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FERDINAND III

The Saint.



Ferdinand III of Castile (1201-1252), also known as "the Saint", was a key figure in medieval Spanish history.

Prince Ferdinand, son of Alfonso IX and Berenguela of Castile, was born in Peleas de Arriba, in the province of Zamora, in 1201. He inherited the throne of Castile from his mother, Queen Berenguela, and was proclaimed king in Valladolid in 1217 (Martínez Díez, 1993).

But a century earlier, in 1157, King Alfonso VII, the Emperor, decided to divide his kingdom among his sons. His first-born son, Sancho III, was left with Castile and Toledo and his other son, Ferdinand II, with the Kingdom of Leon and Galicia. Ferdinand III, in 1230, reunited them as a single kingdom.

He was an outstanding leader in promoting the Reconquista, significantly expanding the Christian kingdoms. He reconquered important cities such as Cordoba (1236), Jaen (1246) and Seville (1248). The conquest of Cordoba, which took place between December 1235 and June 1236, was his most outstanding achievement. The fall of the capital, which had been the centre of al-Andalus for centuries and a symbol of Muslim power, was a vitally important milestone for the Reconquista.

From a social perspective, Ferdinand III replaced Latin with Castilian as the official language, promoted the creation of several legal treaties, and ordered the erection of the two jewels of Spanish Gothic architecture: the cathedrals of Burgos and Leon (Santamaría, 2021).

He died in the Alcazar of Seville in 1252. He was canonised in 1671 by Pope Clement X, which earned him the nickname of "the Saint" (Castañeda Delgado, 1994).

Ferdinand III's relationship with the Pyxis of Zamora is associated precisely with the conquest of Córdoba. However, no documents exist that clearly confirm the relationship between the monarch and the piece, or its arrival at Zamora Cathedral, as the date and donor are unknown.

Manuel Gómez Moreno, author of the *Monumental Catalogue of Spain*, assumed that it was part of the booty obtained by Ferdinand III in the conquest of Cordoba, and that the King would hand it over as a gift to Zamora Cathedral.

María Elena Gómez-Moreno (1995) relates this event as follows: "*Royal hands gave it as a precious gift to Zamora Cathedral, to whose reliquary it passed as a guardian of stones from the Holy Land, and there it remained hidden from prying eyes*".

And, in the reliquary of the Cathedral, supposedly containing "*stones from the Holy Places*", it remained sheltered from prying eyes for nearly seven centuries (Martín Benito & Regueras Grande, 2003).

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