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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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