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## THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA, Yesterday and Today.



The Pyxis of Zamora is so called because it was part of the reliquary of Zamora Cathedral when it was discovered on 3 August 1904 (Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar, 1995) during one of the visits made by the couple Manuel Gómez-Moreno and Elena Rodríguez Bolívar when collating the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Zamora*. It is also known as the Pyxis of Subh or the Pyxis of al-Hakam II.

It is a cylindrical ivory box with a conical lid that closes with a hinge and a nielloed silver clasp, dating back to the second half of the 10th Century 901=1000 (before 964), with the following dimensions: Height = 17.70 cm; Diameter = 11 cm (Ceres: *Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España*, undated).

It is a piece of Caliphate ivory work that reflects the refinement and technical mastery achieved in the era of al-Andalus in the palace workshop of Medina Azahara, commissioned by the Umayyad Caliph al-Hakam II, also known as Alhaken II, for his favourite concubine, Subh (Aurora, in Christian sources), mother of the future heir Abd-al-Rahman, who died prematurely (Martínez Martín, 2015). It is engraved with the following inscription, "*God's blessing to the Imam, the slave of God, to Hakam Al Mustansir bi'llah the Prince of the Believers. From what has been ordered to be done for the lady mother of Prince 'Abd el Rahman, under the direction of Durri As Saghir, in the year 353 AH*". (Ceres: *Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España*, undated).

The entire surface of the piece is covered with *ataurique* decoration of serrated, fingered and ringed leaves and palmettes, interspersed with gazelles, peacocks and other birds, recreating the decorative elements of the palatine gardens of Medina Azahara (Ceres: *Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España*, undated; *Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, undated).

These types of ivory pots or boxes were exotic and exclusive objects, reserved for the Caliphate family and high-ranking state officials, and were intended to contain jewellery and perfumes; later, they were highly prized by Christians who reused them to contain relics in monasteries and cathedrals (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, undated).

In line with the above, although the date and donor are unknown (Martín Benito & Regueras, 2003), Gómez Moreno's hypothesis is that it was part of the booty obtained by Ferdinand III in the conquest of Cordoba (1230), who gave it to Zamora Cathedral, making it the most valuable piece in its reliquary (Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar, 1995).

It can now be physically seen in the National Archaeological Museum in Room 23, showcase 23.15, as part of its selection of pieces known as "essential" because they form part of our cultural heritage and because they are significant for many reasons: their exceptional beauty, their unique artistic characteristics, their technical perfection, their singular significance and/or their capacity to reveal some fundamental aspect about the societies that created them (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, undated).

Its 3D digital twin can also be seen as a piece representing Spain in the context of Europeana's *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture* project.

### Bibliography.

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