

THE FIRST TYPEFOUNDING IN MEXICO

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THE earliest known typefounding on the American continents is ascribed to the native press of the Jesuit Missions in Paraguay in the opening years of the eighteenth century. It is believed by competent authorities—among them José Toribio Medina and Lawrence C. Wroth—that the types used in the printing of these early Paraguayan doctrinal booklets were cut and cast by the Indians, who were reported to have great skill as artisans in varied lines.

The earliest unequivocal reference to typefounding in America, as has been pointed out by Mr. Wroth, is on the title-page of a Mexico City imprint of 1770: *Descripcion del Barreno Ingles* by Joseph Antonio de Alzate Y Ramirez. At the foot of the title-page we read: 'Impressa con las licencias 'necessarias, en Mexico en la Imprenta del Lic. D. Joseph de 'Jauregui, en la Calle de S. Bernardo, Año de 1770. Los 'caracteres de esta Impression han sido fabricados en esta 'ciudad por D. Franciso Xavier de Ocampo, a expensas de 'dicho D. Joseph de Jauregui.' Here is a clear statement, and of it Mr. Wroth writes: 'Except for the Paraguayan incident, 'there has been found no evidence that would suggest the 'occurrence of earlier attempts than this at letter casting in 'Spanish America. Certainly, unless the casting of type in 'Mexico in 1770 had been an uncommon operation, Joseph de 'Jauregui would not have proclaimed the completion of a font 'of native-made letters in so conspicuous a place as the title-page of a book.'

In the course of some studies on the early history of printing in Mexico, I have encountered a document which sets back

the date of the first typefounding in Mexico City over two hundred years and the first typefounding in the Americas over a hundred and fifty years. It will be recalled that the first printer in Mexico about whose work and record there is no question whatever was Juan Pablos, who was sent out from Seville as the agent of Juan Cromberger to operate a printing-office in the latter's name. There is some evidence tending to show that Esteban Martin had been printing in Mexico City about 1535, but as to Pablos the facts are perfectly clear, and we have record of an imprint of 1539.

Cromberger died soon after his printing-office was established in Mexico. Pablos continued to operate it for the heirs in none too energetic fashion, and in 1548 had obtained title to the establishment, details of the transaction not being known to us. In that year he applied for and obtained from the Viceroy the exclusive privilege for printing in Mexico for a period of six years.

The initial equipment of the Pablos-Cromberger office had been sent from Seville. In order to discourage competition it was expressly specified in the contract that any worn-out types should be melted up rather than sold. Perhaps in the course of a decade most of his types were worn out, and he faced the alternative of importing a new supply from Spain or of settling the question permanently by importing a typefounder. It was this latter course he determined upon.

In the notarial records of the city of Seville we find a contract between Antonio de Espinosa, a typefounder of Seville, and Juan Lopez, acting by power of attorney for Juan Pablos of Mexico City, whereby Espinosa agreed for certain remuneration to go to Mexico City to enter the employ of Pablos. He was to take with him Diego de Montoya, and the two engaged to 'cut and cast types' for Pablos.

It is apparent the agreement was carried through, for at least two reasons. First, we find Antonio de Espinosa in

Mexico City in 1559, Medina saying it is not known when he first arrived. In that year he went back to Spain to have the exclusive privilege held by Pablos abrogated and to secure for himself permission to print in Mexico. This permission he obtained on the plea that the prices charged by Pablos were prohibitive.

Secondly, soon after 1550 there came a radical change in the typography of the Pablos press. In all the books which I have seen printed in Mexico before that date gothic types only were used. From 1554 on we find a wide variety of new roman and italic types, some of them very handsome. The extent of the typographic equipment would support the presumption of a local type-supply.

All things considered, we seem justified in regarding Antonio de Espinosa as the first typefounder on the American continent.

The document on which our conclusions are based has been published by D. José Gestoso y Perez in his collection of documents on the early printers of Seville: *Noticias Ineditas de Impresores Sevillanos*, Sevilla, 1924. The portions relevant to the subject under discussion are here given in translation :

September 24, 1550

Pablo Juan

Let all who see this letter know that I, Antonio de Espinosa, typefounder, citizen of this city of Seville in the precinct of San Juan de La Palma, declare and acknowledge that I have agreed and covenanted with you, Juan Pablo, printer by decree of His Majesty in New Spain, now absent, and with you, Juan Lopez, viola player, just now arrived from New Spain and present, and by virtue of the power of attorney which you hold, which was made out before Diego de Ysla, His Majesty's notary in the city of Mexico, on the 25th of February of this year '50, and reads as follows : . . . [Here follows the power of attorney authorizing Lopez to make collections and execute business on behalf of Pablos.]

In such manner that I, the said Antonio de Espinosa, be bound and bind myself to go and take with me Diego de Montoya to the said city of Mexico, both of us to be with you, the said Juan Pablo, working in the said capacity of typefounder and cutter, from the day I enter the said city of Mexico for three full years, the

first three succeeding years. And in consideration thereof, you will give us food and drink, house and bed. And moreover, to me, the said Diego [obviously a clerical error for Antonio] de Espinosa, 150 ducats of gold for every year, and to the said Diego de Montoya through me, the said Antonio de Espinosa, 48 ducats every year, so that, in all, you are to give me, Antonio de Espinosa, every year 198 ducats of gold of 375 maravedis each, which you will pay me by thirds of the year without any litigation. And moreover, you are to give me and the said Diego de Montoya transportation and food, good and plenty, from here to Mexico, and obtain for us a satisfactory house. And moreover, you are to give me during . . . [lacuna in the original] the voyage to me and the said Diego de Montoya, from the time that we leave the port of this city until we arrive in Mexico, food to eat and eight ducats every month, payable in the said city of Mexico. And moreover, you are to give us in advance 40 ducats in this city, a month before we leave this city. And in this manner I promise and bind myself to go on the said voyage, and to take the said Diego de Montoya, and to fulfil all the aforesaid, under penalty of 50,000 maravedis, which the party breaking the contract shall pay to the party observing it, with costs. And I empower the courts to force and compel me to fulfil it properly and as if it were a thing arranged and adjudged in a lawsuit, in addition to which I renounce any laws in my favour. And inasmuch as I am older than seventeen and younger than twenty-five, I swear and promise by God, Holy Mary, the Holy Apostles, and the sign of the cross, which I make with the fingers of my hands in the presence of the notary and the undersigned witnesses, not to allege or claim any consideration because of my age, nor to ask restitution contrary to what is contained in this writing or part of it. And I, the said Juan Lopez, in the name of the said Juan Pablos, and by virtue of the said power of attorney, covenant that I bind the said Juan Pablos to all that is contained in this writing, and that he will do and carry out and pay as we say; and that I, the said Juan Lopez, bind myself, in my person and property, to pay and fulfil all that has been declared above, in Mexico as well as on the sea, and to give you and the said Antonio de Espinosa the said 40 ducats in this city, and all the aforementioned without failing you in any thing, under penalty of the said 50,000 maravedis. To this end, I empower the courts of Their Majesties, wherever they may be, to force me . . . [the legal formulas follow].

The document is dated at Seville, in the office of the aforementioned notary, Wednesday, 24 September 1550.