

FROM ROYAL CASKETS TO RELIC CONTAINERS: TWO IVORY CASKETS FROM BURGOS AND MADRID

In the case of a work of art, the interest in the idea is balanced, and may even be eclipsed, by an interest in form.

Erwin Panofsky¹

The Islamic objects in the church treasuries of medieval Spain are perhaps best understood as trophies of war. In contrast to the lands beyond the Alps, where Islamic objects enjoyed the aura of exotic vessels from the Holy Land, though they were sometimes brought by knights who took the cross and fought against the infidels, the lasting wars in Spain and the continuing hope of pushing the Muslim invaders southward created a situation in which almost every looted object was regarded by the Christians as a further symbol of the liberation of the Iberian Peninsula.²

The *Poem of the Cid*, Rodrigo of Vivar, which is beyond question the most celebrated saga of the Christian reconquest of Spain, has plenty of descriptions of the booty taken during victorious wars against the infidels. These include chests full of silver and golden coins,³ rich garments,⁴ banners,⁵ costly tents,⁶ saddles and swords,⁷ and so on. These spoils were usually shared among the soldiers, probably as their wages, but part of the booty, as the *Poem of the Cid* tells us, was sent directly to the church. The reason behind these endowments can be explained by the following prayer which El Cid made before leaving Castille on a mission:

I do not know whether I shall return to it in all my life. O Glorious Virgin, protect me as I depart, and help and succour me night and day. If you will do this and my good fortune holds, I shall endow your altar with rich gifts and I make a solemn promise to have a thousand masses sung there.⁸

On the other hand, the fact that part of the plunder taken after the battle in Valencia, among which were probably the Islamic war drums which El Cid had vowed to give to Bishop Jerome of Valencia to hang up in the church,⁹ was sent to the bishop as promised,¹⁰ hints at the presentation of booty as trophies of war.

In addition to literary sources, such as the epic of El

Cid, historical accounts also clearly attest to how booty was divided right after a victorious battle among warriors, some of whom were clergymen of high rank. James I, king of Aragon, who took the city of Valencia from the hands of the Moors in 1238, informs us that "much good and fine silken and cotton cloth . . . rich silks and many other valuable stuffs" were shared among the bishops, the barons, and the archbishop of Narbonne.¹¹ This account might explain, as Dorothy Shepherd has suggested, the existence of Islamic textiles in the tomb of Saint Bernard Calvo, bishop of Vich (1233–43), who accompanied King James I during the siege of Valencia.¹² Moreover, the carved ivory pyxis in the treasury of the cathedral of Saint-Just in Narbonne might be one of the luxury objects which the archbishop of Narbonne obtained after the battle.¹³ Though made in Cuenca for one of the heirs of the Dhu'l-Nunids (probably for Isma'il ibn al-Ma'mun) the pyxis might have reached Valencia as part of the hoard of this dynasty, which, between 1031 and 1085 and almost without any interruption, controlled Toledo and Valencia and even Cordova for a very short period.

The silver casket of Hisham II in the treasury of the cathedral of Gerona (no.64) was probably among the spoils which fell into the hands of the Catalan mercenaries who fought in Cordova between May and July 1010 on behalf of Muhammad al-Mahdi. A contract between the Catalan counts and Wadih, the governor of La Marca Superior, certified that the booty from Cordova would be divided among the Catalans. It is quite probable, therefore, that it was donated as a trophy to the cathedral of Gerona, where it is now kept.¹⁴

The Nasrid metal lamp from the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (no.50.519), which was confiscated after the fall of the Nasrid kingdom in 1492, entered the possession of Cardinal Cisneros and after his death became part of the treasury of the Alcalà de Henares.¹⁵

According to a thirteenth-century poem, ivory caskets which were looted from al-Mansur (around 1002) were displayed as trophies on the altar of the church of San

Pedro de Arlanza.¹⁶ Other precious objects even reached France. The booty captured by Raymond II of Rouergue around 1000 was donated to the church of Ste. Foy in Conques. The loot consisted of 21 engraved and gilded silver vases and a silver saddle which was highly admired for its excellent workmanship.¹⁷ Part of the plunder which was taken after the defeat of the king of Denia and the Balearic Isles was sent directly to the abbey of Cluny.¹⁸

Many Islamic items, some of which are still kept in the treasuries of Spanish churches, are reputed to be trophies of war. The so-called veil of Hisham (Madrid, the Royal Academy of History, no. 292) which was found in a casket under the altar of the church of San Esteban de Gormaz in Soria, is believed to have been kept in that church as a trophy of war.¹⁹ The large embroidery, the so-called Banner of Las Navas de Tolosa, which is reputed to have been taken by Alfonso VIII from the Almohads after the decisive battle of 1212, is hung in the monastery of Las Huelgas near Burgos.²⁰ According to tradition the rectangular carved box which was made for the daughter of ^ʿAbd al-Rahman III, was presented around 950 in the cloister of Santo Domingo in Silos by Fernán González, count of Castile (931–70).²¹ Fernán González fought against ^ʿAbd al-Rahman III at the battle of Simancas in 939, but the many legends of his valiant exploits which emerged after his death and in which he was called the “illustrious count” of Castile might be the real reason for the account associating him with this ivory box.²²

Attributes of power and dominion like crowns and thrones, as well as banners, arms and armor with royal insignia, were probably the most celebrated trophies. These items conclusively demonstrated that the Muslim foe was defeated and that Christian sovereignty prevailed once more. The checkered history of the bells of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela illustrate this atmosphere in the Christian and Muslim domains. The bells, undoubtedly symbols of Christian faith, were looted by al-Mansur in 997, brought to Cordova, and functioned as lamps in the mosque there. In 1236, when Cordova was returned to the hands of the Christians, the bells were carried back by Muslim prisoners to Santiago.²³ Another example is that of the so-called Sword of Boabdil — the sword of Muhammad XII, one of the last Nasrid sultans. The sword, which was taken after the battle in Lucena in 1483, was probably regarded by the Castilians as a symbol of the forthcoming defeat of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold.²⁴

Of no less importance were the luxury ivory caskets which were looted by Christians from the royal palaces in the main capitals of the Islamic kingdoms in Spain.

These precious objects, which are lavishly decorated with carving, colored, and sometimes even set with gems,²⁵ were originally regarded as one of the most valuable presents for a member of the royal family. The fact that most of them usually bear the names of the royal personages or court dignitaries for whom they were made meant that they were considered, as soon as they fell in the hands of the Christians, as symbols *par excellence* of triumph over the Islamic enemy.

An interesting case is that of the casket from Pamplona.²⁶ The inscription on this casket attests that it was made for ^ʿAbd al-Malik, son of al-Mansur, in 1004, the year of his capture of Leon. Therefore it might be regarded as a triumphal casket. In the Middle Ages the casket was kept in the Benedictine monastery of Leyre, where it was used as a container for the relics of the two martyred sisters of Huesca, Nunilona and Alodia, who were beheaded in 851 at the order of ^ʿAbd al-Rahman II. The memory of the two sisters was probably revived at the end of the eleventh century, more precisely in 1096, the year Huesca was retaken. The fact that this triumphal casket was chosen as a reliquary for Nunilona and Alodia might thus appear as more than mere coincidence.

THE IVORY CASKETS FROM BURGOS AND MADRID

Two rectangular caskets with a hipped cover, which were made during the Taifa period in the provincial center of Cuenca, might illustrate a more significant episode of alteration of function, and are therefore a case in point. The first casket is now in the Archaeological Museum in Burgos (fig. 1),²⁷ and the second one is in the Archaeological Museum of Madrid (fig. 2).²⁸

From the stylistic point of view these caskets belong to a group of carved ivories among which are two containers and some fragments: (1) a cylindrical pyxis in Narbonne which was made for the Dhu'l-Nunid sovereign Ismaʿil ibn al-Maʿmun;²⁹ (2) a rectangular casket with a flat lid in the Louvre (no. 2775);³⁰ and (3) three carved plaques which probably once belonged to a casket and which are now mounted on the so-called relic casket “*arqueta de las bienaventuranzas*”;³¹ the carved inscription on one of the fragments attests that it was made for Ismaʿil ibn al-Maʿmun, like the above-mentioned pyxis from Narbonne; (4) three other carved plaques each of which originally formed a facet of a casket: the first one is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (no. 4075/1857),³² the second one was formerly in the collection of Adolphe Stoclet in Brussels,³³ and the third is in the collection of Viuda de Bosch in Barcelona.³⁴ Though the



Fig. 1. Burgos casket. Cuenca, 1026. Wood faced with ivory. Burgos, Museo Arqueológico Provincial. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)



Fig. 2. Madrid casket. Cuenca, 1049–50. Wood and leather faced with ivory. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 57 371. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

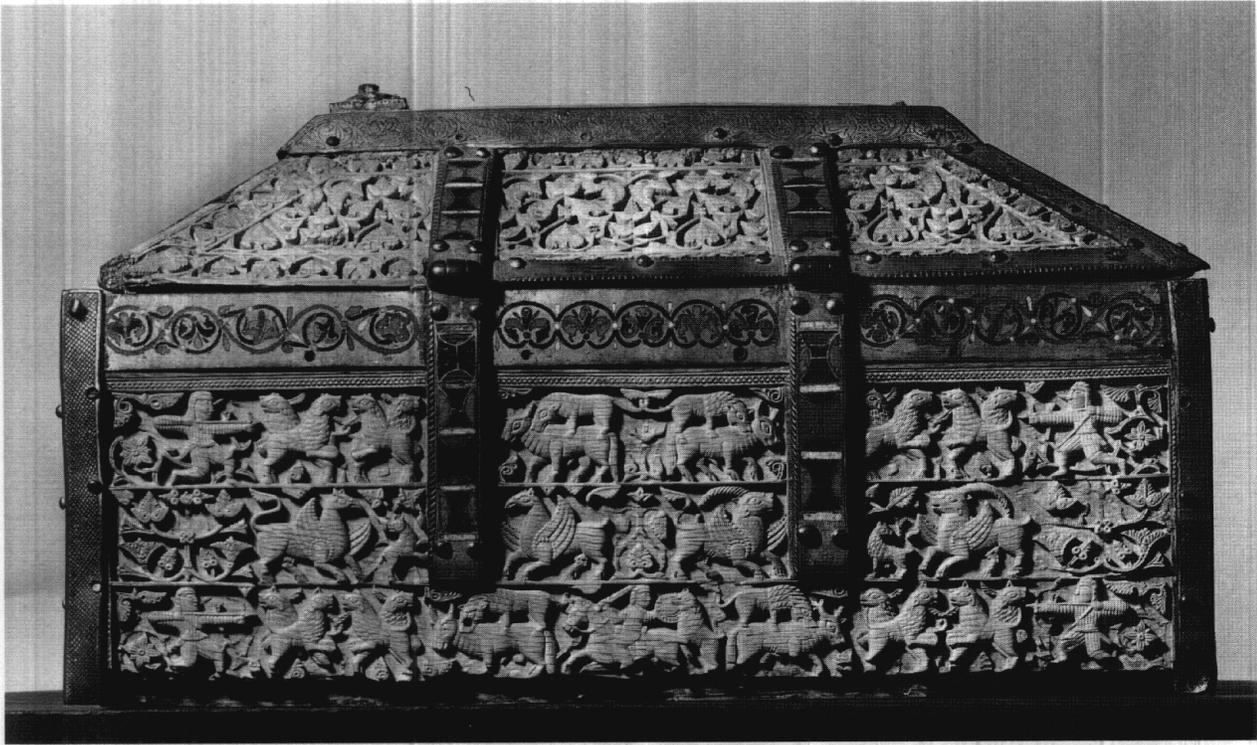


Fig. 3. Burgos casket. Rear panel. Cuenca, 1026. Carved ivory. Burgos, Museo Arqueológico Provincial. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

casket from Burgos and the one from Madrid are the only signed ones — the first is signed by the carver Muhammad ibn Zayyan and the second by his son (or his brother) ʿAbd al-Rahman — it is likely that the whole group of ivories was manufactured in the workshop of the Zayyan family in the city of Cuenca, and that, according to the inscriptions on three items of this group, they were all made for potentates of the Dhu'l-Nunid dynasty.

The first inscription is the one on the casket from Madrid which states that the casket was made to the order of Ismaʿil ibn al-Maʿmun around 1049–50.³⁵ Ismaʿil was governor of Cuenca and the heir presumptive to the throne of Toledo. He died before his time, and the throne was left to his son Yahya al-Qadir who came to power in 1075, as soon as his grandfather al-Maʿmun had died. The second inscription is carved on a fragment of a plaque mounted on the “*arqueta de las bienaventuranzas*,” and it refers to Ismaʿil ibn al-Maʿmun as well.³⁶ The third inscription is the one on the pyxis from Narbonne, and it states that the box was made for the *hajib* Ismaʿil, *qaʿid al-quwwad*, probably the same Ismaʿil ibn al-Maʿmun;³⁷ though the inscription on the casket from Burgos does

not bear the name of the person for whom it was made in the year 1026, it has been suggested that either Abu Bakr Yaʿish ibn Muhammad ibn Yaʿish al-Asadi (reigned in Toledo until ca. 1030) or ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Midras ibn Dhi'l-Nun, the father of al-Zafir, ruler of Toledo, was the dedicatee.³⁸

After the destruction and the plunder of Madinat al-Zahra in 1010 and the collapse of the caliphate of Cordova around 1031, ivory carvers from the royal workshops probably found asylum in Cuenca under the rule of the Dhu'l-Nunids during the Taifa period. The style of the ivories from Cuenca differs in many respects from those made for the Umayyad house in Cordova and Madinat al-Zahra.³⁹ The general method of carving in the Zayyan workshop in Cuenca keeps the traditional technique of ivory carving in Spain, namely deep carving which is restricted to two main levels, while leaving the lower surface undecorated and smooth. But in comparison with earlier carved ivories of Muslim Spain, the upper level is flat, the carving is less soft, there is a simplification of forms, and the ornament is repetitive. These factors create a peculiar style which is rigid, almost even



Fig. 4. Madrid casket. Right side panel. Cuenca, 1049–50. Carved ivory. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 57 371. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

“archaic.” This is probably the reason why some scholars have described this style as less lively, as dry and even senile, and have suggested that the ivories from Cuenca are a testimony to the decline of ivory manufacture in Spain.⁴⁰

From the iconographical point of view, some further distinctions should be made. First and foremost the obvious royal banquet motif, which frequently appears on the caskets from Cordova, is missing. The iconographic program consists mainly of a delicate arabesque of half-palmette leaves and of confronted birds, antelopes, and fabulous creatures. Human figures rarely appear, and they are solely to be found on the two rectangular caskets from Burgos and Madrid.

Four bowmen and one horseman appear on each of the two large front and the back panels of the casket from Burgos (figs. 1 and 3). A bowman bending his bow

is depicted on each edge of the upper and the lower bands, and a horseman attacked by a wild animal from behind appears in the center of the lower band. The warriors are all dressed in a short tunic and wear what is likely to be a helmet which covers the forehead and the nape of the neck. They are all girded with daggers. A quiver for holding arrows is attached to the girdle of the bowmen, and the horseman is armed with a dagger and a round shield.

Similar figures are depicted on one of the narrow facets of the casket from Madrid (fig. 4). Two spearmen, each stabbing a lion which devours a defenseless lying figure, and two bowmen who take aim at gazelles, are depicted on the upper and the lower panels of the frame of this facet.

Hunting scenes are usually associated in a general sense with royalty and with courtly art, and for that reason alone

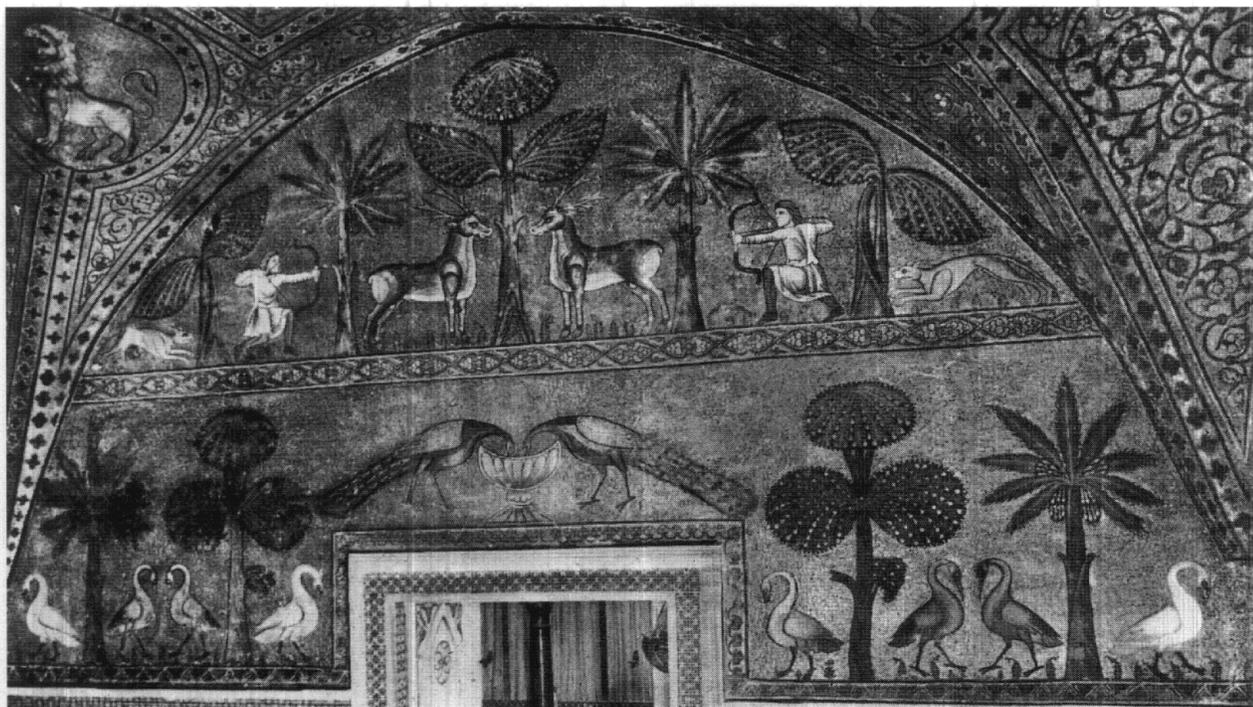


Fig. 5. Palermo, Norman stanza (the so-called Stanza di Ruggiero). Mosaics of the western wall. Probably 1160–70. (photo: from Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*)

they might be found on royal caskets. But it must be pointed out that the hunt as a royal activity is usually represented on the ivories of Muslim Spain by the motif of the falconer. This is quite understandable because the *bayzara*, the art of falconry, is the practice of hunting in its most ennobled form and was regarded as a royal entertainment. The hunting scenes on the caskets from Burgos and Madrid, however, seem to convey a different meaning. They represent the chase in its crucial and most dramatic moments. The bowmen are fully concentrated and are carefully bending their bows before shooting arrows. The rider turns backwards to defend himself against an attacking wild animal, which digs its claws into the horse's flesh. The scene of a defenseless figure, who probably escapes a horrible death thanks to a spearman approaching from behind, reaches a crescendo. It seems, therefore, that in these caskets the specific royal connotation of the hunt was ignored, and emphasis was instead placed on some other characteristics of the hunt. These might be vigilance, precision, and above all courage.

An interesting comparison to these enigmatic hunting scenes is to be found in the mosaics which cover the upper part of the so-called Stanza di Ruggiero in Palermo.⁴¹ Though these mosaics were probably commissioned at

the order of William I or William II and are datable to between 1160 and 1170,⁴² some motifs, at least on the surface, strongly recall those which are depicted on the caskets from Burgos and Madrid.

Apart from the wild and fabulous animals which adorn the walls and the ceiling of this room, the scenes on the western and the eastern walls are of importance for this discussion. Above the panels, in which confronted birds and lions are arranged between fantastic trees, two bowmen are aiming at stags (figs. 5 and 6). The similarity between the motifs of the mosaics and those on the ivory caskets and, above all, the resemblance between the hunting scene in Palermo and the one on the lower panel of the narrow facet of the casket from Madrid (fig. 4) are striking. It is of course dangerous to read too much meaning into an image. But the Arabic inscription written around the entrance arch to another Norman palace, the Ziza in Palermo, might hint at the meaning of the inner decoration of these Norman palaces; it must be pointed out that the mosaics of the Ziza resemble these of the Stanza di Ruggiero and that they were probably set at the beginning of the reign of William II (r. 1166–89). The Arabic inscription, which is partially damaged, reads:

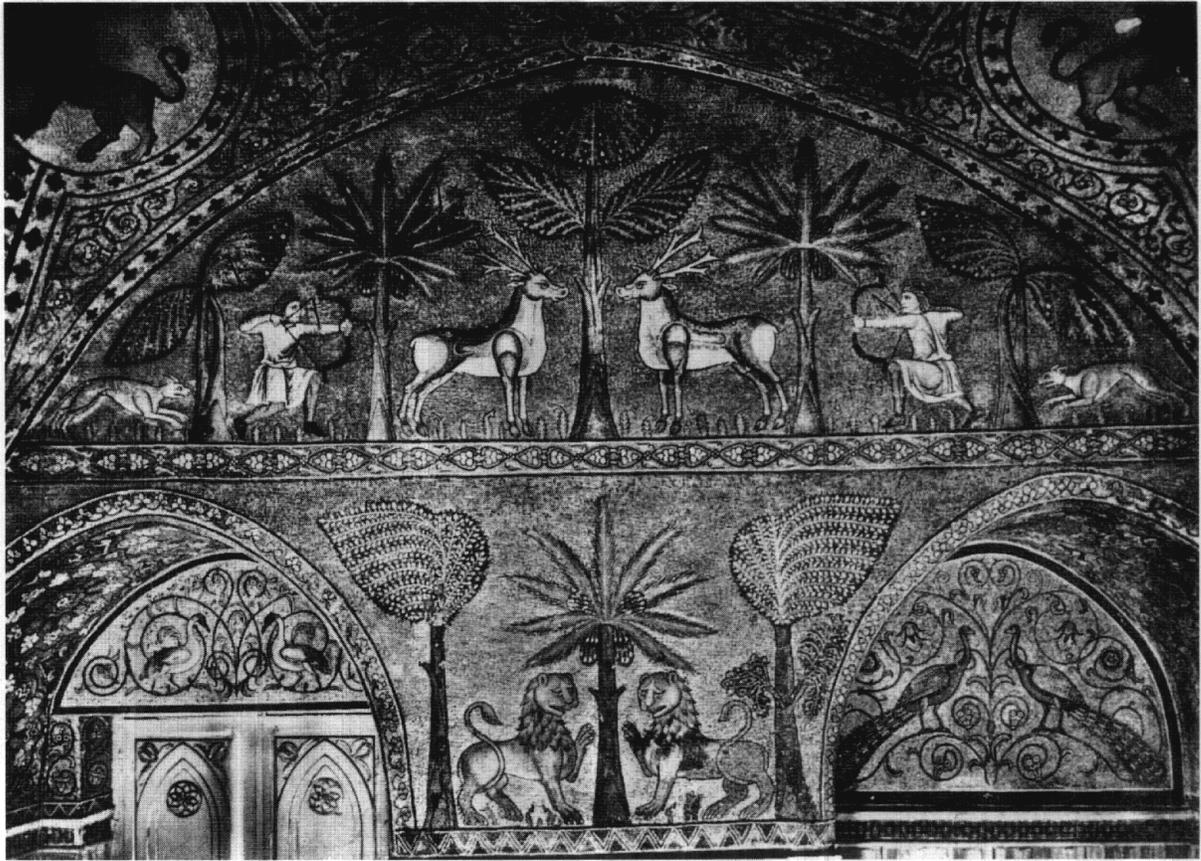


Fig. 6. Palermo, Norman stanza (the so-called Stanza di Ruggiero). Mosaics of the eastern wall. Probably 1160–70. (photo: from Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*)

Here, as oft as thou shalt wish, shalt thou see the loveliest possession of this Kingdom, the most splendid of the world and of the seas. The mountains, their peaks flushed with the colour of narcissus . . . Thou shalt see the great King of his century in his beautiful dwelling-place, a house of joy and splendour which suits him well. This is the earthy paradise that opens to the view; this King is the Musta²izz, this palace the ^cAziz.⁴³

The last sentence seems to be the key to understanding the decoration of the Ziza and also that of the Stanza di Ruggiero. On the one hand, the palace is the palace of an earthly paradise. On the other hand, the king who dwells in it is the *musta²izz*, the one who overwhelms all, the victorious, and his palace is the mighty. It might be suggested that the heraldically arranged animals between fantastic trees and plants symbolize a paradisaical scene, while the bowmen and the emblem of an eagle with a hare in its claws, which is depicted in the center of the ceiling, symbolize courage and victory.⁴⁴

The ivory caskets from Burgos and Madrid seem to convey the same impression. The delicate vegetal imagery on the lid of the casket from Burgos, the devouring animals and valiant warriors on its large facets (figs. 1 and 3), and the pair of peacocks with intertwining necks on its narrow facet (fig. 7) probably transmit the same ideas of paradise and victory. A similar combination of motifs appears on the casket from Madrid. The repetitive design of pairs of confronted and adorsed animals enclosed in architectural motifs (fig. 2), the delicate vegetal pattern, the spearmen and bowmen on one narrow facet (fig. 4), and the devouring animals on the other narrow facet (fig. 8) suggest that ideas of paradise and victory may also be represented on this casket. These images, then, reinforce the good wishes conferred upon the noble owners of the caskets. More than that, the combination of victory and paradise might hint at the most desirable blessing any pious Muslim can wish for, namely to win a victory over death by entering the abode

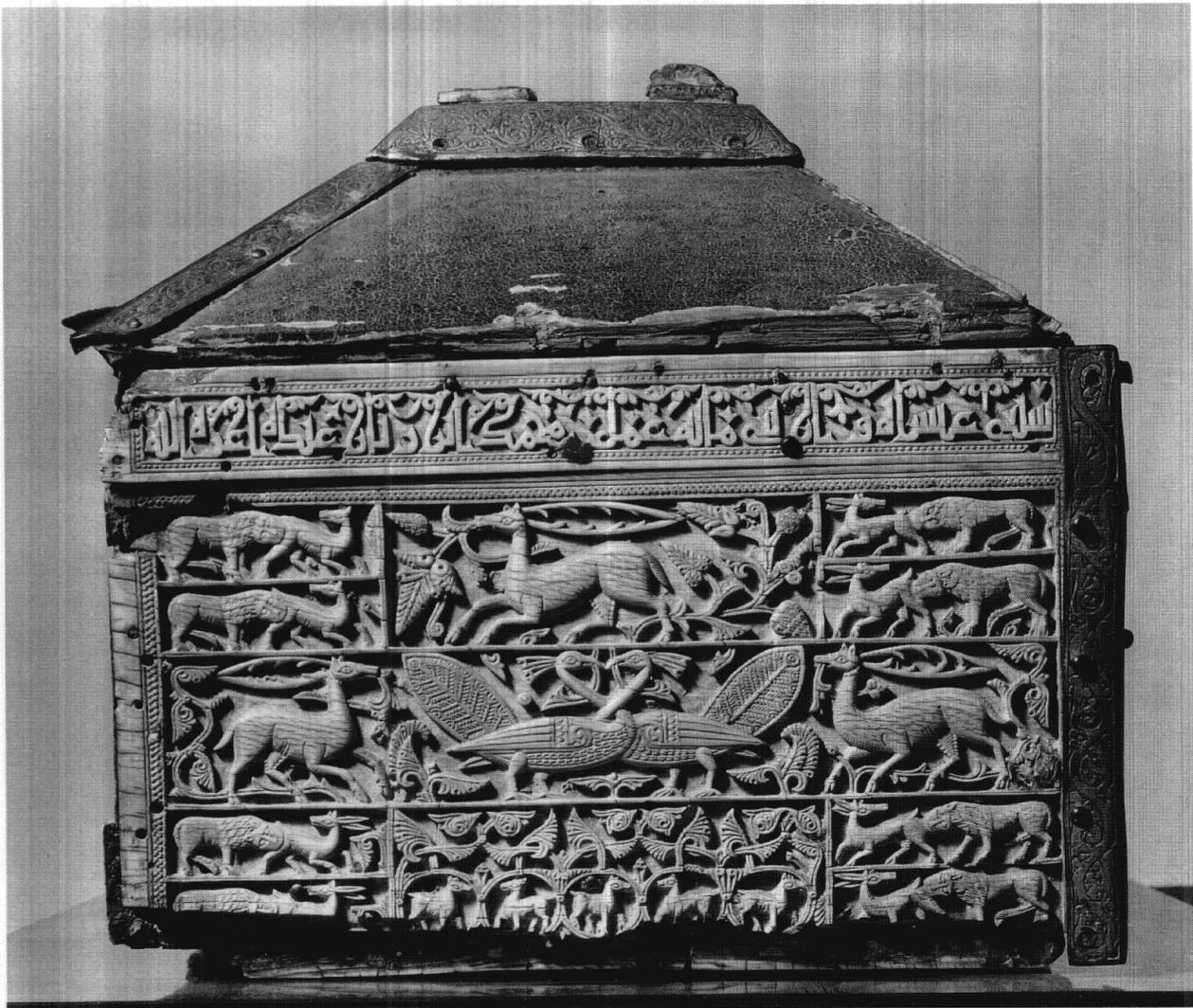


Fig. 7. Burgos casket (right side panel). Cuenca, 1026. Carved ivory. Burgos, Museo Arqueológico Provincial. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

of paradise (*janna*). The meaning of the fabulous animals — the griffin and the winged unicorn —, however, remains unsolved in this context.⁴⁵

Reading the motifs alone is of course a harmful proceeding to inflict on a work of art. In order to understand it an iconographical analysis in the deeper sense of the word is required. This process was defined by Erwin Panofsky as an “iconological” approach,⁴⁶ a term that refers to obtaining a broader synthesis of the subject matter by bringing into the discussion the specific historical context of the artifact. Before providing such a context for these caskets, however, some “formalistic” points

should be stressed. The most disputable issue in Panofsky’s theory probably originates from his clear definition of iconography as “that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form.”⁴⁷ In his later works, Panofsky was very well aware of this Achilles heel, and he even said that “form” cannot be divorced from “content” and “must also be understood as carrying a more-than-visual meaning.”⁴⁸ Thus, a change in “form” might also involve a change in meaning.

The “archaic” style of the ivory caskets from Burgos and Madrid should be reexamined with these issues in



Fig. 8. Madrid casket. Left side panel. Cuenca, 1049–50. Carved ivory. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 57 371. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

mind. In fact, the unique style of the casket from Burgos has already been noticed by some scholars, who have mainly stressed the appearance of eastern, Asiatic, or even Sasanian motifs on this casket.⁴⁹ The impression of an “archaic” style is, however, achieved not only by giving the animals and the human figures short and rather stout forms and by the lack of any frontal image, but also by the division of the composition into horizontal registers and by the rigid symmetry of the motifs. This archaic impression and the representations of armed figures dressed in an Oriental manner might have had a further meaning in Islamic Spain, especially in Toledo, which was always remembered as the capital of the vanquished Visigothic kingdom.⁵⁰

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CASKETS

The history of the Arab conquest of Spain was enlivened by different mythical stories, most of which were political in nature. These stories were probably invented by the Arabic-speaking population in order to legitimize their right to rule Spain.⁵¹ One of them tells the story of a sealed house in Toledo; it is recounted in various versions by several Arab writers.⁵² The principal version, which varies slightly in different accounts, relates that when Musa ibn Nusayr captured the city of Toledo he found there two important buildings. The first one was the House of Kings (probably the palace), where luxurious treasures were kept, among them the Table of Solomon and the 24 crowns of the 24 former kings of the Visigothic kingdom. The second house was sealed by 24 locks, each installed in succession by newly enthroned

Visigothic kings. Once, so goes the tradition, a spell which protected the Visigothic kingdom from its disastrous end was left locked in this house. In the course of time the story was forgotten, and only the ritual of installing a new lock on the door of the house remained. Through this specific act each king demonstrated that he was willing to keep the long-traditional custom of not entering the sealed house. Roderic, the 25th king, broke this tradition. He went into the house and found there pictures of Arabs riding horses. An inscription that was found in the house explained the enigmatic depiction in a most fatal way: whenever this house is reopened, those who are depicted inside it will invade the country. And so it was: in the same year the Arabs invaded Spain.

One of the earliest accounts of this legend is to be found in the controversial book, the *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik* of Ibn Khurdādhbih (ca. 820–911), who says that

turbaned horsemen holding bows were depicted in the sealed house.⁵³ Other earlier writers like the ninth-century Iranian author Ibn al-Faqih and Ibn Qutayba (828–89) repeat almost the same details in their accounts.⁵⁴ A slightly different version by the Andalusian historian Ibn al-Qutiyya (d. 977) claims that there were statues of turbaned horsemen.⁵⁵ Al-Qadi al-Rashid (late eleventh century) tells the same anecdote in the *Kitāb al-Hādāya wa al-Tuḥaf*⁵⁶ and adds that the Arab warriors wore turbans and sandals and that they held bows, arrows, and swords.⁵⁷ Almost the same account is repeated by Abu Jaʿfar ibn ʿAbd al-Haqq al-Khazraji al-Qurtubi in his *Kitāb al-iktifāʾ fī'l-akhbār al-khulafāʾ* (datable to 1174–75).⁵⁸ According to him the same Arab figures were portrayed on a scroll of parchment, and they held spears with fluttering pennons.⁵⁹ Ibn Khallikan (1211–82), in his famous biographical dictionary, under the account on



Fig. 9. Enameled plaque, mounted on top of the lid of the Burgos casket. Probably Burgos, 1150. Burgos, Museo Arqueológico Provincial. (photo: Hirmer Photo Archive, Munich)

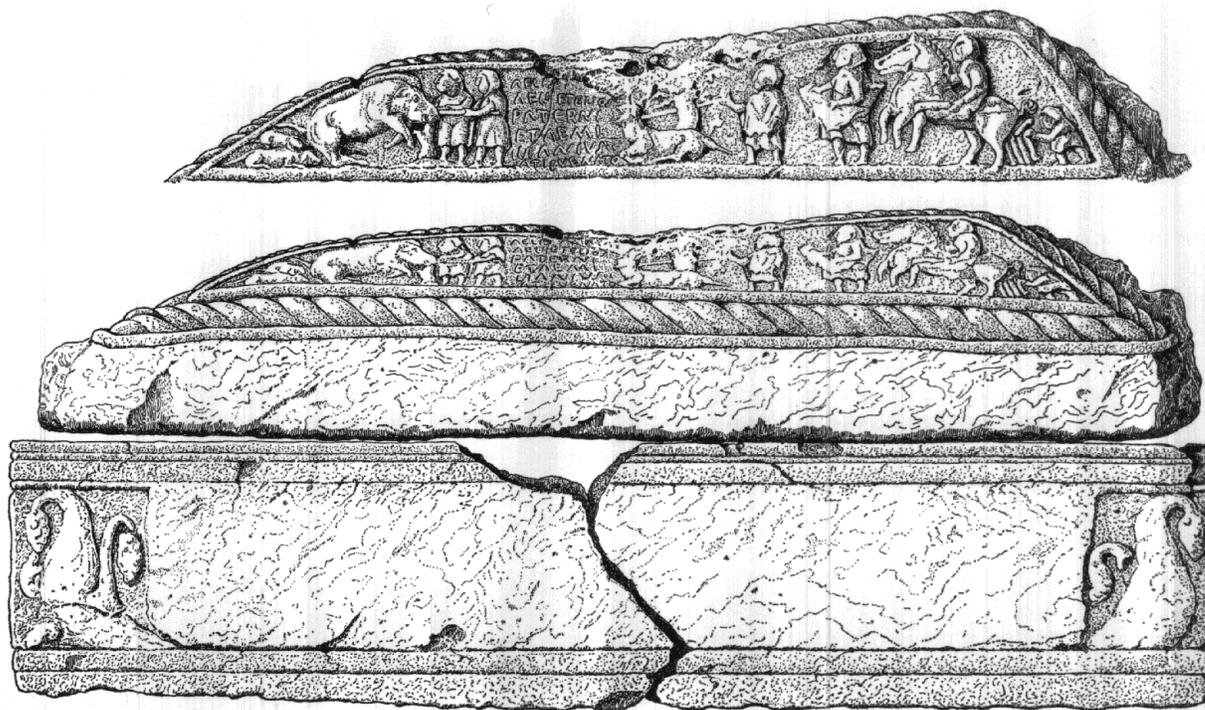


Fig. 10. La Molina sarcophagus. Bureba (Burgos), probably 4th century. Barcelona, Museum Marés. (drawing: from Helmut Schlunk, "Frühchristliche Sarkophagen")

Musa ibn Nusayr, indicates that the Arab horsemen were depicted on the walls of a locked marble chest (*tābūt min al-rukhām*)⁶⁰ which was found in the sealed house. The Arabs wore turbans and skin coats, held bows and spears, and were girded with daggers.⁶¹ Al-Maqqari (1577–1632), in his book on al-Andalus, also mentions a chest (*tābūt*) which was found in the sealed house and on which Arab warriors were depicted. The warriors were dressed with skins of animals (*firāʿ*), and instead of turbans had locks of coarse hair. They were riding horses, were girded with swords, and held spears in their hands.⁶²

These various versions attest that the legend was quite popular. Moreover, it was most probably known in Toledo, the locale of the story itself and the place where the memory of the former Visigothic kingdom was kept green.⁶³

Though written at least a century after the manufacture of the ivory caskets from Cuenca, the thirteenth-century account of Ibn Khallikan might hint that already from the thirteenth century onwards, as the account of al-Maqqari certifies, a version prevailed which claimed that the fatal spell was enshrined in the sealed house of Toledo in a chest (*tābūt*), the sides of which were deco-

rated with depictions of Arab warriors. Therefore the two royal ivory caskets from Burgos and Madrid might also have called to mind this myth. It must be pointed out, however, that the allusion to the myth is rather loose. One can even argue that the warriors depicted on the caskets do not resemble the ones with the skin coats, turbans, locks of coarse hair or the ones with the spears with fluttering pennons that the different Arab sources refer to. This suggests that the myth was not taken too literally or down to the smallest detail in a rigid, codified iconographical method but was rather loosely and maybe even indirectly referred to, so as to trigger the general memory of the myth. In view of all this, the change to the "archaic" style of these caskets might have borne a specific meaning — it might have referred to the legendary old marble chest kept in the sealed house of Toledo.

The Dhu'l-Nunids, for whom these caskets were made, probably tried to revive this legend for several reasons. This story first and foremost legitimized Islamic rule in Spain. The choice of Toledo as their capital helped the Dhu'l-Nunids, on the one hand, to establish their links with the glorious past of this particular province and, on

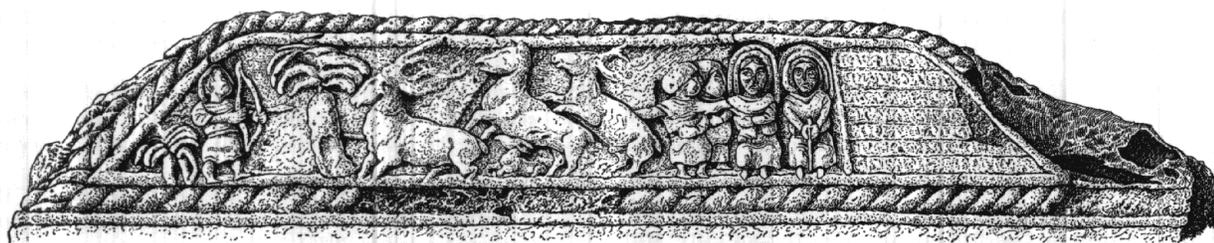


Fig. 11. La Molina sarcophagus. Rear side of the lid. Bureba (Burgos), probably 4th century. Barcelona, Museum Marés. (drawing: from Helmut Schlunk, "Frühchristliche Sarkophagen")

the other hand, to associate their rule with the heroic days of Tariq ibn Ziyad and Musa ibn Nusayr, the conquerors of al-Andalus.

The specific function of these caskets is still unknown. They seem to have been used as containers for some valuable substance; the inscription on the pyxis from Narbonne states that it was made for the treasury (*khizānah*) of Ismā'īl. But concomitant with their function, whatever that was, the caskets from Burgos and Madrid, with their peculiar iconography, might have been regarded as symbols of Islamic power in Spain in general and of the authority of the Dhu'l-Nunids in Toledo in particular.

THE CASKETS IN A CHRISTIAN SETTING

It is as yet impossible to discover when and under what circumstances the casket from Burgos fell into the hands of the Christians. The first documentary reference to the casket appears in 1440 in an inventory of the Benedictine abbey of S. Domingo in Silos, in which it is said to house some relics of the 11,000 Virgins of Cologne. But since it was restored in 1150 by an enameler in that abbey, it is quite probable that it reached the treasury earlier. Given that it was intended to enshrine the relics of S. Domingo, the founder of that abbey, the casket was "Christianized" by the enameler. Two champlévé copper plaques with enamels were mounted on the casket. One plaque, representing S. Domingo with a Benedictine mantle and accompanied by two angels, is attached to one of the narrow sides of the casket (fig. 1). Another plaque, depicting the Lamb in a medallion with the Alpha and Omega and surrounded by two fabulous birds, is mounted to the flat top of the lid (fig. 9). Some other enameled straps and strips of engraved and gilded copper are mounted on the casket's corners.

The casket from Madrid was formerly kept in the treasury of the cathedral of Palencia. The twelfth-century gilded copper strips with enamels, which are mounted

on the casket's corners, might hint that the casket was used in its new Christian setting in that same century.⁶⁴

Ivory containers in general and rectangular caskets with truncated pyramidal lids, like the caskets under discussion, in particular were frequently used as relic containers in church treasuries. The form of the latter probably recalls the classical form of Christian reliquaries — a rectangular flat-bottomed container with a lid with four sloping sides. These Christian reliquaries might be called "miniature sarcophagi," as Marie-Madeleine Gauthier described them,⁶⁵ because their form might be a stylized shape of the ancient sarcophagus, in which relics of saints were originally kept. Basset speculates whether the story of the sealed house is a medieval popular version of Roderic's opening of a church treasury in Toledo.⁶⁶ Thus the later Arabic accounts, which claim that the fatal spell was enclosed in a marble chest, suggest that a marble sarcophagus, decorated with battle or hunting scenes, was kept in that treasury. This sarcophagus could have been a late Roman one, which was kept in the treasury as an authentic sarcophagus of Christian saints or martyrs and later became, in the medieval popular imagination, the chest in which the spell was found.

A fourth-century sarcophagus which was made in Bureba, a manufacturing center of early Christian sarcophagi in the eastern part of the province of Burgos, might support this speculation.⁶⁷ Both sides of its lid are decorated with hunting scenes. The scenes appear in long registers, and one even finds the motifs of the rider, the spearman, and the bowman hunting a stag (figs. 10 and 11). Hence, the peculiar form, the "archaic" decoration, and the marble-like impression of the ivory caskets from Burgos and Madrid might have been intended specifically to evoke the memory of a late Roman or an early Christian sarcophagus like the legendary one in the sealed house of Toledo.

Unfortunately it is unknown whether the stories which were associated with Islamic objects in their original

sphere migrated and were told in the new Christian milieu. Nevertheless, kept in the treasuries of the churches of Silos and Palencia, the caskets from Burgos and Madrid, with their royal character and their superb appearance, were most likely regarded as important spoils and symbols of triumph over the infidels, and might even have embodied through their long and adventurous history two major events — the capture and the liberation of the Iberian Peninsula.

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NOTES

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1. Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955), p. 12.
2. For basic literature on Muslim Spain and on this particular time, see mainly Reinhart Dozy, *Spanish Islam*, trans. Francis G. Stokes (reprt. London, 1988); Anwar G. Chejne, *Muslim Spain: Its History and Culture* (Minneapolis, 1974); Thomas E. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1979); Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain, Unity in Diversity, 400–1000* (London-Basingstoke, 1983), especially chapters 5, 6, and 7; idem, *The Arab Conquest of Spain* (Oxford, 1989); Bernard F. Reilly, *The Medieval Spains* (Cambridge, 1993); see also the covering essay of Mahmoud Makki, "The Political History of al-Andalus (92/711–897/1492)," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden, 1992), pp. 3–87; and especially Derek W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London, 1978), and Richard A. Fletcher, "Reconquest and Crusade in Spain c. 1050–1150," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 37 (1987): 131–47.
3. *The Poem of the Cid*, trans. Rita Hamilton and Janet Perry (London, 1975), p. 29.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
11. Cited by Dorothy G. Shepherd, "A Twelfth-Century Hispano-Islamic Silk," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 38 (1951): 61.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
13. For this casket, see mainly Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. no. 42.
14. For this casket, see *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, exhibition catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ed. Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York, 1992), cat. no. 9 (with extensive literature).
15. For this lamp, see mainly Gaston Migeon, *Manuel d'art musulman* (Paris, 1927), I: 386, fig. 192; *The Arts of Islam*, Hayward Gallery exhibition (London, 1976), cat. no. 175; *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 57.
16. This was mentioned by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 5. The literary source for this is given by José Ferrandis, *Marfiles arabes de Occidente* (Madrid, 1935), I: 21:

Cuando fué Almocore gran tierra alexado,
 Finco de sus averes, el campo bien poblado;
 coyeron sus averes, que Dios le avya dado;
 tan grant aver fallaron que non podria ser contado.

Fallaron ay de marfil arquetas muy preciadas
 con tantas de noblezas que non podrian ser contadas
 fueron para San Pedro las arquetas donadas;
 estan en este dia en el altar asentadas.
17. Cited by Meyer Schapiro, "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art," in idem, *Romanesque Art* (New York, 1977), p. 17; cited also by Rafique Ali Jairazbhoy, *Oriental Influences in Western Art* (Bombay, 1965), p. 38.
18. Jairazbhoy, *Oriental Influences in Western Art*, p. 43.
19. Albert Frank Kendrick, "Textiles," *Burlington Magazine, Monograph II. Spanish Art* (1927), pp. 60–61; F.L. May, *Silk Textiles of Spain, 8th–15th Century* (New York, 1957), pp. 14–17; *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 21.
20. For recent literature and bibliography, see *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 92.
21. See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 19; *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 1.
22. Richard Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid* (London, 1989), p. 59.
23. D.P. de Gayangos, *The History of Muhammadan Dynasties in Spain*, a version adapted from the *Nash al-ṭib* of al-Maqqari (London, 1840), 2: 196; cited by Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Cordoba," *Al-Andalus*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1992), p. 18.
24. *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 63.
25. The many drill holes which appear on carved ivory containers are most probably remnants of inlay in precious stones.
26. John Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba* (London, 1960), p. 26, pls. 23, 24; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 35; Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, *Highways of the Faith: Relics and Reliquaries from Jerusalem to Compostela* (London, 1986), pp. 28–32; *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 4.
27. On this casket, see mainly Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, p. 30, pl. 31; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 40; Gauthier, *Highways of Faith*, p. 32, fig. 12; Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra: 800–1200* (Suffolk and London, 1972), fig. 263.
28. See mainly Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, p. 30, pl. 32; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 43; *Arts of Islam*, cat. no. 150; *Al-Andalus*, cat. no. 7.
29. See above, n. 13.
30. Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 47.
31. This casket was commissioned by Ferdinand I in 1063 for the church of San Isidoro de León. See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 41, fig. 49.
32. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 45.
33. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 44.
34. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 46.

35. The inscription reads:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ بَرَكَةٌ دَائِمَةٌ وَنِعْمَةٌ شَامِلَةٌ لِرَأْفَاعِيَّةٍ بَاقِيَّةٍ وَغِبْطَةٌ طَائِلَةٌ وَالْأَمْرُ تَابِعَةٌ وَعِزٌّ وَأَقْبَالٌ وَأَنْعَامٌ وَأَفْضَالٌ وَبُلُوغٌ آمَالٌ لِصَاحِبِهِ أَطَالَ اللَّهُ بِقَاهُ مِمَّا عَمِلَ بِمَدِينَةِ قُونَكَةَ بِأَمْرِ الْحَاجِبِ حَسَامِ الدَّوْلَةِ أَبُو مُحَمَّدٍ إِسْمَاعِيلَ بْنِ الْمُؤْمُونِ ذِي الْمَجْدِينَ بْنِ الظَّافِرِ ذِي الرِّيَاسَتَيْنِ أَبُو مُحَمَّدٍ بْنِ ذِي النُّونِ اعْتَزَّهُ اللَّهُ فِي سَنَةِ أَحَدَى وَأَرْبَعِينَ وَارْبَعِ مِائَةِ عَمَلُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَانِ بْنِ زِيَانَ

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, continuous blessing, complete happiness, and lasting health, and prolonged delight, and continuous . . . , and support, and the achievements of all the hopes of the owner, may God prolong his life. Completed in the city of Cuenca by the order of the *hajib* Husām al-Dawla abū Muḥammad Ismāʿil ibn al-Maʿmūn Dhū'l-Majdayn ibn al-Zāfir Dhū'l-Riyāsatayn Abū Muḥammad ibn Dhū'l-Nūn, may God give him glory. In the year 441 [1048–49]. Work of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayyān."

36. It reads:

[اسم]اعيل بن المؤمن ذي [المجدين]

"Ismāʿil ibn al-Maʿmūn Dhū'l-Majdayn."

37. It reads:

بَرَكَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِمَّا عَمِلَ بِمَدِينَةِ قُونَكَةَ لِخِزَانَةِ الْحَاجِبِ قَائِدِ الْقَوَادِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ

"Blessing from God. Completed in the city of Cuenca for the treasury of the *hajib* [of the] chief commander Ismāʿil."

38. Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, p.30; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 47, n. 1, where the suggestions of Lévi-Provençal and Ferrandis are cited.
39. For a stylistical discussion of the ivories from Cuenca, see Marinetto Sanchez, "Plaquitas y bote de marfil del taller de Cuenca," *Miscelanea de Estudios Arabes y Hebraicos* 36, pt. 1 (1987), pp. 45–100 (my thanks to Charles Mayorkas who helped me in the translation of this article).
40. Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, p.30; Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650–1250* (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.153.
41. Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (London, 1949), pp. 180–83, figs. 113–19.
42. It should be mentioned that the mosaics were restored beginning in 1828, *ibid.*, p. 180.
43. The English translation is from John Julius Norwich, *The Normans in Sicily* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 601.
44. Demus, *Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, fig. 114. For the meaning of the hunt as a celestial activity in medieval Islamic art, see Dorothy G. Shepherd, "Banquet and Hunt in Medieval Islamic Iconography," *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner*, ed. Ursula E. McCracken, Lilian M. Randall, and Richard H. Randall, Jr. (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 79–92.

45. The griffin and the winged unicorn might be understood as mighty animals guarding the valuable content kept in these precious caskets.
46. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology; Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (reprt. New York, 1967), pp. 3–17.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
48. Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1984), p. 165.
49. Josef Strzygowski, *Asiens bildende Kunst in Stichproben, ihr Wesen und ihre Entwicklung* (Augsburg, 1930), p. 229, figs. 224a, 224b; André Grabar, "Un relief du XIe siècle à Brauweiler et l'origine des motifs "sasanides" dans l'art du moyen âge," reprt. in *idem, L'Art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1968), 2: 677–85, fig. 162c.
50. It should be noted that an archaic impression can be found on a large group of twelfth-century Byzantine ivory caskets — the "antikisierenden Kästen — and on a relatively smaller group of eleventh- and twelfth-century oliphants — the so-called Byzantine oliphants. For the caskets, see Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts* (reprt. Berlin, 1979), 1: 17–19, cat. nos. 21–64; for the Byzantine oliphants, see mainly Otto von Falke, "Elfenbeinhörner II. Byzanz," *Pantheon* 5 (1930): 39–44; T.D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," *Antiquity* 11 (1937): 278–82; Hanns Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 60 (1962): 27–45; *idem*, "Les Oliphants," *Les Monuments historiques de la France* 12 (1966): 6–11.
51. For an example, see the story of the daughter of the Christian governor who was kidnapped by the Visigothic king and because of whom the Arab conquest of Spain was started: de Gayangos, *Muhammadan Dynasties*, vol. 1, appendix, p. xlv; or the story of the spell which was found engraved on a colossal column and which was the reason why the Muslims refrained from invading the land of the Franks: *ibid.*, 1: 289.
52. René Basset, "La maison fermée de Tolède," *Société de Géographie et d'Archéologie de la Province d'Oran* 18 (1898): 42–58.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
54. *Ibid.* The account of Ibn Qutayba appears in the *Āḥādīth al-Imāmah wa'l-siyāsah*, which has been attributed by some scholars to Ibn al-Qūtiyya (d. 977); for the translation of this account, see de Gayangos, *Muhammadan Dynasties*, vol. 1, appendix E, p. lxxiv.
55. Basset, "La maison fermée," p. 44.
56. Al-Qādī Abu'l-Husayn Ahmad b. al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al-dhakhāʿir wa'l-tuḥaf*, ed. M. Hamīd Allāh (Kuwait, 1959), pp. 171–72; for the English translation of this account, see Ghada Hijawi Qaddumi, "A Medieval Islamic Book of Gifts and Treasures," translation, annotation and commentary on the *Kitāb al-Hādāya wa al-Tuḥaf*, Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1990, p. 177 (caption 212).
57. Al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al-dhakhāʿir wa'l-tuḥaf*, p. 172; Qaddumi, "Islamic Book of Gifts and Treasures," p. 177.
58. De Gayangos, *Muhammadan Dynasties*, vol. 1, appendix D, pp. xliii–iv.
59. *Ibid.*, p. xlv.
60. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa-anbāʾ al-zamān*, ed. Ihsan Abbās (Beirut, 1968–72), 5: 327.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 328; for the English translation, see *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*, trans. M.G. de Slane (first published Paris, 1842; repr. Beirut, 1970), 3: 482–84.
62. Al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-tib min qhusn al-Andalus al-raṭīb*, ed.

- Muhammad Muḥī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Hamīd (Cairo, 1949), 1: 232; for the English translation, see De Gayangos, *Muhammadan Dynasties*, 1: 263.
63. For the various Christian accounts of this legend, see Basset, "La maison fermée," pp.49–55.
64. Professor Juan Zozaya, who kindly discussed with me some problems relating to this casket, has suggested that the enameled and gilded copper stripes are its original mountings.
65. Gauthier, *Highways of Faith*, pp.12–13.
66. Basset, "La maison fermée," pp.56–57.
67. Helmut Schlunk, "Zu den frühchristlichen Sarkophagen aus der Bureba (Prov. Burgos)," *Madriider Mitteilungen* 6 (1965), figs. 8, 9.