

Becoming Alfonso VI: the king, his sister and the *arca santa* reliquary

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Alfonso VI became the ruler of a vast kingdom and far outstripped his predecessors in the extent of his sway. Yet few would have predicted this at his birth in c.1040. A series of events between that moment and his triumph in 1072 shaped the king that was to rule a reunited León, Castile and Galicia, and from 1085 Toledo. His parents, Fernando I and Sancha, defined him by giving him a name, *Adefonsus*. Even more than the family names Sancho and García that were given to his brothers, *Adefonsus* came with a legacy, material and immaterial. It was not a surprising choice of name as it was that of his maternal grandfather, Alfonso V, King of León. Before him and his ancestor Alfonso IV, it had been the name of two of the most successful early kings of Asturias, Alfonso II and Alfonso III. Both had become symbols of ideal kingship: Alfonso II was celebrated for his piety and purity, whilst Alfonso III's reputation rested more on his conquests. The *Crónica de Alfonso III* attributed to 'the great king', Alfonso II, the building of the basilica of San Salvador in Oviedo, with its two groups of six altars dedicated to the apostles, as well as a church to the Virgin.¹ Alfonso III was acknowledged as a restorer of churches and a builder of palaces in Oviedo, but the paean to him, recorded in the *Crónica Albeldense*, concentrated first on his manly virtues and praised him for being 'illustrious amongst the Asturians, strong amid the Vascones, vengeful to the Arabs and protective of his citizens'.² It was nonetheless careful to recognise that his victories were holy and that they had been given to the prince (*princeps*) through the aid of Christ, his leader and guide (*dux*). These eponymous ancestors were surely a heavy burden for a small child but also an inspirational one.

It is not known whether Alfonso VI went to Oviedo as a child with his family, since the earliest evidence for such a visit is much later in 1053,³ but it is possible that he accompanied the court on earlier royal visits. If so, he may have shared his parents' special access to the precious objects donated by his namesakes: the Cross of Angels and the Cross of Victory given by Alfonso II and Alfonso III respectively,

¹ Y. BONNAZ, *Chroniques Asturiennes*, Paris, 1987, ch.14.1, pp. 50-51.

² Y. BONNAZ, 1987 (note 1) ch. 47.5, pp. 27-28. This is my translation.

³ F. J. FERNÁNDEZ CONDE, I. TORRENTE FERNÁNDEZ, G. DE LA NOVAL MENÉNDEZ, *El monasterio de San Pelayo de Oviedo. Historia y Fuentes. I. Colección Diplomática (996-1325)*, Oviedo, 1978, no. 3, p. 24.

and held by the cathedral church of San Salvador. He may have been told stories associated with the glittering objects. For all his later adulation, Alfonso II had had some troubled periods in his reign and had even been deposed in 801, but he had overcome this adversity.⁴ The Cross of Angels had been donated after he had been restored to his throne and to his capital of Oviedo.

Alfonso IV would have provided a less grandiose model, as his reign was brief (925-931) and did not leave any recorded material legacy. On the other hand Alfonso V (994-1028) grew to be a strong ruler, who had some military success, and received the highly complimentary epithet *strenuissimus* from the author of the *Historia Silense*.⁵ According to Adémar of Chabannes, he was recognised internationally and was part of a diplomatic network that included King Cnut of England and the Danes (r.1016-35) and Duke William the Great of Aquitaine (d.1030).⁶ Within this nexus they exchanged precious diplomatic gifts in a spirit of rivalry. Alfonso V also restored the royal church of St. John the Baptist, which had been destroyed in the raids of al-Mansur.⁷ This building, later to be replaced by one commissioned by Fernando I and dedicated to St Isidore, was probably modest, since it is described in the *Historia Silense* as built of 'mud and brick' not stone, but it may have held some of the manuscripts acquired through the diplomatic networks.

Alfonso VI probably grew up in the palace at León along with his brothers and sisters. He was either the third or fourth child; the sources give conflicting evidence, some suggesting that both sisters, Urraca and Elvira, were born before Alfonso.⁸ In either case, the first child was Urraca, and the second child was Sancho, named for his paternal grandfather, Sancho III, the Great of Navarre. Thus Alfonso VI was the second son, a position with which his father, also a second son, may have empathised. Given the later conflicts between the siblings, it is all too likely that the family dynamics were stormy from the beginning and split into various factions. The twelfth-century *Historia Silense* famously describes Alfonso's relationship with his elder sister, Urraca.⁹ It says that she looked after him *in loco matris*, in place of a mother, that she fed and dressed him, and that she loved him, as a sister, *medulitus*, deep in her heart, more than her other brothers. Although this relationship later became the subject of literary scandal, there is nothing here to suggest that it was more than a strong alliance formed in the midst of sibling rivalries. Apart from Ur-

⁴ R. COLLINS, *Early Medieval Spain. Unity in Diversity 400-1000*, New York, 1995, p. 229.

⁵ J. PÉREZ DE URBEL y A. G. RUIZ-ZORRILLA (eds.), *Historia Silense*, Madrid, 1959, ch. 73, pp. 176-177.

⁶ G. BEECH, "England and Aquitaine in the century before the Norman Conquest", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 19, pp. 84. ADÉMAR DE CHABANNES, *Chronicon*, ed. P. Bourgain, Turnhout, 1999, Bk. III, ch. 41, pp. 161.

⁷ W.M. WHITEHILL, *Spanish Romanesque Architecture of the Eleventh Century*, Oxford, 1968, p. 145; G. BOTO VARELA, "Arquitectura medieval. Configuración especial aptitudes funcionales", *Real Colegiata de San Isidoro*, León, 2007, pp. 52-54; R. COLLINS, 1995 (note 4), p. 241.

⁸ J. PÉREZ DE URBEL y A.G. RUIZ-ZORRILLA, 1959 (note 5), ch. 81, p.184; F.J. FERNÁNDEZ CONDE, *El libro de los testamentos de la catedral de Oviedo*, Rome, 1971, pp. 111-118.

⁹ J. PÉREZ DE URBEL y A. G. RUIZ-ZORRILLA, 1959 (note 5), ch.12, p. 122.

raca, the sources mention only one regular companion for Alfonso during his years of education. This was Pedro Ansúrez, the eldest son of the Count of Carrión.¹⁰

In these early years the palace surroundings were probably unexceptional. The acquisition of works of art seems to have concentrated on manuscripts, including two from 1047: that known as the *Facundus Beatus* and a book of St. Isidore's *Ety-mologies* owned by Queen Sancha and the eldest son Sancho, and, in 1055, Fernando and Sancha's *Liber Diurnus*. Much was to change, however, after Fernando I's defeat of his brother at Atapuerca in 1054 and the initiation of *paria* payments from Zaragoza, Toledo and Badajoz. In his late teens and early twenties Alfonso would have watched his father, Fernando I, become exceptionally wealthy, and with the gold and silver came a flood of luxury goods from al-Andalus. Much of the new-found wealth would have been distributed to loyal nobles, but some was reserved for conspicuous donations to the church, including Cluny, and for artistic commissions of a scale and magnificence that rivalled imperial patronage. These opportunities enabled Fernando I and Sancha to attract artists and craftsmen who executed a remarkable group of objects in ivory, gold and silver, above all for the new church of San Isidoro of 1063.¹¹ The culmination was the dazzling silver and gold reliquary of the new dedicatee, St. Isidore. The material expression of their father's wealth and success must have been overwhelming for all the sons and daughters.

When Fernando died in 1065, Alfonso VI came into his material inheritance, around the age of twenty-nine. Despite the formal division of the kingdom having taken place only a couple of years before, it is difficult to believe that the eldest son Sancho had not always been destined to receive the ancestral patrimony of Castile and with it the homage of Navarre, and that León had always been marked for Alfonso, the kingdom so inextricably linked to his name.¹² The contentious surprises would have been the additional areas, including the long disputed lands between the river Cea and the river Pisuerga, including the lands of the Count of Carrión. These were the territories that Alfonso's brother, Sancho II of Castile, might have expected to receive to enhance his otherwise relatively meagre portion. This division led to violent conflict.

Alfonso VI's charters from the early years of his reign show him building his support in León and travelling very little. They also show his continuing partnership with his elder sister, Urraca. This is expressed most clearly in a charter of 15 October 1071 in which Alfonso gives properties to Urraca and describes her as '*dilectissima adque amantissima soror mea domina Urracca, prolis Fredenandiz*'.

¹⁰ J.A. ESTÉVEZ SOLA, (ed.), *Chronica Nainerensis*, Turnhout, 1995, book 3, ch.15.77; A. GAMBRA, *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, curia e imperio*, I, *Estudio*, León, 1997, pp. 582-86.

¹¹ M.A. FRANCO MATA, 'El tesoro de San Isidoro y la monarquía leonesa', *Boletín del Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid)*, IX (1991), pp. 34-61.

¹² A. SÁNCHEZ CANDEIRA, *Castilla y León en el siglo XI. Estudio del reinado de Fernando I*, Madrid, 1999, pp. 228-229.

The exchange is confirmed by Urraca's gift to him of a textile of gold thread that had been bought for two thousand gold dinars.¹³ The sibling loyalties and rivalries ran as deep as ever and were exacerbated by the perceived inequity of the inheritance. Alfonso's eventual defeat at the hands of his brother Sancho in January 1072 at Golpejera, some 30 kilometres west of the river Pisuerga, was not only a military and political disaster but also a humiliating reversal of Atapuerca, the battle at which Fernando I had defeated and killed his elder brother. This humiliation was complete when Sancho captured Alfonso, put him in chains and took him to a prison in Burgos. The most likely outcome at this stage was death or, if Alfonso was fortunate, lifetime imprisonment, but through the intervention of his sister Urraca and Cluny, Alfonso escaped into exile in Toledo.

Alfonso's geographic experience would have broadened at this point as he travelled south to Toledo through lands that he may have previously known only by hearsay, as there is no record of Fernando I taking his sons on campaign or sending them as ambassadors. Although Alfonso's spirits would surely have lifted, it must still have seemed as if this other kind of captivity was to be his lot. In Toledo, he lived at the court of al-Mamun, ruler of the taifa kingdom of Tulaytula (1043-1075), albeit probably outside the main city. León and Toledo had long operated in the same social and cultural world. For many decades León had lived in the shadow of its Arab neighbours, paid them tribute and raided them for everything from scientific knowledge to luxury textiles. With the fall of the Caliphate, there had been a gradual and ultimately complete reversal: the tribute had begun to flow in the opposite direction and al-Mamun was obliged to receive his royal 'guest'. Yet the taifa kingdoms, like Toledo, had inherited and reinvented much of the cultural sophistication of the Caliphate, and these months spent living in al-Mamun's court would surely have made a strong impression on Alfonso. He would have had many hours of leisure and opportunities to study the courtly life, taste and history of his hosts. Alfonso VI and al-Mamun certainly became close allies, and perhaps even friends.

During those hours it is not inconceivable that the conversation might have turned to the vicissitudes of monarchs, and in particular to the difficulties faced by the caliphs of Córdoba¹⁴. There had been many challenges to that throne, and pertinently one from al-Mughira, the brother of al-Hakam. This threat had been contained ultimately by violent means, but before that it was deflected politically, amongst other approaches, by an ironic gift. The intricate language of that coded family message has been convincingly demonstrated by Francisco Prado-Vilar's

¹³ A. GAMBRA, *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, curia e imperio*, II, *Colección diplomática*, 1998, no. 7, pp. 16-18.

¹⁴ It is not known whether Alfonso VI spoke Arabic, but Lucas de Tuy says that his friend and fellow student, Pedro Ansúrez did. LUCAS DE TUY, *Chronicon mundi*, E. Falque (ed.), Turnhout, 2003, bk. 4, 66.7-8, p. 300. He may have been mistaken in this, as he probably was in his belief that Pedro accompanied Alfonso to Toledo.

analysis of the ivory pyxis presented to al-Mughira in 968.¹⁵ It is not known where that pyxis was in 1072, but knowledge of it or other similarly eloquent gifts was doubtless available in Toledo. In 1049/50 al-Mamun had used the gift of an ivory casket, to designate his son, Husam, the legitimate heir to the throne of Toledo, although this casket, now known as the Palencia Casket, lacks the complex iconography of the al-Mughira pyxis.¹⁶ Such experiences may have enriched Alfonso VI's earlier experience of diplomatic gifts and deepened his understanding of the luxury goods that had been showered upon his father. Illuminated manuscripts are the only familial gifts that have survived from Alfonso's childhood, but the 1047 *Etymologies* and the 1055 *Liber Diurnus* may well have contained their own coded messages.¹⁷ Figurative ivories and metalwork had appeared much more recently in León and Castile, and those at León were donations to San Isidoro. Even though they were local gifts, they seem to speak internationally, of Fernando and Sancha's status among the rulers of Europe. If family messages were also encoded within these gifts, they have not yet been identified.

Back in León, Sancho II was failing to win round the nobility, and Urraca and Pedro Ansúrez were working to effect Alfonso's return.¹⁸ By October 1072 Sancho was dead, and Alfonso was called home by Urraca to take control not only of León but of Castile as well. By February 1073 he had taken Galicia too, and imprisoned his brother García. This complete reversal must have seemed miraculous to Alfonso VI. Indeed, in a charter dated to 17 November 1072, Alfonso, '*magnifico rege Fredinando et Santia regina progenitus*', expressed his gratitude to God for restoring to him, the exile (*extorris*), the kingdom that he had lost, without shedding the blood of his enemies or laying waste the region.¹⁹ Significantly Alfonso VI confirmed this charter with his sister Urraca. Moreover Urraca was to appear regularly confirming his charters until the late 1070s, even after Alfonso VI's marriage to Inés, the daughter of Duke William VIII of Aquitaine, around 1074.²⁰ However, with the arrival of Alfonso's second wife, Constance of Burgundy in 1080, there is an emphatic change. From that date Urraca appears only infrequently to confirm Alfonso's charters, until after Constance's death in 1093.²¹ This demise seems to have occasioned something of a resurgence in Alfonso's special relationship with his sister. Although there is no indication of the exuberance of their youthful attachment, there is evidence of Urraca's closer and more frequent involvement with

¹⁵ F. PRADO-VILAR, "Circular visions of fertility and punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus", *Muqarnas*, 14 (1997), pp. 19-41.

¹⁶ J.D. DODDS, (ed.), *al-Andalus, The art of Islamic Spain*, New York, 1992, cat. no. 7, pp. 204-6.

¹⁷ F. PRADO-VILAR, "*Lacrimae rerum*: San Isidoro de León y la memoria del padre", *Goya*, 328 (2009), pp. 195-221

¹⁸ E. FALQUE (ed.), "*Chronicon Compostellanum*", *Habis*, 14 (1983), p.80.

¹⁹ A. GAMBRA, I, 1997 (note 10), no.11, pp. 22-25.

²⁰ For example, A. GAMBRA, II, 1998 (note 13), no. 11, 12, and 13, pp. 22-29.

²¹ A. GAMBRA, II, 1998 (note 13), pp. 489-490.

royal charters. This included a donation to San Salvador de Oviedo and to its bishop Martín in 1096, made with the agreement of Alfonso VI's new queen Berta and confirmed by Urraca as '*imperatoris germana, Fredinandi regis filia*', together with her sister Elvira.

After his return Alfonso encouraged and funded several projects across his kingdom, from Santiago de Compostela to Burgos along the royal road, known to us as the pilgrimage route. In this way he knitted together the kingdoms of Castile, León and Galicia, economically, politically and militarily. Yet I would maintain that there is little evidence for his personal involvement in architectural projects or in other acts of artistic patronage. One clear exception to this is Sahagún, the place to which he most often returned after military campaigning, and which was to provide the setting for his burial and for that of two of his queens. According to Ambrosio de Morales, in the sixteenth century, Alfonso VI's tomb sat next to the *repoussé* high altar that the king himself had commissioned.²² Unfortunately we do not know the date of this donation, or even whether it was connected with plans for Alfonso's burial or with his earlier choice of Sahagún as a preferred palace and Queen Constance's fondness for the site. The donation is usually assumed to be later, as de Morales's description matches that of the altar given by Diego Gelmírez to the cathedral of Santiago in 1105 and described in *The Pilgrims' Guide*.²³ According to de Morales, the altar at Sahagún was made of silver plate; on the front was a figure of Christ in Majesty surrounded by the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse, and to each side figures of the apostles were arranged in three registers. The *arca santa* at Oviedo, which could almost be described in the same terms, may be the only other surviving example of Alfonso VI's deeply personal patronage, as opposed to his more political and strategic donations.²⁴

In 1074 Alfonso VI asserted himself over his kingdom and re-enforced tribute payments from Granada and Sevilla, together with a large back-payment of 30,000 gold dinars.²⁵ According to an Arabic source, Alfonso sent Pedro Ansúrez as an ambassador to the King of Granada, which implies that Pedro was still closely involved in the royal administration.²⁶ When Alfonso returned home he spent the

²² A. DE MORALES, *Viage de Ambrosio de Morales por orden del rey D. Phelipe II*, Madrid, 1965, pp. 36-37.

²³ A. SHAVER-CRANDELL and P. GERSON, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, London, 1995, pp. 92-93.

²⁴ For the *arca santa*, see M. GÓMEZ MORENO, *El Arte Románico. Esquema de un libro*, 1934, pp. 28-30; *Ibid.* M. GÓMEZ MORENO, "El Arca Santa de Oviedo documentada", *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, XVIII, 1945, pp. 125-36. J.A. HARRIS, "Redating the Arca Santa of Oviedo", *The Art Bulletin* (vol.77/1) 1995, pp. 82-93, R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, "Patria uallata asperitate moncium. Pelayo de Oviedo, el arca de las reliquias y la creación de una topografía regia", *Locus Amoenus*, 9, (2007/08), all of which give extensive bibliography.

²⁵ B. REILLY, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under King Alfonso VI 1065-1109*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 83-84; A. GAMBRA, I, 1997 (note 10), p. 583.

²⁶ E. LEVÍ-PROVENÇAL and E. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (trans.), *El Siglo XI en 1ª persona. Las "Memorias" de 'Abd Allah, último Rey Zirí de Granada destronado por los Almorávides (1090)*, Madrid, 1980, pp. 153-154.

next year, 1075, travelling across his realm. He began in January by visiting Galicia where he probably funded the planning of a new cathedral at Santiago de Compostela. Oviedo, in March, was his second major destination, and in May he went to Castrojeriz to make a donation to the see of Oca-Burgos. Donations to Santiago and Burgos made strategic sense, but Oviedo was a different matter: it was above all symbolic. The bishop of Oviedo was Arianus, and he was Alfonso's first episcopal appointment, in 1073, and Alfonso may have retained a special interest in him.²⁷ Little more is known about Arianus beyond his presence at court from time to time, as he confirmed several charters. His most tangible legacy is a tiny silver-gilt casket that he commissioned for San Salvador, his Cathedral church at Oviedo, to hold the Host.²⁸ Alfonso VI certainly carried out some legal business in Oviedo, but the famous charter that describes the opening of the wooden box of the *arca santa*, dated to March 14 in the middle of Lent, has been regarded as a forgery, ever since Bernard Reilly's 1985 ground-breaking analysis of Alfonso VI's chancery.²⁹ Raquel Alonso has supported the suggestion of Richard Fletcher that the surviving document may be based on genuine material, and even Reilly accepted that the document was "probably based on a genuine donation".³⁰ To me also the charter reads as if it contains the vestiges of an original. Indeed it may juxtapose two separate charters that have been spliced at the crucial point just before the word '*dono*'. Although there are clearly other interpolations, much of the body of the text that concerns the *arca santa* may indeed be genuine. Alfonso VI's personal involvement in the event is stated very clearly in the charter, which refers to *ipsius regis studium*, the zeal of the king himself, for the veneration of this great treasure that had lain long-hidden in the church of San Salvador at Oviedo. As Alonso also notes, the story of the journey of the relics from Toledo is simply told in the charter in comparison to the elaborate narrative that appears in the twelfth-century version by Bishop Pelayo.³¹ The charter records that Alfonso was in Oviedo with his '*nobilissima germana nomine Urraca*' and that Bishop Arianus was present at the opening of the *arca santa*. Moreover the tone of much of the charter also seems right for the time, especially the wish that God may direct Alfonso so that he may rule happily, in peace, and with mercy and good judgement.

The fact of Alfonso VI's patronage of the *arca santa* reliquary is difficult to dispute as it is recorded by the inscription around the edge of the upper surface. The *arca santa* was famously damaged in 1934 and reconstructed by Manuel Gómez

²⁷ A. GAMBRA, I, 1997 (note 10), p. 637.

²⁸ M. GÓMEZ MORENO, 1934 (note 23), p. 30.

²⁹ A. GAMBRA, II, 1998 (note 13), no.27, pp. 60-65; B. REILLY, (ed.) "The Chancery of Alfonso VI of León-Castile (1065-1109)", in *Santiago, Saint-Denis, and Saint Peter. The Reception of the Roman Liturgy in León-Castile in 1080*, New York, 1985, p. 7 and p. 25 n. 40.

³⁰ R. FLETCHER, *The Quest for El Cid*, London, 1989, p.210. R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08 (note 24), p.24.

³¹ F. J. FERNÁNDEZ CONDE, 1971 (note 8), pp. 111-118. For Alonso's excellent summary of the evidence, see R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08 (note 24), pp. 21-24.

Moreno, and this must constantly be borne in mind when dealing with its elements, especially as Gómez Moreno manipulated the evidence by adding the date of 1075 to the inscription.³² Fortunately the inscription was recorded on at least three occasions before 1934: by de Morales, Hübner, and Vigil.³³ All three of those epigraphers agreed that the inscription clearly read: ‘*rex Adefonsus humile devocione preditus fecit hoc receptaculum*. It continued: ‘*Propter hoc convenimus cum dicto Adefonso principe et cum germana laetissime Urraca*.’ The use of the title *princeps* instead of *imperator* or *rex* implies a date before 1077,³⁴ and the use of the superlative, *laetissime*, ‘most delightful’, also chimes with the early charters and not with any later ones.

In 1995 Julie Harris published an article that re-dated the *arca santa* to the 1120s and viewed it as the creation of Bishop Pelayo and as part of his concerted campaign to raise the profile of his see at Oviedo.³⁵ However Raquel Alonso Álvarez has argued recently for an earlier date and a *terminus ante quem* of 1102, based mainly on re-assessment of the documentary evidence and, in particular, on a phrase in the writings of the same Bishop Pelayo.³⁶ I do not disagree with her conclusions but I wish to take the argument further by re-visiting the visual evidence and iconography of the *arca santa*, as well as the texts on the reliquary itself, to argue for the traditional date soon after 1075 and for a special role for the *arca santa* in the sovereignty of Alfonso VI.

According to the charter of 14 March 1075, when the wooden box of the *arca santa* was opened, it was found to contain a large and diverse collection of relics, purported to have been brought to Oviedo from Toledo for safe keeping at the time of the Arab invasion. It was then forgotten and passed into obscurity.³⁷ By 1102 it was encased in silver-gilt and held in the Cámara Santa, the treasury of the cathedral church of San Salvador at Oviedo, and perhaps by that point it shared the space with the two crosses, the Cross of Angels of Alfonso II and the Cross of Victory of Alfonso III.³⁸ As Raquel Alonso has observed, the first minimal references to the *arca* date to the final years of the eleventh century, and Bishop Pelayo’s promotion of it, for very different purposes, belongs to the second and third decades of the twelfth century.³⁹ This raises the question of audience. The *arca santa* is a reliquary that looks like an altar, but, because of the damage to the top, it is impossible to identify any signs of

³² M. GÓMEZ MORENO, 1945 (note 24), pp. 125-36.

³³ A. DE MORALES, 1965 (note 22), pp. 71-72. E. HÜBNER, *Inscriptiones Hispaniae Christianae*, 1871, pp. 81-83; C.M. VIGIL, *Asturias monumental, epigráfica y diplomática*, 2 vols., Oviedo, 1887, p. 15.

³⁴ A. GAMBRA, I, 1997 (note 10), pp. 683-686.

³⁵ J.A.HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), pp. 82-93.

³⁶ R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08 (note 24), pp. 21-24.

³⁷ R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08, (note 24), p. 22; J. A. HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), pp.86-87. By the time of the explosion in 1934, the box was empty. M. GÓMEZ MORENO, 1945 (note 24), p. 125.

³⁸ R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08 (note 24), p.20.

³⁹ J.A. HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), pp.91-92; R. ALONSO ÁLVAREZ, 2007/08 (note 24), pp. 23-25.

use as an altar. The decision to engrave the top instead of embossing it implies, however, that use was intended to be an option. If it was housed with the earlier donations of Alfonso II and Alfonso III, Alfonso VI may have been deliberately complementing the sacred treasure of his predecessors. Harking back to an intrinsically Gothic idea, was he building up the identity of his kingdom through a store of treasure? Was the *arca santa* initially conceived as a private and personal object, one to which only the royal family and the higher clergy of the cathedral would have full access? Other viewers, as now, might have seen only the frontal.

Overall the iconography of the *arca santa* is conventional for an altar in that it features a figure of Christ in Majesty with four evangelist symbols and depicts scenes from the life of Christ, the dedicatee of the cathedral of San Salvador. It also portrays the archangel St. Michael, to whom the Cámara Santa was later dedicated. Yet most of those who have worked on the *arca santa* have commented on the oddity of the selection of scenes and regarded its programme as problematic.

At first glance the frontal of the *arca santa* reliquary is highly traditional with Christ in a mandorla at the centre, supported by four angels, and twelve apostles including St. Paul, ranged in two rows either side of the mandorla. The iconography, materials and design of the *arca* all call to mind the frontals of surviving Carolingian altars, such as the Golden Altar from the Palatine chapel at Aachen.⁴⁰ At the same time it could be said to reference the twelve altars of the apostles, divided into two groups of six, that the *Crónica of Alfonso III* asserted Alfonso II had built for the same church of San Salvador. The feature that distinguishes the frontal from Carolingian altars is the pseudo-Kufic inscription that runs around the entire edge (fig. 1).

On the right hand side of the reliquary there is a series of scenes from the infancy of Christ in two registers (fig. 2). This is not a straightforward sequence, however, and it cannot be read chronologically clockwise or anti-clockwise.⁴¹ A figure labelled 'Anna', usually assumed to be the mother of the Virgin, begins the narrative on the right of the upper register, humbly casting her eyes away from the Annunciation, which follows. But the next scene, reading right to left, is the Annunciation of the Shepherds, followed out of order by the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Elisabeth. One explanation for the additional figure, although not for its designation as 'Anna', could be a design problem, a need to even up the number of figures on the register. A similar, but unnamed figure was adopted as the solution for such a problem on the twelfth-century altar of Eilbertus in Cologne.

On the *arca santa*, the Nativity is depicted on the left side of the lower register followed by the Flight into Egypt on the right side. Very unusually for any period,

⁴⁰ P. LASKO, *Ars Sacra 800-1200*, New Haven and London, 1972, 1994, p. 130.

⁴¹ J.A. HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), p. 84, Julie Harris is inaccurate in saying that these scenes 'can be read in a counterclockwise manner'.



Fig. 1. Arca Santa, frontal, 1918, Arxiu Mas.

‘Anna’ appears again in the scene of the Flight into Egypt. It has been suggested that she is a member of the departing party, but there is no basis in the Gospels or in apocrypha for anyone called Anna travelling with the party. From the disposition of the figures it seems more likely that Anna is watching the departure with a gesture of blessing or farewell, and she holds a flowering sprig. This narrative aspect is so distinctive, almost unique, that it signals a particular, perhaps personal, meaning. Aside from one other example to which I shall return below, the device of ‘Anna’ in this scene was not picked up elsewhere.

It has always been assumed that the figure of Anna depicts the mother of the Virgin, St. Anne, which has been problematic as the cult of St. Anne was not popular in the West until the twelfth century. The supposed presence of St. Anne was one of the main arguments that Julie Harris used to re-date the *arca santa* to c.1120, and it has remained a stumbling block to my, or any other, eleventh-century interpretation of this object. English manuscripts sent to Alfonso V could have been one potential source for this idea, as the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin was celebrated in England until the Norman conquest. However, John Lowden has suggested to me that this may not be St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin and wife of Joachim, especially as Joachim is very unusually missing from the side of this Anna. Instead the figure labelled ‘Anna’, and not Santa Anna, may be Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Hannah, or Anna in the Vulgate, was childless until she went to the Temple to beg



Fig. 2. Arca Santa, Infancy scenes, 1918, Arxiu Mas.

God for a child. After her prayers were answered and her son Samuel was born, she sang a hymn of praise to the Lord, *Exultavit cor meum*, that prefigures the *Magnificat* of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1. 52-3).⁴² Thus Hannah/Anna typologically prefigures the Annunciation to the Virgin, which goes some way towards explaining her presence on the *arca santa*, beside the Annunciation scene.

A regular part of the Roman Breviary sung at Lauds on Wednesdays, the canticle was also one of the one hundred and five canticles included in the *Liber Diurnus* of Fernando I and Sancha. There is earlier evidence of the Leonese royal family's special interest in the Canticles. In the *Historia Silense's* moving account of the good death of Fernando I, he recites a version of '*Benedictus Dominus Deus Israhel patris nostri*', (I Chronicles, 29), the words of King David before his death, and Alfonso VI referenced the same text when he gave the monastery of San Isidoro de Dueñas to Cluny on the anniversary of Fernando's death in 1073.⁴³

⁴² N. FRYE, *The Great Code: Bible and Literature*, London, 1982, p. 183.

⁴³ B. BISHKO, 'The liturgical context of Fernando I's last days', in *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History 600-1300*, London 1984, VII, pp. 51-55. R. WALKER, "The Wall-Paintings in the Panteón de los Reyes at León: A Cycle of Intercession", *The Art Bulletin*, vol.80/2 (2000), pp. 211-12; F. PRADO-VILAR, 2009 (note 17) p. 207.

The scenes in both registers on the *arca santa* have labels, mostly the names of the participants, for example: ANNA, GABRIEL, SANTA MARIA, ELISABET, and IOSEP, but the two lower scenes also have textual rubrics in a band running above.⁴⁴ The Nativity is accompanied by MARIA ET IOSEP POSUERUNT DOMINUM IN PRESEPIO ANIMALIU[m]. This is not a biblical text, which raises questions about its selection. The text emphasises the extent to which Christ is out of place lying in the manger, as does the depiction of the scene, in which Christ, the manger and the ox and ass are isolated under a central arch but the manger is resting on a richly decorated support.⁴⁵

Above the Flight into Egypt scene is a text from the gospel of Matthew: ANGELUS APARUIT IOSEP DICENS FUGE IN EGIPTUM ET ESTO' (from Matt. 2.13). Again this rubric is not a straightforward choice, as the scene does not depict the appearance of the angel to Joseph, but instead the Flight itself in action. The rubric also ends somewhat abruptly. To those who knew the Gospel the continuation would have been very familiar: the description of the family's flight and that they had to stay in Egypt until the death of Herod, after which, in the words of the prophet Hosea, God said 'I have called my son out of Egypt'. One explanation for this textual oddity could be that the plaques were originally arranged in a different way or over a larger surface, perhaps over the back of the reliquary as well, and that there was more text. However, some of the scenes are contained on one continuous sheet of silver and the back of the altar is covered with a geometric panel that no one has yet suggested is of a later date. Alternatively it may be that the choice was made to imply subtly the continuation of the verse and not to write it out on the reliquary. I wish to propose that both the textual rubrics were carefully chosen to refer to the exile and return of Alfonso VI and to make an analogy with the experience of the infant Christ as an exile, first in the manger and again in Egypt. Just as the Christ child was summoned back by God only after the threat from a king had passed, so Alfonso VI was recalled by Urraca only after the death of his brother, King Sancho II. Out of Egypt paralleled 'out of Toledo'.

There is a further unusual juxtaposition of scenes on the left-hand side of the reliquary (fig. 3). In the upper register is the Ascension of Christ. Christ ascends, between an alpha and omega, in a mandorla supported by two angels. To the right, in a scene from the Apocalypse, the archangel Michael fights the dragon between a seraphin and a cherubim. In the lower register eight of the apostles, in a line, look up to watch the Ascension. They are the first eight that are named in the Acts of the Apostles at the scene of the Ascension but the lack of the remaining four is puzzling. Again we must ask whether this was the original arrangement, because it is, to my knowledge, unprecedented.

⁴⁴ If the upper register had similar rubrics, these have been lost.

⁴⁵ In later English hymns, for example in the Worcester fragments, similar concepts of exile in the manger were expressed as '*vagit in presepio*'.



Fig. 3. Arca Santa, Ascension and St Michael fighting the dragon, Arxiu Mas.

The pattern of the rubrics on this side of the *arca santa* follows a similar pattern to those on the infancy side. Most of them are labels that name the figures, CERUBIN, MICAEL, DRACO, SERAFIN, and the names of the apostles, but there are also two short texts, this time in the upper register. The rubric under the Ascension scene is ASCENDENS CHRISTUS IN ALTUM CAPTIVAM DUXIT CAPTIVITATEM. This text comes from Psalm 67, *Exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici eius*, a triumphant psalm, a joyous song of the defeat of God's enemies, although the phrase is altered from the vocative to the more descriptive 3rd-person of the original verse 19. This choice of rubric is not wholly surprising as the passage is associated typologically with the Ascension, but it is not by any means the most obvious text. More significantly the choice of the phrase "he took captivity captive", literally captures Alfonso VI's own experience. For Alfonso, who had been captured, chained and imprisoned, was suddenly free and, like Christ, returned to his kingdom.

Likewise the rubric under the figure of St. Michael could be merely descriptive, MICAEL ARCANGELVS PUGNANS CV[M] DRACONE, as the Archangel is indeed fighting with the dragon. Yet the passage from the Apocalypse (12.7-8) from which it is adapted could be said to develop the triumphalist words of Psalm 67. During verse 7 to 9 of the Apocalypse text St. Michael and his angels cast out the great serpent of old who is called the Devil and Satan. In the next verse a loud voice proclaims: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ, for the accuser of our brothers in cast down." If Alfonso VI were to have sought a verse to sum up the idea of his rule as one of safety and strength, and blessed by God, he could hardly have done better than this verse.

The lid of the reliquary is the most restored part of the *arca santa*, almost a copy of the original, and it differs from the scenes on the sides of the reliquary in that it is engraved and not embossed. The subject matter is an extended crucifixion scene with Christ on the Cross beneath weeping symbols of the sun and moon, Sol and Luna (fig. 4). The Virgin and Longinus, St. John and Stephaton stand in pairs to each side. Four censuring angels fill the outer upper panels. The two thieves hang on their crosses to either side of Christ. Two devils stand over the cross of the bad thief, and two angels over the good thief, a motif otherwise known from this time only in the Girona Beatus manuscript.⁴⁶ The Girona Beatus, written in the kingdom of León probably at Tábara, was almost definitely in Catalonia by 1078.⁴⁷ If that is the case, the artist who designed the crucifixion scene of the *arca santa* probably made the design before 1078. There may have been other copies and the design could have been copied and kept a long time after the manuscript was loaned, but

⁴⁶ J. YARZA LUACES, "Del ángel caído al diablo medieval", *Seminario de estudios de arte y arqueología*, Valladolid, 45 (1979), p. 309, n. 49. J. WILLIAMS, *The Illustrated Beatus*, Volume Two, The Ninth and Tenth Centuries, London, 1994, p. 56.

⁴⁷ J. WILLIAMS, 1994 (note 46), p. 51 and 56.



Fig. 4. Arca Santa, Engraving of the Crucifixion, Arxiu Mas.

this similarity between the depiction of the crucifixion in the Girona Beatus and on the top of the *arca santa* remains one argument in favour of a late 1070s date for the *arca santa*.

Perhaps because the important dedicatory inscription occupies the edge of the top panel of the *arca*, there is very little other text, and where it does appear it is framed. The labels that identify the figures at the crucifixion are set within a band that runs just below the arms of the cross. Jesús Hernández has convincingly compared the letters of these labels to the letters on the little casket of Bishop Arianus.⁴⁸ The close similarity of the lettering on the two metal surfaces suggests the involvement of the same designer or metalworker in this part of each project. Arianus's casket is dated by its inscription to the years of his episcopate (1073-1093). Although the style of a script can give only a very approximate date, given that a

⁴⁸ J. HERNÁNDEZ PERERA, "Las artes industriales españolas de la época románica", *Goya*, 43-45 (1961), p. 105. His position is supported by Serafín Moralejo, S. MORALEJO, "Les arts somptuaires hispaniques aux environs de 1100", *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 13 (1982) p. 289.

scribe may work in the same style for many years, the archaic nature of this lettering makes it yet another argument for a late 1070s date for the *arca santa*.

The fact that the *arca santa* was almost destroyed in 1934 and was restored by Gómez-Moreno makes it a difficult subject for detailed stylistic analysis. Julie Harris asserts that stylistic evidence supports an early twelfth-century date for the *arca santa*.⁴⁹ I, on the other hand, have not found any close parallels from the early twelfth century. Interestingly fol.1v of the *Liber Testamentorum* (Cathedral Archive, Oviedo, ms 1) of c.1118, which clearly depicts the *arca santa* reliquary, varies not only the composition but also the style.⁵⁰ Nor am I convinced by Harris's comparison of the crucifixion engraving on the *arca santa* with the twelfth-century Christ of Nicodemus from Oviedo.⁵¹ Indeed I would suggest that the overall form of the *arca santa* crucifixion has more in common with eleventh-century manuscripts from England and the Continent and with the archaic wall painting in the Panteón at San Isidoro in León.⁵² This might make sense if such manuscripts had been sent to León, perhaps given to Alfonso V by King Cnut of England or Duke William of Aquitaine.

Most commentators on the *arca santa* have stated that it has almost no links with the St. Isidore reliquary commissioned by Fernando I for the 1063 re-dedication of the church of San Isidoro.⁵³ That is clearly true at a high level, and the *arca* opts for a flatter *repoussé* technique without the protruding heads of the St. Isidore reliquary, and for more elaborate drapery. Nonetheless I think that it is important to notice some small similarities that could suggest that the maker or makers of the *arca santa* came from the same workshop or from the same area but perhaps from a later generation. Peter Lasko noted that the chequer pattern, which formed a background for the figure of Fernando as well as decorating the areas behind the columns, on the St. Isidore reliquary was picked up and used on the back panel of the *arca santa*. Details such as the sleeves of the Virgin on the *arca santa* and those of the figure of Fernando I on the reliquary of St. Isidore would also support a connection.⁵⁴ Likewise some details of the drapery and the treatment of columns are shared between the two pieces of metalwork. Elements of the design, most no-

⁴⁹ J.A. HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), pp. 88-90.

⁵⁰ J. YARZA LUACES, "El Obispo Pelayo de Oviedo y el "Liber Testamentorum", *Actum Luce. Rivista di studi lucchesi*, XVIII/1-2 (1989), pp.67-68; THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (NEW YORK), *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200*, New York, 1993, pp. 295-296; cat. no. 149.

⁵¹ J.A. HARRIS, 1995 (note 24), pp. 88-89.

⁵² See, for example, a Psalter in the British Library, Arundel ms 60, fol.12b, illustrated in J. BACKHOUSE, D.H. TURNER, L. WEBSTER (eds), *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art, 966-1066*, London, 1984, cat. no.67; S. MORALEJO, 1982 (note 48), p. 289; A. FRANCO MATA (dir and coord.) *Patrimonio artístico de Galicia y otros estudios. Homenaje al prof. Dr. Serafin Moralejo Álvarez*, tomo 1, Santiago de Compostela, 2004, pp. 219-237.

⁵³ P. LASKO, 1972 and 1994 (note 40), pp. 158-159.

⁵⁴ For illustrations of the reliquary of San Isidoro, see THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 1993 (note 50), pp. 239-243.

tably the scene of St. Michael and the dragon, echo the ivory carving on another reliquary made for the royal church at León, that of San Pelayo, usually dated to c.1059.⁵⁵ Such comparisons might suggest that the makers of the *arca santa*, like those of the San Isidore reliquary, came from Lower Saxony. With the advent of the troubled reign of the Emperor Henry IV, highly talented craftsmen could have gravitated towards the wealthy Spanish kingdoms. Having established a link with Fernando I, possibly through the agency of the abbey of Cluny, they are likely to have wished to foster the contact that gave them access to the amount of silver and gold that enabled them to make their finest work.⁵⁶ Understandably the renewed *parias* and the 1075 back payments in gold dinars would have made employment in Spain once again very attractive.

Some metalwork, dated to the middle of the eleventh century, survives from Lower Saxony. The most splendid of these pieces is the portable altar of Countess Gertrude (Cleveland Museum), with gold panels depicting Christ, the Virgin and twelve apostles over the two long sides of the altar. Each of these large-headed compact figures stands under an arch of the arcade, which, in different forms, decorates each side. Their bodies are articulated by clinging layers of drapery and enlivened by the folds that fly away from the outline of the bodies. One of the shorter sides shows the Holy Cross adored by Constantine, St. Helena, Sigismund and St. Adelaide, whilst the other has St. Michael fighting the dragon flanked by four angels.⁵⁷ Gertrude's altar was emulated by more rudimentary examples including a portable altar with similar small figures of Christ and the apostles between columns attributed to Lower Saxony c.1075.⁵⁸ Thus the metalworkers of Lower Saxony seem to have continued to develop the techniques and styles that had led to the St. Isidore reliquary, but nothing survives from there to explain the dramatic developments executed on the *arca santa*.

The tall figures of the *arca*, with their thin limbs revealed by the clinging drapery, have more in common with another group of panels that once probably adorned a large altar frontal but are today mounted on a twelfth-century portable altar in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore. They are usually attributed to Reichenau or Paderborn.⁵⁹ These panels have long thin-limbed figures, a consistent depth of *repoussé* without dominant heads, and an angel greeting the three Mariés at the tomb of

⁵⁵ For illustrations of the reliquary of San Pelayo, see THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 1993 (note 50), p. 237.

⁵⁶ J.W. WILLIAMS, "Tours and the medieval Art of Spain", *Florilegium in honorem Carl Nordenfalk octogenarii contextum*, Stockholm, 1987, pp. 203-207.

⁵⁷ P. M. DE WINTER, *The Sacral Treasure of the Guelphs*, Cleveland, 1985, pp. 36-37, colour plates VI-IX.

⁵⁸ P. M. DE WINTER, 1985 (note 57), p. 47 and p. 51 fig. 54, now in the *Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstgewerbemuseum*, Inv.W2.

⁵⁹ I wish to thank John Lowden for bringing these plaques to my attention; P. VERDIER, "Plaques de'un antependium ottonien et iconographie mariale du Baptême", *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Tome I, Poitiers, 1966, pp. 185-195.

Christ is marked out by particularly lively drapery with fluttering folds flying out behind him. These features are all found on the *arca santa*, although the execution of the Baltimore panels falls far short of the quality of work found on the reliquary.

The elements of the style found on the *arca santa* have been well described by Peter Lasko and Julie Harris amongst others. The most noticeable features are the contrasts between the different areas of the bodies: the nests of 'V' folds that articulate the drapery that falls between the legs of nearly all the figures; the scoops of material that fall from the necks of the female figures and one of the apostles; the simple horizontal folds that stretch across the stomachs of Anna, the Virgin and the young shepherd; the almost transparent cloth that reveals the thin legs of the apostles; the heavy linear folds that cover the shoulder of Gabriel and contrast with the bunched folds around his feet; the fluttering hemlines of the angels that support the mandorlas. Combined with the strength of the gestures and poses, the result is vibrant and light, perhaps because of the absence of mounds or other ground for the figures. However it is not necessary to look to the twelfth century for these features. They can all be found in Anglo-Saxon or Continental eleventh-century manuscripts. They often occur separately, but can also be found side-by-side and compartmentalized, for example in the comparison proposed by Serafin Moralejo between one of the apostle figures on the frontal of the *arca santa* and another apostle, one of six, drawn on the inserted frontispiece of an Anglo-Saxon Homiliary (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198).⁶⁰ Other examples, closer to León, come from the San-Sever Beatus (Paris, BN, ms lat. 8878), especially some of the angel figures, for example on fol. 58.⁶¹ The San Sever Beatus is dated to the time of the abbacy of Gregory Muntaner (1028-1072) by its *Ex Libris* (fol.1); it has been linked in turn to the *Liber Diurnus* of 1055, and is thus usually dated to the middle of the eleventh century.⁶² In summary, I think that there is sufficient comparative evidence to assert that stylistically the *arca santa* could have been made in the late 1070s. The expertise required to execute it was in place; the materials required to make such a large piece were exceptionally available; the stylistic elements were known and could be drawn on by the remarkably talented artist who created it. Moreover its light vibrant style would have been extremely apt to express the exuberance of Alfonso VI's return to power.

The other connection that requires consideration is that between the *arca santa* and the wall paintings in the Panteón at San Isidoro. Whilst it is clear why Bishop Pelayo of Oviedo wanted to adopt and re-invent the *arca santa* for the greater glorification of his diocese and to attract pilgrims to his cathedral, the links with the wall

⁶⁰ A. FRANCO MATA 2004 (note 52), pp. 223-225. E. TEMPLE, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900-1066*, London, 1976, no. 88.

⁶¹ J.W. WILLIAMS, *The Illustrated Beatus*, Vol. 3, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries, 1998, fig. 398.

⁶² F. AVRIL, "Quelques considerations sur l'execution materielle des enluminures de l'apocalypse de Saint-Sever", *Actas del simposio para el estudio de los codices del "comentario al apocalipsis" de Beato de Liébana*, 2, 1978, p. 263; J. WILLIAMS, 1998 (note 61), pp. 44-57, esp. pp. 52-54.

paintings of San Isidoro at León are not immediately explicable. These connections are not primarily stylistic, but particular iconographic similarities are too close to ignore. These comparisons involve elements of the infancy cycles depicted on the *arca santa* and on the walls of the Panteón at San Isidoro, in particular the appearance of ‘Anna’ before the Annunciation and again in the depiction of the Flight into Egypt on both the *arca santa* and the walls of the Panteón. What could explain this association? The paintings at San Isidoro are, in my opinion, highly programmatic in their intelligent and imaginative referencing to the liturgy and to other works of art based in León.⁶³ While it makes sense for the creator of the paintings to have drawn on material from León, why would he – or she – have looked to an object in Oviedo? I wish to suggest that the reason is that both works of art are connected to Alfonso VI’s sister, Urraca. I have already made this case elsewhere for San Isidoro.⁶⁴ As for the *arca santa*, its inscription mentions Urraca which establishes an initial link: she is present but not the patron. In addition I wish to suggest that she is referenced in the iconography of the *arca santa*. In order to explain this, it is necessary to set out my overall interpretation of the *arca santa* reliquary.

My argument is that the *arca santa* was a personal gift from Alfonso VI to God via the cathedral of Oviedo, a gift of thanksgiving for his reclaimed kingdom. The frontal gives all the credit to the Almighty and to the destiny that he had inherited from Alfonso II and Alfonso III. The pseudo-Kufic would have been a familiar marker of preciousness, a reflection of luxury objects from al-Andalus, but in this case it also denoted their use as carriers of meaning especially in matters of power and succession.

The traditional Carolingian form of the front of the *arca santa*, which has only minimal labels for the names of the apostles, contrasts with the much more complex and literary scenes of the lateral panels. At a cursory glance the side panels are merely a selection of Christological scenes, but at closer viewing they are intimate and particular. Thus the infancy cycle operates at two levels: first as a straightforward narrative of the early life of Christ, but at a second level as a typological narrative of Alfonso VI’s own exile and return. Clues to this lie above all in the rubrics but also in the figure of Anna/Hannah. In each instance care was taken to deliver the message by subtle allusion, by suggesting text. If Alfonso VI had been tempted to be arrogant and over-confident because of his sudden and complete success in 1072, the inferred Canticle of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) contained the admonishing text: “let not arrogancy come out of your mouth”. Like the Magnificat of the Virgin Mary, Hannah’s hymn highlights the ability of God to turn a prior order upside down: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of

⁶³ R. WALKER, 2000 (note 43), pp. 216-220.

⁶⁴ R. WALKER, 2000 (note 43), pp. 200-225.

glory". The ultimate message of the Canticle could be taken to affirm Alfonso VI's victory and reign: "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed".⁶⁵

The reason for the second appearance of Anna/Hannah at the departure of the Holy Family is less obvious. In the Book of Samuel it is clear that God's gift of a child to Hannah was conditional on her offer to give him back to God, which she did by giving him to the Temple, where he was eventually to anoint the first two kings of Israel. But what could her presence on the *arca santa* at the Flight into Egypt signify? At a general level she could be predicting the return and the anointing of a king, but it is also possible that Alfonso VI used this device to recognise his sister Urraca who had helped to save Alfonso's life by arranging for his exile and even more importantly had helped him to regain his kingdom. Hannah already had more than one antitype: Sarah, Anna and the Virgin Mary, and would have been an appropriate allegorical figure for Urraca who had been to Alfonso *in loco matris* but then given him up to be King in the service of God.

In this light the presence of Anna/Hannah in the wall paintings of the Panteón at León makes a different kind of sense. Urraca's intervention in the affairs of León and Castile was the most momentous action of her life, and it seems reasonable to suggest that she remained proud of it until her death and that she might have decided to memorialise it obliquely in her paintings in the Panteón at San Isidoro. Just as other elements of the paintings in the Panteón reference other works of art, for example a Beatus manuscript, so the presence of Anna in the Panteón references the *arca santa* and Urraca's role in Alfonso VI's reclamation of his throne and thus the relationship that she forged with Cluny.

The scenes of the Ascension and St. Michael on the other side of the *arca santa* also operate on two levels. They show Christ's Ascension to reclaim his kingdom and the defeat of his enemies by the angelic forces led by St. Michael, but they also celebrate Alfonso VI's recovery of his kingdom, the justice of his cause and the supporters who had resisted Alfonso's enemies. In the figure of St. Michael, the leader of God's army, there may even be a reference to Pedro Ansúrez, who had led the rebellion against Sancho together with Urraca.⁶⁶ The depiction of the Crucifixion is the narrative link between the Christological scenes, but it also draws special attention to the fate dealt to bad thieves by God, a fact to which the brothers who tried to take Alfonso VI's kingdom should have paid attention. In its entirety the reliquary gives thanks to God for Alfonso VI's salvation and for the inauguration of a reign of peace and to those who had acted as his agents.

⁶⁵ F. PRADO-VILAR, 2009 (note 17), pp.195-221. See especially pp. 206-210 for Francisco Prado-Vilar's discussion of the parallels between Fernando I/David and Alfonso VI/Solomon, the kings anointed by Samuel.

⁶⁶ B. REILLY, 1988 (note 25), pp. 65-69.

This use of language may seem a little far-fetched, even verging on blasphemy, but I think that the almost playful use of objects was now well understood in these diplomatic circles both Muslim and Christian. In a similar vein, in 1079, Pope Gregory VII implicitly likened Alfonso VI's imprisonment to St. Peter's, whilst at the same time reminding him in no uncertain terms that it was the Church in the guise of Cluny that had released him from captivity and thus made possible his subsequent successful reign. Gregory did not need to say this bluntly: he merely sent a gift with his letter, a reliquary in the form of a gold key. Within the key was a relic from the chains that had bound St. Peter in imprisonment.⁶⁷

For those who had viewed the side panels of the *arca santa* and understood their language, the frontal might have acquired an additional level of meaning. According to this, the pseudo-Kufic could also have denoted Toledo, not in a triumphalist sense, but in the sense of escape from captivity.⁶⁸ Jerrilynn Dodds was surely right to recognise a tension in the design of the frontal between the frame and the enclosed Christ. This sense of emancipation or escape could relate both to the contents of the *arca*, objects that had escaped safely from potential captivity in Toledo, as well to as Alfonso VI's experience, as he too had come safely out of Toledo. After the capture of Toledo in 1085, that city became the centre of royal and ecclesiastical interest, but in the earlier years of Alfonso VI's reign, its antitype Oviedo held a position of prime importance for Alfonso VI and for his belief in his right to rule.

⁶⁷ B. BISHKO, "Fernando I and the origins of the Leonese-Castilian alliance with Cluny", *Studies in Medieval Spanish Frontier History*, 1980, p.132, n. 444; ERICH CASPAR (ed.), *Das Register Gregors VII*, Ep. VII, 6.

⁶⁸ THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 1993 (note 50), pp. 34-35.

FUNDACIÓ AMATLLER. ARXIU MAS

Documentación de las imágenes

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04576003	Datos: negativo b/n · (16 b) Número de cliché: C.25258 · Año: 1935 Localización/identificación: Oviedo (Asturias) Catedral. Cámara Santa. Arca de las Reliquias. Plata repujada, s. XII. © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas
04576004	Datos: negativo b/n · (16 b) Número de cliché: C.25254 · Año: 1935 Localización/identificación: Oviedo (Asturias) Catedral. Cámara Santa. Arca de las Reliquias. Plata repujada, s. XII. © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas
04576005	Datos: negativo b/n · (16 b) Número de cliché: C.25252 · Año: 1935 Localización/identificación: Oviedo (Asturias) Catedral. Cámara Santa. Arca de las Reliquias. Plata repujada, s. XII. © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas

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