

Rosario Arquero Avilés
Gonzalo Marco Cuenca

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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