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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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