

The Pyxis of Zamora

A STORY TO TELL



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THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA.

A STORY TO TELL

BOOK OF MICRO-STORIES



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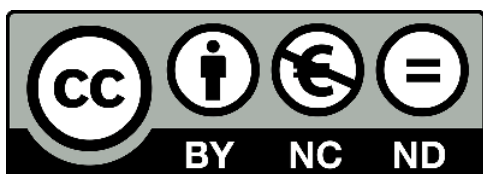


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Introduction

The Pyxis of Zamora. A Story to Tell is not a traditional narrative or a linear story to be followed from beginning to end. Instead, it is presented as a mosaic of scenes, a collection of small tesserae that, when joined together, form the complete picture of an object as enigmatic as it is fascinating: the Pyxis of Zamora. Each of these pieces is a story in itself, an independent fragment that invites the reader to immerse themselves in different moments and perspectives of the journey of this singular object.

The structure of this book connects with the very nature of the Pyxis of Zamora, whose history has been woven over the centuries through anecdotes, documents and, possibly, legends. It is therefore not surprising that some scenes contain explanations or details that are repeated in others; each fragment needs to place the reader in the precise context to understand the importance of that particular moment fully.

Through this book of micro-stories, we aim to bring the reader closer to the reality and mystery surrounding the Pyxis of Zamora, an object whose essence we can only glimpse through the perspective that the passage of time offers.

We hope that this journey through the short stories of this great history will arouse curiosity, astonishment and the desire to discover more about this silent witness of our past.

To conclude this introduction, we would like to point out that this book not only invites you to discover the many stories surrounding the Pyxis of Zamora, but also aims to complement the digital experience offered in the framework of the *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture* project, in the context of which the Pyxis of Zamora was the piece chosen to represent Spain in its first edition.

Our virtual exhibition, *The Pyxis of Zamora. A story to tell*¹, responds to the aim of bringing European cultural heritage to new audiences through 3D digitisation, allowing the Pyxis of Zamora to be explored from new perspectives and facilitating its dissemination beyond the physical limits of the National Archaeological Museum, where the original piece is kept.

Consequently, the mission of this book is to contribute to enriching the narrative and knowledge surrounding the Pyxis of Zamora, complementing its three-dimensional visualisation and connecting the historical narrative with the possibilities offered by new technologies for the dissemination and reuse of cultural heritage.

1. Available at: <https://expoidealab.es/s/el-bote-de-zamora/page/inicio>



1

AL-ANDALUS

THE ORIGINS

MEDINA AZAHARA.

The "Shining City", Yesterday and Today.



It was Abderramán III (al-Nasir), father of al-Hakam II who, after his proclamation as Caliph of Cordoba on 16 January 929, decided to establish a palatine city (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976; Torremocha Silva, 2023) and to begin the construction of Madinat al-Zahra (Medina Azahara), which was to be conceived as a symbol of the political and religious power of the Independent Caliphate of the West: the Umayyad Caliphate of al-Andalus (Manzano Moreno, 2024).

Some legends say that Abderramán III gave it the name of Zahara, his favourite wife. The truth is that, with the start of its construction, Abderramán III, prince of the believers, was fulfilling his obligation, as a good ruler, to create a city of splendour after having proclaimed himself Caliph and after having pacified al-Andalus (Martínez Enamorado, 2001). Accordingly, the city was built as the centre of government, political, and military power in the Cordoba of the Umayyads, the peak of Western Islamic civilisation in al-Andalus (UNESCO, 2018).

The so-called "Shining City" or Medina Azahara, began to be built on 19 November 936, located some 8 kilometres west of Cordoba, at the foot of the Yebel al-arús, or the Bride's Mount, as it was called by the Arab chroniclers (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976; Martínez Enamorado, 2001), in the Sierra de Córdoba.

It was the capital of al-Andalus at the time of its greatest magnificence, during the almost 25 years of the reign of Abderramán III, the 15 years of his son al-Hakam II and the first years of his grandson, heir and successor, Hisham II (Castejón Calderón, 1980).

Both the descriptions of the Arab authors and the evidence of its archaeological remains confirm that the layout, spaces and rooms of Medina Azahara as a whole, including the palace and its surroundings, were luxurious and sumptuous (Manzano Moreno, 2024).

Medina Azahara had a very short-lived existence. After a prosperous period of approximately 80 years, it was sacked during the civil war of succession in 1009-10, which marked the end of the Umayyad Caliphate's power.

After the death of al-Hakam II in 976, court factions had conspired to place his son Hisham II on the throne, whose 11 years of age precluded a minor from becoming Caliph, according to the rules of Islamic law (Manzano Moreno, 2024). This situation was exploited by the ambitious administrative official, Muhammad ibn Abi Amir (known as Almanzor), who seized absolute control of power.

Although Hisham II was recognised as Caliph, he spent much of his life secluded within the walls of Medina Azahara, isolated and with little contact with his subjects. It was Almanzor who truly held power and, through his policies, altered the foundations of the Caliphate of Cordoba, ultimately leading to its demise in 1031 (Manzano Moreno, 2024).

The remains of Medina Azahara fell into oblivion for more than a thousand years, until their rediscovery by Ricardo Velázquez Bosco, who was appointed Delegate-Director of the excavations that were to be carried out at the expense of the Spanish State in the ruins of the palaces of Medina Azahara (Velázquez Bosco, 1923).

Since 2018, the Caliphate city of Medina Azahara has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2018). Today it is an archaeological site, whose itinerary begins at the northern wall walkway, where there is a viewpoint from which you can see the Caliphate city and the surrounding area, following a route that goes from the upper to the lower part of the city (*Museos de Andalucía, Conjunto Arqueológico de Medina Azahara, 2025*) and which allows the visitor to approach what must have been the design, spaces and rooms of Medina Azahara in its period of maximum splendour.

The archaeological site also has a museum that opened to the public in 2019, as well as various infrastructures for the management of its heritage, which opened to the public in October 2009 (*Museos de Andalucía, Conjunto Arqueológico de Medina Azahara, 2025*) and which is the starting point for a visit to the archaeological site. The museum has different areas: a cultural, exhibition and didactic area, a conservation and research area and other services.

As part of the cultural, exhibition and didactic area, there is the auditorium, the permanent exhibition in which the most significant pieces from the collection of the Caliphate city are exhibited, as well as the specialised "Manuel Ocaña" Library, whose purpose is to satisfy the informative needs of related institutions and the general public, as well as to serve as an instrument to support scientific research (*Museos de Andalucía, Conjunto Arqueológico de Medina Azahara, 2025*). The library has a collection of documents that mainly focuses on the Islamic world of al-Andalus, with an emphasis on archaeology, covering different fields such as history, art, architecture, epigraphy and numismatics, among others. It also has numerous publications on the rest of the Islamic world and Medieval Europe (*Museos de Andalucía, Conjunto Arqueológico de Medina Azahara, 2025*).

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MEDINA AZAHARA.

Design, Spaces and Rooms.



The Caliphate city of Medina Azahara, designed to compete with Cordoba itself, featured a terraced design (Manzano Moreno, 2024), with the space distributed across three levels or terraces corresponding to different functions.

The upper level was allocated for the palatial residence, the seat of Caliphate power, with sectors linked to the administration and protocol of the Caliphate State. There was also an intermediate terrace with various official buildings, including the main garden areas; finally, a lower terrace, which constituted the medina proper (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976; Martínez Enamorado, 2001).

The descriptions of Arab authors indicate that the Medina Azahara complex, including the palace and its surroundings, was luxurious and sumptuous, featuring gardens watered by ponds, walls adorned with rich floral and geometric decorations, and marble paving (Manzano Moreno, 2024). It was configured as a complete urban complex with infrastructures such as bridges, communication routes, hydraulic systems, buildings and decorative elements, in which everyday objects typical of the western Islamic civilisation of al-Andalus at the time of its maximum splendour were used (UNESCO, 2018).

In the centre of the city, dominating all other buildings, stood the palace, the residence of the Caliph, where one of the Umayyad libraries - the palatine library of Medina Azahara - was located. At the foot of the Caliph's palace were all the offices of the bureaucracy of the Caliphate State, whose employees were numerous in relation to the administrative, governmental and diplomatic functions of the Caliphate State, the latter of which supported hundreds of copyists and miniaturists (illuminators of manuscripts).

The mosque of Medina Azahara was located on an intermediate site between the large court buildings and the public access areas, including souks and barracks. It was the first building to be erected in Medina Azahara, and the first preaching took place there in May 941 (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976).

It was in the central pavilion of the southern terrace, located in the central axis of the great medina, that visitors and guests awaited the Caliph's audience. Beforehand, they would have entered through the so-called *Puerta de las Bóvedas* (Gate of the Vaults), crossing some 200 m of gardens situated along the line of a walled enclosure that led to the Suda Gate, which gave access to the residence of the governor of the city, the first to receive distinguished visitors and to accompany them on their visit.

This southern terrace also housed the *Dar al-Mulk* or Royal House or House of Power, which was so named because it housed royal personages and was also the seat of the council of viziers or ministers (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976). On the upper roof or *as-Satih al-Mumárrad* was the set of three large *kibli* halls that formed the noble part of the medina where the most important events of the Caliphate's court took place, such as the swearing-in of new sovereigns, the arrival of ambassadors and other events of the Caliphate court of Cordoba.

Special mention should also be made of the room, which, in 1912, was named by its excavator, Ricardo Velázquez Bosco (1923), the Hall of Ambassadors. In the centre of the large upper terrace was the Throne Room - the private room of the Caliph - which was also called the Golden Room, described as a building with eight doors, whose arches were made of ebony and ivory, on the front of which was another small pavilion called "*the qubaila (cupola), which housed a basin filled with mercury, on whose surface the sun's rays were reflected on the upper construction, which seemed to rotate with the reflection*" (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala (1976, p. 38).

At the easternmost end of this great terrace was the *Máyalis al-Xarki* hall, also called *Almunis*, which, according to Castejón & Martínez de Arizala (1976), was the favourite hall of al-Hakam II, who received numerous ambassadors there during his reign and residence in this extraordinary palatine city (Manzano Moreno, 2019).

An account of many of these receptions is given in the *Palatine Annals of the Caliph of Cordoba al-Hakam II*, by Isa Ibn Ahmad Al-Razi, translated by García Gómez (1967).

Additionally, as part of the various spaces and rooms of Medina Azahara, there were also the royal workshops or trade houses (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976). These included pottery and ceramics, both domestic and everyday, and luxury ceramics, among which the green-manganese from Medina Azahara was particularly noteworthy, as well as the so-called "*tirazes*" or palatine workshops for making embroidery and precious fabrics, generally worked silk intended to adorn the costumes of princes and distinguished persons of al-Andalus (González Arévalo, 2024).

The Caliphate ivory carving workshops also stood out, where pieces such as knobs, jewellery boxes, ointments, and toiletries were usually manufactured. Among these, chests, elephant ivory urns, also known as ebonised boxes, were particularly noteworthy (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003). These chests featured profuse work on the ivory as a result of “*ataurique*” (a decorative technique characteristic of Caliphate art in Cordoba), based on stylised plant motifs, representations of animals and human scenes, including extensive dedications in *Kufic* inscriptions (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976). It is in these ivory carving workshops that our main piece was made: the Pyxis of Zamora, also known as the Pyxis of Subh or the Pyxis of al-Hakan II.

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AL-HAKAM II. The Cultured Caliph.



Al-Hakam II al Mustasir (*"He who seeks God's victorious help"*) (Vallvé, 1992), also known as Alhaken II, was born in Cordoba on 13 January 915. He was the second Umayyad Caliph of Cordoba, succeeding his father, Caliph Abderramán III. He died in the same city where he was born on 1 October 976.

His reign spanned almost 15 years, from 961 to 976, a period of splendour in al-Andalus, which was politically significant for being a relatively peaceful and prosperous period and, fundamentally, for its flourishing culture. In this regard, it should be noted that al-Hakam II was famous for possessing one of the largest libraries of the time, as well as for his work on the extension of the mosque in Cordoba, and for the extraordinary palatine city in which he lived - *Medinat al-Zahra* (Medina Azahara) - located just a few metres from the capital (Manzano Moreno, 2019).

Al-Hakam II was appointed successor at a very early age, at the age of four, and was groomed to rule by his father. However, he did not come to power until he was 46 years old. By the time he succeeded his father on 16 October 961, he already had a wealth of experience in governmental affairs that would help him preserve the hegemony of the Caliphate of Cordoba on the peninsula (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004). During the years of his reign, al-Hakam II was able to preserve the political stability and peace on the borders of al-Andalus, which his father had hard-won, and brought the lustre and prestige of the Umayyad Court of Cordoba to its maximum expression (Villanueva, 2023). This situation meant his personality stood out more for his love of literature and the arts than for his leadership abilities.

Thanks to his training as a crown prince, he managed to acquire a broad cultural background that combined scientific knowledge with that derived from the juridical-religious sciences, grammar, lexicography, rhetoric and poetry (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004). His figure has survived to the present day as that of a wise, highly cultured man, poet, mystic and bibliophile (Bueno García, 2009).

A sovereign who was concerned with knowledge and study, a scholar and patron of the arts, he assembled a considerable collection of books in Cordoba and actively patronised scholars he sent for from all over the world (Vallvé, 1992; Guichard, 2015).

The Pyxis of Zamora, also known as the Pyxis of Subh or Pyxis of al-Hakam II, was commissioned by the Umayyad Caliph for his favourite concubine, the mother of the future heir Abd-al-Rahman, who died prematurely (Martínez Martín, 2015). Its recipient was Subh (Aurora, in Christian sources), one of the most influential women in Umayyad Cordoba due to her participation in the political life of the Caliphate, both in the time of al-Hakam II and that of the future heir, his son Hisham II, for whom she was regent with the support of his tutor and minister, Muhammad ibn Abi Amir, the future Almanzor (Vallvé, 1992; Mosquera & Fernández, 2018).

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SUBH.

The Recipient of the Pyxis.



The Pyxis of Zamora, also known as the Pyxis of Subh or the Pyxis of al-Hakan II, was commissioned by the Umayyad Caliph in 964 as a gift for Subh, his favourite concubine, two years after the birth of his first son, Prince Abd-al-Rahman, who would have been the future heir (Abd-al-Rahman) had he not died prematurely at the age of eight (Martínez Martín, 2015).

Its recipient was thus her - Subh (Aurora in Christian sources).

But who was she?

Her origin is uncertain, although her nisba (al-Baškunsīya), which indicates the family or geographical origin in Arabic onomastics, defines her as a woman from the north of the Iberian Peninsula, probably from Vascona or Navarre (Marín Niño, 1987; Rabasco García, 2024), although it is not known with certainty whether she was born there, whether she was a captive or whether she had been bought as a slave (Marín Niño, 1997). It is estimated that she was born around 944 (Galán & Galindo, 2005).

It seems that Subh had been educated from childhood to become a singing slave, which suggests that she spent a good part of her early years in al-Andalus, probably in Cordoba, receiving training in Arabic music and poetry (Marín Niño, 1997). However, it is not known whether she received this education in the Umayyad citadel as a child, or whether it was acquired from the Caliph once she had completed her training.

The first known record of Subh coincides with the year of the birth of her firstborn son, Abd-al-Rahman, in 962. It is precisely at this time that Subh changed her social status from a slave and concubine of Caliph al-Hakan II to *Umm Walad* (mother of the Caliph's son), *sayyida* or Lady of the Citadel, an honorary title reserved for the mother of the heir (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, 2025) and a favourite.

It is estimated that Subh was 17 years old when al-Hakan II attained the Caliphate, becoming the mother of Abd-al-Rahman at the age of 18 and of her second son, Hixam II, at 21 (Galán & Galindo, 2005).

Subh went from absolute anonymity to assuming Caliphate power (Rabasco García, 2024), becoming a female symbol of it (Torreras Palacio, 2024) for a long period at the end of the 10th Century.

In fact, she became one of the most influential women in Umayyad Cordoba due to her participation in the political life of the Caliphate, both in the time of al-Hakan II and of the future heir, her second son Hixam II, after his death in 976, of whom she was regent with the initial support of his tutor and minister, Muhammad ibn Abi Amir, the future Almanzor (Vallvé, 1992; Mosquera & Fernández, 2018). Subh became an instrument used by Almanzor in his rise to power (Marín Niño, 1997), who obtained successive posts and appointments through her intervention.

From the death of al-Hakan II in 976, leaving an 11-year-old boy as his heir, until 996, when Subh definitely broke with Almanzor, Subh's political actions were aimed at preserving her son's inheritance. Subh died in 998, only a year after the events that led to her removal from power when Almanzor forced her son Hixam II renew his oath to delegate his power to the Amirids, thus sealing the end of the Umayyad dynasty (Marín Niño, 1997).

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HISHAM II. The Child Caliph.



On the death of Caliph al-Hakan II, his heir and successor, Hisham II or Hixam II, occupied the Umayyad throne. Hisham II, son of al-Hakan II and his concubine Subh, was born in 965 in Cordoba, one year after the production of the Pyxis of Zamora (Puerta Vílchez, 2013).

Hisham II was only 11 years old when his father died and, for the first time in the history of al-Andalus, a child reigned. He had to delegate his powers to Al-Mushafi, his prime minister or *hayih* (Vallvé, 1992). The appointment of Hisham II led to great palace intrigues and conspiracies, motivated by the controversy that he was a minor, as this violated Islamic tradition, which stipulated that a Caliph should be an adult and capable of exercising his religious and political functions.

His premature succession led to an initial conspiracy against his appointment, with some detractors supporting the proposal to elevate his uncle Al-Mughira, the younger brother of al-Hakam II, to power, as an alternative. However, they failed; his mother, Subh, widow of al-Hakam II, the prime minister Al-Mushafi, aided by Muhammad ibn Abi Amir, the Almanzor of the Christian chronicles, defended the rights of the younger Hixam and proclaimed him the third Umayyad Caliph (Calvo Poyato, 2013; Collins, 2013). Al-Mughira would be ruthlessly eliminated by Almanzor, who personally arranged for his assassination (Guichard, 2015).

With Subh's support, Almanzor's career was meteoric. Ibn Hayyan, the primary source of information on the period, suggests that they were lovers and that they had already had relations during the lifetime of al-Hakam II, during which Almanzor transitioned from being a simple writer of memorials to becoming the administrator of the assets of the younger Hisham (Calvo Poyato, 2013).

Hisham II had a theoretical reign of 33 years (976-1009), but the royal power and his person would be controlled by different regents (Valencia, 2011), from his mother Subh, to the vizier Al-Mushafi, and fundamentally Almanzor, who used him as a symbolic figure while consolidating his power.

His reign marked the beginning of the Umayyad decline in al-Andalus, as he was unable to exercise leadership worthy of his grandfather, Caliph Abderramán III, and his father, al-Hakam II.

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DURRI. The Boy.



The Pyxis of Zamora contains the following inscription in beautiful *Kufic* characters, clearly visible in the plain border running along the base of the lid: “*God's blessing to Imam, the slave of God, Al 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.*” (Galán & Galindo, 2005; Puerta Vílchez, 2013; Martínez Martín, 2015).

From this inscription, we can extract significant information about its origin. Specifically, it indicates that the gift was made by Caliph al-Hakam II to the mother of his future heir, Abd-al-Rahman, and to his concubine, Subh, in the year 964 AD (Hegira 353 AH) (Mosquera & Fernández, 2018). It also provides us with another interesting piece of information, “*under the direction of Durri As Saghir*”. But who was this person?

Durri As Saghir, also known as Al-Durri al-Sagir or Al-Durri al-Asgar or, more commonly, as Durri “The Boy” or “The Little One”, was a trusted servant and treasurer of Caliph Al-Hakam II. Durri is a recognised figure in the primary written sources of the period, such as Ibn Hayyan's (1967) work, the *Muqtabis*, where the author repeatedly cites this official at dates close to the making of the Caliph's Pyxis.

In his function as a high-ranking official, he directed, on behalf of the Umayyad Caliph, the supervision of significant architectural works, such as the minaret of a mosque, the carving of the capitals of Medina Azahara and, obviously, the production of some aulic or palatial ivory carvings, such as the Pyxis of Zamora (Puerta Vílchez, 2013; Luque, 2020).

His task, as a delegate of the Caliph, was to represent the caliphate institution and was nominally responsible for commissioning works from his position as a civil servant in the Umayyad administration. He wielded the ultimate jurisdiction over the sophisticated products produced in the State ebony workshop, exercising a supervisory or “high inspection” function over them. However, he did not make specific artistic decisions regarding ebony products (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2012).

Durri was a member of the *Banu Durri* - an influential family of Slavic descent that provided the Caliphate administration with prominent officials (Meouk, 1991, cited by Silva Santa-Cruz, 2012). The Slavs or *siqlabí* were slaves from some Christian territories (Vidal Castro, 2008).

A Slav who accumulated so much wealth that he had an *almunia* [farming estate] called *al-Rumaniyya* built near the palatine city of Medina Azahara. This estate was equipped with gardens, servants and beasts of burden, which Durri donated to the sovereign upon his death (Villanueva, 2023). In the chronicle of the *Muqtabis* (Ibn Hayyan, 1967), reference is made to the fall from grace before the Caliph of Durri, “The Boy” for the poor performance of his duties, which led to his dismissal and exile outside the palatine city. However, thanks to the intervention of the Crown Prince Hisham II, he regained the confidence of the Caliph and was restored to office.

During the Caliphate of Hisham II, he was appointed Governor of Baeza. During his rule in Baeza, he was accused of prevarication (Vallvé Bermejo, 2002), and was executed by order of Almanzor, who considered him to be involved in the Slavic uprising that triggered the Cordoban revolution (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2012) that deposed the Caliph Hisham II in 1009 (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2012).

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THE CALIPHAL *KUFIC* SCRIPT.



On the plain border that runs along the base of the lid of the Pyxis of Zamora we can find, in *Kufic* characters, the following inscription: "God's blessing to the Imam, the slave of God, Al 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". (Galán & Galindo, 2005; Puerta Vílchez, 2013; Martínez Martín, 2015).

Historically linked to the city of Kufa in present-day Iraq, the *Kufic* script, given the importance Islam assigns to the written word, is one of the most outstanding elements of the archaeological manifestations of al-Andalus (Martínez Enamorado, 2003). Along with *ataurique* work, *Kufic* characters are a reliable dating system for inscriptions where the date is missing or badly damaged (Martínez Enamorado, 2003).

Three types can be distinguished in the Umayyad period: archaic *Kufic* (8th and 9th Centuries), flowery *Kufic* (second half of the 9th Century and 10th Century) and simple *Kufic* (mid-10th Century to the end of the Caliphate period) (Martínez Enamorado, 2003).

Simple *Kufic* script developed during the period of al-Hakam II. This is a type of writing that stands out for its total elimination of floral decorations, characteristic of the flowery *Kufic*, and instead returns to a *Kufic* script that is reminiscent of the archaic *Kufic* in its simplicity and sobriety. The first examples of this new style can be found in the capitals of the Alcazar of Cordoba from 964 to 965 and in the Pyxis of Zamora (Martínez Enamorado, 2003). However, the consolidation of simple *Kufic* is best reflected in the inscriptions commemorating the extension work on the Great Mosque of Cordoba, carried out by order of al-Hakam II (Martínez Núñez, 1997).

It is worth noting that the inscription on the Pyxis of Zamora is an elegant, sober and well-executed design, as there are no anomalies between the lines. It clearly shows the new elegance acquired by the simple *Kufic* through the ideal proportion between the height and thickness of the graphemes (Martínez Núñez, 1997).

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THE ART OF IVORY CARVING.



Ivory carving is the decorative art of carving in ivory. It is usually very delicate and meticulous work, requiring great precision and detail, as it generally involves working with single pieces of small or medium size, which entails the difficulties associated with the use and shape of this select material.

-curvature, hardness, colour, etc.-

Ivory is a bony material from the teeth and tusks of various vertebrate animals, especially elephants, although its origins may be varied. It is a solid, dense, heavy material that, mainly because of its scarcity and difficulty in obtaining it, became one of the most prized raw materials for adornment and the production of sumptuous objects (Marfil *et al.*, 2018).

Since ancient times, this exquisite and select material has been considered of great value, both artistically and economically. For this reason, it was recognised and popularly called "white gold", due to its aesthetic colour, which largely depends on the quality and origin of the material (Marfil *et al.*, 2018).

The Pyxis of Zamora is a piece of ivory, from an elephant tusk, featuring silver details and of exceptional artistic quality. This ivory pyxis (small casket) reflects the refinement and technical mastery achieved during the al-Andalus period in the Caliphate workshops of Medina Azahara. It is composed of or divided into two elements or pieces of ivory, which make up the body and the lid, sculpted with a beak and bevel (Puerta Vílchez, 2013).

Ivory pieces were crafted in qualified artistic workshops under the exclusive authority of the Caliph, who utilised this rare and expensive raw material that was difficult to obtain. During this period, there was great interest in the production of high-value objects, which were considered precious or luxurious at the time (Holod, 1992).

Giving sumptuous gifts was an essential activity in the main Islamic courts, as part of the sovereign's representative and promotional strategy (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2014).

These gifts were used as cases for the presentation of rich materials - such as fragrances and jewels - that complemented and increased the monetary value of the gift, due to their rarity, their extraordinary beauty and the exotic character of the raw material. They were also conceived with a certain will to last, after the fragrances had been consumed or the precious stones had been used (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2014).

The pieces were also everyday objects, designed to delight the recipient and showcase proximity to the Caliphate's power. But they were by no means mere vessels, as they carried multiple meanings and often bore the names and titles of the giver and the recipient, as well as the date when the gift was made (Holod, 1992).

The recipients of these ivory pieces, their patrons and probably the artists who made them were members of the Caliph's inner circle, and the place where they were made, the ivory workshops of the palatial city of Medina Azahara, made these works an expression of Caliphal power (Zozaya, 1998).

These ivory pieces are generally finely decorated with leafage ornamentation and sometimes depict animals or human figures, although these are rare. The carvings, made using the *ataurique* technique, featured floral details and stylised leafage forms, and were primarily intended for the women of the court, symbolising fertility and the continuity of the dynastic line of the Caliph. Conversely, decoration with human or animal figures was primarily intended for or linked to male power, bearing messages more directly related to the exercise of government (Monteira Arias, 2018). Over time, Caliphal ivory caskets and jars (pyxis) were frequently reused as reliquaries in church treasuries and occasionally mutilated or modified with artistic additions (Monteira Arias, 2018).

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ATAURIQUE.



Ataurique is a decorative technique characteristic of Caliphate art in Cordoba, based on stylised leafage motifs. Leafage decoration in al-Andalus was used as ornamentation on architectural elements such as walls, jambs, capitals, friezes and the voussoirs of arches (Puerta Vílchez, 2013). It was also used in ceramics, textiles, metals and polychrome woodwork.

However, the evolution of leafage ornamentation is most evident on ivory. Leafage forms cover the entire area as the central theme (Gregorio & Robledo, 1995). In smaller and more delicate ivory pieces, they may be almost completely covered with acanthus leaves, palmettes, flowers, pineapples, pomegranates, dates and other figures.

The Pyxis of Zamora is an excellent example of Caliphate ivory work, with the application of *ataurique* on ivory. The use of these leafage forms had a profound symbolism and depended on the piece being carved. At any event, the *ataurique* transcended the merely ornamental, becoming an excellent icon of expression of the political, religious and cultural power of Caliphate art.

The surface of the Pyxis of Zamora is carved in an ordered geometric structure and decorated with significant elements, ringed leaves, acanthus palmettes and small flowers interspersed with gazelles and birds, including peacocks which, in the symbolism of medieval art, represented pride (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976). It is worth noting that, for the first time, animals appear in Cordoban ivory artwork (Galán & Galindo, 2005).

Their decorations seem to follow the decorative line of Medina Azahara. The four-petal flowers, which have been interpreted as jasmine or perhaps orange blossom, are characteristic of the Caliphate court carver Khalaf (Galán & Galindo, 2005). Although the Pyxis of Zamora is not signed by this carver and cannot thus be attributed to him, other pyxides, such as the one in the *Hispanic Society* in New York and the small box in Fitero (Navarre), are ivory works signed by Khalaf and have a similar style and characteristics (Puerta Vílchez, 2013).

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THE NIELLO TECHNIQUE.



The lid of the Pyxis of Zamora is decorated using the niello or enamelling technique. It was customary to complete the decoration of some pieces of ivory work with clasps that contained nielloed details, pictures or areas in black or blue, which contrasted with the white of the ivory.

Niello is a goldsmith's technique applied to metal by inlaying a black enamel into grooves or incisions previously made in the surface (Moss, 1953), which is then fixed to the piece by applying heat.

This technique enjoyed great favour in the Caliphate period, being widely used in the workshops of Medina Azahara, which allowed for colour effects in certain elements of the ironwork on chests and pyxides (Makariou, 2000).

Niel was the paste obtained by mixing silver, copper, lead and sulphur (Cambil Campaña, 2014). Sulphur and, frequently, boron salt were used to facilitate the melting of the metals.

The paste was melted and, once cooled, ground to a fine consistency so that it could be used to fill in the metal incised decorations. These decorations were often geometric, leafage or animal motifs and, in the case of pyxides, were made on the clasps with a dual functional and decorative purpose.

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ICONOGRAPHY on the Pyxis of Zamora.



The Pyxis of Zamora is the first example in Andalusian ivory artwork of animals carved on its surface (Galán & Galindo, 2005a). Among the ornamental animal figures that can be found, interspersed with other leafage elements common to the *ataurique* technique, are peacocks, gazelles and other small birds.

This type of theme in the decoration, with soft and delicate motifs, finds a certain parallel in other gifts to Subh, mother of the heir Hixam II and favourite of al-Hakam II, as well as in other gifts to female recipients. Peaceful ornaments, very different from the gifts addressed to men, which present an iconography with hunting or fighting scenes and fierce and violent animals such as lions, hawks, eagles or cheetahs (Galán & Galindo, 2005b; Aranda, 2010).

These pieces became true emblems of sovereignty and the motifs that decorated them conveyed messages associated with power. Ivory pieces with leafage ornamentation were primarily intended for women of the court, symbolising fertility and the continuation of the dynastic line of the Caliph.

The motifs featuring wild animals, sometimes in combat, attacking, or chasing prey, were primarily linked to male power, carrying messages that directly referred to the exercise of government (Monteira Arias, 2018; Silva Santa-Cruz, 2014). They embodied a visual and symbolic metaphor of the Caliph's authority, with an explicit political nature, which graphically expressed the dominating force and power of the sovereign, as well as his struggle against everything that represented evil (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2014).

The most outstanding figure on the pyxis, due to its size and sophisticated representation, is that of the peacock. In the central part of the pyxis, in vertical symmetry, there are two pairs of peacocks, front and back of the cylindrical structure, with erect crests and long tails, facing each other sweetly and surrounded by "trees of life", stems and plant motifs that seem to symbolise a lush orchard or earthly paradise.

The peacock is one of the most widely represented birds in Eastern and Western art and, given its tranquil character, it has been associated with women. This figurative element has been found on everyday objects for personal use, such as combs, pots, and jewellery (Canillas del Rey, 2021). The peacock was also a common animal in the gardens of Medina Azahara, as well as in Cordoban Muslim art (Galán & Galindo, 2011).

Other animals, such as gazelles and deer, prevalent in decorative objects such as chests, pots, combs and textiles, also in symmetrical compositions, were associated with beauty, purity and the natural environment of the Islamic paradise.

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FRAGRANCES and Andalusian perfumes.



One of the functions for which the Pyxis of Zamora could be used, beyond its prized value as an official present and its aesthetic beauty, was as a container for exotic perfumes.

Perfumes, aromas and special essences were a sign of social distinction in al-Andalus, only within the reach of the nobility and the privileged, as they tended to have a high economic value due to their uniqueness and the difficulty in obtaining the raw material from which they were made, which was imported from the East.

In al-Andalus, the art of using aromatic substances developed from aesthetic, sensual and medicinal points of view. These essences were considered to be a sensory stimulus and to invigorate the brain, beneficial to health and highly appreciated by the Andalusian population of all social classes (Silva Santa-Cruz, 2013).

Many of these cosmetic and therapeutic compounds, such as balms, ointments, lotions and colognes, were prepared in pharmacies, the most famous of which was the pharmacy (*Jizanat al-adwiya*) of Medina Azahara (Holob, 1992). However, there were also perfumers who worked for more modest classes, in the streets, where they prepared perfumes or lotions in full view of customers (Greus, 1988).

Important people, close to power, both men and women, used perfumes in sprays and deodorants, often after bathing. They preferred sweet, thick, Oriental perfumes, such as crumbled ambergris and natural amber, as well as civet, perfumed oils, flower essences like roses and violets, and lemon and sandalwood essences (Greus, 1988).

Distinguished women devoted much of their time to personal grooming and had dressing tables in their rooms with containers and cases containing different perfumes, as well as brushes, ivory combs, henna for painting their nails and scented chewing gum for their breath (Greus, 1988).

Clothes, halls and rooms were also perfumed, spreading the scents of these highly prized fragrances over them. Scented candles were also used for special occasions and incense was burnt regularly. Items such as censers for burning perfumes, incense burners for burning incense and incense holders, small flasks that were easy to transport and handle were widespread and were used to preserve liquid essences (Girona Calvé, 2022). Not forgetting the sumptuous objects of ivory work, pyxides, chests and other luxurious ivories, which could also be used to contain perfumes.

The main bases for many of these aromatic preparations were amber, musk and camphor, which came from very distant lands and had to undergo long journeys before reaching their destination (Holob, 1992; Girona Calvé, 2022), which meant that they were imported at very high prices and were considered luxurious gifts, comparable to large quantities of gold, silver or silk (Holob, 1992).

Musk, an essence of animal origin, was used in the form of a liquid essence or white stone, which was kept in a sachet and hung around the neck under clothing (Greus, 1988). Camphor, a vegetable essence, was used for the preparation of perfumes based on moss powder and sandalwood oil, accompanied by apple water or mixed with rose water, and is also commonly found as a basic component in the production of medicines (for the eyes, gums or as a dentifrice) (Girona Calvé, 2022).

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THE LIBRARIES of the Umayyads.



Abderramán III moved the so-called palace library or royal library from the library of the Alcazar of Cordoba where he had resided to the new city of Medina Azahara, where he would take up residence, once the work on the palatine residence of the Prince of the Believers and his Alcazar (known as *Dar al-Mulk* or House of Power) had been completed.

The transfer of this palatine library to Medina Azahara coincided with the location in the new capital of the Caliphate of the buildings destined to be the seat of government and administration, the mint or factory where coins were minted, as well as the transfer there of Abderramán III himself, accompanied by his family, his concubines, the chamberlain, the viziers with their government departments, the Grand Imam of the Aljama Mosque and his personal guard. This palatine library was directed by Talid al-Qurtubid and was worked on by personalities such as Lubna of Cordoba and Fatima of Cordoba.

Talid al-Qurtubi, a senior palace employee, was appointed to oversee the palatine library of Medina Azahara by Abderramán III (Torremocha Silva, 2023). As chief librarian, he was responsible for the formation and maintenance of the index and the books on the shelves (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925).

Lubna of Cordoba was a Christian slave who was manumitted, i.e. freed from slavery, in the time of the Caliph Abderramán III. Although it is not known for certain when she was born in the 10th Century, she grew up within the walls of Medina Azahara and became an intellectual, specialising in Arabic grammar, calligraphy and metrics. She performed multiple functions in the palatine library located in Medina Azahara by Abderramán III, organising the library and cataloguing and classifying its collections (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Abderramán III's sons, the princes Mohammed and al-Hakan, inherited their father's love of books and both emulated him, even competing to see which of the two would build up a more select and extensive library.

On the death of Mohammed, his library was inherited by his brother al-Hakan, who would become al-Hakan II, who, on the death of his father in 962, would bring together three libraries: the palace library (in which the collections treasured by his ancestors were kept), that of his brother Mohammed and his own, becoming the "most passionate bibliophile of the family" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p. 82).

The space occupied by the palatine library in Medina Azahara was already cramped and, according to Ribera & Tarragó (1925), the books lay piled up in the rooms and could not fit as many as were being added to daily; so another place had to be found. The move, "with a good number of people working assiduously, lasted six whole months" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p.107).

Al-Hakan II then founded the Great Library of Cordoba in one of the renovated pavilions of the old Alcazar of Cordoba, appointing Khalid ben Idris, a bibliophile and translator known by the nickname of "the intelligent of al-Andalus", as its director (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Lubna of Cordoba was then appointed curator of the Great Library of Cordoba, also serving as al-Hakan II's personal secretary. She would supervise the acquisition, copying, translation, criticism and annotation of manuscripts (Costero Quiroga, 2023; Radio Televisión Española, 2022; Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Working alongside Lubna of Cordoba was Fatima of Cordoba, who was also a manumitted slave in the time of the Caliph Abderramán III. She was a copyist and in charge of the copying, translation and restoration workshops of the Great Library of Cordoba. She created an innovative system of cataloguing that recorded all the books, making it easier to see their subjects, contents and locations in the various rooms, bookcases, and shelves. She was also responsible for supervising the numerous workshops and smaller libraries established by Caliph al-Hakan II (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Talid al-Qurtubid would go on to become the curator of the Great Library of Cordoba founded by al-Hakan II. He worked there under the direction of Khalid ben Idris, along with Lubna of Cordoba and Fatima of Cordoba. The functions of all these collaborators also involved organising and carrying out trips to the East to bring books acquired in cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, Alexandria, Cairo, Constantinople and Basra to Cordoba with the mission of searching for books to enrich and increase the bibliographic collection (Capdevila, 1925; Dozy, 1877; Torremocha Silva, 2023).

According to Dozy (1877), the catalogue of the Great Library of Cordoba was composed of 44 notebooks, each containing 20 sheets, according to some, or 50, according to others. Some writers estimated that the number of volumes was as high as 400,000. It included works on philosophy, astronomy, medicine, history, genealogy and poetry.

Among the most important texts that made up the collection were, to cite some of the most significant, Dioscorides' "*De materia medica*" and Galen's "*Liber de curandi ratione per sanguinis missionem*" (Torremocha Silva, 2023). Al-Hakan II would have read them all and, furthermore, he would have made notes on most of them (Dozy, 1877), writing at the beginning or end of each book, the name, the moniker, the patronymic name of the author, his family, his tribe, the year of his birth and death and the anecdotes about him.

In the Great Library of Cordoba founded by al-Hakan II, the best bookbinders, illuminators and draughtsmen worked continuously "decorating the books that skilful copyists wrote and then handing them over to a board of splendidly paid scholars who collated and corrected them" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p.107). In other words, in addition to its function as a repository of knowledge, the library had a workshop of copyists, miniaturists and bookbinders engaged in the reproduction and restoration of books (Pavía Fernández, 2014).

However, that era of cultural splendour did not last long and gave way to an era of barbarism, marked by the plundering and burning of libraries and palaces. Sadly, the Great Library of Cordoba came to a tragic end when Almanzor allowed the most radical ulema to expurgate the most precious library in the West to gain his support and trust, burning the works that were considered opposed to the orthodox precepts of Islam (Pimentel, 2016; Ors, 2019; Pavía Fernández, 2014).

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2

ZAMORA

THE DISCOVERY AND SALE

FERDINAND III

The Saint.



Ferdinand III of Castile (1201-1252), also known as "the Saint", was a key figure in medieval Spanish history.

Prince Ferdinand, son of Alfonso IX and Berenguela of Castile, was born in Peleas de Arriba, in the province of Zamora, in 1201. He inherited the throne of Castile from his mother, Queen Berenguela, and was proclaimed king in Valladolid in 1217 (Martínez Díez, 1993).

But a century earlier, in 1157, King Alfonso VII, the Emperor, decided to divide his kingdom among his sons. His first-born son, Sancho III, was left with Castile and Toledo and his other son, Ferdinand II, with the Kingdom of Leon and Galicia. Ferdinand III, in 1230, reunited them as a single kingdom.

He was an outstanding leader in promoting the Reconquista, significantly expanding the Christian kingdoms. He reconquered important cities such as Cordoba (1236), Jaen (1246) and Seville (1248). The conquest of Cordoba, which took place between December 1235 and June 1236, was his most outstanding achievement. The fall of the capital, which had been the centre of al-Andalus for centuries and a symbol of Muslim power, was a vitally important milestone for the Reconquista.

From a social perspective, Ferdinand III replaced Latin with Castilian as the official language, promoted the creation of several legal treaties, and ordered the erection of the two jewels of Spanish Gothic architecture: the cathedrals of Burgos and Leon (Santamaría, 2021).

He died in the Alcazar of Seville in 1252. He was canonised in 1671 by Pope Clement X, which earned him the nickname of "the Saint" (Castañeda Delgado, 1994).

Ferdinand III's relationship with the Pyxis of Zamora is associated precisely with the conquest of Córdoba. However, no documents exist that clearly confirm the relationship between the monarch and the piece, or its arrival at Zamora Cathedral, as the date and donor are unknown.

Manuel Gómez Moreno, author of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain*, assumed that it was part of the booty obtained by Ferdinand III in the conquest of Cordoba, and that the King would hand it over as a gift to Zamora Cathedral.

María Elena Gómez-Moreno (1995) relates this event as follows: "*Royal hands gave it as a precious gift to Zamora Cathedral, to whose reliquary it passed as a guardian of stones from the Holy Land, and there it remained hidden from prying eyes*".

And, in the reliquary of the Cathedral, supposedly containing "*stones from the Holy Places*", it remained sheltered from prying eyes for nearly seven centuries (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

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THE PYXIS in Zamora Cathedral.



The Pyxis of Zamora was made during the Umayyad period, in the year 964, and possibly did not reach Zamora until the capture of Cordoba. However, it is known that it was first inventoried in 1367 (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003; Garín García, 2023), as part of the treasury of Zamora Cathedral (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

There is a theory that Ferdinand III, the King of Zamora, collected a sumptuous booty after the conquest of Cordoba, which took place in 1236. Among the items seized was a precious ivory box and other smaller boxes of lesser value that the monarch would have given as gifts to the cathedral of his homeland (Sadia, 2022).

It is worth noting that something made in the mid-10th Century was considered sufficiently valuable or beautiful to be given to Zamora Cathedral in the mid-13th or 14th Century and remain there for seven centuries, until its acquisition by the National Archaeological Museum in 1911, after a heated controversy that reached the Congress of Deputies [Lower House of Parliament] (Garín García, 2023).

Like many treasures in Hispanic churches, these ivory carvings were offered by kings and lords as the richest presents obtained from infidels and converted into sacred objects (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003). From the time it was handed over by the Castilian monarch, the pyxis would forget its original purpose and become a reliquary.

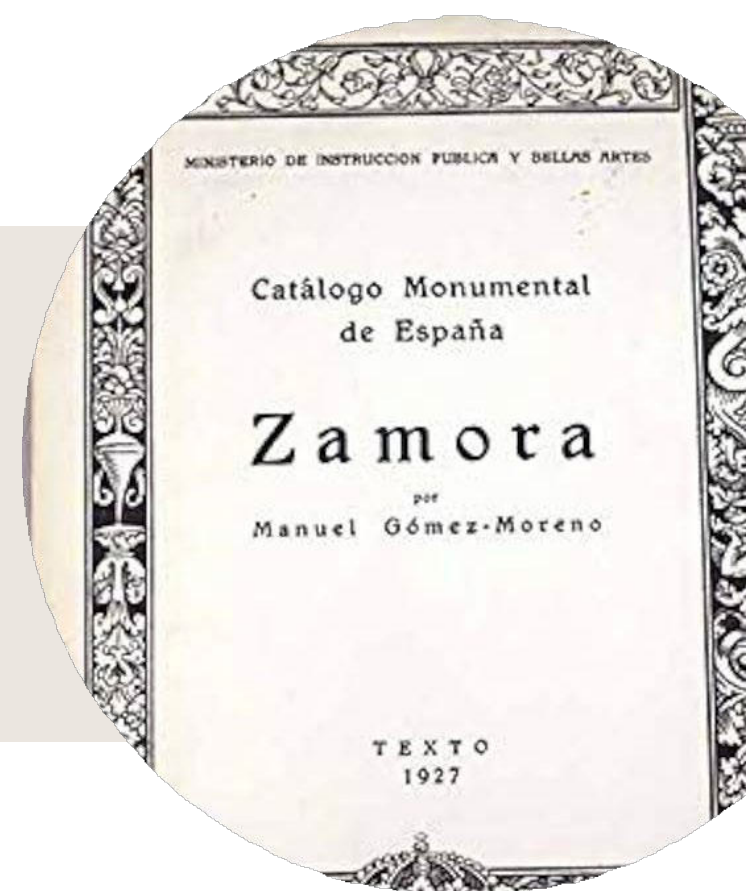
We can deduce that, at this early stage, the meaning of the pyxis was unknown, and the inscription in Kufic script on the lid had not been translated. Hence, it was not known that it was a gift intended for Subh, the Caliph's favourite, mother of the future heir Abd-al-Rahman, so that it could be used as a casket for jewellery or perfumes. It is true that it was necessary to read the inscription on the pyxis to know that it was a gallant gift and not a sacred object. In the 13th and 14th Centuries, it was unusual for clerics to know Arabic, and the Zamora prelates simply accepted the gift for its beauty and changed its use (Garín García, 2023).

Although the piece was registered and assigned to the cathedral treasury, it took centuries before it was discovered in 1904 by Manuel Gómez Moreno and his wife Elena Rodríguez Bolívar during one of their visits to Zamora Cathedral, when they were writing the volume corresponding to Zamora in the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain* (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

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The Monumental and Artistic Catalogue of Spain.



The Royal Decree of 1 June 1900 ordered the "*complete and orderly cataloguing of the historical or artistic wealth of the nation*" and was the origin of the so-called *Monumental and Artistic Catalogue of Spain*. This catalogue aimed, for the first time, to provide an inventory and describe the historical, artistic and archaeological heritage of each of the Spanish provinces with a view to its subsequent publication (Rodrigo Montero, 2012).

As stated in Article 2 of this Royal Decree, "*For the greater order and practical result of this work, it will be carried out by province, not moving on to others without the Historical and Artistic Catalogue of the province in which the research has begun being completely finished*". Article 3, for its part, clarified, "*The Catalogue of each province will form a volume or notebook, which will include all the monumental and artistic wealth existing in those provinces*" (Ministerio de Instrucción y Bellas Artes, 1900).

Regarding the development of the work, a criterion was established for an exhaustive collection of information, which also included photographic images of objects, places, sites and monuments, thereby complementing the detailed descriptions with graphic evidence. In this way, it was hoped to create a tool that would foster knowledge of the historical and artistic heritage and improve protection and conservation efforts.

The initiative was thanks to Juan Facundo Riaño, a man of profound culture, who chose the young Manuel Gómez-Moreno for this work. Gómez-Moreno began the work with the province of Avila, and later wrote the volumes for Leon, Zamora, and Salamanca (Muñoz Cosme, 2012). It may come as a surprise that this first volume was written between 1900 and 1901 and published for the first time in 1983.

Manuel Gómez-Moreno, together with his wife, Elena Rodríguez Bolívar, worked on the two volumes of the catalogue corresponding to the province of Zamora, specifically, between October 1903 and April 1905, which was published in 1927.

The production of the *Zamora Catalogue* is amply documented, as its author states that he produced it in two consecutive campaigns, accompanied by his wife, and completed it in 1905 at his home in Granada. It was his wife who transcribed the texts and became the copyist of the manuscripts, which were delivered in December 1906 (Hidalgo Brinquis, 2012).

During the opening of the reliquaries in Zamora Cathedral in 1904, a surprising discovery was made: several painted, carved and chiselled ivory and enamel chests of various sizes, one of which was the so-called Pyxis of Zamora, a masterpiece of Hispano-Muslim art. The Gómez Moreno couple illustrated this find with two photographs of the Pyxis of Zamora on a plate in volume 2 of the Zamora volume of the Monumental Catalogue (Villaseñor Sebastián, 2012).

The ambitious project of the *Monumental and Artistic Catalogue of Spain* remained unfinished; of the 47 volumes begun, only 39 were completed, between 1900 and 1961, and only 17 of them were published (Muñoz Cosme, 2012). Despite this, the work contains a large amount of documentation, photographs of many properties and objects that were later altered or disappeared, and the authors' interpretation of them is a source of great value for researchers and professionals related to cultural heritage and the history of the social and artistic sciences in our country (Muñoz Cosme, 2012).

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MANUEL GÓMEZ-MORENO.

The Discovery.



Manuel Gómez-Moreno Martínez (1870-1970) was a renowned Spanish archaeologist, art historian and academic, and a pivotal figure in the study of Hispanic art and archaeology. His life and work spanned multiple disciplines, leaving a significant legacy in the cultural and historical field of Spain. His professional and personal work was characterised by a continuous curiosity and defence of the national artistic heritage (Gómez Moreno, 2016).

Gómez-Moreno was a multifaceted figure, typical of his time, halfway between erudition, philology, collecting and the new trends based on scientific positivism as a basis on which to approach historical and archaeological research. It also represents "the end of an era, that of 19th-Century scholars and antiquarians who tackled any subject of their interest, and the start of another, that of researchers trained in universities and research centres, specialising in certain subjects" (Olmos Romera, 2010).

Gómez-Moreno was one of the great academics of the 20th Century, due to his enormous bibliographical production and its subsequent repercussions, as well as his institutional involvement, projects, academic posts and honorary positions. He held positions in the State administration and in different cultural property management bodies such as the Alhambra, in his native Granada, the National Archaeological Museum, the Prado Museum, the Royal Academies and many others, in addition to his role on the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios* [Council for the Extension of Studies] through the *Centro de Estudios Históricos* [Centre for Historical Studies], and the Central University itself (Bellón Ruiz, 2022).

Even today, he is still regarded as one of the most important figures in the world of Art History in Spain. His merits were recognised on numerous occasions, including by the Royal Academy of History (1915), the Academy of Fine Arts (1931) and the Academy of Language (1942), as well as his appointment to the boards of trustees of the world's most important museums and his award of Doctor Honoris Causa by several universities. He was also awarded the *Gran Cruz de Alfonso X el Sabio* [Grand Cross of Alfonso X, the Wise] and the *Gran Cruz de Isabel la Católica* [Grand Cross of Isabella the Catholic], as well as the Gold Medal for Work (López-Yarto Elizalde, 2012).

Gómez-Moreno, together with his wife, Elena Rodríguez Bolívar, worked on the drafting of several volumes of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain*, specifically those for the provinces of Avila, Salamanca, Zamora and Leon. This catalogue was an initiative linked to the regenerationist spirit following the disaster of 1898, contributing to the discovery, study, inventory, and cataloguing of artistic treasures from Romanesque, Hispano-Muslim and Mozarabic art (Serrano, 2023).

As part of their work on the volume on Zamora, they made several visits to the province between 1903 and 1904. On their second visit, between June and August 1904, when they were opening the reliquaries in Zamora Cathedral, Elena Rodríguez, standing on a ladder, handed down the pieces to her husband, which were to be photographed and described. Among them were painted, carved, chiselled, ivory and enamel chests, large and small (Gómez-Moreno, 1995). Among these objects was, to the couple's surprise, the splendid Pyxis of Zamora (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

As María Elena Gómez-Moreno (1995) stated, "*She would always remember the emotion with which she held in her hands a marvellous carved ivory pyxis, which she gave to Manuel as the most valuable item in the reliquary; it was the famous jewellery box that the Caliph al-Hakan II had instructed to be carved for the mother of his son and possible heir, Abderramán*".

But the relationship with the Caliphal pyxis and Gómez-Moreno does not end with its discovery in Zamora Cathedral. Years later, in 1911, it was the archaeologist himself, aware of the sale of the pyxis and other pieces by the Cathedral Chapter to the antique dealer Juan Lafora - and fearing that the pyxis was leaving Spain - who informed the MP Guillermo Joaquín de Osma of its sale. The MP announced the sale of this jewel of heritage in the press and in Parliament, generating considerable controversy and a public scandal.

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ELENA RODRÍGUEZ-BOLÍVAR. The Hidden Discoverer.



Born in Granada in 1874, a cultured woman and pianist, although not an academically trained archaeologist. When she married the archaeologist and historian Manuel Gómez-Moreno in 1903, "*she learned by working with the best teacher*" (Lorenzo Arribas & Pérez Martín, 2022, p. 50).

Already during their courtship - since at that time they could not travel together before getting married - Elena supported Manuel from afar, when he was working on the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Avila* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1900-1901) and the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Salamanca* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1901-1903). During this period, she was in charge of specific tasks in the background, such as locating many of the materials from among the documentation that he required, or matters related to the administration of Manuel Gómez-Moreno on these trips (Lorenzo Arribas & Pérez Martín, 2022), such as sending clothes, sweets to give away at his destinations or even the transmission of family news and news about Granada, the city where he lived at that time.

But it was a few months after their wedding when Elena would board a train to Zamora to accompany Manuel in 1903, repeating the journey in 1904 and again in 1906 to Leon. On these trips, Elena Rodríguez-Bolívar gave her unconditional support to Manuel Gómez-Moreno, taking on certain "auxiliary" activities that would undoubtedly facilitate the archaeologist's work: questions of administration and infrastructure for accommodation in the different localities, accompaniment to facilitate the taking of inventory data to continue with the preparation of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain*, as well as perfecting the technique of developing photographs, as Elena took care of her husband's printing plates (Lorenzo Arribas & Pérez Martín, 2022).

In addition to these functions, Elena Rodríguez-Bolívar was also responsible for the handwritten transcription of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Zamora* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1903-1905) and the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Leon* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1906-1908).

It was the same transcription function that Manuel's sister, Sacramento Gómez-Moreno Martínez, had previously assumed (Liceras Garrido; Comino & Murrieta Flores, 2022) in the case of the originals of *the Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Avila* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1900-1901) and *Monumental Catalogue of Spain: province of Salamanca* (Gómez-Moreno Martínez, 1901-1903).

But of all these "hidden" functions that Elena Rodríguez-Bolívar undertook in support of Manuel Gómez-Moreno, perhaps the most important was the discovery of what she herself would call "my Pyxis", that is, the Pyxis of Zamora.

Recognition of the role played by Elena Rodríguez-Bolívar in the discovery of the Pyxis of Zamora is primarily due to her daughter, María Elena Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar (1907-1991), who went on to become a Professor of the Institute of Geography and History and Director of the Museum of Romanticism of Madrid (*Ministerio de Cultura. Pares. Portal de Archivos Españoles*, undated). Thanks to her contribution, we know that on 3 August 1904 (Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar, 1995), her mother, Elena, on a ladder, handed her father, Manuel, various pieces from the reliquary of Zamora Cathedral (Lorenzo Arribas & Pérez Martín, 2022), "*painted, carved and chiselled ivory and enamel chests, large and small, among which was a marvellous carved ivory pyxis, which she gave to Manuel as the most valuable piece in the reliquary*" (Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar 1995, p. 183). It was what would later be known as the Pyxis of Zamora.

She cried out in amazement when she found that cylindrical ivory pyxis, beautifully carved with leafage and animals: it was, without a doubt, the jewel of the reliquary, unknown for centuries in its beauty by the clergy themselves and which, from then on, was for Elena "my pyxis" (Gómez-Moreno Rodríguez-Bolívar, 1995, p. 241). And so it would be until this pianist, who played until the end of her life, died in Madrid on 25 February 1972.

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THE SALE of the Pyxis of Zamora.



In 1911, the Chapter of Zamora Cathedral sold some chests to the antique dealer Juan Lafora, including an ivory pyxis from the Caliphate era, valued at 52,500 pesetas (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

A few years earlier, this Caliphal pyxis, which would come to be known as the Pyxis of Zamora, was discovered by Manuel Gómez-Moreno and his wife Elena Rodríguez-Bolivar. The two researchers, in their task of cataloguing the pieces from the reliquary of Zamora Cathedral so that they could form part of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain*, found the precious pyxis carved from ivory.

With this discovery, the Cathedral Chapter of the time recognised the importance of the small jewel it treasured and did not hesitate to send it to an exhibition of Retrospective Art held in Santiago de Compostela in 1910 (Gómez-Moreno, 1995; Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003). It should be noted that the Gómez-Moreno couple's *Monumental Catalogue* remained unpublished and was not finally published until 1927 (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003; Sadia, 2022).

It should also be noted that at the start of the 20th Century, the confiscations of Spanish artistic heritage, which had been ongoing since the mid-18th Century, were still taking place, with large quantities of works of art, books and other objects of cultural value and heritage being sold at grotesque prices. Many of these works left Spain.

The Cathedral Chapter's choice to send the pyxis to the Compostela exhibition - after enthusiastically welcoming the find - would end up with dire consequences for the piece, as it was publicly exhibited for the first time in Spain and antique dealers were very attentive to any movement in the field of heritage that could bring them profits (Sadia, 2022). In this regard, the pyxis had the misfortune to come across Juan Lafora, one of the leading antique dealers in the country, who, after sniffing out the piece, would never lose track of it (Sadia, 2022).

It is also known that the Dean of the Cathedral, at the Chapter meeting of 23 February 1910, stated that "*some antique dealers had been making proposals to acquire objects from this Holy Church, some deteriorated and unused, and others easily replaceable by other less valuable ones*" (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

Among these objects was the Caliphal pyxis, which was undoubtedly the most prized item in the lot. Shortly afterwards, following the Dean's report, the Chapter authorised the sale of the Pyxis of Zamora, agreeing to keep the matter absolutely confidential. Only the archpriest showed a conscience regarding its heritage and bitterly opposed the operation (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003; Sadia, 2023).

In March 1910, the Apostolic Nuncio approved the sale of these objects to help the institution meet its needs (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003; Sadia, 2023). What is curious is how the clergy understood that they could meet these pressing needs, as they invested the 52,500 pesetas obtained from the sale in the public treasury, buying public debt securities (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003; Sadia, 2023).

The singular beauty of these ivory pieces undoubtedly made them attractive for national antique dealers and, even more so, attracted the attention of art collectors from all over the world. So much so that other pieces similar to the Pyxis of Zamora were also sold to antique dealers and subsequently to collectors. Today, these pieces, which have been alienated from Spanish heritage, are exhibited in museums outside Spain.

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JUAN LAFORA, ANTIQUÉ DEALER.



The confiscations of the 19th Century, which lasted until the first decades of the 20th Century, caused an incipient dispersion of numerous pieces of Spanish cultural heritage. Many of these pieces, of great value, left the country through plundering or marketing networks that benefited a few and harmed many.

In 1911, the Chapter of Zamora Cathedral sold a number of chests to the Madrid antique dealer Juan Lafora, including an ivory pyxis from the Caliphate period, valued at 52,000 pesetas (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003). The Pyxis of Zamora, similar to other Caliphate pyxides, was sold to an antique dealer and collector, Juan Lafora Calatayud, whose intention was to sell it to other collectors in the United States, but fortunately, the operation was aborted *in extremis* (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

Juan Lafora Calatayud (1855-1930) was a prestigious antique dealer, collector and theatre impresario. His antiques shop was located in Carrera de San Jerónimo, 51, in Madrid, where, it seems, "*academics, historians, archaeologists, researchers and collectors met*" (Marés Deulovol, 1977).

He was an antique dealer who knew his trade well and the pieces that could be of value, as well as the customers who could acquire them. The fine arts academic Frederic Marés Deulovol (1977) said of him that "he gave special treatment to each object and seemed, more than an antique dealer willing to sell, a collector willing to buy".

In his shop, he not only brought together the best of Spanish culture, but also played a double game in many operations, having no problem justifying his defence of heritage through spurious buying and selling. He also had contact with foreign antique dealers (Fiz Fuertes, 2021). Precisely because of these contacts, he was able to make major heritage sales of pieces that are now part of foreign museums and collections.

He was involved in negotiations for the sale of important works of art from Castile and Leon, such as the *Retablo de Nuestra Señora del Maestro de la Horta* (Fiz Fuertes, 2021), which is currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (*Fundación de Castilla y León*).

As a theatre impresario, he built the La Latina theatre in Madrid and collaborated with the playwright and Nobel Prize winner Jacinto Benavente. His daughter, Beatriz Lafora, continued his professional activity as an art and antique dealer.

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3

MADRID

THE ARRIVAL AT THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

PARLIAMENTARY CONTROVERSY OVER THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA



The controversy over the Pyxis of Zamora reached Parliament at a time of heightened public awareness of the crisis in Church-State relations, as well as other scandals related to the disposal of artistic heritage (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

It should be noted that while other countries, such as France, England and the United States, could boast of their prestigious and, in some cases, new museums, Spain saw many of its works of art and heritage treasures sold abroad to form part of private collections or museums in other countries.

The first intervention in Parliament, which was to be the flame that would light the fire, was made by the Conservative MP Guillermo Joaquín de Osma y Scull, who had previously been warned by the discoverer of the pyxis, Manuel Gómez-Moreno, about the sale of this artistic treasure of Spain's heritage.

On hearing the news, MP Osma publicly announced the sale of the pyxis by the clergy of Zamora, sent the daily ABC a report of this fact and a photograph of the object, expressing his indignation. He also wrote to the Nuncio, told the President of the Government, José de Canalejas, and his political boss, Maura, what had happened; he telegraphed the Governor and the Bishop of Zamora and prepared his intervention in Congress (Gómez-Moreno, 1995). In this way, MP Osma sparked a controversial debate and initiated an investigation into the events (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

Specifically, in the daily record of the parliamentary sessions of 10 March 1911, the following was recorded as part of his speech, "*The fact, gentlemen, is that, in yet another very regrettable case of the exploitation of the wealth of our churches, which has come to be regarded as proverbial, our Spain is poorer today, although it may not seem so to us, than it was a few days ago. A work of art has been sold which at the same time was, and is wherever it is found, a historical document: in both ways of incalculable value*".

And he continued, *"There was that ivory box, whose historical interest lies in the inscription and dedication carved on it, the last one remaining in Spain, of the four similar ones that had been passed down over time; three of them went, years ago, to museums abroad; the last copy that remained in Spain was also the most complete, the most interesting because of its inscription, the oldest copy of all those we have known; and it has been sold"*.

Guillermo de Osma's speech on the situation of the Pyxis of Zamora led to the participation of the President of the Government, Canalejas, who supported State intervention to put an end to abuses and greed (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

Specifically, that same day, 10 March 1911, President of the Government Canalejas, according to the daily record of the parliamentary sessions, intervened with the following words, *"I cannot admit that the mere possession, the mere possession by the Cathedral Chapter, by any religious institution, of such a jewel, authorises it to sell it freely; if it is a sacred thing, it is outside the trade of men; if it is part of the national heritage, it must be guaranteed by the effectiveness of the exercise of the intervention of the Public Power"*.

After the speeches by Osma and Canalejas, the ultra-conservative MP Manuel Senante y Martínez spoke in reply, defending the Church's right to sell its heritage without conforming to the prescriptions of canon law. He also justified this right to sell to meet the pressing needs of the Church, given the hardship that Spain was going through (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

The parliamentary controversy became public and was reported in the press in Madrid (ABC, El País, El Imparcial, El Universo, etc.) and locally in Zamora (El Heraldo de Zamora and El Correo de Zamora). The latter newspapers, El Correo de Zamora - more traditional and Catholic - and El Heraldo de Zamora - of liberal ideology - spread the controversy among their readers with opposing arguments and positions.

Canalejas stood firm, standing against the commercialisation of works of national artistic heritage, and on 13 March 1911, according to the daily record of the parliamentary sessions, once again at the request of the MP Guillermo de Osma, he confirmed the situation of the pyxis as follows, *"It has been confirmed that the pyxis in question and another of less importance that also belonged to the artistic treasure of the same cathedral are in Madrid, and I am pleased to announce to the House that tomorrow both pyxides will be deposited in the possession of the State"*. His involvement proved to be key to the subsequent recovery and purchase by the State of the Caliphal pyxis.

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GUILLERMO JOAQUÍN DE OSMA.

Politician and collector.



Guillermo Joaquín de Osma y Scull (1853-1922) was a prominent conservative party MP, diplomat and Spanish collector who was born in Havana in 1853 and died in Biarritz in 1922.

During his multifaceted career, he stood out as a politician, becoming Minister of Finance for two periods, 1903-1904 and 1907-1908, in the governments of Antonio Maura, during the reign of Alfonso XIII (Urquijo Goitia, 2008). In 1919, he was appointed senator for life and President of the Council of State. He was also a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, the Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando and the Academy of Belles Lettres of Barcelona (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

He married Adela Crooke y Guzmán (1863-1918), Countess of Valencia de Don Juan, painter, art lover, renowned patron of artists and avid collector, from whom he obtained the title of Count Consort of Valencia de Don Juan. They both shared a love of art collecting and were advised by prestigious intellectuals such as Manuel Gómez-Moreno, Antonio Vives Escudero, Elías Tormo, José Ramón Mélida, Miguel Asín Palacios and Hugo Obermaier (Salvador Benítez & Sánchez Vigil, 2020).

In 1916, together with his wife, he founded the Valencia de Don Juan Institute in a small palace in the Chamberí district of Madrid, located at Calle Fortuny, number 43, designed by the architect Enrique Fort.

The Valencia de Don Juan Institute housed important collections of paintings, sculptures, tapestries, embroidery, weapons, tiles, earthenware, pottery, jet works, coins, furniture, books and other documents that the couple managed to collect from their ancestors or through their own acquisitions (Ocaña Martínez, 2001). As they had no descendants and did not want to see their collections dispersed upon their death, they decided to create the foundation, which was conceived first and foremost as a centre for research and study (Moreno Conde, 2017).

Through the Gómez-Moreno couple, Guillermo de Osma learned of the sale of the Pyxis of Zamora to the antique dealer Juan Lafora and of the latter's intentions to sell it to collectors in the United States. On hearing the news, Osma *"did not think twice: he sent the news and the photo that Gómez-Moreno had given him to ABC; he wrote to the Nuncio; he told the President of the Government, Canalejas, and his political boss, Maura, what had happened; he telegraphed the Governor and the Bishop of Zamora and prepared an intervention in Congress where he was a Member of Parliament"* (Gómez-Moreno, 1995).

In the Congress of Deputies, suspecting that the pyxis might be about to cross the Atlantic or had already crossed it, MP Osma intervened on several occasions with the intention of preventing the Spanish art treasure from being sent abroad (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

The effective participation of Osma and that of the President of the Government, José de Canalejas, in Congress, together with the police investigation into the situation and destination of the Pyxis of Zamora - before it could leave Spain - the controversy aroused in Parliament, the public uproar that reached the press and the possible repentance of the antique dealer Lafora – forced to reveal the whereabouts of the pyxis, which was still in Madrid - may have been the main reasons that managed to stop this artistic and archaeological jewel from leaving our borders.

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JOSÉ DE CANALEJAS. In Defence of the National Artistic Wealth.



José Canalejas y Méndez (1854-1912), a Spanish liberal politician and lawyer, was born in Ferrol (La Coruña) and died in Madrid in 1912, the victim of an assassination.

In his long political career he held various important posts: Undersecretary of the Presidency (1883), Minister of Public Works (1888), of Grace and Justice (1888-1890), of Finance (1894-1895), of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (1902) (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004) and President of the Council of Ministers (1910-1912), a post he held until his death. He was also a member of the Royal Spanish Academy in 1904, occupying the letter R, and presided over the Royal Academy of Jurisprudence on two occasions (*Real Academia Española*).

During his Presidency, he implemented a wide-ranging programme of reforms with the intention of modernising Spain. Canalejas, together with Antonio Maura, may be considered one of the great political personalities of the reign of Alfonso XIII (Aguilar Gavilán, 2012).

On 10 March 1911, his intervention in Parliament, as President of the Council of Ministers, against the commercialisation of works of national artistic heritage was key to the recovery and subsequent purchase by the State of the Pyxis of Zamora. It should be noted that Juan Lafora, the antique dealer who had bought the object from the Cathedral Chapter of Zamora for 52,500 pesetas, possibly for fear of the police investigation underway or because of public pressure, went to Canalejas himself to reveal the whereabouts of the pyxis, still in Madrid, and to point out that he was "a mere intermediary" (Gómez-Moreno, 1995; Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

On 13 March, in the house of President of the Government Canalejas, the act of delivery in deposit of two works, pending payment by the State, was signed in the presence of the antique dealer, Juan Lafora, the MP Guillermo de Osma, members of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts and members of the National Archaeological Museum where the objects - the Pyxis of Zamora and another piece of lesser value - were deposited (Gómez-Moreno, 1995; Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

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THE PURCHASE OF THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA BY THE STATE.



On 13 March 1911, the act of depositing two caskets from Zamora Cathedral was signed. One of these unique pieces was the Pyxis of Zamora. This event was held at the home of the President of the Government José Canalejas y Méndez and was attended by the antique dealer Juan Lafora, who deposited the works in his possession until then, the MP Guillermo de Osma, as well as members of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts and the National Archaeological Museum, where the objects were to be deposited (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

On 14 March, the daily *El Correo de Zamora* reported that the objects had arrived at the National Archaeological Museum, having been bought from the antique dealer Lafora for the same amount for which he had acquired them - 52,500 pesetas (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

On 24 June 1911, the Royal Decree of 20 June was published in *La Gaceta de Madrid*, at the proposal of the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Amalio Gimeno, in a single article which stated the following, "*The Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts is authorised to acquire the two caskets which were sold by the Chapter of Zamora Cathedral for the price of 52,500 pesetas, which will be paid to the person who turns out to be the owner, after the necessary budgetary appropriation has been, recognising his right to receive the legal interest on that amount until the day on which payment is verified*".

One of the caskets is valued at 25,000 pesetas and the other at 27,500 pesetas; the first payment of 25,000 pesetas being made on 29 October 1912. The second payment of 27,500 pesetas was made one year later, on 22 October 1913, to the antique dealer Juan Lafora.

Finally, 5,028.46 pesetas were paid to Lafora as late payment interest on 18 May 1914 (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003). By means of this payment, the payment owed by the State for the purchase of the objects from the Chapter of Zamora Cathedral, which were acquired by the antique dealer Juan Lafora, was concluded.

The acquisition file of the National Archaeological Museum corresponds to the year 1912, number 78 (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, 51944) (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

"And the perfume pyxis of Sultana Subh came to be displayed in the National Archaeological Museum as a major piece among the sumptuary arts of the Spanish Islamic world" (Gómez-Moreno, 1995).

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THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA FAMILY



The Caliphate ivory workshop at Medina Azahara achieved great prestige and produced exquisite pieces, some of which are kept in the world's leading museums (Castejón & Martínez de Arizala, 1976).

The extraordinary collection of Andalusian ivories, to which the Pyxis of Zamora belongs, was primarily produced in two workshops: one in Medina Azahara during the Caliphate period and another in the ivory workshop in Cuenca in the 11th century, during the development of the so-called Taifa kingdoms.

Although we could include numerous ivory caskets, also carved in these workshops, in the Pyxis of Zamora family, we will focus exclusively on other ivory caskets or pyxides made from elephant tusks and usually containing perfumes or jewellery. For example, the pyxis dedicated to al-Mughira (968 AD), on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris, is considered to be one of the masterpieces of this period (Pancaroglu, 2017).

This pyxis was a gift to Prince al-Mughira, son of Abderramán III. Its decoration is noteworthy for its four linked, lobed medallions that are fully ornamented and include figurative scenes, featuring both human and animal figures. The pyxis features a total of 69 zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures, along with leafy decoration.

The central medallion shows three figures on a dais supported by two lions. One of these figures is a musician playing a lute. Another medallion shows a hunting scene with two lions attacking two oxen. A further medallion depicts two falconer knights facing each other, separated by a palm tree representing the “tree of life”. The last medallion depicts a new falconry scene, with two falconers seizing eggs in two nests.

Another notable pyxis is the Hispanic Society of America's ivory pyxis, produced for the Umayyad court in the workshop at Medina Azahara (966 AD).

The Hispanic Society of America pyxis is similar in nature to the Zamora and al-Mughira pyxides, made of elephant tusk ivory, with a lid that features an inscription in Arabic incorporating the artist's name, Khalaf. The inscription reveals that the vessel was intended to contain perfumes (musk, camphor and ambergris) (*The Hispanic Museum Library*, 2024). It is decorated in the *ataurique* style, with animal figures (turkeys, gazelles and birds).

The pyxis in the Victoria and Albert Museum in Kensington (United Kingdom) is another of the jewels from the Caliphate workshop at Medina Azahara that are found outside Spain. This ivory pyxis was carved between 969 and 970 AD for the prefect of the forces of order in Cordoba under the Caliph Al-Hakam II.

The object is similar to the previous ones, with a lid inscribed in *Kufic* script and finely decorated with *ataurique* workmanship. The main element of the decoration is the three large medallions visible on the body of the jar, each of which depicts a man of high rank. The first depicts a man seated on a dais, flanked by two attendants. The second shows a falconer on horseback, and the third depicts a man sitting cross-legged on a palanquin mounted on an elephant (*Victoria and Albert Museum*, 2003).

The ivory pyxis in Braga Cathedral, Portugal, is an example of the pyxides developed in the ivory workshops of Cuenca during the period of the Taifa kingdoms. This pyxis, housed in the Cathedral's treasury, is small, measuring 20 cm in height and 10 cm in diameter, and dates to between 1004 and 1008 AD. The piece was commissioned by 'Abd al-Malik, son of Almanzor. The entire surface of the pyxis is finely carved in bas-relief and includes a figurative composition with leafage and animal elements (birds and gazelles) (*Museum With No Frontiers*, 2025).

The Pyxis of Narbonne is another example from the Cuenca workshops (1026-1031 AD). Used as a reliquary in Narbonne Cathedral (France). Carved by Muhammad Ibn Zayyan for Ismail al-Zafir, king of the Taifa kingdom of Toledo. On the lower edge of the lid is an inscription in *Kufic* characters, with *ataurique* decoration (*Ministère de la Culture*).

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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.

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4

TWIN it!

THE 3D PYXIS

THE PYXIS OF ZAMORA

in Twin it! 3D



In the framework of the *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture* campaign (2024), the European Commission and the Europeana initiative invited EU Member States to select and share at least one high-quality, iconic 3D model to create a pan-European collection of 3D digitised heritage assets and thus contribute to a common European cultural heritage data space. Its ultimate aim was the exploration of 3D models of heritage buildings, sites and objects across Europe and the creation of digital twins of them.

Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture (2024) was launched in 2023 under the auspices of the Swedish and Spanish Presidencies of the Council of the EU and culminated in 2024, during the Belgian Presidency, with the creation of an exhibition to underpin these aims.

In the case of Spain, the Pyxis of Zamora was the piece chosen to represent us in *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture*, after having been selected by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Spain at the conference of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in October 2023.

The exhibition entitled *The Pyxis of Zamora. A story to tell* is connected with the objectives of the *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture* campaign and its ultimate aim is to contribute to the dissemination and popularisation of the Pyxis of Zamora. This object can be physically seen in the National Archaeological Museum, the leading institution interested in our R&D&I reference project PID2020-113405RB-I00/AEI/10.13039/501100011033, entitled *Cultural and bibliographic heritage in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) context: virtual exhibitions as agents of dissemination and reuse*, funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, State Research Agency, Government of Spain.

The project aims to enhance the digital experience of the Pyxis of Zamora in relation to *Twin it!* by providing more than just a simple three-dimensional visualisation of the object.

While *Twin it!* aims to create a pan-European collection of heritage assets digitised in 3D, facilitating their access and conservation through the Europeana platform, the proposal of this exhibition aims to go a step further by adding to the 3D model a set of stories that facilitate the discovery of the object's trajectory, as well as interpretative materials and other resources that seek to enrich the public's understanding and enjoyment.

Through the virtual exhibition and its book of micro-stories (Arquero Avilés & Marco Cuenca, 2025), users can not only explore the Pyxis of Zamora in detail from anywhere and at any time, but also immerse themselves in its stories, uses and meanings, integrating 3D technology with informative and cultural content. Thus, the project seeks to transform the digital model into an enriched cultural experience, in line with the current trends of virtualisation and digitisation of heritage, which aim not only to conserve, but also to interpret, disseminate and make cultural heritage accessible to diverse and global audiences.

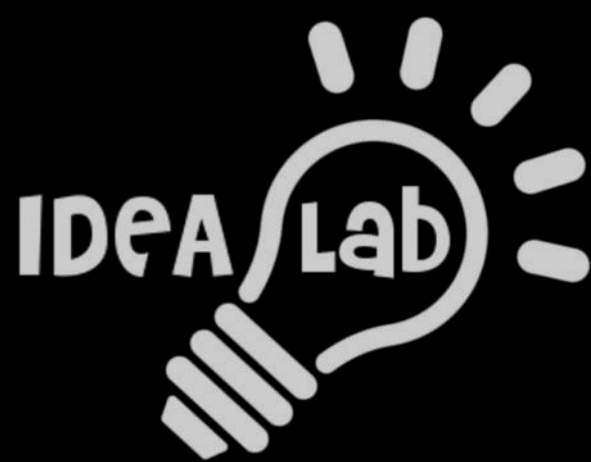
The virtual exhibition entitled *The Pyxis of Zamora. A story to tell* (Arquero Avilés, Marco Cuenca & Cobo Serrano, 2025) thus traces a composition of stories around the Pyxis of Zamora that tie in with the context of the exhibition *Twin it! 3D for Europe's culture* (2024).

Complementary information about it can be found in *Europeana: the Pyxis of Zamora, Pyxis of Subh [Museum Objects]* (2023) and explored as a digital object in 2D in *Google Arts and Culture: the Pyxis of Zamora 2D* (undated) and in 3D in *Sketchfab: the Pyxis of Zamora 3D* (undated) and in the *Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliográfico. Bote de Subh* (undated).

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