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[illegible]

Spain of three ships sailing from the New World. It stated that an amphora of wine was sold and "amphora" was replaced with the @ symbol as an abbreviation. Stabile concluded the @ symbol was a common medieval shorthand for units of measure in southern Europe, even if the precise units differed.Spanish journalist Jorge Romance then found an even earlier use: "I read about the 16th Century example of @ and remembered I had seen the symbol before when I was a history student at the University of Zaragoza. I went through my old papers and found customs records between Aragon and Castile in the 15th Century. It meant 'arroba' as a weight measure, and in this instance one arroba of wheat."But the earliest yet discovered reference to the @ symbol is a religious one. It features in a 1345 Bulgarian translation, [external](#) of a Greek chronicle. Held today in the Vatican Apostolic Library, it features the @ symbol in place of the A in the word Amen. Why it was used in this context is a mystery.It seems fitting then that the first email to be sent with the @ symbol has also been lost to time. When Tomlinson sent the first message to tomlinson@bbn.tenexa, he didn't realise what a game-changer it would be and so didn't bother writing, [external](#) it down.Subscribe to the BBC News Magazine's email newsletter, [external](#) to get articles sent to your inbox.