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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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