

**NARRATING THE TREASURY:
WHAT MEDIEVAL IBERIAN CHRONICLES CHOOSE TO TELL
ABOUT LUXURY OBJECTS**

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Some well-known lines from the Poem of Fernán González, written towards the mid-thirteenth century, are dedicated to the defeat of Almanzor (Muhammad ibn Abi ‘Amir al-Mansur, d. 1002) at the battle of Lara – a battle which never really took place, just like the non-existent encounter between the Muslim ruler and the count of Castile Fernán González (d. 970). This section of the poem recounts the enormous spoils taken by the Christians from the Muslims: goblets and vessels of gold, cases full of gold and silver coins, silk fabrics, swords, armor, and ivory caskets, the latter donated to the monastery of San Pedro de Arlanza:

With al-Mansur now a good distance away,
The field was left well peopled with Christians;
they gathered their possessions, granted them by God,
and found such great wealth as to be beyond tally.
They found in the tents an abundant treasure:
many cups and goblets made of fine gold;
such riches as no Christian or Moor had ever seen,

- it would have sufficed Alexander and Porus.
Many cases they found there, along with many bags,
filled with gold and silver –no sign of copper coins-,
many silken pavilions and many tents of war,
breastplates and swords and a great mass of armor.
They found caskets of ivory very great in value,
with other noble objects impossible to count;
to San Pedro de Arlanza were most of them given,
where to this day they are displayed upon its altar.¹

¹ *The Poem of Fernán González*, trans. Peter Such and Richard Ramone (Liverpool: Aris & Phillips Hispanic Classics, 2015), verses 275-278: 175. “Quando fue Almançor / grand tierra alexado, finco de los cristianos / el canpo bien poblado; cojieron sus averes / que Dios les avie dado; tan grand aver fallaron / que non serie contado. Fallaron en las tiendas / sobejano tesoro, muchas copas e vasos / que eran d'un fino oro: nunca vio atal riqueza / nin cristiano nin moro, serien ende abondados / Alexander e Poro. Fallaron y maletas / e muchos de çurriones llenos d'oro e de plata, / que non de pepiones, muchas tiendas de seda / e muchos tendejones, espadas e lorigas / e muchas guarniçiones. Fallaron de marfil arquetas muy preçiadas,/ con tantas de noblezas que non serien contadas;/ fueron pora San Pedro las mas d'aquellas dadas,/ estan todas oy dia en su altar asentadas.” On the objects and booty described in this fragment of the Poem, see Juan Carlos Ruíz Souza, “Botín de guerra y tesoro sagrado,” in *Maravillas de la España Medieval: tesoro sagrado y monarquía*, ed. Isidro Bango, 2 vols. (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2001), 1: 31-40.

Just as it is easy for us to imagine what these ivory boxes from al-Andalus would have looked like, since some of them, converted into reliquaries, have been preserved in the treasuries of Christian churches,² it is also easy to imagine the extent of the circulation of wealth represented by war and its spoils in Iberia throughout the central Middle Ages. Some of these objects, still held today in ecclesiastical institutions and museums, frequently out of context, give evidence of such circulation. Written sources, particularly chronicles, offer a complementary view from the perspective of medieval scribes which reveals the place of such luxury objects in the rulership strategies of Iberian kings and queens.

Chronicles written in the kingdoms of Castile and León between the reigns of Alfonso VI and Fernando III, the period of great expansion by the Christian kingdoms against al-Andalus beginning with the conquest of Toledo in 1085 and culminating in that of Seville in 1248, also reflect the importance of the spoils of battle and the circulation of objects between Christian and Muslim lands as a result of war. The chronicle known as the *Historia Silense* or *Historia Legionense* (first third of the twelfth century), the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* (c. 1145-1150), which centered on the reign of Alfonso VII, and the *Chronica Najerense* (last quarter of the twelfth century) all make copious references to wealth, gold and silver, precious fabrics and silks, as well as horses, coming from the booty obtained in battle.³ The opulence of the defeated

² See, for example, Mariam Rosser-Owen, “Islamic Objects in Christian Contexts: Relic Translation and Modes of Transfer in Medieval Iberia,” *Art in Translation*, special issue, *Translating Cultures in the Hispanic World*, 7/1 (2015): 39–64.

³ *Historia Silense*, ed. Justo Pérez de Urbel and Atilano González (Madrid: CSIC, 1959); *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* ed. Antonio Maya Sánchez, in *Chronica hispana saeculi XII, Pars I*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 71 (Turnhout:

Muslims and the great spoils acquired by the Christians is a constant presence in the multiple narratives of military campaigns. After the Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, the archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, author of *De Rebus Hispaniae* (c. 1240) and an eye-witness to that glorious event, notes that:

Those who wished to loot found many things in the field, that is, gold, silver, rich garments, silk harnesses and many other valuable ornaments, as well as much money and precious vessels.⁴

The loot described in the chronicles proceeds not only from the war in al-Andalus, although it does feature in the majority of references. In the so-called *Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Castile*, attributed to Juan de Soria, Chancellor of Fernando III (written 1230s-1240s), the chronicler makes a generic mention of the famous sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, when gold, silver, precious stones, and Syrian cloths of various kinds were wrested from its churches.⁵ Beyond looting, however, gifts, treaties, rewards, ransoms, theft, and commerce were also means of transfer of objects between Christians and Muslims. In general, we have only vague references in the chronicles to any of these means. For example, the *De Rebus Hispaniae* reports that the

Brepols, 1990); *Chronica Naierensis*, ed. Juan A. Estévez Sola, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 72A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

⁴ “In campo autem qui uoluerunt rapere plurima inuenerunt aurum, scilicet, argentum, uestes preciosas, suppellectilia serica et multa alia preciosissima ornamenta, necnon et pecunias multas et uasa preciosa.” *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*, ed. Juan Fernández Valverde, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 72, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987): 275.

⁵ *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla*, ed. and trans. Luis Charlo Brea (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 1984): 46.

Muslim ruler of Toledo, who was planning to marry Teresa, sister, changed his mind when he was struck by an angel after Teresa rejected him when he tried to embrace her, threatening him with the wrath of God. The king of Toledo returned her to León accompanied by camels loaded with gold, silver, rich fabrics, and magnificent works of gold.⁶

The chronicles' accounts of the looting of churches by monarchs or nobles in the context of recurring conflicts among Christians offer regrettably few details of the objects pillaged, defining them by the material of which they are made rather than giving any attention to their individual characteristics. Alfonso el Batallador, king of Aragon, was said to sacrilegiously steal gold, silver, and precious stones from places of worship in the Tierra de Campos because, according to *De Rebus Hispaniae*, he had no money to pay the army in his wars first against his estranged wife Queen Urraca and then her son, King Alfonso VII.⁷ Curiously, the archbishop-chronicler says nothing about what is highlighted by the documents from Urraca's reign, that is, the contributions of ecclesiastical institutions to the queen's demands to finance her war

⁶ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 167. The chronicle puts the following words into the mouth of the sister of the king of León: "I am a Christian and I loathe associating with strangers: do not touch me, lest the Lord Jesus Christ, whom I adore, strike you down." See also Simon Barton, "Marriage across Frontiers: Sexual Mixing, Power and Identity in Medieval Iberia," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 3:1 (2011): 1-25.

⁷ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 222. "unde et rex Aragonum ad sanctuaria misit manum et thesauros auri et argenti et preciosorum palidum, quos regum et reginarum deuotio dedicarat, manu sacrilega usurpauit et etiam possessiones oblatas a regibus infiscauit."

against Alfonso el Batallador. A charter from the Cathedral of Oviedo, for example, includes the gift of a valuable cup to the queen in 1112, and from the monasteries of Leon she obtained in 1122 various objects of gold and silver: cups and goblets, cutlery and tableware, sacred rings, and ornaments such as crosses, chalices and an altar frontal⁸. At the beginning of 1115, the queen ordered the “silver” of the monastery of Valcabado, described as three vessels, a salt-cellar and a *cithara* to be handed over to her officers; at the end of 1116 she ordered the dismantling of the cross from this same monastery, which her aunt the Infanta Elvira had had made.⁹ Although the use of church treasuries must have been quite common at moments of crisis in medieval Christian kingdoms, the extensive coverage of Urraca's pillaging in contemporary sources is directly related to the fact that female power was seen as lacking legitimacy, a lack especially in the first half of her seventeen-year reign, then again during the first decade

⁸ *La Reina Doña Urraca (1109-1126). Cancillería y colección diplomática*, ed. Irene Ruíz Albi, Fuentes y Estudios de Historia Leonesa; 102 (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 2003), doc. 29, pp. 534-536: “est una copa argentea et deaurata, centum quinquaginta solidos ponderata, purissimo argento et opere obtimo fabricata;” doc. 125, pp. 761-764: “Et quia de proprio habere non potuit, per meam licenciam et canonicorum suorum tabulam altaris constantem nonaginta septem marcis argenti, et quamdam capsam con/tinentem LX uncias auri, ab ecclesia sua comodatim accepit et mihi contulit, tali pacto, ut constituto tempore ecclesie sue restitueret.”

⁹ *La Reina Doña Urraca (1109-1126). Cancillería y colección diplomática*, doc. 62, pp. 606-607. See Pascual Martínez Sopena, “La circulation des objets en temps de guerre. Les années de la reine Urraca (Leon et Castille, vers 1100-1130),” in *Objets sous contrainte. Circulation des richesses et valeur des choses au Moyen Âge*, ed. Laurent Feller and Ana Rodríguez (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013): 257-282.

of the reign of her son Alfonso VII. At the death of Queen Urraca, ecclesiastical institutions such as the abbey of Sahagún rushed to claim from her son the return of the sacred objects the queen had appropriated, or compensation for the plunder.¹⁰

The imprecision in generic references to precious objects in the chronicles is striking. Also striking is the very scarcity of movable goods, compared to the constant references to fixed property – land, churches, buildings of all types – in the narrative sources, and this in spite of the fact that the world of their authors – archbishops, bishops, clergymen and monks – was undoubtedly full of objects. As reflected in the documentation, the churches and monasteries had been sustained by copious endowments of the goods needed to begin their institutional journey, precious liturgical objects listed in the foundational documents and which, it is logical to think, formed part of the daily life of those who lived in the monasteries or were clerics in the churches.¹¹ In other words, the chroniclers were likely surrounded by objects, but they only dealt in detail with certain pieces on specific meaningful occasions in their writings.

¹⁰ The idea of a kingdom devastated by Urraca's actions is found in some documents from the early months of the reign of Alfonso VII. Such is the case of the acknowledgment of the goods of the monastery of Sahagún, made by the king in August 1126, where he presents himself as a child, ignorant, disturbed by adolescence, and corrupted by his mother and by her supporters (*ubi a matre [...] infestatus*). *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún*, ed. José Antonio Fernández Florez (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1991) IV: 103-107. See also Ana Rodríguez, *La estirpe de Leonor de Aquitania. Mujeres y poder en los siglos XII y XIII* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2014): 216-217.

¹¹ For some examples of monastic endowments with an abundance of precious objects and fine cloth from al-Andalus, see Ana Rodríguez, “A propos des objets nécessaires.

Some examples are particularly significant. Lucas de Tuy, author of the *Chronicon Mundi* and canon at the basilica of San Isidoro in León until the 1240s, was probably throughout his long ecclesiastical life in contact with precious objects at the royal church, many of which proceeded from the endowment of San Isidoro by King Fernando I and Queen Sancha in 1063, after the remains of the Visigothic bishop were translated from Seville. Although it might be not a single document but a twelfth-century recasting of the juridical content of several royal documents, as has been discussed recently,¹² the lengthy catalog of possessions received by the church began by listing the liturgical ornaments, gold- and silverwork, textiles, and tableware. It included three golden crowns, one of them belonging to the king himself (or to the queen?):

... one of them [the crowns] with six *alphas* around it; another with *annemates* (glass beads or maybe amethysts) with *olovitreo* (enameled, or with glass inlays?); and the third is the golden diadem from my own head [...].¹³

Dotations monastiques et circulation d'objets dans le royaume de Léon dans le Haut Moyen Âge,” in *Objets sous contrainte. Circulation des richesses et valeur des choses au Moyen Âge*, ed. Laurent Feller and Ana Rodríguez (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013): 63-90.

¹² María Encarnación Martín López, “Un documento de Fernando I de 1063: ¿Falso diplomático?,” in *Monarquía y sociedad en el Reino de León: de Alfonso III a Alfonso VII*, ed. José María Fernández Catón (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 2007): 513-540.

¹³ “Offerimus [...] ornamental altarium id est frontale ex auro puro opere digno cum lapidibus zmaragdiis saffiris et omni genere preciosis et olouitreis. Alios similiter tres frontales argenteos singulis altaribus. Coronas [sic] tres aureas, una ex his cum sex alfas et corona de alaules intus in ea pendens alia est de annemates cum olouitreo atque

The richness of these crowns and other goldwork, as well as the gold and ivory crosses, other pieces of silver and enamelwork – and the precious stones mounted in them – emeralds, sapphires, amethysts – and the details of their description are extraordinary, as befitted the place that would shortly become the royal pantheon, the center of the dynastic and symbolic power of the rulers of León until the kingdom’s union with Castile in 1230.¹⁴

Of all the gifts given to San Isidoro, only an ivory cross, currently in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid), can with reasonable certainty be identified as part of that endowment because it bears the names of the royal donors.¹⁵ Others cannot be

tercia uero est diadema capitis mihi aureum et arcellina de cristallo auro cooperta, crucem auream cum lapidibus conpertam olouitream et aliam eburneam et similitudinem nostri redemptoris crucifixi, turibulos duos auris cum inferturia aurea et alium turibulum argenteum magno podere conflatum et calicem et patenam ex auro olouitreo, stolas aureas cum amoxerce argenteo et opera ex aureo et aliud argenteo ad amorcere habet opera olouitrea et capsam eburneam opratam cum auro et alias eburneas argento laboratas: in una ex eis sedent intus tres alie capselle [...].” Ermine robes, liturgical vestments, Greek and Islamic textiles (*alvexi*) are described below. The table service is also made in silver. Also: “Omnia haec uasa argentea dearauta cum predicta arrotoma binas habent ansas.” The *arratomas* could be objects of rock crystal. *Patrimonio cultural de San Isidoro de León: Documentos de los siglos X-XIII*, ed. María Encarnación Martín López (León: Universidad de León, 1995): 26-29, doc. 6. The date in the document is 22 December 1063.

¹⁴ Therese Martin, *Queen as King: Politics and Architectural Propaganda in Twelfth-Century Spain* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006).

¹⁵ Ángela Franco Mata, “El tesoro de San Isidoro y la monarquía leonesa,” *Boletín del*

clearly identified with pieces still kept at San Isidoro in its treasury, but what does seem clear is that this rich holding, composed of pieces made of gold and silver, precious stones, and ivories, must in some way have been viewed by those who lived inside the walls of San Isidoro. One of these inhabitants must have been Lucas de Tuy, whose chronicle lacks any description of the objects with which he was undoubtedly familiar. When the *Chronicon Mundi* relates the construction of the church of San Isidoro it simply mentions its decoration with gold, silver, precious stones, and silks.¹⁶ Clearly, the works that adorned the church in which he was canon for most of his life were not a priority in his account. It seems likely that, at the time when the canon of San Isidoro was writing, these objects no longer figured as important elements for the story of the future of the monarchy of Leon, despite their significance for rulers in the past.

Lucas de Tuy also refers, with the same lack of precision, to the riches – gold, silver, and precious stones – presented by Fernando I to the Cathedral of San Salvador in Oviedo, although he had described in at least some detail the cross *ex auro puro preciosisque gemmis* (“a golden cross with precious stones”) given by Alfonso III to that church.¹⁷ For his part, the Archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, attributes particular value to the precious objects delivered by the kings to Oviedo as a source of the legitimacy of Toledo. When he speaks of the transfer to Asturias of the ark containing relics, sacred books, and the tunic of the Virgin in the eighth century, after the Islamic conquest, Rodrigo indicates that all this comes from Toledo and not from

Museo Arqueológico Nacional IX, (1991): 35-68.

¹⁶ “...plurime pulcritudinis auro et argento lapidibusque preciosis et cortinis sericis decoravit,” *Lucas Tudensis. Chronicon Mundi*, ed. Emma Falque Rey, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*, 74 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003): 293.

¹⁷ Falque, *Lucas Tudensis. Chronicon Mundi*: 248

Seville as a way of reaffirming the metropolitan primacy of the see of Toledo in the face of the threat of the restoration of the old Visigothic sees. This was an imminent danger at the time of writing of *De Rebus Hispaniae*, just at the moment of the conquest of Cordoba (1236) and before that of Seville (1248):

It is said that the ark of the relics was built in Jerusalem and was transported by sea to Seville at the time of the persecution of the impostor Mohammed, and from there carried to Toledo, and that, finally, it was said, it was placed in Asturias.

And further on:

Whereupon, when the king (Alfonso II) was personally examining some precious stones, he thought of making a cross with gold and with those stones; and when he went from the church to the palace, two angels appeared before him under the guise of pilgrims saying that they were goldsmiths. Then the king, in addition to giving them gold and stones, provided them with a house where they could work in peace. And having sat down to eat, he sent some of his people to the goldsmiths, asking them who they were. When they arrived, they found an admirably finished cross that illuminated with its dazzling brilliance all the corners of the house [...] the king ... carried the glorious cross to the altar of the Savior; and relating this to Leo III, who occupied the Apostolic See, he obtained from him permission for an archbishop to be created in the church of Oviedo.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 125-126. “Ad hec cum rex preciosos lapides coram aspiceret, cogitavit crucem de auro et eisdem lapidibus fabricare, ipsique ab ecclesia ad palacium uenienti occurrerunt duo angeli in effigie peregrina se esse aurifices asserentes. Rex autem datis auro et lapidibus etiam dedit

This cross has been identified with the Cross of the Angels, preserved in the Cathedral of Oviedo, although very much transformed – almost converted into a replica – after the damage suffered in the Civil War, its theft in 1977, and its later recovery in a very bad state of disrepair.¹⁹

Certain objects, however, did arouse the interest of the authors of the Latin chronicles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In some cases, it is very possible that the chroniclers had seen the pieces, as they themselves affirmed, as discussed below; in others, their interest stems from a tradition coming from older accounts; in almost all, the recounting of objects responds to the need to identify and individualize in order to construct a particular narrative. Some objects become fundamental narrative elements of the accounts in which they are included. And it is this that allows them to be individualized because their value is not only in the precious materials that compose them or the specialized work necessary for their manufacture, but in their ability to be carriers of – or to exemplify – personal or collective virtues or defects, and individual or family memories.

domum in qua possent secrecius operari. Cumque in prandio consedisset, misit nuncios ad aurifices sollicitans quinam essent. Cumque nuncii accessissent, inuenerunt crucem miro opere consumatam et corusco splendore tocius domus penetralia illustrantem, adeo ut non possent tantum splendorem intuencium oculi tolerare. Quod rex audiens festinauit, et tanto splendore comperto, agens gracias Saluatori, conuocato clero et populo et pontifice gloriosam crucem altare optulit Saluatoris, et ista referens Leoni tercio, qui sedi apostolice presidebat, optinuit ut in Ouetensi ecclesia archiepiscopus crearetur.”

¹⁹ See Raquel Alonso Álvarez, “The *Cruces Gemmatae* of Oviedo between the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 9:1 (2017), 52-71.

The *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* gives us a unique opportunity to learn what objects and relics were part of the sacred treasure that a king carried with him on military campaign – a very frequent situation at the time – and were presumably used on the portable altars on which the clerics accompanying the royal armies celebrated liturgical ceremonies. This chronicle recounts that Alfonso el Batallador, king of Aragon, always took with him on campaign a chest of pure gold adorned with precious stones inside and out, in which there was a cross made from pieces of the *Lignum Crucis*, relics of the cross of Christ, which he had stolen in times of war from the monastery of Sahagún.²⁰ He also had ivory containers covered with gold, silver and precious stones, filled with relics of the Virgin, fragments of the True Cross, and relics of apostles, martyrs, and confessors, virgins, patriarchs, and prophets. This treasure was guarded in the tents containing the king's chapel, which was always situated next to the

²⁰ “Habebat autem rex Aragonensium semper secum quandam archam factam ex auro mundo, ornatam intus et foris lapidibus pretiosis, in qua erat crux salutaris ligni, reliquiis veneranda, quo Dominus noster Ihesus Christus, Dei filius, ut nos redimeret suspensus est. In diebus autem bellorum rapuerat illam de Domo sanctorum martyrum Facundi et Primitivi, quae est in terra Legionis, circa flumen Ceiae. Et habebat pariter alias pixides eburneas coopertas auri, argento et lapidibus pretiosis, plenas reliquiis sancte Marie, el ligni Domini, apostolorum, martirum et confessorum, uirginum, patriarcharum et prophetarum; erantque reposite in tentoriis, ubi erat capella que semper iuxta tentoria regis adiacebat, easque cotidie uigilantes sacerdotes et leuite et magna pars clericorum obseruabant semperque offerebant super eas sacrificium Domino Deo...”

Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris: 174. Note that the chronicles state that this cross was stolen by Alfonso, not by Urraca.

royal apartments; his priests, deacons, and clergy watched over them and celebrated mass with them.

But at the battle of Fraga of 1134 as punishment for the sins of the king of Aragon (among which, one imagines, was the robbery of the relics from Sahagún), the Muslims took possession of the chest of gold and the ivory containers with all the riches and relics they contained, overthrowing the royal tents and storming the chapel. Alfonso *el Batallador* fled the battlefield with some of his faithful men and, sick at heart – says the chronicle – died a few days later.²¹ Subsequently, the *Estoria de España* of Alfonso X, which repeatedly presents the king of Aragon as the promoter of unbearable violence, tells in one of its chapters how the king deceived the sacristans of the monastery of Sahagún in order to steal the *Lignum Crucis*, the most important of their relics. In another we read how he further planned to rob inside the monastic enclosure, using his own brother Ramiro, “a false and evil monk,” say the authors of this Alfonsine historiographical work:

Ramiro had the whole wealth of the monastery brought before him [...] to wit, carpets, pillows, blankets, quilts, sheets, gold and silver vessels, reliquaries full of holy relics, and church ornaments of great riches [...], among which things he took a finger of Mary Magdalene, some crosses of gold, and precious stones, and in their place put plaster and dog bones.²²

²¹ *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*: 176-177.

²² “Ramiro hizo traer a su presencia toda la sustancia del monasterio..., conviene a saber tapetes, almohadas, cobertores, cocedras, savanas, vasos de oro e de plata, custodias llenas de reliquias santas, e ornamentos de la Iglesia de muchas riquezas [...] Entre las cuales cosas tomó un dedo de la Magdalena, llevó unas cruces de oro, llevó piedras preciosas e en su lugar puso yeso y hueso de perro.” *Primera Crónica General*

As noted above, portable altars and relics accompanied rulers on their journeys and military campaigns. Jaime I of Aragon entered Mallorca in 1229 accompanied by the relics that he had hoarded; a reliquary in the shape of a silver book, which has traditionally been identified with the portable altar used during Jaime's campaigns, is still preserved in the cathedral of Palma. This diptych composed of two leaves divided into twenty-four squares containing twenty-four relics of Christ, the Virgin, and saints, may indeed be a piece from that period with additions from the early years of the fourteenth century.²³

Certain objects appear in chronicles because they have special importance for the rituals of medieval Christian monarchies. Despite the very scarce evidence for coronation ceremonies in Castilla-León during the central Middle Ages, a fact that has given rise to an intense debate in the historiography on rituality and sacred elements in the mediaeval Hispanic monarchy, references to the crowns themselves are relatively abundant in the chronicles.²⁴ The crown is a central element in the account in *De Rebus de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal (Madrid: Gredos, 1955): 313. Ramiro II el Monje was the successor of Alfonso I as king of Aragon in 1134.

²³ José Miralles Sbert, *Las reliquias y relicarios de la Catedral de Mallorca* (Palma de Mallorca: Monumenta Maioricensia, 1961).

²⁴ The two opposing positions in the debate are developed in José Manuel Nieto Soria, "Origen divino, espíritu laico y poder real en la Castilla del siglo XIII," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 27 (1997): 43-102, and Nieto Soria, *Fundamentos ideológicos del poder real en Castilla (siglos XIII-XVI)* (Madrid: Eudema, 1988); and Teófilo Ruiz, "Une royauté sans sacré: la monarchie castillane du Bas Moyen Âge," *Annales E. S. C.* 39 (1984): 429-453; Peter Linehan, "Frontier Kingship. Castile 1250-1350," in *La*

Hispaniae of the legitimacy of Visigothic power, a legitimacy that the archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, sought to transfer seamlessly to the Castilian monarchy –so-called neogothicism – ignoring the dynastic break and the disappearance of the Visigothic kingdom in 711. After the rebellion of Duke Paul in Narbonne in 673 and his defeat by King Wamba, the rebel returned the sacred objects that had been stolen:

For the traitor Paul, fearful of being deprived of the funds which he had received from the king, increased them by robbery in sacred places, and sacrilegiously seized as many vessels of gold and silver as he could obtain from the treasuries of the Lord; In his madness, he even wore on his head the golden crown that the very devout King Recaredo had offered in Gerona to the altar of Saint Felix. Thereupon, King Wamba stipulated that the sacred vessels he was able to find should be returned to their respective churches.²⁵

The crown of Recaredo has not survived, but it cannot have been very different from those from the treasure of Guarrazar displayed today in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid.²⁶ The cruel punishment meted out to Paul and his companions for their betrayal was accompanied in the duke's case by a symbolic crown: the account says that they were imprisoned in Toledo, making their entry into the city:

...after having their heads shaved, their beards shaved off, barefoot, clothed in sackcloth, mounted on camels, and Paul, for greater dishonor, crowned with a fish spine, following the long line of his men whom he had pushed into

royauté sacrée dans le monde chrétien. Colloque de Royaumont, mars 1989 (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992): 71-79.

²⁵ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 88.

²⁶ See Alicia Perea, ed., *El tesoro visigodo de Guarrazar* (Madrid: CSIC, 2001).

blindness [literally; they were imprisoned after being mocked with the humiliation of having their heads shaved – anyone suffering this punishment could not be king, according to canon XVII of the IV Council of Toledo – and their eyes put out] and treason, becoming the general object of derision, jest and mockery.²⁷

The archbishop of Toledo later describes other crowns, as at the battle of Guadalete in 711. King Rodrigo:

...with a crown of gold and a garment embroidered with the same metal was carried on a bed of ivory drawn by two mules, as required by the protocol of the Gothic kings.²⁸

In the course of the battle where Almanzor confronted the Christian kings in Rueda or Roa (983-984), he “took off a gold cap that he wore as a crown, rose from his chair and sat on the ground, according to the custom of the princes of his people.”²⁹ Fernando I, at the time of his death, stripped himself of crown and royal tunic before the reliquary of Saint Isidoro of León.³⁰ Elsewhere, the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* relates the imperial coronation of Alfonso VII in 1135: the king, dressed in a splendid

²⁷ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 90. “decaluatis capitibus, rasis barbis, pedibus denudatis, induti saccis, camelis impositi, et Paulus confusionis pocior corona picea coronatus, sequente longa deductione suorum quos cecitas et proditio producebat, facti ómnibus in ludibrium et derisum, in obprobrium et cachinnum.”

²⁸ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 102-103.

²⁹ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 163.

³⁰ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 194.

cloak woven with admirable craftsmanship, received on his head a crown of pure gold and precious stones.³¹

In spite of all these written references, it is striking that the only crown to have been preserved as a material object from the central Middle Ages in the kingdoms of Castile and Leon is that from the tomb of King Sancho IV, who had been crowned in Toledo and was buried in the cathedral of that city. Sancho's coronation was featured in the first lines of the chronicle of his reign.³² The crown consists of eight rectangular metalwork plates or links joined by hinges and bordered by a simple molding. Each segment is crowned with a castle. It is completed with four sapphires and four cameos – probably antique stones reused in the thirteenth century. We find evidence of the existence of crowns with cameos in the will of Alfonso X, written in Seville in January 1284: “and the crowns with stones and cameos [...] may be held by anyone who rightfully inherits our greater lordship of Castile and León,” from which we can recognize the presence of more than a single crown with cameos among this monarchs' treasures. In terms of its technical manufacture, Sancho's crown is a minor example of metalworking, which may indicate that when arranging funeral goods an effort was made to avoid the loss of works of high quality or significance. Thus, it would be

³¹ *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*: 182.

³² “É luego fuese para Toledo, é fizose coronar á él é a la reina doña María, su mujer; e coronáronlo cuatro obispos...” (“And then he went to Toledo, and had himself and Queen María crowned, and four bishops crowned him...”) *Crónica del Rey Don Sancho, el Bravo, hijo del Rey Don Alfonso X*, in *Crónicas de los reyes de Castilla, desde Don Alfonso el Sabio hasta los católicos Don Fernando y Doña Isabel*, ed. Cayetano Rosell, 3 vols. (Madrid: BAE, 1961), I: 69; Isidro G. Bango “La llamada corona de Sancho IV y los emblemas de poder real,” *Alcanate* IX (2014-2015): 261-283.

appropriate for a dead king to wear a crown that, for its low material quality, was of little use for the public acts of a living monarch.³³

In the chronicles, it is important to note that objects usually appear linked to specific places. Some of them, however, circulate in very different ways. A revealing example of what Arjun Appadurai called “the social life of things”³⁴ centers on the travels of an object that was initially owned by Zafadola – a linguistic corruption of Sayf al-Dawla, “Sword of the Dynasty” – who was to be the last King of the taifa of Zaragoza, vassal of Alfonso VII, and one of the participants in the latter’s imperial coronation of 1135. Lucas de Tuy’s *Chronicon Mundi* – and also Jiménez de Rada’s *De Rebus Hispaniae*, although with some variations as we shall see below – attributed the motive of the pilgrimage to Santiago by King Louis VII of France, married in 1154 to Constanza, daughter of Alfonso VII, to his desire to verify whether his wife was the daughter of a concubine of the ruler of León-Castile, as had been insinuated. The two monarchs met in Burgos. Alfonso VII made a show of all his power and wealth, and offered Louis VII “a profusion of gifts, each more valuable than the last; but Louis would only accept a great emerald (*zmaracdam magnum*) that King Zafadola had given to his lord Alfonso VII.”³⁵ Lucas de Tuy then notes that when the king returned to France, he presented this precious jewel to the abbey of Saint Denis.

³³ Bango, “La llamada corona de Sancho IV y los emblemas de poder real,” 280.

³⁴ *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁵ Falque, *Lucas Tudensis. Chronicon Mundi*: 315. “Multa donaria oblata fuerunt tunc nobilissimo Lodoico regi Francorum, sed nichil inde accipere uoluit, nisi quendam zmaracdam magnum [lapidem preciosum] cogente imperatore Adefonso, quem rex Zafadola detulerat. Reuersus est itaque rex Lodoicus in Franciam cum honore et leticia

Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's account makes the same point as Lucas de Tuy about the reason that led Louis VII to make his pilgrimage to Santiago and to meet with his Castilian counterpart, and it also coincides in pointing out the abundance of wealth offered by Alfonso. However, it adds some significant details while omitting others:

The emperor [Alfonso VII] offered him a profusion of gifts, each more valuable than the last; but Louis would only accept a ruby, which he placed in the crown of thorns in Saint-Denis, which I remember seeing.³⁶

De Rebus Hispaniae omits any reference to Zafadola, the first owner of the gem, while disagreeing with the *Chronicon Mundi* about what type of gemstone it was: a green emerald according to Lucas de Tuy, a carbuncle or red ruby according to the Archbishop of Toledo. It seems likely that Jiménez de Rada would have been able to distinguish between a ruby and an emerald: a chapter later he recounts the conquest of Almería by the Genoese, who received all the regal booty including a container of

magna et hunc preciosum lapidem, quem detulerat ab Yspania monasterio beati Dionisii contulit.” Georges Martin, “L’escarboucle de Saint-Denis, le roi de France et l’empereur des Espagnes,” in *Saint-Denis et la Royauté. Études offertes à Bernard Guenée*, ed. Françoise Autrand, Claude Gauvard and Jean-Marie Moeglin (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999): 439-462, tracks the transmission of the story through the different narrative sources of the thirteenth century. As Martin rightly points out, the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, begun in the lifetime of Alfonso VII, and which inspired Lucas de Tuy for certain details, does not contain this episode.

³⁶ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 230. “Optulit eadem imperator infinita donaria, que sui ualore numerum excedebant; set nil eorum uoluit recipere Lodouicus, nisi quondam carbunculum, quem in corona spine Dominice apud Sanctum Dionisium collocauit, quem etiam memini me uidisse.”

emeralds.³⁷ Two new pieces of information, however, are of particular interest: first, this is the personal testimony of Jiménez de Rada – one of several in his chronicle – who tells us that he remembers seeing it in Paris, where he received training in theology before assuming the archbishopric of Toledo. Secondly, the mounting of the jewel in the Holy Crown, a magnificent piece of gold work destined to house the relics of Christ’s crown of thorns; this reliquary was melted down in April 1794, although drawings were made prior to its destruction.³⁸ Of the stones that were extracted before the crown-reliquary was dismantled, there is only mention of a Syrian garnet that had belonged to Anne of Kiev, wife of King Henry I of France.³⁹

Zafadola, who probably gave the gem to Alfonso VII as proof of his vassalage, was in turn the son of Imad al-Dawla, “Supporter of the Dynasty,” an ally against the Almoravids of the king of Aragon, Alfonso el Batallador, with whom he took part in the Battle of Cutanda in 1120. Imad al-Dawla is almost certainly the *Mitadolus* whose name

³⁷ *Roderici Ximenii de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae*: 232.

³⁸ The old drawings of the crown and the explanations relating to the precious objects that were part of the treasure of Saint-Denis were published in the catalog of the exhibition that took place in the Musée du Louvre in 1991. See Daniel Alcouffe et al., *Catalogue de l’Exposition: Le trésor de Saint Denis* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1991). The crown of St. Louis is also mentioned in the inventory of 1634 of the goods of the church of Saint Denis: Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, “Le trésor de Saint-Denis. Inventaire de 1634,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 18 (1975): 149-156.

³⁹ Georges Martin tends to think that Jiménez de Rada identifies one of the garnets of the Crown of Thorns he saw in Saint-Denis – perhaps that of Anna of Kiev? – with the precious stone given by Alfonso VII, as a way of enhancing regal prestige. This episode, with some additions, is repeated in the *Historia de España* of Alfonso X.

appears on the inscription on the silver-gilt foot of a rock crystal vase, probably coming from the sacking of the Fatimid palaces of Cairo in the middle of the eleventh century. Now known as the Eleanor Vase, this luxurious object also comes from the treasury of the abbey of Saint Denis and is currently held in the Musée du Louvre.⁴⁰ The very well-known inscription on the base reads, “As a bride, Eleanor gave this vase to King Louis, Mitadulus to her grandfather, the king to me, and Suger to the saints.” This text traces the route of the object: Mitadulus, ruler of Zaragoza, gave it to William IX of Aquitaine, probably when both were in the service of Alfonso el Batallador, king of Aragon; William of Aquitaine gave it to his granddaughter Eleanor, perhaps as a baptismal gift, who in turn gave it to her husband, Louis VII; and he gave it to Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, in whose treasury it would long be held. *De Rebus in administratione sua gestis*, a work composed by Abbot Suger between 1144 and 1148, which describes the enlargement of Saint-Denis and the way in which the treasure had been accumulated, includes the reference to several ewers, some donated by the magnates of the kingdom, and others acquired. Notable among them was the Eleanor Vase:

Also a vessel, a kind of carafe of beryl or crystal with the capacity of a pint, which the newly married Queen of Aquitaine had given to our Lord King Louis on his first voyage, and the present King to us as an index of his affection, we offered it in turn to our masters the holy martyrs for the sacrifice of the table of God. We ordered the story of the donation to be engraved on the vessel itself,

⁴⁰ George T. Beech, “The Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase, William IX of Aquitaine, and Muslim Spain,” *Gesta* 32 (1993): 3-10; George T. Beech, “The Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine. Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 369-373. See also Rodríguez, *La Estirpe de Leonor de Aquitania*: 133-188.

once it had been adorned with gold and precious stones, in these few lines: Eleanor, the bride, gave this vessel to King Louis, Mitadolus to her grandfather, the King to me, and Suger to the saints.⁴¹

Surprisingly - and unlike the colorful jewel of the Crown of Thorns reliquary - there is no trace of the Eleanor Vase in chronicles from Spanish lands, despite its prominence in French accounts. Perhaps the reason for this absence lies in the fact that there was no royal intermediation in the transmission of the precious object and that, therefore, it was not possible to construct a narrative about the power of the Castilian kings and the obligations of their vassals, reflected in gifts of material goods of great value. Nevertheless, both objects, the gem of Zafadola and the Fatimid rock crystal ewer of Mitadolus ended up in the treasury of the great Parisian abbey of Saint Denis. It is also significant that both had been presented by King Louis VII of France after receiving them by means of his two wives: the vase from the first, Eleanor; the gem from the second, Constanza.

As we have seen, most of the objects described in any detail in the chronicles of the kingdoms of Castile and León during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have an intrinsic value derived from the precious materials of which they are made, the production techniques, the function for which are conceived or that they acquire as symbols of power and, on many occasions, the long journey made to the treasuries of the churches and of the Christian kings where they end their journey from their places of origin: we read of Syrian textiles, Andalusí silks, Fatimid rock crystal, ivory, and gold- and silverwork on liturgical implements. Demand, as the basis of real or

⁴¹ *Abbot Suger and the Abbey Church of St Denis and Its Art Treasures*, ed. Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946). Chapter XXXII: “Hoc vas sponsa dedit Aanor regi Ludovico / Mitadolus avo, mihi rex, sanctisque Suger”.

imaginary exchange, also endowed the objects with value by setting the parameters of utility and scarcity. In this sense, few objects were more in demand at that time than relics, whose circulation in the Middle Ages reflects a fundamental aspect of the construction of the identity of the ecclesiastical community and of its prestige, both local and on a larger scale. It also shows the rivalries between different institutions to gain the power conferred by objects whose value was determined by their history, by the verification of that history, and by forms of exchange outside the paths established for other types of goods. Given these specific conditions of demand for relics in the Middle Ages, their circulation and transfer from place to place frequently occurred through theft.⁴²

Castilian chronicles deal with the circulation of relics and sacred goods produced by theft in two different ways. In the first case, when the one taking the holy spoils by force is secular: as we have already seen, during the reign of Wamba the traitor Paul committed sacrilege, which eventually led to him being paraded around Toledo crowned with a fish spine. Sacrilegious, too, were the actions of Alfonso el Batallador, whose defeat in Fraga against the Muslims is interpreted as a divine punishment for having stolen the *Lignum Crucis* and the relics from the monastery of Sahagún, leaving – in the addition made to the tale by the *Estoria de España* – plaster and dog bones in their place. To these laymen who steal the treasures of the churches and their relics, even to revere them on their own portable altars, medieval narrative sources devote their most forceful damnations.

In the second case, when those who resort to theft are archbishops, bishops, or abbots, the assessment of the situation by the ecclesiastics who wrote the Castilian

⁴² Patrick Geary, “Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics,” in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 169-191.

chronicles is quite different. In contrast to the reprobation of Christian kings and nobles who took precious sacred goods by force from the churches of the kingdoms, the ecclesiastics' acquisition by theft of relics that they considered necessary to endow their own houses with legitimacy and prestige is presented as a valid form of exchange. These are the *furta sacra* studied by Patrick Geary as a way of obtaining relics that was as desirable as donation and rather moreso than the commerce practiced with other types of precious objects:⁴³ more representative, in short, of their value and effectiveness. In general, the narrative sources analyzed in the present article are less specific when dealing with the acquisition of relics by the great episcopal sees of the kingdoms, and incorporate discourses found elsewhere. On some occasions, however, they may explain how a given ecclesiastical institution acquired its relics: theft provides some of the most detailed accounts.

The *Historia Compostelana*, written between 1107 and 1149 to the greater glory of Archbishop Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela, is particularly voluble in this respect when it narrates, for example, the *traslatio* of Saints Fructuoso, Silvestre, and Cucufate in 1102 from Braga to Santiago. The author of this part of the chronicle himself admits that the acquisition was "pious larceny" (*pio latrocinio*).

And because San Fructuoso was the defender and patron of that region, he took him most fearfully and silently, with pious larceny, from the church that he had built when he was still alive, and when he had done so, he handed him over to the care of his faithful guardians [...] Once dawn broke and he knew that what he had done had not become known, he returned as quickly as if in flight, and full

⁴³ Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

of joy and happiness carried his hidden treasure to a town of Santiago called Cornelhá.⁴⁴

The account takes a similar form when it traces the itinerary of the head of Santiago (St. James), stolen in Jerusalem by Bishop Mauricio de Braga: the envoys of the bishop approached the altar with mattocks, dug deep, and found a vessel of ivory and inside it another silver one full of relics. Then they fled. This pious larceny, as it were, reached Iberia and was deposited in San Zoilo de Carrión de los Condes; from there Queen Urraca took it and other relics – among them a fragment of the Holy Sepulcher and a bone of Saint Stephen – to San Isidoro de León. Then the queen gave the head of St. James to Archbishop Gelmírez, who solemnly entered Santiago with it in 1116.⁴⁵ In the second book of the *Historia Compostelana* there is an inventory of

⁴⁴ *Historia Compostellana*, ed. Emma Falque Rey, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 70 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988): 34: “Sed quoniam sanctus Fructuosus regionis illius defensor et patronus erat, cum maiore timore et silentio de ecclesia sua, quam ipse adhuc uiuens in carne fecerat, eum pio latrocinio sustulit et sublatum fidelibus suis custodibus seruandum commisit [...]”. The author of this story refers to the theft of the relics by Archbishop Gelmírez in Braga in 1102 and their subsequent secret transfer to Santiago as “*traslatio*”. Other narrative sources tell the same kind of stories; as Geary notes in “Sacred commodities” (183-184), “The usual target of the isolated theft was a distant monastery or church visited by a cleric who, judging that the saints whose relics were there were not receiving proper veneration, entered the church at night, broke open the shrine, and fled with the remains.”

⁴⁵ Falque, *Historia Compostellana*, 193-194: “Quedam denique nocte tempestiua ceteris absentibus, clauso ecclesie hostio, aggrediuntur altare ligonibus, quos secum furtim attulerant, et fodientes in altum sub altari, sicut audierant, inueniunt uas quoddam

everything the archbishop acquired for his church: from liturgical garments to silver and gold gospel books, gold and silver boxes with crystal inlays, a silver *Lignum Crucis* given to him by Queen Urraca, and a silver casket that is distinguished from the rest because it is said to hold the head of Santiago.⁴⁶

The rivalry between the archiepiscopal sees of Santiago and Toledo had important consequences for the organization of the Hispanic church and for the hierarchy among the dioceses after the union of the kingdoms of Castile and Leon in 1230. This conflict had previously been embodied in the tale of the robbery of a precious object disguised as a forced donation. During Gelmírez's rule as archbishop, the author of the third book of the *Historia Compostelana* recounts the obtaining by Santiago of a gold chalice, for which the archbishop paid, through his treasurer, a hundred marks of pure silver to King Alfonso VII, who in turn had bought it from the

eburneum et intus aliud argenteum plenum reliquiis. Quod accipientes discedunt cum episcopo suo noctu et adeunt civitatem sanctam Iherosolimam fugientes..."

⁴⁶ Falque, *Historia Compostellana*, 333. The inventory testifies to the enormous wealth of the archbishop's seat. The long list includes a gospel book of purple, two of silver and one of gold, a silver missal, a silver epistolary, a gold belt, "two silver caskets, in one of which is said to be the head of Santiago" (*capsas II argenteas, in una quarum perhibetur esse caput beati Iacobi*), another ivory casket, another of gilded metal sculpted with admirable artifice with inlaid glass, another precious gold casket which the archbishop bought for three thousand *sueldos* and then gave to the Holy Father Pope Callixtus, a silver *Lignum Crucis*, given by Queen Urraca, daughter of King Alfonso."

archbishop of Toledo “at a time when he was in need.”⁴⁷ Gelmírez's treasurer then stayed in the royal court before departing on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The court was probably in residence in Toledo at that time because it was in the Cathedral of Toledo that the treasurer saw a valuable ewer of beautifully worked crystal. As he knew that the archbishop of Toledo was very fond of this object, and he feared that he would refuse to give it as a gift, the treasurer secretly whispered in the ear of the king to ask the archbishop for it, and then to give it to him. And the king did so, says the *Compostellana*, because this treasurer was also the king's chancellor, thanks to the influence exerted by Gelmírez. Once he had acquired the ewer, he carried it off to the church of Santiago.

In sum, objects of daily use exchanged for others of greater value; transfer of luxury goods that pass from an Islamic to a Christian context, and in the course of that process become sanctified, like chalices or reliquaries; gems and rock crystals whose intrinsic value is enhanced by the prestige of their former owners; sacred objects whose value lies not in their beauty but in being essential elements in the construction of identities and sources of power: all of these appear in the Castilian and Leonese chronicles written during the central Middle Ages. These forms of exchange – donation, purchase, theft – allow us to establish ideas about their nature and inalienable character, while the details in some descriptions bring us closer to a real world of objects that were seen and remembered, if only rarely set down in writing.

The textual accounts deal in diverse ways with the objects that formed part of the daily ritual life of the authors of the chronicles, all of whom were clerics. As we can

⁴⁷ Falque, *Historia Compostellana*, 433: “quendam calicem aureum honorabilem et pretiosum, in quo septingenti morabitini continebantur, quem ipse rex A. toletano archiepiscopo imminente sibi necessitate adquisierat.”

conclude from the present discussion about what the texts say--and what they do not--the authors' criterion when individualizing certain objects in the telling of their tales was not necessarily related to their familiarity with them, as evidenced particularly by the meager interest of Lucas de Tuy in the treasury of San Isidoro de León, where he was canon and between whose walls he wrote his *Chronicon Mundi*. Nor, in the majority of cases, was it related to the idea of extolling the victories against the Muslims of al-Andalus. Rather, the enormous wealth and extravagance of what could be obtained as booty, for example, was measured by the quantity of goods and by the value they had from the materials of which they were made – gold, silver, rich textiles from Andalusí workshops – and not in the specificity of a given object that might deserve a detailed description. Only as partial fragments of larger texts, whose main purpose was to elaborate a narrative linked to the construction of regal power, is a more detailed sketch considered necessary. What made such objects deserving of inclusion in a story was not, therefore, their intrinsic value. It was rather their ability to evoke facts and circumstances whose protagonists were not the things themselves but, fundamentally, the content and form of the multiple relationships forged in a process of exchange. In this way, a precious few objects were able to become, in the histories in which they were featured, fundamental elements of the narrative.