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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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