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Chronicling the Iberian Palace: written sources and the meanings of medieval Christian rulers' residences

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Contemporaneous written evidence makes it clear that medieval rulers were aware of the impression that their dwellings caused and, indeed, that they took deliberate steps to reinforce the visual impact on the viewers. In this study, I will focus on some of the more extensive twelfth-century descriptions of two palaces from Christian lands of Iberia – one episcopal (Santiago de Compostela), one royal (León) – within an examination of the roles that these buildings played in buttressing their patrons' power. Two chronicles, the *Historia Compostellana* (c. 1100–40) and the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* (c. 1145) present the rulers' palaces as an essential setting for their authority; these accounts are rounded out by hagiographical and literary sources, along with an archaeological analysis of some of the elements of the standing architecture. In addition to aiding in the study of a building through its multiple uses – both practical and symbolic – written descriptions allow us a glimpse of the meanings that medieval palaces had for their patrons and the viewing public.

Keywords: palace; Santiago; León; urban; twelfth century; chronicle

Palaces are the delight of our power, the fine face of our rule, and the honored witness of our kingship. Admiring ambassadors are shown the palace, and from their view of it they form their first impressions of the king. A thoughtful king therefore greatly enjoys a beautiful palace, and he relaxes his mind, tired out by public cares, in the pleasure of the building.¹

As an antecedent to the twelfth century, on which this study focuses, Cassiodorus, writing in 537, sets the stage admirably. His understanding of the palace's multiple meanings is based on the ancient tradition that the building was an architectural expression of rulership, at once intimate and open. Such a concept finds its echo in the sources addressed here, whose authors indicate that the residences were deliberately designed to present the ruler to the populace, that they were built to impress travelers from other lands, that they served public purposes while also giving private retreat to the owner, and that their ornamentation was consciously conceived to be viewed as

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¹Translation by Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity*, 159. "Aula nostra sicut agnoscitur peritis dispositioribus instituta, ita doctorum in ea diligens debet esse cautela, quoniam pulchritudo illa mirabilis, si subinde non reficitur, senectute obrepente vitiatur. Haec nostrae sunt oblectamenta potentiae, imperii decora facies, testimonium praeconiale regnorum: haec legatis sub ammiratione monstrantur et prima fronte talis dominus esse creditur, quale eius habitaculum comprobatur. Et ideo magna voluptas est prudentissimae mentis pulcherrima iugiter habitatione gaudere et inter publicas curas animum fessum reficere dulcedine fabricarum" (Mommsen, *Cassiodori Senatoris Variarum*, vii, 5, as cited by Tronzo, *Cultures of His Kingdom*, 4).

elite in the interior and imposing on the exterior. All of these aspects of the function and decoration of a palace, whether royal or episcopal, contribute to the understanding of the buildings in my study.² Civil architecture from the Christian kingdoms of Spain has been the topic of comparatively little modern scholarship.³ Even palaces, ornamented so lavishly in the twelfth century that they drew critique similar to that leveled against monastic decoration by Bernard of Clairvaux, attract limited scholarly attention today.⁴ While this omission is, at least to a degree, understandable, owing to the poor survival rate of domestic architecture, it must be said that these structures have not received the level of scrutiny that their medieval significance merits.

The present article focuses on the royal palace in León and the episcopal residence in Santiago de Compostela, both in the kingdom of León-Castilla, because of the unusual conjunction of detailed narratives in chronicles and surviving structural elements in elevation.⁵ Rather than attempting to reconstruct the original design of these buildings according to the written descriptions, my intention is to weave together this rare combination of textual and architectural evidence in order to examine more completely the roles palaces played in buttressing their patrons' power. If the

²Many descriptions of medieval palaces have been gathered in Mortet's classic, *Recueil de textes*, later revised with Deschamps. For more recent studies of the term "palace" in medieval Spanish documentation, see García de Cortázar and Peña Bocos, "El *palatium*, símbolo y centro de poder." In addition Pérez Gil, "El palacio, un concepto impreciso," provides an ample historiographic analysis.

³For other lands, we are fortunate that such eminent scholars as Mesqui (*Châteaux et enceintes de la France médiévale*) and Renoux ("Les fondements architecturaux du pouvoir princier en France;" *Palais royaux et princiers au Moyen Age*; "Palais et souveraineté en Francie occidentale," "Palais princiers, royaux et épiscopaux normanno-angevins") for France; Miller ("From Episcopal to Communal Palaces;" *The Bishop's Palace*) and Tronzo (*The Cultures of His Kingdom*) for Italy; Colvin (*The History of the King's Works*), Keevill (*Medieval Palaces: An Archaeology*), and James (*The Palaces of Medieval England*) for England; and Ehlers (*Deutsche Königspfalzen*) and Fenske et al. (*Deutsche Königspfalzen*) for Germany have focused their research on the architecture of rulership. Islamic structures, including those in al-Andalus, have been the object of intense investigation, particularly by archaeologists, but also by art historians and literary specialists, among them Almagro Gorbea (*Palacios medievales hispanos*), Almagro Vidal (*El concepto de espacio en la arquitectura palatina andalusí*), Díez Jorge (*El palacio islámico de la Alhambra*), Ewert (*Die Aljafería in Zaragoza*), Navarro Palazón (*Casas y palacios de al-Andalus*), Pavón Maldonado (*Tratado de Arquitectura Hispanomusulmana. 3. Palacios*), and Ruggles (*Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*; "The Alcázar of Seville and Mudejar Architecture"). Written descriptions of Islamic palaces formed part of that culture's poetic traditions (Robinson, *In Praise of Song*). The case was different for Christian Spain, both in the types of architectural descriptions written in the Middle Ages and in the historiography of modern studies dedicated to domestic structures. Until recently, the pioneering 1922 study of Spanish palaces by Lampérez y Romea, *Arquitectura civil española*, has had little echo. In 1983, Chueca Goitia (*Casas reales en monasterios y conventos españoles*) examined the unusual peninsular model of palaces built within monastic complexes. At present, episcopal palaces (Carrero Santamaría, "La fortaleza del obispo. El palacio episcopal urbano en Galicia;" "De palacios y de claustros") and late medieval palatine structures (Adroer i Tasis, *Palas reials de Catalunya*; Ruiz Souza, "Castilla y AlAndalus. Arquitecturas aljamiadas") inspire more scholarship than do royal palaces from earlier periods (Martínez de Aguirre et al. *El Palacio Real de Pamplona*).

⁴See a study of such critiques in Mortet, "Hugue de Fouilloi." For Bernard's *Apologia*, see Rudolph, "Things of Greater Importance."

⁵In addition to the two palaces examined here, remains of twelfth-century Christian rulers' residences survive in four other locations in northern Iberia (Estella, Pamplona, Huesca, and Barcelona), but these structures do not figure prominently in any contemporary chronicles.

surviving physical remains make it easy to forget the grandeur of the medieval palace, documentary sources provide a much-needed corrective; they are used here to draw an overall picture of some key characteristics of palatine architecture in twelfth-century Christian Spain. In addition to aiding in the study of a building through its multiple uses – both practical and symbolic – the texts remind us that rulers (or those who wrote about/for them) were conscious of certain concepts more commonly connected to modern architecture, among them beauty, workmanship, and the appropriateness of a dwelling-place to one's position in society. These urban palaces were an integral part of a medieval town's organization, with the bishop's lodging physically connected to his cathedral, while the secular ruler could choose among several privileged sites (e.g. along the extant Roman walls, at the highest point in the town, near easy access to running water). Such positioning underlined the palace as a locus of power, a meaning further emphasized through technological and decorative elements to create a commanding aspect. Contemporaneous chronicles make it clear that rulers were aware of the impression that their dwellings caused and, indeed, that they took deliberate steps to reinforce the visual impact on the viewer.

To begin with a basic but indispensable observation, palaces of northern Iberia during the central Middle Ages were typically built of worked stone. While this characteristic may seem too obvious to need stating, in fact, it is necessary that it be highlighted, for building material was of primary importance in the establishment of hierarchical standing in the urban environment. The religious structures on which medievalists focus their attention were constructed from stone more often than not; however, such material was far from common in twelfth-century Spanish cities. Rather, archaeological evidence demonstrates the scarcity of ashlar masonry – that is, neatly squared blocks of fine quality stone, such as sandstone, limestone, or granite – in comparison with the standard building materials of wood, rubblework, brick or adobe, as can be seen in the construction type of civil structures from the medieval town of Covarrubias (Figure 1).⁶ Ashlar stonework was a luxury, contributing to the prestige of the palace's owner and clearly differentiating the building from the bulk of secular architecture.⁷ In the second decade of the twelfth century, when the Leonese author of the so-called *Historia Silense* wanted to praise a king of the past as setting the precedent for current construction, he underlined that the monarch had a residence of stone. Ramiro I of Asturias (d. 850) is said to have “built many constructions, two miles away from Oviedo, with sandstone and marble in a vaulted work [...]. He also made [...] a palace without wood, of admirable construction, and vaulted below and

⁶Archaeological soundings throughout León, for example, have confirmed that the cathedral and the palatine complex at San Isidoro were among the very few ashlar constructions in the medieval city (Miguel Hernández, “Desarrollo urbano preindustrial,” Gutiérrez González and Miguel Hernández, “Génesis del urbanismo”; Gutiérrez González, “Las fuentes arqueológicas”).

⁷As noted briefly by Pérez Gil: “Some documents seem to indicate, however, that they enjoyed better quality materials than in most constructions. Such is the case in the minimal description of a palace in Sanabria (Zamora) found in a document of 968 (*palacio uno ex esquadro construe to ex petra murice fabricato*), which alludes to the presence of stone in its walls.” [“Algunos documentos parecen indicar, no obstante, que gozaban de una fábrica de mayor calidad que la del común de construcciones. Tal es el caso de la escueta descripción de un palacio en Sanabria (Zamora) inserta en un documento de 968 (*palacio uno ex esquadro constructo ex petra murice fabricato*), que alude a la presencia de piedra en sus muros.”] (“El palacio, un concepto impreciso,” 827).

Figure 1. Domestic architecture, late medieval construction type, Covarrubias (photo: T. Martin).

above.”⁸ As the writer of the *Silense* emphasized, stone allowed for vaulting, rather than a flat wooden ceiling, creating impressive interiors for reception halls and oratories. Ashlar masonry was expensive, for it required transport from quarry to construction site and the hiring of experienced masons to work it. Much less costly, for example, was the type of building material used in the noble Leonese residence known today as the palace of doña Berenguela (late twelfth century), which was built of rubblework and faced with river rocks; cut stone was reserved for quoining (reinforcement at the corners), and windows and doors, where the piercing of the wall made its structural benefit worth the expenditure (Figures 2a and 2b).⁹ In functional terms, stonework served defensive needs admirably, and it also permitted the technological advance of fireplaces with chimneys built into the wall, which provided much more reliable radiant heat (and less annoying and harmful smoke) than did central hearths or movable braziers. Finally, the symbolic importance of finely cut stone seems to have outweighed any financial drawbacks: the very permanence of the medium was an essential message that the rulers chose to project, both to their own subjects and to sojourners.

Palaces were, as a rule, fortified buildings, though not exclusively designed to be military strongholds, as were rural castles.¹⁰ The urban location was a powerful

⁸“multa duobus ab Oueto miliariis remota, ex murice et marmore, opere forniceo, hedificia construxit. [...] Fecit quoque [...] palacium sine ligno, miro opere inferius superiusque cumulatam” (Pérez de Urbel and González Ruiz-Zorrilla, *Historia Silense*, 144). The ninth-century palace outside Oviedo with barrel vaults on two stories is known as Santa María del Naranco (see Noack-Haley and Arbeiter, *Asturische Königsbauten*).

⁹Villanueva Lázaro, “Restos del palacio;” Cosmen Alonso, Herráez Ortega, and Valderas Alonso, “Arquitectura civil medieval;” Rodríguez Montañés, “Palacio llamado ‘de doña Berenguela’.”

¹⁰By contrast with palaces, Iberian castles have been the focus of extensive scholarship by numerous specialists, especially archaeologists and architectural historians. For a useful analysis of castles in the same period and regions addressed in this study, see Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*.

Figure 2a. "Palace of doña Berenguela," León (photo: T. Martin).

Figure 2b. "Palace of doña Berenguela," León (photo: T. Martin).

symbolic factor within the greater meaning of the palace, whose import was augmented by such decorative details as façade imagery and such structural elements as the tower. The former could include iconography from both religious and secular traditions, as, for example, at the royal palace in Estella, where the historiated capitals on the façade featured the hero Roland fighting the Muslim warrior Ferragut, along with a hell scene in which souls are punished for their earthly sins (Figures 3a, 3b,

Figure 3a. Royal palace, Estella (photo: T. Martin).

Figure 3b. Royal palace, Estella, Roland capital (photo: T. Martin).

Figure 3c. Royal palace, Estella, hell capital (photo: T. Martin).

3c).¹¹ For its part, a tower fulfilled the practical function of look-out, while also dominating the cityscape as a sign of power (see, for example, Figure 14). Beyond defense in troubled times, however, the primary purpose of the palace was residence and rule, where king, queen, or bishop met with counselors to govern their lands. The dual nature of the palace, both court and castle, was echoed by the open plaza that often preceded it.¹² This light-filled area served the defensive purpose of preventing the rulers from being approached unawares, but it also spoke of their urban authority. Medieval cities were generally cramped and close, with narrow streets and little open space. The act of leaving land unbuilt can also, therefore, be read as a spatial declaration of generosity to the townspeople. Such plazas displayed benevolence as the site of fountains or markets and provided a communal gathering space for the free circulation of individuals in the fresh air, all with the palace in the background as a continual reminder of the ruler. The use of a plaza as the site for a royal wedding will be examined below.

Control of water was another indicator of power in the Middle Ages, and one that appears frequently in characterizations of palaces, such as in a description of a

¹¹Martin, "Sacred in Secular." The Christian and Muslim heroes are identified by an inscription on the impost block.

¹²For an analysis of Leonese plazas, see Campos Sánchez-Bordona and Pereiras Fernández, *Iglesia y ciudad*.

twelfth-century French bishop's residence, in which both structure and owner are praised: "And this building, which was completely and marvelously perfected by the architect's ingenious art, he enhanced further with a fireplace and a system of water supply flowing through the middle of the chamber."¹³ The significance of water as an ostentatious luxury,¹⁴ beyond its practical necessity, appears for example in the *Song of Roland* when a father sends off his child as a noble hostage:

A son of mine shall go ...
To your palace seigneurial when you go,
[...] thither will he follow
Ev'n to your baths, that God for you hath wrought.¹⁵

While not the stuff of epic, "a very deep well with admirable construction" features prominently in the detailed justification of the palace built by Diego Gelmírez, bishop (1100–20) and archbishop (1120–40) of Santiago de Compostela, adding a practical element to the overall picture of his residence.

Archbishop [Gelmírez] enlarged, augmented, and greatly enriched the cathedral of Santiago, both in ecclesiastical and secular matters, for he was a man of great prudence and great perspicacity, an expert in ecclesiastical questions and most diligent in secular ones, as is evident even today. For that reason, given that the palace in which he lived in Compostela was not sufficiently ideal and that kings, consuls, and other personages met there, coming from all lands to the city of Compostela, it was necessary to have an adequate palace as though for a king, as corresponds to an archbishop of Santiago and legate of the Holy Roman Church. And so he built a palace next to the church of Santiago, large and tall, appropriate and regal, sufficient to take in a great number of princes and peoples, as is suitable. In a corner of the same palace, he also ordered that a very deep well with admirable construction be built, as the work makes manifest. For it is the custom in royal palaces to have water, which can be drawn out easily for multiple uses.¹⁶

Access to water in his residence is one of the ways that the archbishop demonstrated his parity with the secular rulers of his day. Despite this concrete detail, descriptions like the one in the *Historia Compostellana* cannot be used to reconstruct the original design of Gelmírez's twelfth-century palace; rather, the significance of the narrative lies in the ideological meanings of the structure that it reveals, especially the deliberate

¹³Mortet and Deschamps, *Recueil de textes*, 14.

¹⁴In 2001, a special issue of *Bulletin Monumental* (159, no. 1) focused on private baths of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, including a history of heated bathing rooms in medieval French palaces (*Les bains privés au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*).

¹⁵Moncrief, *Song of Roland*, 149–54; Duggan, *Chanson de Roland*. See also Labbé, *L'architecture des palais*; and Kinoshita, "Le Voyage."

¹⁶"Predictus archiepiscopus ecclesiam beati Iacobi et in ecclesiasticis et in secularibus ualde sublimauit, augmentauit atque ditauit, magne equidem prudencie magneque perspicacitatis uir, ad ecclesiastica peritus et ad secularia satis prouidus, sicut usque in hodiernum diem patet. Preterea quoniam palacia sua, in quibus Compostelle morabatur, minus idonea erant, quippe illo confluebant reges, consules ceterique primates, undecumque ad Compostellanensem uenissent urbem, decebat, ut palatia idonea immo regalia haberet, utpote sancti Iacobi archiepiscopus et Sancte Romane Ecclesie legatus. Fecit itaque palatia secus ecclesiam beati Iacobi, ampla atque excelsa, idonea itaque atque regalia, que turbam principum atque populorum, ut decet, capere sufficiant. In eiusdem quoque palatii pilari fecit fieri puteum magne profunditatis miro artificio, ut res indicat. Sic namque consuetudo est, ut in regalibus palatiis aquam ad hauriendum presto habeant pluribus usibus profuturam" (Falque Rey, *Historia Compostellana C.C.C.M.* (hereafter *HC*), Book II, 25).

parallels it draws between royal and episcopal residences. Such similarities were not only recognized but indeed sought after in their day. It also serves as a reminder that allied rulers, whether religious or secular, would have lodged in each other's palaces during their travels, providing the opportunity for the host to impress with the sophistication of the structure and its amenities, and the guest to copy these innovations later in his own residence.

In the necessarily peripatetic life of a medieval ruler, permanence was represented by the palace, whose imposing physical presence spoke silently of the stability of the crown or miter. It also served as a sign of authority to the fractious urban population, more likely to rebel than were the dispersed inhabitants of rural areas.¹⁷ Such was the case in 1117, when the Compostelans revolted against Bishop Gelmírez and Queen Urraca of León-Castilla (d. 1126), trapping their temporal and spiritual rulers in a tower that was then set alight.¹⁸ After this harrowing experience, the uprising was put down and, hard upon its resolution, the bishop built for himself a grand new palace, as if to seal his undisputed lordship over the townspeople of Santiago.

As it stands today, the archiepiscopal residence now known as the Palacio de Gelmírez owes much of its existence to construction that continued through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, particularly during the reigns of the archbishops Pedro Suárez de Deza (r. 1173–1206) and Juan Arias (r. 1238–66).¹⁹ The complex is composed of two basic blocks, an earlier one (presumably from the time of Gelmírez) along the east–west axis of the cathedral, and a later north–south arm (Figures 4a and 4b). As noted, the impetus for the palace seems to have been the successful suppression of the revolt in 1117, when Gelmírez's authority was reconfirmed. While it seems likely that the previous palace had sustained damage, the construction may also have been inspired by the events of 1120, a key moment in the bishop's career when he received the great honor he had long sought and was named archbishop and papal legate. The internal logic of the *Historia Compostellana* suggests that the first phase of his palace was completed that same year. As a rule, this chronicle lays out the history of Gelmírez and the events of his day in a reliable chronological order, and it provides the above justification for his palace immediately before a description of the provincial council he called in Santiago, which took place on 9 January 1121. It seems that Gelmírez quickly brought together in his impressive new apartments all the bishops and abbots under his recently increased command; he used this formidable setting to demonstrate control over religious leaders and townspeople alike.

¹⁷Pastor de Togneri, "Las primeras rebeliones burguesas;" Estepa Díez, "Sobre las revueltas burguesas;" Martínez, *La rebelión de los burgos*.

¹⁸Falque Rey, *HC*, Book I, 114. See also Vázquez de Parga, "La revolución comunal;" Reilly, "Historia Compostellana;" Vones, *Historia Compostellana*; and Williams, "El incendio en Santiago."

¹⁹López Ferreiro, *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia*, II, 190–203; Villaamil y Castro, "Las torres de la Catedral;" Lámperez y Romea, "El antiguo palacio episcopal," and *Arquitectura civil española*, I, 518–27; Conant, *Early Architectural History*; Sánchez Rivera, *Notas Compostellanas*, 30–6; Chamoso Lamas, "El palacio de Gelmírez y su restauración;" Chamoso Lamas et al., *Galice Romane*, 187–91; Filgueira Valverde, "Gelmírez constructor;" Pons-Sorolla, "Obras de restauración en el Palacio;" (*RNA* and *Abrente*); López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago*, 143; Moralejo Alvarez, "Refectorio del Palacio Arzobispal;" Nuñez Rodríguez, *El Refectorio del Palacio de Gelmírez*, "Auf der Suche," and "A la búsqueda del palacio;" Senra, "El palacio episcopal;" Castiñeiras González, "La catedral románica;" Castro Fernández, "Un ejemplo de restauración."

Figure 4a. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela (drawing: Lampérez y Romea).

Figure 4b. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela (drawing: Pons-Sorolla).

Although fireplaces are not mentioned in the *Historia Compostellana*, they must have contributed to the sense that it was “appropriate and regal,” as the remains of five can still be identified in both lower (Figures 5a and 5b) and upper (Figure 7a) reception halls, as well as in the intimate room on the upper level today called a kitchen (Figures 6a and 6b).²⁰ To the left of this latter hearth can be seen the opening for a well from which water could be drawn up from the true kitchen on the ground floor below.²¹ Although currently staged with pots and pans to reinforce its label as a lowly working space, its reduced dimensions, location on the upper story, and elaborately carved window next to the door, along with the capitals flanking the hearth, all identify this cozy chamber with a more elite purpose.²² We find similarly decorative windows in the upper reception hall only at the head of the room, where all three end walls are pierced to create a light-filled space (Figures 7a and 7b). Such fenestration, together with greater ornamentation of the rib vaults and the corbel iconography in which a blessing bishop presides, contributes to the visual hierarchy of this area reserved for the archbishop and his most elevated guests. The repetition of window design in the small chamber would seem to indicate that, rather than a kitchen, it was conceived for the sort of exclusivity criticized in *Piers Plowman*:

The rule is, today, for rich men to regale themselves alone,
In a private parlor (so escaping the poor),
Or in a chamber with a chimney – avoiding the chief hall
That was made for men to eat their meals in.²³

A private chamber of similar elite nature at the royal palace in León receives a brief mention in the *Historia Compostellana*. Following a grand reception at which Queen Urraca’s son, Alfonso VII of León-Castilla (d. 1157), met the archbishop and his court outside the walls of León and performed the public ritual of a procession with them into the city, the account adds:

[...] the king invited [Gelmírez] personally to his palace, and that same day he treated him splendidly to a wonderful feast. After they ate, the king and the Compostelan, just the two of them, entered a private room and there they talked of many things.²⁴

²⁰The fireplaces in the two western halls appear to have made use of a single vertical chimney built into the thickness of the wall. During the restoration of the 1950s, the upper fireplace was suppressed, while the hood over the lower hearth was replaced; the capitals are restored originals, as are those in the so-called upper kitchen. Remains of two additional hearths can also be seen in the eastern block, one in what must have been the original ground-floor kitchen and another on the upper floor.

²¹The architect-restorer Pons-Sorolla, “Obras de restauración,” *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura*: 28, identified this shaft as a well. Given its location, this may be the well referred to in the *Historia Compostellana* as being “in a corner”, although I am, in general, cautious about using such an ideologically motivated text to identify surviving elements of the building.

²²As Lampérez y Romea noted, “the wall in which the door and window open is not built into the wall at the back, indicating that they are constructions from different periods” [“el muro donde se abren puerta y ajimez no enlaza con el del fondo, denotando ser construcciones hechas en distintas épocas”]. This should be interpreted as the later addition of greater decoration to an already elite space. (“El antiguo palacio,” 21).

²³Tiller, *Piers Plowman*, 10, 96–9.

²⁴“[...] rex eum ad suum palatium proprio ore inuitavit et ipso die splendide et habundanter procuravit. Sumpto autem prandio, rex et ipse Conpostellanus quoddam conclaue ambo soli ingressi sunt et colloquium de multis rebus ibi habuerunt” (Falque Rey, *HC*, Book III, 14).

Figure 5a. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, lower reception hall (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

Figure 5b. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, fireplace (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

Figure 6a. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, private chamber (?), well and fireplace (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

Figure 6b. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, private chamber (?), ornamented window (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

Figure 7a. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, upper reception hall (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

Figure 7b. “Palacio de Gelmírez,” Santiago de Compostela, upper reception hall, decoration at elite end (photo: T. Martin, with kind permission of the Museo de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela).

While the members of both episcopal and royal courts would have been included in the public event of the feast in a reception hall of the types that survive in Compostela, the two rulers alone withdrew to the even more exclusive setting of an enclosed (and likely heated) chamber to prepare for the council shortly to be held in February 1130. As scholars working through Spanish winters know well, León's bitter cold and Santiago's drenching rains mean that the rooms most used by rulers must have been heated to be bearable. And, as the hierarchy of space indicates, the chamber in the Leonese palace would likely have been richly appointed on an upper floor; however, no ornamentation survives nor are there any known descriptions of the decorative scheme for the upper areas of the palace in León. Its surviving remains are addressed below.

The psychological effect created by the elevation of the ruler above subjects and servants was a standard in both sacred and secular settings, as for example, in tribunals from which royalty attended the liturgy while displaying themselves to the viewers below. In palaces, practical rooms like kitchens were generally on the ground floor, while upper stories were reserved for the upper ranks. Lower exterior walls were rarely pierced by more than slit windows, in order not to compromise their defensive capacity, so it was only the upper floors that enjoyed adequate illumination and the free circulation of air, despite the presence of central courtyards that figure in some twelfth-century palaces. The author of the *Liber Sancti Iacobi* (c. 1135) demonstrates how clearly the two-story construction was understood as inherently palatine in his glowing description of the Cathedral at Santiago:

It is admirably constructed, grand, spacious, bright, of proper magnitude, harmonious in width, length and height, of admirable and ineffable workmanship, built in two stories, just like a royal palace. For indeed, whoever visits the naves of the gallery [lit. of the palace], if he goes up sad, after having seen the perfect beauty of this temple, he will be made happy and joyful.²⁵

It is worth noting that the cause for joy is the structure is itself, a pleasure to behold. Architecture, through its very beauty, is recognized as having an effect on the emotions of the viewer.

Textual sources suggest that a powerful emotional effect must also have been caused by the exterior of the palace in León; sadly, too little of the physical structure survives to be sure just how such an impression was created. We are fortunate, therefore, to have telling descriptions of two moments that mark the urban palace as the setting for pageant and panoply. They appear in the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, written c. 1145 during the reign of Alfonso VII.²⁶ The first took place in 1135, when Alfonso was crowned emperor at the Cathedral of León. Although he had acceded to the throne at his mother Urraca's death in 1126, Alfonso did not stage a coronation until nine years later when he had solidified his dominion over neighboring rulers. As

²⁵"Mirabiliter operatur, magna, spaciosa, clara, magnitudine condecenci latitudine longitudine et altitudine congruenti, miro et ineffabili opere habetur, que etiam dupliciter uelut regale palacium operatur. Qui enim sursum per naues palacii uadit, si tristis ascendit, uisa optima pulcritudine eiusdem templi, letus et gausus efficitur" (Gerson et al., *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago*, cap. IX, 68–71, as cited in Nuñez, "Auf der Suche," 222).

²⁶Maya Sánchez, *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* (hereafter *CAI*); Sánchez Belda, *CAI*. English translation by Barton and Fletcher, *World of El Cid*, 148–263. See also Ubieta Arteta, "Sugerencias sobre la *Chronica*;" Recuero Astray, *Alfonso VII*; Viñayo González, *La coronación imperial*; Pérez González, *Crónica del Emperador*.

Peter Linehan observed, this coronation was held, significantly, “fifty years and a day after the reconquest of Toledo” by the king’s grandfather, Alfonso VI (d. 1109).²⁷ After the ceremony,

[Alfonso VII] ordered that a great feast be celebrated at the royal palaces, and counts, nobles, and dukes served at the royal tables. And the emperor also ordered that generous gifts be given to the bishops and abbots and to everyone, and that many charitable offerings of clothing and food be distributed among the poor. On the third day the emperor and all came together again in the royal palaces, as was the custom, and they dealt with matters pertaining to the salvation of the entire kingdom of Spain. The emperor established customs and laws throughout his kingdom, as they were in the days of his grandfather king Alfonso.²⁸

Although the chronicler provides no physical description of the building, through this reference we see that the palace functioned as the site where the king manifested his newly confirmed authority over the other Christian kingdoms of Iberia by enacting laws he now had the power to enforce. He also sealed his sovereignty through public generosity to members of the community, acts similar to those performed by Archbishop Gelmírez in his newly constructed palace in Compostela. Presumably this would have taken place in an elongated reception hall of the type seen both in Santiago and in the royal palace at Huesca, although such a space no longer survives in León.²⁹ The vignette in the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* also shows that, although the ruler was invested with power at the Cathedral, the actual, legal running of his empire took place from his palace, as did the presentation of generous gifts guaranteeing him the loyalty of clergy, the poor, “and everyone else.”

Nine years later in 1144 on the occasion of the wedding of Alfonso’s daughter to king García Ramírez of Pamplona (d. 1150), the royal palaces again served as the mise-en-scène for a grand public event. The espousal was the culmination of years of battle in which the king of Pamplona had attempted to rid himself of the overlordship of León-Castilla. Unsuccessful, García swore himself Alfonso’s vassal and agreed to marry the emperor’s illegitimate daughter by Guntruda of Asturias, the infanta Urraca (d. 1189). As the lengthy account makes clear, Alfonso used the occasion to spread the news of García’s submission:

The emperor, sending out messages through his legates, ordered that his own knights and all the counts, nobles, and dukes in his entire kingdom, every one of them together with their knights, should come prepared to the royal wedding. [...] The emperor arrived and with him his wife, the empress Berenguela, and an enormous crowd of authorities,

²⁷Linehan, “Spain in the Twelfth Century,” 483.

²⁸“Iussit autem fieri magnum conuiuuium in palatiis regalibus, sed et comites et principes et duces ministrabant mensis regalibus. Iussit autem dari imperator magna stipendia episcopis et abbatibus et omnibus et facere magnas eleemosinas pauperibus indumentorum et ciborum. Tertia uero die iterum imperator et omnes, sicut soliti erant, iuncti sunt in palatiis regalibus et tractauerunt ea, que pertinent ad salutem regni totius Hispanie. Deditque imperator mores et leges in uniuerso regno suo, sicut fuerunt in diebus aui sui regis domni Adefonsi” (Maya Sánchez, *CAI*, I:70–1, 183).

²⁹For the palace in Huesca, see Martin, “Sacred in Secular.” The similarities in design and layout among secular and ecclesiastical palaces in the Iberian Christian kingdoms during the Central Middle Ages are striking, in contradistinction to the findings of Miller (“Religion Makes a Difference”) for a similar period in Italy. Unfortunately, too little interior ornamentation survives to be able to make an iconographic comparison between episcopal and royal Spanish palaces.

counts, dukes, and knights of Castilla. King García also arrived with a not small crowd of knights, prepared and prettified, as befits a betrothed king traveling to his own wedding.³⁰

Here we observe the derogatory attitude of the chronicler, whose wording feminizes and thus denigrates García for being married in León rather than in his home kingdom. It was, of course, the bride who was expected to travel to her new husband's lands, not the reverse.

For her part, the most serene infanta lady Sancha entered León by the Cauriense gate and with her came her niece, the infanta lady Urraca, betrothed of King García, together with an enormous crowd of nobles, knights, clerics, women, and maidens of the noblest families from all of Spain.³¹

As with Alfonso's reception of Archbishop Gelmírez fourteen years before, the processions began outside the Roman walls of the city. On this highly visible occasion, each group paraded publicly through León, involving all the townspeople in the event. The processions ended at the palace, before which a temporary structure had been erected for the secular celebrations. Such ephemeral architecture was an essential aspect of the medieval pageant, but the brevity of the description does not allow more than a glimpse of its general form.

The infanta lady Sancha set up a chamber at the royal palaces, which are at San Pelayo [later San Isidoro], and around the chamber was an enormous crowd of clowns, women, and maidens who sang and played organs, flutes, zithers, psalteries and all kinds of musical instruments. For his part, the emperor and king García were seated on a royal throne in a high place in front of the doors of the emperor's palace, while bishops, abbots, counts, nobles, and dukes were seated around them.³²

The king's sister Sancha (d. 1159) here took precedence over his wife, perhaps because the palaces were part of the infanta's domain as head of the royal inheritance known as the *infantazgo*, based at the double monastery of San Pelayo and San Juan Bautista (rededicated to San Isidoro and later converted to an Augustinian canonry).³³ The infanta also seems to have acted as foster mother to her niece, for in an early draft

³⁰“Imperator propriis militibus et cunctis comitibus et principibus et ducibus, qui in toto suo regno erant, ut unusquisque eorum cum sua nobili militia parati uenirent ad regales nuptias, missis legatis, precepit. . . . Venit autem imperator et cum eo uxor sua imperatrix domna Berengaria et maxima turba potestatum, comitum et ducum et militum Castelle. Venit autem et rex Garsia cum turba militum non pauca ita paratus et ornatus, sicut regem sponsatum ad proprias decet uenire nuptias” (Maya Sánchez, *CAI*, I:92, 191–2).

³¹“Intrauit autem serenissima infans domna Sanctia in Legionem per portam Cauriensem et cum ea consobrina sua infans domna Vrraca, sponsa regis Garsie, cum maxima turba nobilium militum et clericorum et mulierum et puellarum, quas totius Hispanie maiores genuerant” (Maya Sánchez, *CAI*, I:92, 192).

³²“Talamus uero collocatus est in palatiis regalibus, qui sunt in Sancto Pelagio, ab infante domna Sanctia et in circuitu talami maxima turba strionum et mulierum et puellarum canentium in organis et tibiis et cytharis et psalteriis et omni genere musicorum. Porro imperator et Garsia rex sedebant in solio regio in loco excelso ante fores palatii imperatoris, episcopi et abbates et comites et principes et duces sedilibus paratis in circuitu eorum” (Maya Sánchez, *CAI*, I:93, 192).

³³For an introduction to the *infantazgo* in this period, see Viñayo González, “Reinas e Infantas,” Henriot, “*Deo votas: L’Infantado*,” and “Infantes, *Infantaticum*,” and Martin, “Hacia una clarificación del *infantazgo*.”

of Sancha's will, she referred to Urraca as having been brought up under her care.³⁴ Taking place in an enclosed space, the women's celebration featured musicians, while the men's seating formed part of the public display, specially built for the occasion in front of the palace façade. Their entertainment was also of a different nature:

Some of the most illustrious men in Spain compelled their horses with their spurs to race, as much to exhibit their own ability as the vigor of their mounts; others, lance on the lance-rest, killed bulls enraged by the barking of dogs. Finally, for the blind men, they set a pig in the middle of the open space [that is, the plaza before the palace] that would belong to him who killed it and, wanting to kill the pig, most of the time they wounded each other, provoking laughter from those who were present. And so a great merriment was occasioned in the city, and they praised God, who always brought good fortune to them in everything.³⁵

The urban character of the palace was thus used to heighten the import of momentous events in the ruler's life. Here, the very doors were chosen as the backdrop for the nuptial festivities (*ante fores palatii imperatoris*), emphasizing the prestigious lineage of the princess given in marriage to the ruler of Pamplona, whose act of traveling to León underlined his subordinate status. Performing the role of silent witness, the royal residence stood in the background as a powerful reminder of the bride's dynastic connections. The ruler of León-Castilla used the setting of the palace to reinforce his claim to the title of emperor and with it his domination over other lords. This unusually prolix information from the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, featuring both real and symbolic functions of the royal palace, underlines the multiple roles it played in the life of a capital city without, unfortunately, providing concrete details that would contribute to an understanding of its physical reality.

Today the palace in León has been all but forgotten after it was subsumed within the conventual buildings of the attached church of San Isidoro (Figures 8a and 8b).³⁶ Part of the royal residence was turned over in the mid-twelfth century to the Augustinians who had charge of the canonry, and the rest of it was given to their successors in 1478 by Fernando II of Aragón (d. 1516). By 1539, much of the palace, which once extended along the Roman wall, had been torn down and a library built in the area to the southwest of the church. One of the few surviving sections of the palace, now used as a museum space (Figure 9), served as the setting for a miraculous occurrence recounted by Lucas of Tuy (d. 1249) in the *Liber miraculorum Sancti Isidori*, which he compiled 1220–30 during his tenure as canon at San Isidoro.³⁷

³⁴Martín López, "Colección documental de la infanta doña Sancha," 290–1.

³⁵"Alie autem potestates, uerumtamen Hispanie delecti, alii equos calcaribus currere cogentes iuxta morem patrie, proiectis hastilibus, in structa tabulata, ad ostendendam pariter artem tam suam quam equorum uirtutem percutiebant, alii, latratu canum ad iram prouocatis tauris, protento uenabulo occidebant. Ad ultimum cecis porcum, quem occidendo suum facerent, campi medio constituerunt et uolentes porcum occidere sese ad inuicem sepius leserunt et in risum omnes circumstantes ire coegerunt. Factum est autem gaudium magnum in illa ciuitate et benedicebant Deum, qui semper prosperabat eis cuncta" (Maya Sánchez, *CAI*, I:93, 192–3).

³⁶One exception is Williams, "León: The Iconography of a Capital." For an analysis of the four successive royal palaces in León, see Martin, *Queen as King*; and Torres Sevilla, *Palat de Rey*. Campos Sánchez-Bordona and Pérez Gil, *El Palacio Real*, focus on the late medieval palace in the southern part of the city that replaced this one.

³⁷Biblioteca de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro, ms. 63. A critical edition is underway by Patrick Henriët, to whom I offer my gratitude for generously providing me with the corrected Latin text. The only published edition is Pérez Llamazares, *Milagros de San Isidoro*.

Figure 8a. San Isidoro, León, ground plan (shaded area indicates foundations of earlier church) (drawing: P. Neira Olmedo, © T. Martin).

Figure 8b. Royal palace, León, section showing relationships among upper chamber, "Pantheon," tower, and church of San Isidoro (drawing: J. Williams).

Since the aforementioned Queen Sancha lived in the palace that was joined to the church of the blessed confessor, and she continually went to pray to God at a window that is in the highest part of the wall of that church, that is, under the pinnacle, facing the high altar [...] one day, rapt with ecstasy, she saw the heavens open and, in a remarkable golden chamber shining with gems, her spouse, the great doctor San Isidoro [...] who said to her: 'My sister, beloved and sweetest spouse [...] because this place where you are living is consecrated to God and very close to the church, leave this palace and build yourself another one, and give this one to my canons, because it is not fitting that any secular person live here [...]'. Convening the prior, of venerable holiness, Pedro Arias, with his canons, she immediately bestowed upon them the aforementioned palace [...]. After that, she moved to another residence on the plaza of the same church.³⁸

This hagiographical account, together with an archaeological reading of the standing walls, allows us to reconstruct at least part of the royal palace of León. The infanta Sancha, sister of Alfonso VII, is said to have made use of an upper chamber, contiguous with the west wall of the church, to view liturgical services. It was originally pierced by two round oculi flanking a large opening that gave on to the central nave of the church. While typically referred to as a window, it must in fact have served as a doorway on to a tribune: the opening measures nearly four meters high and three meters wide. Until an over-zealous restoration in the early twentieth century, brackets could still be seen that once supported the tribune;³⁹ from here the royalty would participate in the liturgy and appear to their subjects below. Following Manuel Gómez-Moreno, it is generally assumed that this upper chamber was not vaulted at the moment of construction of the Pantheon, but rather covered by a wooden roof, based in part on the presence of square post holes at the springing of the vault.⁴⁰ However, these elements, known as put holes, are a standard of medieval construction: they supported wooden scaffolding as walls were raised and vaulting installed. Sometimes covered over once construction was complete, they were more often left unfilled for reuse in building maintenance, as can be seen in the surviving transept tower of even such an important church as Cluny. Nor is the change in masonry above the put holes indicative of a wooden roof. Rather, the vault is constructed of lightweight tufa, while a finer grained stone was used for the ashlar masonry of the weight-bearing walls. Finally, the curve of the tribune opening in the church wall echoes the arc of the vault above, and the arrangement of the flanking oculi would not be possible without a barrel vault (see Figures 9 and 11). As we have seen, such vaulting was known in Iberian palatine architecture since at least the ninth-century building now known as Santa María del Naranco, a structure lauded by the Leonese author of the *Historia Silense* for its barrel vaulting.

³⁸“Cum regina prefacta Santia in palatio quod erat contiguum beati confessoris ecclesie moraretur, et per fenestram que in eminentiori templi eiusdem parieti, id est in pinaculo contra maius altare respicit aspiciendo frequenter almi doctoris corpus, hoc est sepulcrum, oraret dominum ... quadam die rapta in extasi vidit celos apertos, et in thalamo auro et gemmis radiantibus insignito, sponsum suum magnum doctorem Ysidorum ... sibi dicentem: ‘Soror mea, dilecta et dulcissima sponsa ... dum vero quia his qui te continet locus est domino consecratus, et ecclesie valde propinquus, recede ab isto palatio, et aliud tibi edifica et hoc trade meis canonicis, quod non licet alicui seculari persone in eo corporaliter vel temere habitare ... Convocatis ad se reverende sanctitatis Petrum Arie priorem cum suis canonicis, illico illis palatium contullit supradictum ... Quibus peractis ad aliam in platea eiusdem ecclesie se transtulit domum” (Ms. 63, cap. 35, fol. 18r–18v, published in Henriet, “Infantes, *Infantaticum*”).

³⁹Pérez Llamazares, *Historia de la Real Colegiata*, 338.

⁴⁰Gómez-Moreno, *Catálogo monumental*, 185. Williams, “San Isidoro in León,” 179–80, held that the vaulting was part of the original design.

Figure 9. Royal palace, León, upper chamber (photo: T. Martin).

When Sancha turned over this upper chamber to the Augustinians, probably around 1150, logic suggests that she must also have granted them the frescoed space supporting it. Called the royal chapel from the thirteenth century and the chapel of Santa Catalina in the late Middle Ages, today it is known as the Pantheon, a name it has had only since the end of the seventeenth century (Figure 10).⁴¹ This two-storied

Figure 10. Pantheon, León (photo: J. Williams).

⁴¹Martín González, "El panteón real de San Isidoro;" Campos Sánchez-Bordona, "Los proyectos de nueva construcción del Panteón Real."

structure is generally associated with the church rather than the palace.⁴² There can be no doubt, however, that the barrel-vaulted upper room was built to serve a palatine function. As for the lower room, this liminal space likely had more than a single purpose: its strong groin vaulting supported the elite space of the upper apartments; it was the nexus between sacred and secular, the point of transition where church and palace met; and it held the tombs of the patrons of San Isidoro. The first burials from the later eleventh century were likely built directly into the west wall of the church, and it may be that Sancha's donation of c. 1150 marked the moment when the Pantheon lost its multivalence and began to be used exclusively as a chapel for royal burial.⁴³

Following her gift to the canons, the infanta Sancha maintained for herself the southern areas of the palace, those that faced on to the plaza – setting of the festivities for her niece's wedding – which allowed for continued interaction with the city and citizens of León.⁴⁴ In an 1151 donation, Sancha referred to “meum palatium,” a strong use of the possessive pronoun that would seem to distinguish the section of the palace where she continued to live from the part she had given to the canons.⁴⁵ We can recognize the little that survives of the palace maintained by Sancha from the openings on two stories in the southwest wall of the church of San Isidoro (Figure 11, right side of the drawing). She and her court continued to have direct access from the palace to the church through a door ornamented by a chrismon tympanum on the ground floor (Figure 12) and, directly above, from a tribune opening from which the liturgy could be viewed. This upper door is now hidden behind the raised choir, although it can be seen from the west in the later library (Figure 13).

San Isidoro's tower comprises the other surviving elements of the palace (Figure 14). According to Lucas of Tuy, by the early thirteenth century the tower included a “chamber of stone [...] in which the money of some magnates had been entrusted.”⁴⁶ The reference may be to the uppermost of two barrel-vaulted rooms that constitute the interior spaces, built over the solid base of the late Roman wall (see Figures 8a and 8b). As in the chamber above the Pantheon, the contemporaneous lower room of the tower features a barrel vault as part of its original design (Figure 15). The scaffolding holes that caused such distraction in the other chamber were filled in here, and so the authenticity of this vault has never been questioned. Unfortunately, the walls of this

⁴²My identification of the Pantheon as structurally part of the palace, though functionally multipurpose, is likely to be considered polemical, given that this space is most often referred to as a narthex and discussed in relation to burial. See Bango Torviso, “El espacio para enterramientos privilegiados;” Walker, “The Wall Paintings;” Valdés Fernández, “El Panteón Real.” For an extensive discussion of the evidence that leads me to this conclusion, see Martin, *Queen as King*.

⁴³The infanta Sancha's tomb, from 1159, is the oldest surviving in the Pantheon. Its inscription is designed to be read on three sides, indicating that the fourth side was originally placed against a wall, not in an open space. Whatever the arrangement of the earlier burials and exactly where they were laid out, they were not monumentalized in the Pantheon until the thirteenth century. See Suárez González, “¿Del pergamino a la piedra?;” and Sánchez Ameijeiras, “The Eventful Life.”

⁴⁴According to Campos Sánchez-Bordona and Pereiras Fernández, *Iglesia y ciudad*, 31–51, this plaza maintained an elite status through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the location around which the upper nobility established their own palaces. See also Represa, “Evolución urbana;” and Estepa Díez, *Estructura social de la ciudad*.

⁴⁵Dominguez Sánchez, *Colección documental*, 80–2.

⁴⁶“et cuiusdam lapidae domus que est in turre ipsius monasterii in qua quorundam magnatorum cernabatur pecunia comendata.” (Ms. 63, cap. 73, fol. 38r).

Figure 11. Elevation of western wall from royal palace to church of San Isidoro, León (drawing: J. Williams).

Figure 12. San Isidoro, León, lower door from church into royal palace (photo: T. Martin).

Figure 13. Royal palace, León, upper door into church of San Isidoro (photo: T. Martin).

tower room have been stripped clean of all decoration, but the deliberate pitting of the stone to hold plaster indicates that it was once completely covered by frescoes, such as those seen in the Pantheon and praised (or criticized) in descriptions of other twelfth-century palaces.⁴⁷ Rising from the Late Antique ramparts, this vertical element of the palace would have stood out as a marker of power, indicating the royal presence in the northwestern quadrant of the town, diagonally opposite the cathedral with its bishop's palace. Pierced by slit windows at the levels of both vaulted

⁴⁷As, for example, the well-known 1158 description of the episcopal palace at Le Mans: "The workmanship surpassed the quality of the materials; their execution and the arrangement of the room were a proof of the artist's ingenuity which they reflected in a beautiful and subtle way. Next to this room and continuous with it he constructed a chapel; and if this chapel was beautifully resplendent as a work of architecture, the pictures painted on its walls, conforming expressly with an admirable skill to the appearance of living creatures, held enrapt not only the eyes of the spectators, but also their minds, and so attracted their attention that in their delight with the images they forgot their own business; those for whom tasks were waiting were so entranced by the paintings that they seemed almost idlers" ["Quarum materiam, licet commendabilem, superabat opus: nam et opus earum et compositio camere ingenium artificis, quod in eis pulcrius et subtilius relucebat, admodum commendabant. Camere illi capellam continuam posuerat; que, etsi prima manu artificis ni(c)hil(l)ominus pulcrius resplenderet, imagines tamen ibi pictæ, ingenio ammirabili viventium speciebus expressius conformate, intuentium non solum oculos, sed etiam intellectum depredantes, intuitus eorum in se adeo convertebant ut ipsi suarum occupationum obliti in eis delectarentur; set quos sua occupatio ex[s]pectabat, per imagines delusi, penitus of[t]iosi viderentur."] (Mortet, *Recueil de textes*, 166).

Figure 14. Royal palace, León, tower built over the late Roman wall (photo: T. Martin).

Figure 15. Royal palace, León, tower, lower vaulted chamber (photo: T. Martin).

chambers, the thick walls and meager openings speak to the defensive function of the tower, while the open area at the top was later reconstructed so that bells could be hung.⁴⁸

As the Leonese example makes clear, one of the difficulties inherent in studying medieval palaces is their susceptibility to reuse with a new function. This residence was repurposed to serve the church, while the royal palace in Pamplona today holds the Archivo General de Navarra, that in Estella is an art gallery, and in Huesca, the best preserved of the twelfth-century palaces is used for temporary exhibitions at the Museo Arqueológico Provincial.⁴⁹ The count's palace in Barcelona continued to function as a ruler's residence throughout the Middle Ages, but its eleventh- and twelfth-century remains are reflected mainly in a few windows that were preserved when walls were reused in the late medieval reconstruction.⁵⁰ For their part, episcopal palaces tended to be adapted to new purposes within the canonry when the bishops decided to modernize their residences.⁵¹ As such, little survives intact to attract modern art historians' attention, skewing our view of the architecture of power in medieval cities. These fragments, however, were the centers of authority in their day, and to ignore them is to prize survival over historical significance. Such written descriptions as those addressed in the present study allow a glimpse at the meanings behind medieval palaces for their patrons and the viewing publics. There are sufficient physical remains in Spain to warrant further study and enough documentation to draw synthetic conclusions that contribute to a more complete picture of the urban built environment in the Middle Ages. In sum, palaces played too central a role in the political landscape of medieval Iberia for them to be relegated to the margins of modern scholarship.

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⁴⁸Martin, *Queen as King*, 164–5.

⁴⁹For Estella, see Lacarra, "El combate de Roldán y Ferragut;" for Pamplona, see Martínez de Aguirre et al., *El Palacio Real de Pamplona*; for Huesca, see Martin, "Sacred in Secular," and Guitart Aparicio, *Castillos de Aragón*, 151.

⁵⁰Adroer i Tasis, *El palau reial major de Barcelona*.

⁵¹Carrero Santamaría, "La fortaleza del obispo."

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