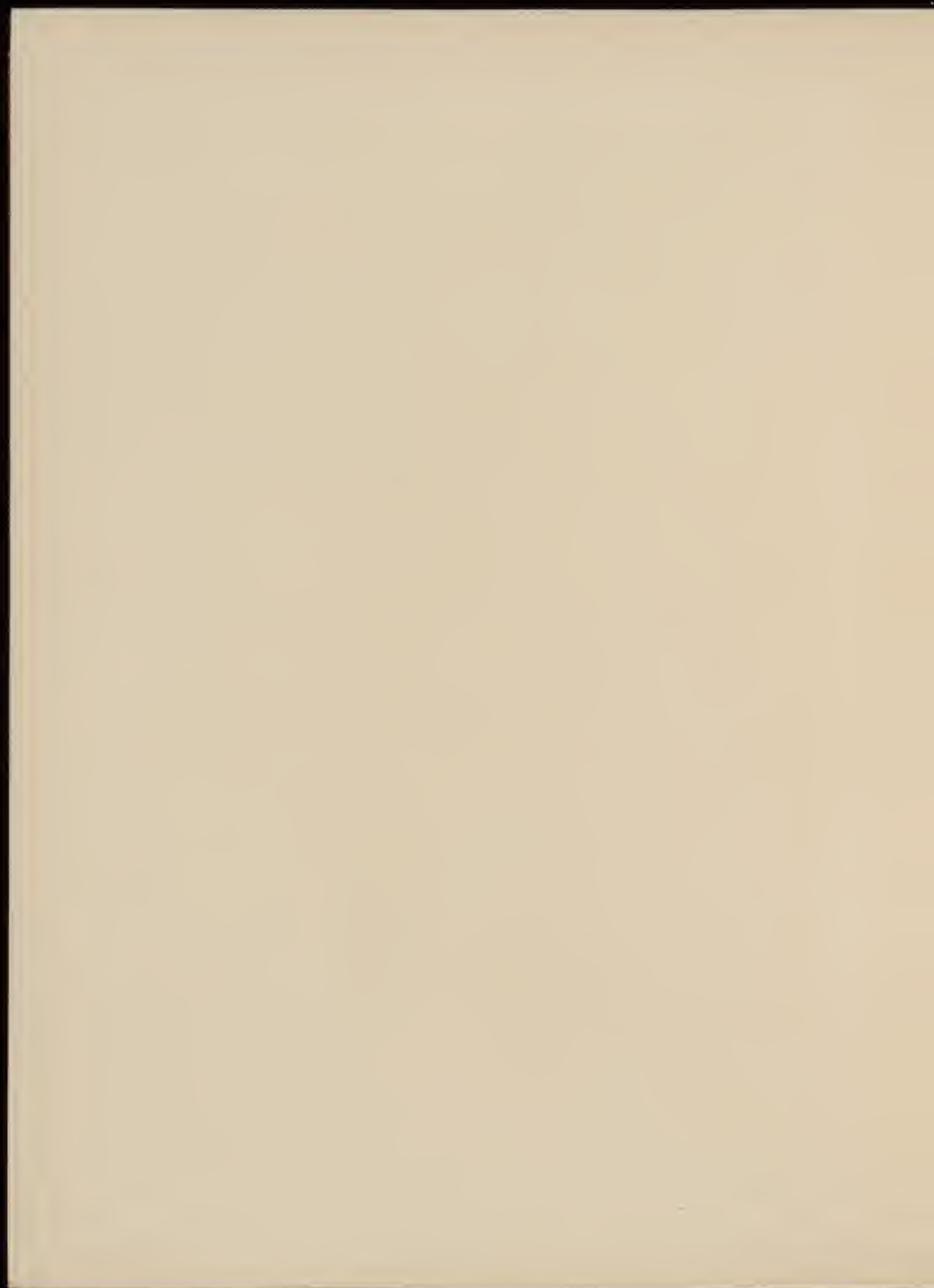
and that he worked there and in Sevilla at the Reja of the presbytery, little more is known of Maestre Bartolomé except that he was forced to petition Charles V for sixteen hundred ducats due him on the Granada work, which the clergy refused to pay. The Royal Reja is supposed to have been finished in 1523, but no details are available as to the length of time spent on it.







BURGOS CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE CONSTABLE'S CHAPEL (1523)



BURGOS CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CONSTABLE'S CHAPEL

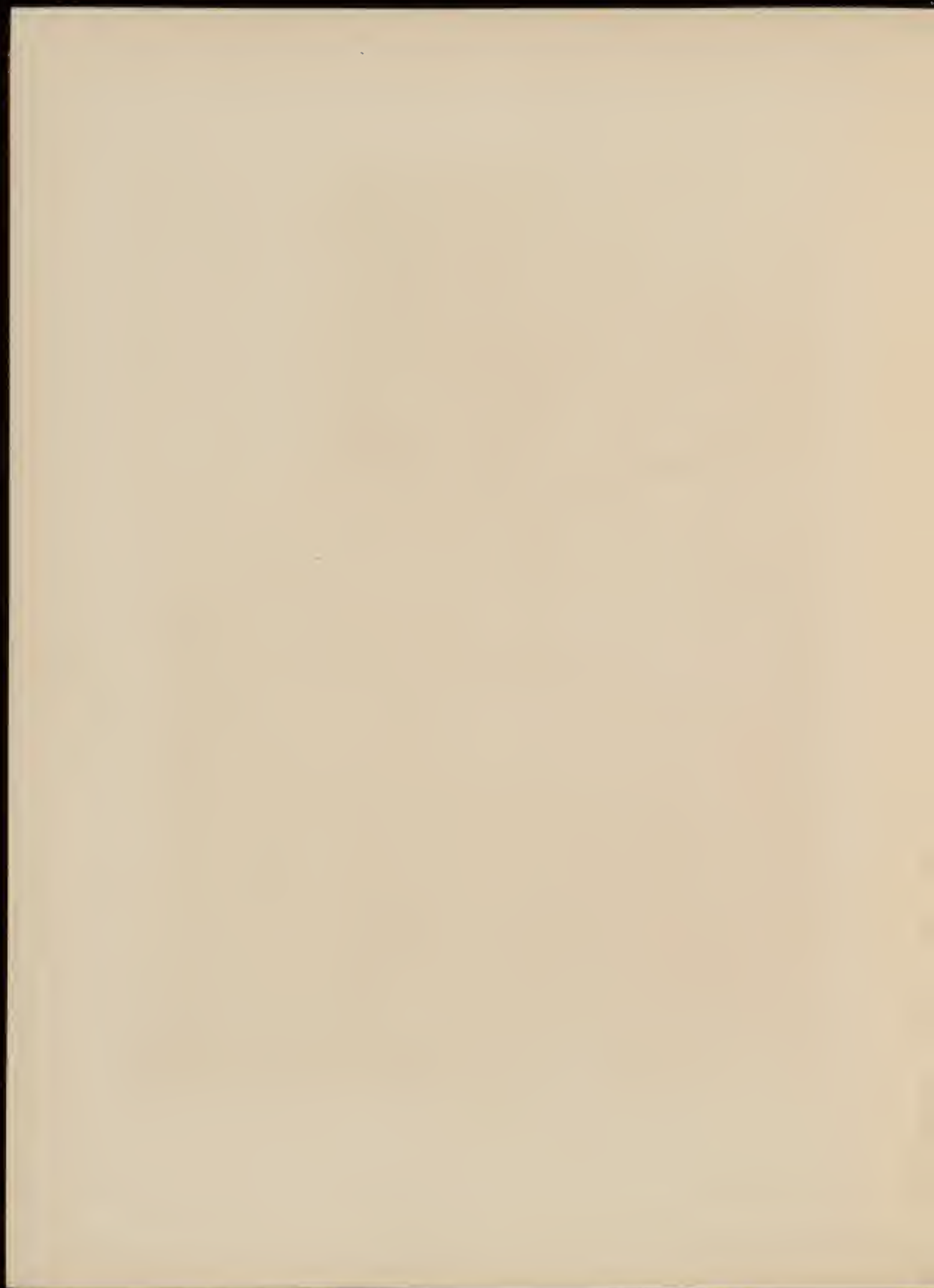
THE chapel screened by this distinguished Reja was built in richest Plateresque style for the Constable of Castile, Don Pedro Hernandez de Velasco, in 1482 *et seq.*, the Reja, dated A. D. MDXXIII, being probably the last touch to the superb whole. Its maker was Cristóbal de Andino, architect, sculptor, rejero and probably silversmith, son to Pedro de Andino, who likewise practised these arts. Cristóbal did much excellent work at Palencia, but this at Burgos is his masterpiece, acclaimed as such even during his lifetime. Of it a contemporary wrote: "All who wish their work to breathe the spirit of authority and to pass without rebuke should follow, like Cristóbal Andino, ancient precepts in that his works have greater beauty and elegance than any I have seen before. If this, you think, be not the case, look at that Reja he is making for my lord the Constable, which Reja is well known to be superior to all others in the kingdom." From most modern critics, also, this Burgos production evokes the same lavish praise, though one might be allowed a preference for one of the Toledo examples, or for one from



Sevilla or Granada, which, while earlier and with less of Renaissance flavor, are hardly inferior.

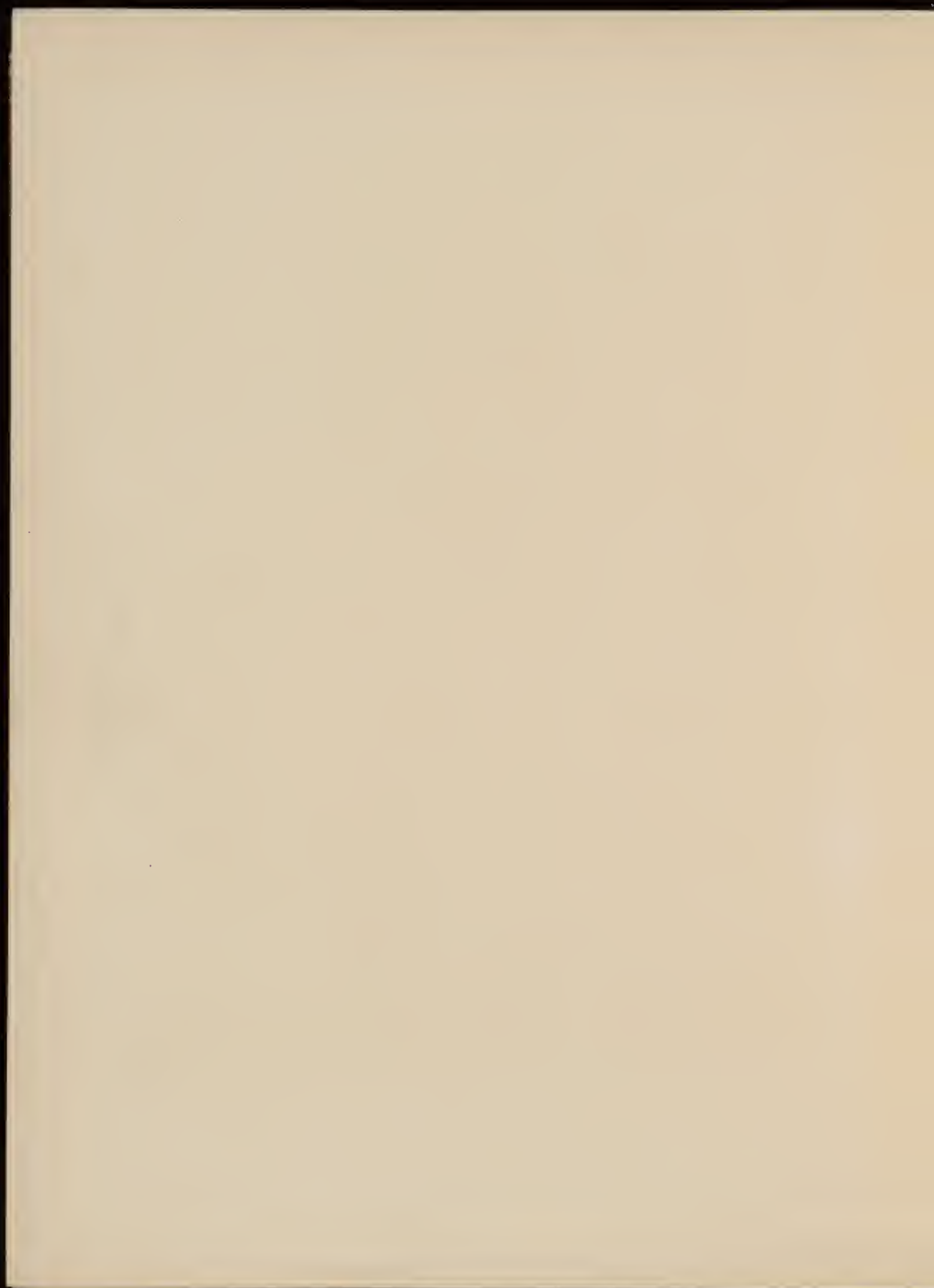
The Constable's Reja is in purest Renaissance. Even without accurate data as to Andino's attainments, one glance at it would prove its maker to have been an architect. Like most late examples, there is a strong domination of the horizontal members—in other words, a preference for Classic principles rather than Gothic verticality. To give it increased architectural feeling, as opposed to the thinner screen of earlier days, Andino has introduced an innovation in the form of two richly wrought colonnettes standing forward of the general plane, and making a total depth of fifteen inches framing the postern gate. Further depth and substantiality are imparted by breaking the cornice over these, and resting the floriated candelabra of the second stage on this projection. To crown the entire composition, the very symbol of architecture—the pediment—has been chosen; and under it are two kneeling figures whose sophisticated naïveté might well be the envy of modern artists. In these and in various other details this Reja is a distinct departure from tradition, and in less inspired hands would surely have lost its abundant spontaneity under its weighty knowledge of “ancient precepts.”







TOLEDO CATHEDRAL
PORTION OF THE CORO REJA (1548)

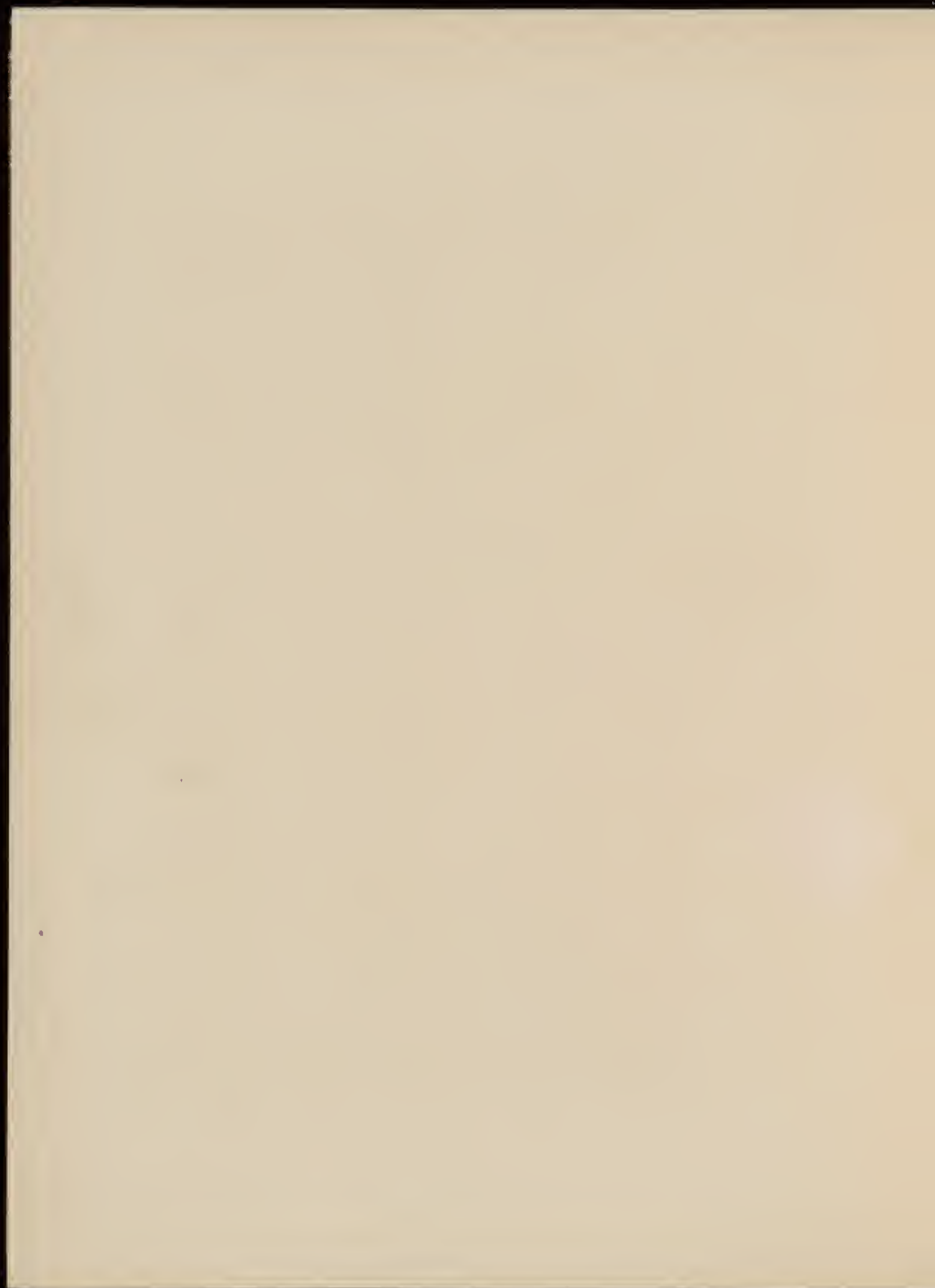


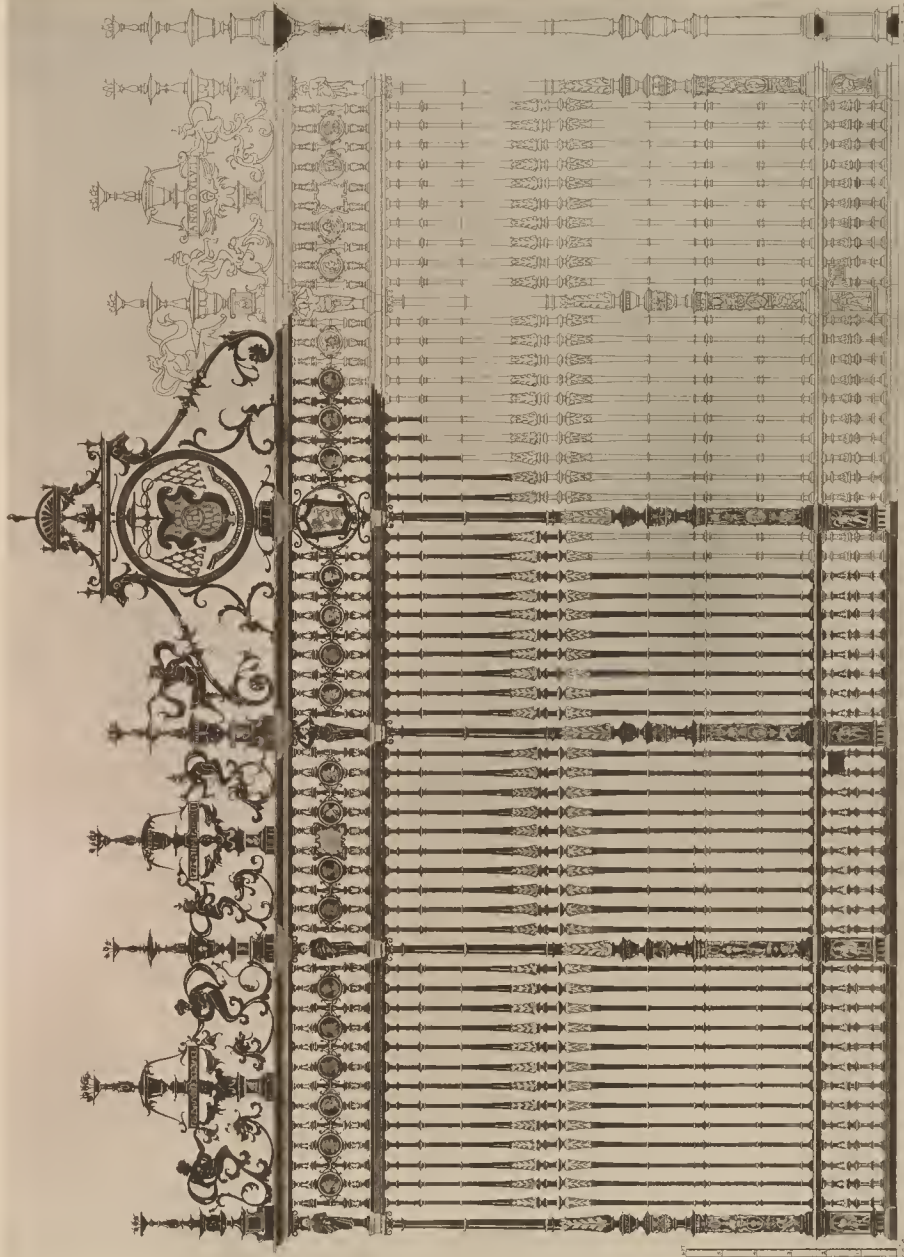
TOLEDO CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CORO

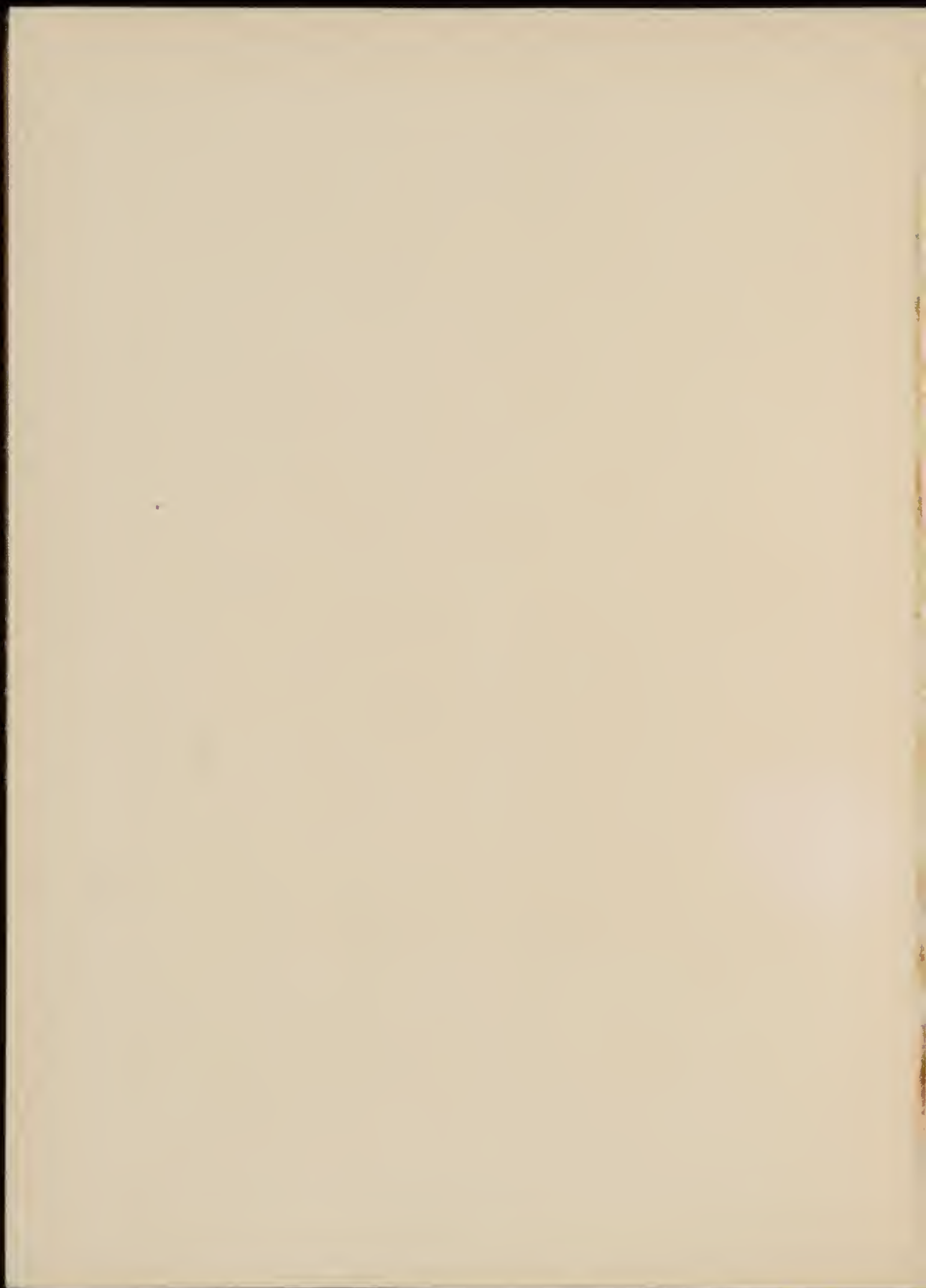
NO example in all Spain more clearly manifests that its maker was conversant with the allied crafts that went to the building of Renaissance Rejas. He was "El Maestre Domingo," generally called Domingo de Céspedes, born near Toledo. He had already made a number of remarkable screens for Toledo Cathedral when the chapter announced in 1540 that those for the altar mayor and coro would be competed for. Alonzo de Covarrubias, architect of the splendid Renaissance Archiepiscopal Palace at Alcalá de Henares, was professional adviser to the chapter, who chose Domingo's design for the coro and Francesco de Villalpando's for the altar. It is on record that the former made a complete model in wood before being finally commissioned to start the work.

Domingo indulged in only one deviation from strict Renaissance precepts—the placing of a colonnette directly in the middle of the composition, thus creating an even number of bays. Otherwise architectural conventionality prevails, somewhat to the sacrifice of spontaneity, yet with none of the stiffness and artificiality seen in some of the later ironwork of



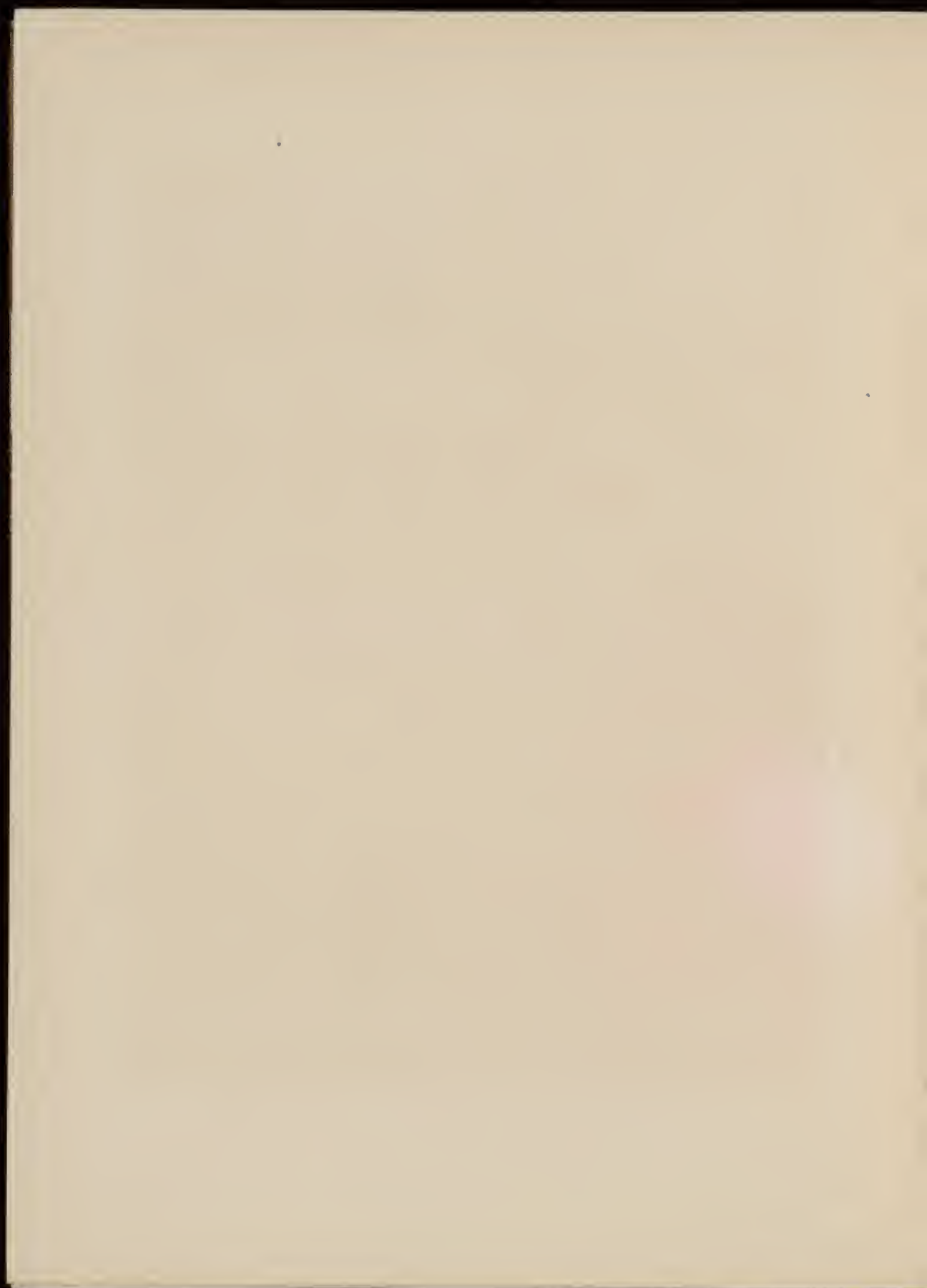


TOLEDO CATHEDRAL REJA OF THE CORO



the period. The composition is built up in purely orthodox manner—base or pedestal, columns, entablature, cresting. No ornamental horizontal bands are introduced to dispute the effectiveness of the frieze or to diminish the height of the uprights. For these last the spindled baluster only is used, though the same smith had preferred twisted bars in the screens of the baptistry and the chapel of the Holy Ghost made shortly before. Candelabra, heraldic ornament and foliation are kept subservient to structure in true architectural spirit.

Of the more original features one is the placing of the doors, which, instead of occupying the central two bays and forming the usual double entrance, are placed singly in the second and fifth bays; another is the encircling of the central motif formed of the Cardinal's escutcheon by a solid rim, a most difficult detail to execute. The colonnettes are also solid instead of having wooden cores. This entire work was originally silvered—for silver at that moment was pouring into Spain from the New World—and must have presented a novel appearance after the gilded and painted work previously done. But when Napoleon's plundering troops were reported approaching the city, the silvering was hidden under a coat of black paint which has never since been removed. Even in this sable garb the beauty of the design and proportion is striking; and the sombre *coro Reja*, though only twenty-five feet high, holds its own well with the many brilliant examples which this great church boasts.





PALENCIA CATHEDRAL
REJA OF THE CORO



PALENCIA CATHEDRAL

REJA OF THE CORO

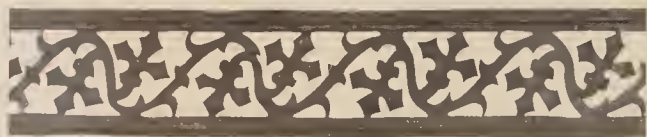
SOME writers give Gaspar Rodriguez of Segovia, others Francesco de Villalpando of Valladolid, as the author of this admirable work. Confusion also exists as to the date; 1522, 1555 and 1561 being variously given. The first mentioned, 1522, may be read twice on the marble base of the Reja and should be definitive; but the rest of the Latin inscription—"Adrian VI being Pope and Charles V being Emperor of the Romans and King of Spain, first of this name"—is disturbing, for Charles was not crowned Holy Roman Emperor until 1530. Furthermore, any one who has studied Reja development would be inclined to reject the first date, for the reason that not a trace of Gothic, such as may be observed in contemporary work, is to be seen here. It is pure Renaissance, free and knowing in composition, and decidedly later than the Reja of the capilla mayor at Toledo made by Villalpando between 1541 and 1548. If one accepts him as maker of both, he must have gone to Palencia after finishing his commission at Toledo.

In general composition the Palencia example is unquestion-

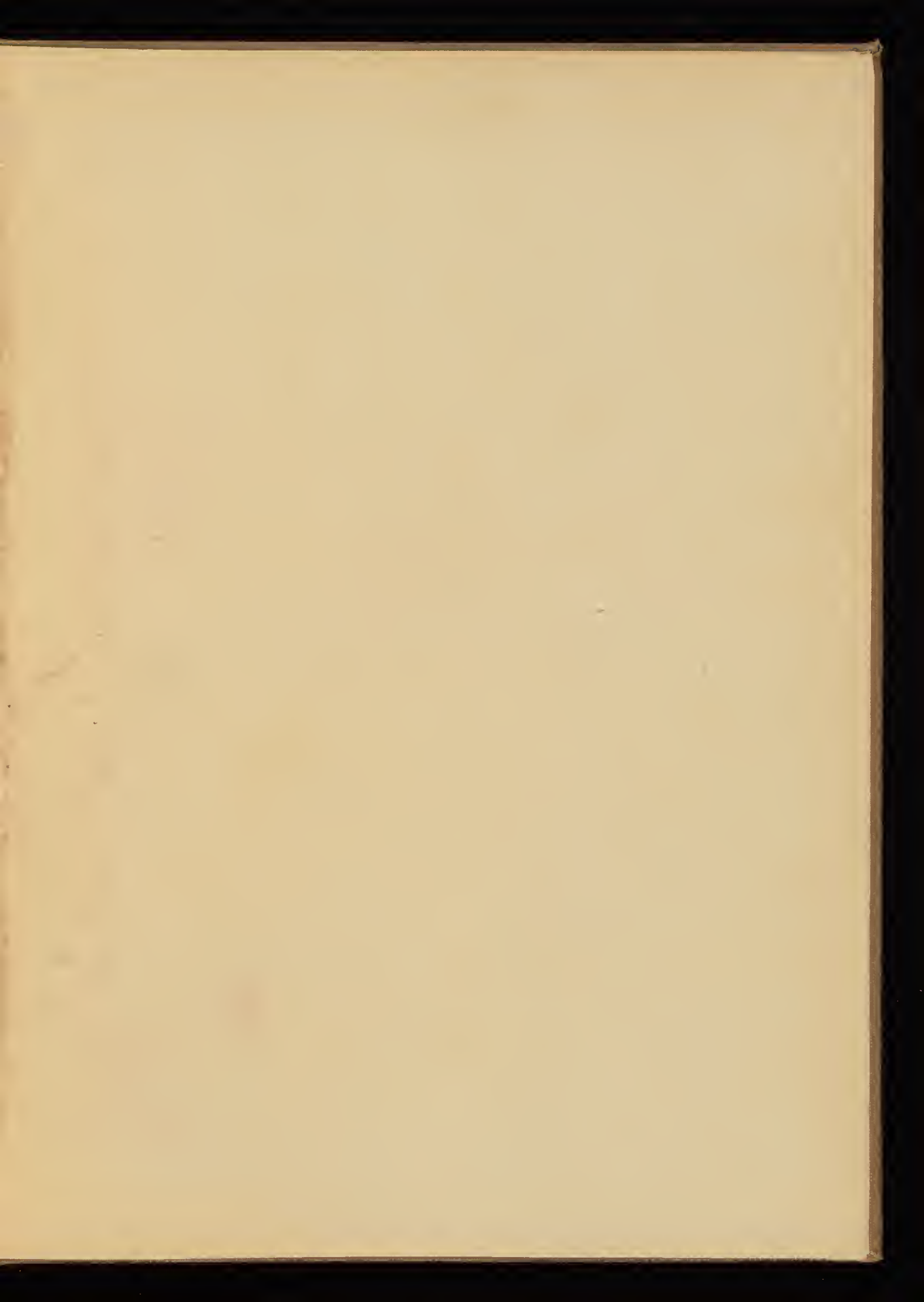


ably superior. A new feature to be observed here is the admirable way it is tied in architecturally with its surroundings by means of a marble parapet; this goes far towards making the great piece of ironwork seem like an integral part of the edifice.

A condition imposed on the Palencian rejeros, both for capilla mayor and coro, was that the arms of the prelate who donated them should be incorporated as a decorative motif; this in the present instance, along with the figures of the four evangelists with their emblems, makes for great richness. The crowning figures are of solid bronze, and the entire Reja is gilt and painted. The total height is nearly thirty feet; the width, thirty feet and six inches to the centers of the end colonnettes.











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