



# Paleography of the Andalusí Visigothic manuscripts: An essay on Escorial MS Ar. 1623

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**ENG Abstract.** This article<sup>1</sup> presents a palaeographical analysis of the Latin pages of MS Ar. 1623, preserved in the Royal Library of the Monastery of El Escorial, as a prominent example of the continuity and adaptation of Visigothic script within an Andalusí context, influenced by the interaction between Arab and Latin traditions. The presence of two Latin fragments in this codex, which contains an Arabic translation of the Hispano-Christian canonical collections, offers a unique opportunity to compare it with other contemporary manuscripts and, in particular, with epigraphy. This analysis reveals the manuscript's connection with the Andalusí Visigothic school of Córdoba. The discovery of innovative graphic elements that reflect this regional variant provides new perspectives on how Visigothic script was not only preserved but also adapted and transformed to serve the Christian communities living under Islamic rule in al-Andalus during the Early and High Middle Ages.

**Keywords:** Visigothic script; al-Andalus; Paleography; Royal Library of the Monastery of El Escorial; MS Ar. 1623; Middle Ages.

## ES Paleografía de los manuscritos visigóticos andalusíes: un ensayo a través del MS Ar. 1623 del Escorial

**Resumen.** Este artículo presenta un análisis paleográfico de las páginas en latín del MS Ar. 1623, conservado en la Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, como un ejemplo destacado de la continuidad y la adaptación de la escritura visigótica en un contexto andalusí, influenciado por la interacción entre las tradiciones árabe y latina. La presencia de dos fragmentos latinos en este códice, que contiene una traducción al árabe de las colecciones canónicas hispanas, ofrece una oportunidad única para compararlo con otros manuscritos contemporáneos y, en particular, con la epigrafía. Este análisis revelará la conexión del manuscrito con la escuela visigótica andalusí de Córdoba. El hallazgo de elementos gráficos innovadores que reflejan esta variante regional aporta nuevas perspectivas sobre cómo la escritura visigótica fue no solo preservada, sino también adaptada y transformada para servir a las comunidades cristianas de al-Ándalus durante la Alta y Plena Edad Media.

**Palabras clave:** escritura visigótica; al-Ándalus; Paleografía; Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial; MS Ar. 1623; Edad Media.

**Summary:** Introduction. The Andalusí Visigothic Script and Its Characteristics. MS Ar. 1623 of El Escorial: A Singular Witness to the Intersection of Latin and Arabic Traditions. Paleographic Analysis of an Arabic-Hispanic Manuscript. Epigraphic Parallels: Exploring the Path to the Manuscript's Scriptorium. Conclusion. Bibliography.

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### Introduction

Visigothic script stands as one of the most distinctive graphic systems of the Iberian Peninsula during the Early Middle Ages, with its use spanning from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Its continued presence in Andalusí

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the principal scholarship and the defining features of Visigothic script—particularly as it developed in Christian communities under Islamic rule in al-Andalus—see, in particular, Agustín Millares Carlo, *Tratado de Paleografía española* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1983), 51-98, especially Chapter 8: 'Reseña de los principales trabajos de autores nacionales y extranjeros acerca de la escritura visigótica' and Jesús Alturo, "La escritura visigótica. Estado de la cuestión", *Archiv für Diplomatik* 50 (2004): 347-383.

territory— attested by numerous codices and inscriptions, particularly in Córdoba and other monastic or ecclesiastical centres— constitutes a palaeographic and historical phenomenon of considerable importance. Foundational studies of Agustín Millares Carlo,<sup>3</sup> Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz,<sup>4</sup> Anscari M. Mundó,<sup>5</sup> Carmen del Camino,<sup>6</sup> and Elena Rodríguez<sup>7</sup> have played a crucial role in defining the palaeographical and codicological characteristics of manuscripts produced within Arabised Christian context. The mere presence of annotations in Visigothic cursive and in Arabic script “lends these codices a distinctive and unmistakable appearance”.<sup>8</sup> It is evident that the diverse cultural environments in which these written artefacts were produced had a significant influence on scribes, giving rise to distinct graphic styles which, while not altering the essential morphology of Visigothic script,<sup>9</sup> nevertheless left a recognisable imprint on its forms.

However, a comprehensive reassessment of the Andalusi Visigothic corpus<sup>10</sup> from an interdisciplinary standpoint remains an urgent scholarly need. Despite the value of previous research, the ways in which Visigothic script adapted and evolved within the unique cultural and linguistic context of al-Andalus remain insufficiently explored. The persistence of Visigothic elements in Andalusi manuscripts reflects not merely continuity, but a dynamic engagement with the socio-political and religious transformations of Muslim-ruled Iberia. In this context, the script served not only as a vehicle for transmitting Christian texts, but also as a medium for articulating cultural identity and expressing new intellectual currents in a multilingual and multicultural society.

Recent advances in the study of majuscule scripts—particularly those informed by epigraphic research<sup>11</sup>—offer promising pathways for addressing long-standing questions concerning the interpretation and contextualisation of Mozarabic codices.<sup>12</sup> Inscriptions, which have often been overlooked, now provide valuable comparative material for the reassessment of manuscript traditions. The study of epigraphic and manuscript evidence in parallel can shed new light on the broader palaeographical developments taking place in al-Andalus and help establish clearer connections between the evolution of Visigothic script in the Christian north and the distinctive trajectory it followed in the southern territories.<sup>13</sup> A transversal palaeographical perspective, grounded in the combined evidence of codicology, epigraphy, and manuscript analysis, is therefore essential for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Andalusi Visigothic script and its distinctive features.

## The Andalusi Visigothic Script and Its Characteristics

Since Andrés Merino's *Escuela Paleográfica* (1780),<sup>14</sup> which first distinguished northern and southern Visigothic hands in the Iberian Peninsula, scholarship has sought to establish regional typologies and provenance criteria for manuscripts lacking explicit scriptorial references. This process led to the recognition of distinct regional traditions<sup>15</sup> and, later, to the formulation of a so-called “Mozarabic school”,<sup>16</sup> encompassing both Arabised Christians in al-Andalus and those who migrated to centres such as Toledo and León.

<sup>3</sup> Agustín Millares Carlo, *Consideraciones sobre la escritura visigótica cursiva* (León, Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos del sur de la Península. Ensayo de distribución regional* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Anscari M. Mundó, “La datación de los códices litúrgicos visigóticos toledanos”, *Hispania Sacra*, 35 (1965): 1-25.

<sup>6</sup> Carmen del Camino Martínez, “Los orígenes de la escritura visigótica. ¿Otras posibilidades para su estudio?”, in *Actas del VIII Coloquio del Comité Internacional de Paleografía Latina* (Madrid: Joyas Bibliográficas, 1990), 29-37 and “La escritura visigótica de los centros mozárabes en su periodo primitivo” in *La escritura visigótica en la Península Ibérica: nuevas aportaciones*, edited by Jesús Alturo, Miquel Torras, and Ainoa Castro (Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2012), 115-144.

<sup>7</sup> Elena E. Rodríguez Díaz, “Los manuscritos mozárabes: una encrucijada de culturas”. in *Die Mozaraber: Definitionen und Perspektiven der Forschung*, edited by Matthias Maser and Klaus Herbers, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2011), 75-103 and *Codicología y Paleografía toledanas. Las copias del De virginitate de San Ildefonso hasta el 1200* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Anscari M. Mundó, “Notas para la historia de la escritura visigótica en su periodo primitivo”, in *Bivium. Homenaje a Manuel Cecilio Díaz y Díaz* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), 187.

<sup>9</sup> Agustín Millares Carlo, “¿Escritura visigótica o escritura mozárabe? Probable procedencia cordobesa de muchos códices visigóticos”, *Boletín de la Real Academia de Córdoba de Ciencias, Bellas Letras y Nobles Artes*, 58 (1947): 251-253.

<sup>10</sup> Agustín Millares Carlo, *Corpus de códices visigóticos* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: UNED, 1999). It remains a key reference work, although it should be reviewed in light of the latest research.

<sup>11</sup> Vicente García Lobo, *Las inscripciones de San Miguel de Escalada* (León: El Albir, 1982). Vicente García Lobo, “La escritura publicitaria en la Península Ibérica. Siglos X-XIII”, in *Inscript und Material. Inscript und Buchschrift. Fachtagung für mittelalterliche und neuzeitliche Epigraphik Ingolstadt 1997* (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 151-190. Vicente García Lobo, “La escritura visigótica publicitaria”, in *Paleografía I. La escritura en España hasta 1250* (Burgos: Universidad de Burgos, 2008), 61-91. Alejandro García Morilla and Vicente García Lobo, “La escritura publicitaria medieval: características y orígenes de la visigótica”, *Progressus*, IX/1, (2022), 141-171. María Encarnación Martín López, “Perspectivas y semejanzas de la escritura visigótica epigráfica en el ámbito de las escrituras nacionales”, in *La Edad Media en la Europa meridional: gentes, dinámicas y procesos* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2023), 163-182.

<sup>12</sup> See Matthias Maser, and Klaus Herbers (ed.). *Mozaraber: Definitionen und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Irene Pereira García, “La epigrafía cristiana andalusí: distribución y variantes”, *Hispania Sacra*, 76/154 (2024), 1100. <https://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2024.1100> and “La epigrafía y la escritura mayúscula de los códices visigóticos: una aportación al estudio del elemento mozárabe”, in *Forma, uso y función de lo escrito: De la Antigüedad al siglo XII*, edited by Carmen del Camino Martínez (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2025), 159-182.

<sup>14</sup> Andrés Merino de Jesucristo, *Escuela Paleographica o de leer letras antiguas, desde la entrada de los Godos en España hasta nuestros tiempos* (Madrid: Juan Antonio Lozano, 1780), 54.

<sup>15</sup> The term refers to geographically defined groups of scribes or manuscript-producing centres whose graphic and codicological practices exhibit consistent local traits. These may include distinctive letterforms, abbreviation systems, layout conventions, and stylistic influences shaped by shared training, liturgical use, and cultural context.

<sup>16</sup> Jesús Muñoz y Rivero, *Paleografía visigoda: método teórico-práctico para aprender a leer los códices y documentos españoles de los siglos V al*

Early palaeographical descriptions emphasised the broad proportions, heavy strokes, and horizontal expansion of southern hands, in contrast with the narrower scripts of the Christian north<sup>17</sup>. Manuel Gómez Moreno's *Iglesias mozárabes* (1919)<sup>18</sup> identified four calligraphic schools—Andalusi,<sup>19</sup> Toledan,<sup>20</sup> Leonese,<sup>21</sup> and Castilian<sup>22</sup>—while Agustín Millares Carlo later refined these distinctions, characterising the Andalusi script as small and broad, the Toledan hand as larger and archaising, the Leonese variant as finer and more elegant, and the Castilian script as slender and taller than wide.<sup>23</sup>

Mundó's contributions were decisive in demonstrating that regional differences became perceptible already in the earliest surviving manuscripts as Visigothic script entered its principal phase of development in the late eighth and ninth centuries. Del Camino later qualified this observation by noting that several graphic traits commonly associated with Andalusi script—such as reduced vertical proportions and thick strokes—also appear in early manuscripts from other regions and therefore cannot be regarded as exclusive markers of southern scriptoria.<sup>24</sup> Mundó further identified markedly late features in certain Toledan codices, thus contributing to the differentiation of a distinct Toledan tradition that persisted into the thirteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Millares Carlo's later work on Visigothic cursive was also highly significant, particularly in distinguishing two principal variants, the Astur-Leonese cursive and the so-called Mozarabic cursive.<sup>26</sup> The presence of the latter in the margins of certain manuscripts has traditionally been interpreted as evidence of production or use within Mozarabic environments, though this does not necessarily imply an Andalusi origin. Subsequent scholarship has called for a reassessment of the dating of these marginal annotations and of their relationship to the main textual hand.<sup>27</sup> Marginal notes in Visigothic cursive from southern contexts are preserved in several codices, including the so-called *Codex Ovetensis* (RBME MS R.II.18) and the *Miscellaneous Codex* of León (Cathedral of León MS 22), as well as in later examples such as the *Collectio Canonum Hispana* ((BNE MS 10041). Comparable annotations in manuscripts now held at Montecassino 4 and 19 and in Escorial MS Ar. 1623 further attest to the persistence and diffusion of this graphic practice beyond the principal textual script.<sup>28</sup>

Undoubtedly, however, it was Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz<sup>29</sup> who first identified the particular features of the script employed in manuscripts from the southern regions of the Iberian Peninsula—features which Carmen del Camino<sup>30</sup> would later nuance and develop in her detailed study of the Visigothic script of Mozarabic centres. With regard to the minuscule, he draws attention to the forms of the letters *q* and *d*; the *g*, which is extraordinarily open at the top; the *f*, whose initial stroke is thickened due to the effect of the returning pen movement, sometimes forming an angle; the *e* of the epsilon type, with a markedly prolonged middle stroke rising upwards; and the *x*, characterised by a highly extended lower left stroke. These features are joined by the *t*, which in Andalusi territory acquires a particularly distinctive form: the rightward stroke of its head—its third stroke—descends to mid-height in a sharply ascending oblique direction, significantly affecting the letter's morphology both in its isolated form and when joined to others.<sup>31</sup> This and other distinctive traits did not emerge from the outset, but rather developed during a later phase, when scriptoria in these regions began to consolidate some of their most defining characteristics.<sup>32</sup>

It is, however, in the domain of majuscule script that Díaz y Díaz lays the principal foundations for understanding the so-called "Mozarabic" capital,<sup>33</sup> adding to the features previously identified by Anscari M. Mundó in his study of Toledan codices. Mundó had pointed out certain distinctive features, such as the letter *B* displaying markedly separated lobes, the *N* with a highly undulating middle stroke, the *S* with an underdeveloped upper curve; and the *D*,

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*XII* (Madrid: Daniel Jorro, 1919), 45-56.

<sup>17</sup> Jesús Muñoz y Rivero, *Paleografía visigoda*, 50. Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 183-184.

<sup>18</sup> Manuel Gómez-Moreno, *Iglesias mozárabes: arte español de los siglos IX a XI* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1919), 357-364.

<sup>19</sup> Represented, in his view, by the *Biblia Hispalense* (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE, ms. Vitr. 13-1) and the now-lost *Biblia segunda Complutense* (Madrid, Biblioteca Histórica Marqués de Valdecilla, ms. 32). Although Agustín Millares Carlo referred to this variant as "Andalusian Visigothic script", the term *Andalusi Visigothic script* is preferred here in order to emphasise its development within the cultural and political framework of al-Andalus. While both terms may denote a similar geographical provenance, *Andalusi* more accurately reflects the historical context of Muslim-ruled Iberia and the Arabised Christian communities in which this script evolved.

<sup>20</sup> By Valerius of Bierzo's *Vitae Patrum*. (BNE, ms. 10.007); *Breviarium mozarabum* (BNE, ms. 10.001) and *De Virginitate* (Florenca, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. 17).

<sup>21</sup> León Bible of the deacon Juan and the presbyter Vimara. Cathedral of León, ms. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Fon instance, Royal Library of the Monastery of El Escorial (hereafter RBME), ms. d-1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Millares, *Tratado de Paleografía española*, 159-161. Millares Carlo focused his research on clarifying the geographical origins of Visigothic codices, a task he considered as crucial as establishing chronology—previously the domain of scholars like E.A. Lowe. Elias Avery Lowe, *Studia paleographica. A contribution to the history of the early latin minuscule and to the dating of visigothic manuscripts* (München, Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910). See comments on this matter in Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 121.

<sup>24</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 138.

<sup>25</sup> Mundó, "La datación", 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Millares, *Los códices visigóticos* and Millares, *Consideraciones*.

<sup>27</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 138.

<sup>28</sup> Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, *Códices visigóticos en la monarquía leonesa*. (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1983), 17-53, 55-88; Agustín Millares Carlo, *Corpus de códices visigóticos*. (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: UNED, 1999), n. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 184-185.

<sup>30</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 127-133.

<sup>31</sup> Mundó, "La datación", 12; Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 159; Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 130-131.

<sup>32</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 139.

<sup>33</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 185.

whose bowl begins very low, leaving the upper cross-stroke exposed.<sup>34</sup> Of particular note is the tendency for the letter *A* to appear without a crossbar, and for the letter *C* to take on a peculiar form: its descending stroke typically slants to the right, resulting in a noticeably smaller lower loop compared to the upper curve. Moreover, the lozenge-shaped *O*, so characteristic of northern scriptoria, is absent; in its place appears an oval form, whose lower section narrows to an extreme, sometimes taking on a heart-like shape. The *T*, whose headstroke curls to the left almost into a volute, while the right stroke gradually lifts and ends in a flourish, is another characteristic feature—though, as Del Camino reminds us, this form also appears in early examples from other regions.<sup>35</sup>

The cultural environment that developed within al-Andalus ultimately gave rise to a distinctive solution for Visigothic script, one not found in other areas of the Iberian Peninsula. Within this broader context, Díaz y Díaz attributes a significant portion of Andalusi Christian manuscript production to Córdoba. At the same time, however, he proposes the existence of a hypothetical Levantine group<sup>36</sup>—an attribution which remains problematic—encompassing manuscripts such as the *Sententiae* of Ripoll,<sup>37</sup> the *Miscellaneus patristicus* of the Cathedral of Urgell,<sup>38</sup> the Codex of Azagra,<sup>39</sup> and Escorial MS Ar. 1623. The inclusion in the latter of a list of episcopal sees headed by Tarragona initially appeared to support this hypothesis.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the identification of an earlier model from which it was copied—together with the peculiar character of its script, which, though showing some modernised traits, bears a strong Cordoban imprint—casts doubt on this interpretation and invites a reassessment of its origin and context of production.



Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, ms. árabe 1623, ff. 239v-240r

<sup>34</sup> Mundó, “La datación”, 11-13.

<sup>35</sup> Camino, “La escritura visigótica”, 135.

<sup>36</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 124-136.

<sup>37</sup> Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, ms. Ripoll 49.

<sup>38</sup> Urgell, Biblioteca Capítular de La Seu d’Urgell, s. n. (*Codex miscellaneus patristicus*). The Andalusi provenance of the manuscript and the distinctive double Roman and Greco-Coptic notation of the *Miscellanea* have already been examined by Rosa Comas, “Un manuscrito mozárabe con notación alfanumérica greco-copta: El codex miscellaneus patristicus de la Seu d’Urgel”, *Revue d’histoire des textes*, 4 (2009), 129-156.

<sup>39</sup> BNE MS 10029.

<sup>40</sup> This leads Gonzalo Martínez Díez to suggest Zaragoza or Tortosa as possible places of origin. Gonzalo Martínez Díez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana* (Madrid, CSIC, 1966), I, 615. For further details regarding the episcopal sees, see, Ana Echevarría Arsuaga, “La jurisdicción eclesiástica mozárabe a través de la Colección Canónica Hispana en árabe”, in *Von Mozarabern zu Mozarabismen. Zur Vielfalt kultureller Ordnungen auf der mittelalterlichen Iberischen Halbinsel*, edited by Matthias Maser, Klaus Herbers, Michele C. Ferrari and Hartmut Bobzin (Münster: Aschendorff, 2014), 131-144 and Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez, “When God Does Not Rule the City of God: Bishops and Episcopal Sees in al-Andalus (711-1147 CE)” in *Canon Law and Christian Societies Between Christianity and Islam: An Arabic Canon Collection From al-Andalus and its Transcultural Contexts*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024, 317-336.

## MS Ar. 1623 of El Escorial: A Singular Witness to the Intersection of Latin and Arabic Traditions

MS Ar. 1623 held in the Royal Library of El Escorial (olim BNE MS 4879) offers an exceptional testimony to the late and adapted use of Visigothic script in a cultural context shaped by a profound interrelation between Latin and Arabic traditions. The codex preserves the *Collectio Canonica Arabica Ecclesiae Andalusiae* (CCAEA or *al-Qānūn al-muqaddas*), a compilation of Christian canon law and papal decretals written in Arabic, and arranged by subject, whose existence constitutes an extraordinary source for the history of Christian communities living under Islamic rule in al-Andalus. The manuscript represents a variant of the so-called *Hispana Systematica*,<sup>41</sup> and although based on a Latin model, the collection was composed in Arabic—revealing a remarkable effort by Christian communities to preserve their ecclesiastical norms and structures within a new linguistic and cultural reality.<sup>42</sup>

The codex first came to light through the efforts of the Lebanese Miguel Casiri who, as librarian of the Arabic collection in the eighteenth century, with the collaboration of Manuel Martínez Pingarrón, catalogued it in his monumental *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana Escorialensis*.<sup>43</sup> From the outset, the codex caused a considerable stir—not only due to its unique linguistic and legal content, which is notably more extensive than Lisbon manuscript studied by Van Koningsveld,<sup>44</sup> but also because of the social and cultural complexities it embodies.<sup>45</sup> The contributions of Francisco Javier Simonet (1903),<sup>46</sup> Gregorio de Andrés (1966),<sup>47</sup> Gonzalo Martínez Díez (1976),<sup>48</sup> Jareer Abu-Haidar (1987),<sup>49</sup> Peter S. van Koningsveld (1994),<sup>50</sup> Hanna Kassis (1994)<sup>51</sup> and Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz (1995) were instrumental in addressing many of the questions surrounding the manuscript. More recently, the manuscript has been the focus of renewed editorial and critical efforts,<sup>52</sup> which continue to highlight its exceptional value as a witness to the coexistence and mutual influence of Latin and Arabic Christian traditions.

The codex is a unified, though incomplete, manuscript consisting of 433 folios. It is written on large-format parchment, measuring 315 × 215 mm.<sup>53</sup> The written area is approximately 240 × 190 mm, laid out in a single column with irregularly ruled lines, varying between 20 and 23 per page. The numbering of books and titles that appears throughout the codex is rendered entirely in Visigothic script. Two pages stand out for being written almost entirely in rounded Visigothic. The first, which occupies nearly the entire page prior to an Arabic annotation and spans the first eighteen lines in continuous script, is located in Book IV, between Title III and Title VI, under the heading SINODVS TOLETANE (fol. 240r). It contains Canon II of the Seventeenth Council of Toledo, which refers to the sealing of the baptistery during Lent (*De obseruandis ostiis bapstisterii de initio quadragesime*), a practice whereby, as a matter of custom and except in cases of extraordinary necessity, the baptistery door was sealed with the bishop's ring until Maundy Thursday. The second page appears in Book VIII, Title IV, where the rubric reads T[ITV]L[V]M DE SANGVINE ET CARNIBVS NON TALIATIS DOM[I]NI I[H]JERONIMI and, following the first paragraph—comprising the first eight lines—another heading in capital another heading in capital letters appears: EX DECRETO ILARII PAPE ROMENSIS EC[C]LESIE ET CON SVMMA MARCIANI INPERATORE (fol. 369v).

<sup>41</sup> On the *Hispana Systematica*, see Gonzalo Martínez Díez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana, II.1*, 247-276.

<sup>42</sup> According to Kassis, the *al-Qānūn al-Muqaddas* originated in response to a growing local demand for Christian texts in Arabic that had emerged as early as the tenth century. He further links its development to efforts by Iberian Christian communities in the eleventh century to regulate clerical discipline, particularly in light of the increasing influence of Cluniac reform ideals. Hanna E. Kassis, "Muslim Revival in Spain in the Fifth/Eleventh Century: Causes and Ramifications", *Der Islam. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients* 67 (1990): 89-90 and "Hanna E. Kassis, "The Mozarabs", in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, edited by María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 423.

<sup>43</sup> Miguel Casiri, *Bibliothecæ Arabico-Hispanæ Escorialensis sive Librorum omnium Mss. quos Arabice ab auctoribus magnam partem Arabo-Hispanis compositos Bibliotheca Cænobii Escorialensis complectitur* (Madrid: imp. Antonius Perez de Soto, 1760), I, 541, catalogue number 1618.

<sup>44</sup> Peter S. van Koningsveld, "The Date of al-Qānūn al-Muqaddas: The Lisbon Fragments and the Islamic Sources", in *Canon Law and Christian Societies between Christianity and Islam. The Arabic Canon Collection from al-Andalus and its Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Matthias Maser, Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez and Geoffrey K. Martin, (Turnhout: Brepols, 024), 61-86.

<sup>45</sup> See María Magdalena Martínez Almira, "Al-Qānūn al-Muqaddas: datos sobre personajes y cronología a partir de fuentes hispanoárabes", *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, 91 (2021): 411-464.

<sup>46</sup> Francisco Javier Simonet, *Historia de los mozárabes de España deducida de los mejores y más auténticos testimonios de los escritores cristianos y árabes* (Madrid: imp. Viuda e Hijos de M. Tello, 1903), 720-729.

<sup>47</sup> Gregorio De Andrés "Un valioso códice árabe de concilios españoles recuperado para El Escorial", *La Ciudad de Dios*, 179 (1966): 681-695.

<sup>48</sup> Gonzalo Martínez Díez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana, II.2*, 587-615

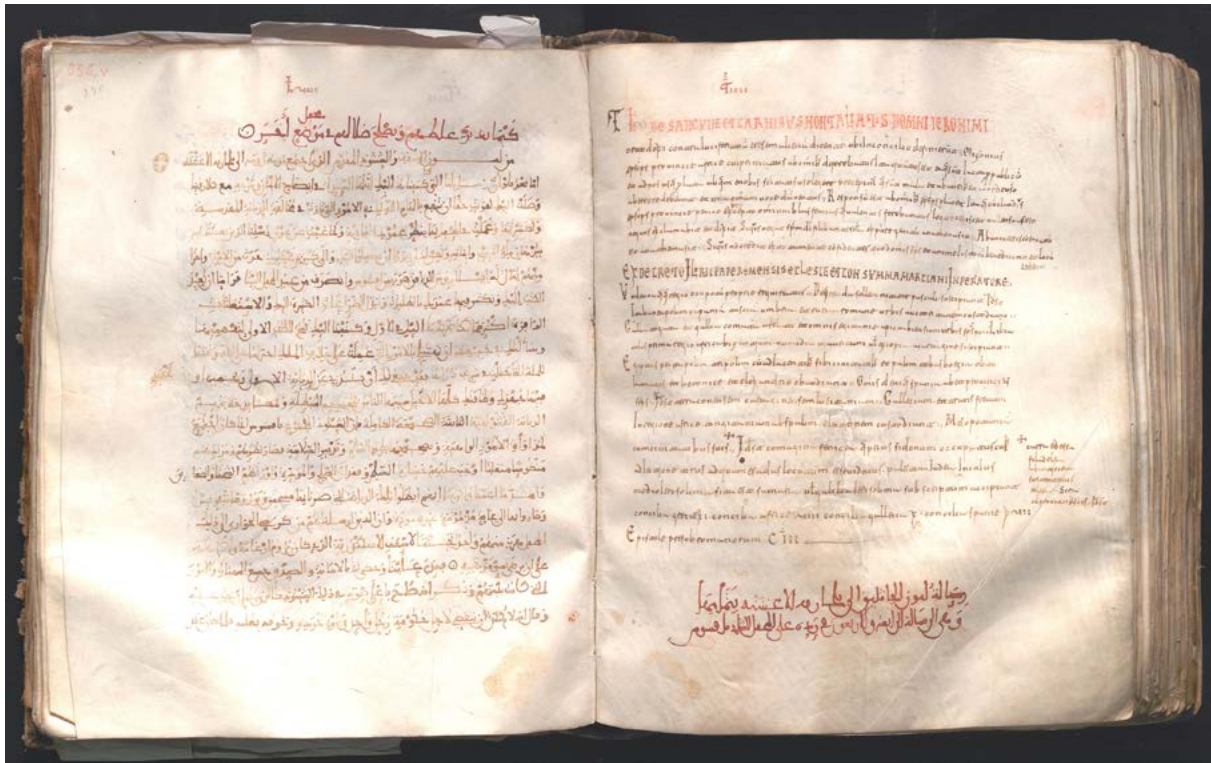
<sup>49</sup> Jareer Abu-Haidar, "A document of cultural symbiosis: Arabic ms. 1623 of the Escorial Library", *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1987): 223-225.

<sup>50</sup> Peter S. van Koningsveld, "Christian Arabic Literature from Medieval Spain: An Attempt at Periodization", in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, edited by Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Brill: Leiden, 1994), 203-224.

<sup>51</sup> Hanna E. Kassis, "Arabic-Speaking Christians in al-Andalus in an Age of Turmoil (Fifth/Eleventh Century until A.H. 478/A.D. 1085)" *Al-Qanṭara* 15/2 (1994): 401-422.

<sup>52</sup> Thanks to a project entitled *Christian Society under Muslim Rule: Canon Collections from Medieval Spain*, funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung (Düsseldorf) and coordinated by Ana Echevarría and Matthias Maser, with the participation of Thomas Burman, Francisco Cintrón, Ana Echevarría, Jesús Lorenzo, Geoffrey Kyle Martin, Magdalena Martínez Altamira, Matthias Maser, and Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala. The first volume has already been published in Monferrer-Sala, Juan Pedro. *Los cánones árabes de la Iglesia Andalusí: Al-Qānūn al-Muqaddas X. Ms. Árabe 1623 de la Biblioteca Real de El Escorial*. (Madrid: Editorial Sínderesis, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 135.



Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, ms. árabe 1623, ff. 369v-370r

The identity of the copyist remains unknown, even though the manuscript contains two colophons that offer some information. The first colophon, located at the end of Book VII, states that the work was completed by an anonymous scribe in October 1049 AD and was dedicated to a bishop named ‘Abd al-Mālik.<sup>54</sup> The second colophon, found at the end of Book VIII, names a presbyter Vincentius, who finished the work on the “first Sunday of Lent”.<sup>55</sup> Although the year is not specified, this date has been interpreted as corresponding to 1050 AD. Vincentius also includes a letter in which he reports difficulties encountered during the production of the codex, mentioning a bishop Martinus who is said to have appropriated materials intended for the manuscript’s copying. However, Matthias Maser<sup>56</sup> has confirmed that the explicit of Book VIII seems to have been copied into the Escorial codex from an older manuscript—much like what occurs in the case of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* (RBME, ms. T-II-24), whose colophon was inherited from an archetype and does not refer to the preserved copy itself.<sup>57</sup> This reopens the debate concerning the manuscript’s material authorship.

Marginal notes in Arabic and Latin abound throughout the codex, opening up a most fascinating chapter concerning the ways in which the manuscript was used.<sup>58</sup> These annotations span four distinct periods, appearing in Visigothic cursive,<sup>59</sup> twelfth- to thirteenth-century Gothicised Caroline minuscule,<sup>60</sup> fourteenth-century Gothic minuscule,<sup>61</sup> and even sixteenth-century Bastarda script,<sup>62</sup> in addition to numerous Arabic glosses. The result is a manuscript unique in its kind—a product of a complex process of production that reflects not only the continuity of a Christian tradition, but also a high degree of Arabisation, its active adaptation to a new cultural and linguistic context, and its remarkably prolonged use over time.

Despite its significance, MS Ar. 1623 (*al-Qānūn al-muqaddas*) has received limited attention in Latin palaeographical scholarship. A morphological study of the Visigothic fragments of the manuscript not only allows for an analysis of the graphic features of Andalusī Visigothic script but also offers an opportunity to reflect on the role played by script

<sup>54</sup> RBME MS Ar. 1623, f. 333r.

<sup>55</sup> RBME MS Ar. 1623, f. 394r-v.

<sup>56</sup> Maser, Matthias. “Whens and Whereabouts—Old and New Lights on the Genesis of al-Qānūn al-Muqaddas (El Escorial, RBME ms. árabe 1623)”. In *Canon Law and Christian Societies between Christianity and Islam. The Arabic Canon Collection from al-Andalus and its Transcultural Contexts*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 27-57.

<sup>57</sup> Millares, *Tratado de Paleografía española*, 131; Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 114-120.

<sup>58</sup> See Cyrille Aillet, “Recherches sur le christianisme arabisé (IXe-XIIe siècle). Les manuscrits hispaniques annotés en arabe.” In *¿Existe una identidad mozárabe? Historia, lengua y cultura de los cristianos de al-Andalus (siglos IX-XII)*, coordinated by Cyrille Aillet, Mayte Penelas and Philippe Roisse. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2008) 91-134 and Cyrille Aillet, “Las glosas como fuente para la historia del cristianismo arabizado en la Península Ibérica (siglos IX-XIII).” In *Relegados al margen: Marginalidad y espacios marginales en la cultura medieval*, coordinated by Inés Monteiro Arias, Ana Belén Muñoz Martínez and Fernando Villaseñor Sebastián (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009), 21-30.

<sup>59</sup> RBME, MS Ar. 1623, f. 246v, 252r, 257v, 258v, 273r, 276v, 369v, 429r, mainly.

<sup>60</sup> At least as far as can be inferred from such a brief text. RBME, MS Ar. 1623, f. 44r.

<sup>61</sup> RBME, MS Ar. 1623, f. 44r, 240r.

<sup>62</sup> RBME, MS Ar. 1623, f. 46v, 259r.

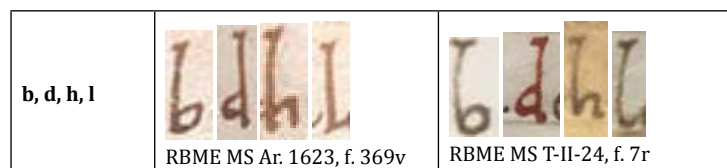
in the transmission and preservation of Christian texts in Arabic. It reveals how this script was transformed and survived within an Arabised cultural context. The presence of a Christian canonical collection written in Arabic, coexisting with Latin texts in Visigothic script, raises important questions regarding the identity of the scribes, the conditions of manuscript production and graphic acculturation, and the function of the codex within its community of origin. This enquiry aims not merely at describing the particular form of Visigothic script employed, but at engaging in a broader reflection on the configuration of Andalusí Visigothic script itself—one that embodies a Christian identity in continuous transformation and which, far from being static, expresses its distinct character through contact with the surrounding Islamic environment.

### Paleographic Analysis of an Arabic-Hispanic Manuscript

The present analysis begins with a general observation repeatedly noted in previous descriptions: the script is characteristically flattened in appearance.<sup>63</sup> When examining the proportion between the height and width of the letters, it becomes apparent that, unlike other Visigothic codices from the Iberian Peninsula—where the main body of the letters often reaches up to half the height of the ascenders—in MS Ar. 1623, as in many other Andalusí manuscripts, it is reduced to approximately one third.

The script has also been described as ‘heavy’, a term referring to the notable thickness of the strokes, which may result from the use of a slightly broader nib that produces a marked contrast between thick and thin lines. The ascenders tend to be uniform in structure. The characteristic swelling at the top of ascenders described by Díaz y Díaz—where they end in a club-shaped terminal<sup>64</sup>—is absent. Instead, there is a consistently applied bifid ending, tending towards horizontality, which appears regularly and seems to correlate with a more pronounced verticality in the ascenders.

As Carmen del Camino suggests, this feature could be symptomatic of a regional trait, although it might also reflect a chronological development.<sup>65</sup> In certain cases, possibly as a result of its gradual adoption, one finds a combination of ascenders with and without bifid terminals within the same scribal hand—as is the case in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* (RBME MS T-II-24), which shares numerous graphic similarities with MS Ar. 1623.<sup>66</sup> The relatively late date of this manuscript and the possible influence of northern Iberian Visigothic script may account for the particular shaping of its ascenders.<sup>67</sup>



As for the descenders, they likewise display a consistent uniformity, tending towards a pointed form, with no noticeable thickening at the ends of the downward strokes.



A slight leftward slant may be observed. The script appears natural; the scribe writes with spontaneity, without the artificiality often seen in the imitative hands of many other Visigothic codices. Moreover, word separation is generally clear and well executed.

<sup>63</sup> Jesús Muñoz y Rivero, *Paleografía visigoda*, 50; Millares, *Tratado de Paleografía española*, 159-161.

<sup>64</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 183-184.

<sup>65</sup> Although she refers to the evolution of the club-shaped terminal into a bevelled finial, I believe the same conclusion could be extended to this specific case. Camino, “La escritura visigótica”, 125.

<sup>66</sup> This may be due to its gradual introduction; thus, this tendency may be characteristic of the late chronology of these manuscripts, contrary to Díaz’s view that it was merely a matter of geographical variation — and therefore only explicable outside Córdoba.

<sup>67</sup> In the manuscript of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* RBME MS T-II-24 (see, for example, fol. 7r), a greater combination of bifid and non-bifid finials on the ascenders can be observed, which suggests that this bifid form was beginning to be introduced, a feature that is fully developed in Escorial MS 1623. This manuscript, dated to the ninth-tenth centuries, has been digitised and is available online through the following website: <http://rbmecat.patrimoniacionacional.es/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=2183>

### The most distinctive features of the minuscule alphabet are as follows:

The letter *a* has two curved strokes which are easily distinguishable from those of *u*.<sup>68</sup> The letter *b*, as previously mentioned, displays a bifid upper terminal. The letter *d* appears in both its uncial and minuscule forms, although the latter is less common.<sup>69</sup> In the case of the uncial *d*, the two strokes are clearly distinguishable,<sup>70</sup> and the curve adopts a variety of graphic forms, sometimes even presenting a more or less rounded stroke that extends above the preceding letter.

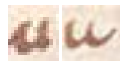









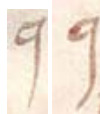

The letter *e* is of the epsilon type, with a thickened middle stroke that is also sharply rising when the letter occurs in final position.<sup>71</sup> The absence of the closed-eye variant in later manuscripts may serve as an indicator of its attribution to the Mozarabic scriptoria.<sup>72</sup> The letter *f* does not exhibit a forward-shifted upper body, unlike what appears to be the case in late Toledan codices, according to Mundó's study.<sup>73</sup>

The letter *g* is clearly distinguishable from *q*; the distinctive form, commonly found in certain Mozarabic centres and characterised by a markedly open upper loop (as observed in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* RBME MS T-II-24 and RBME MS P-I-6),<sup>74</sup> is not present here. This absence may be due to the influence of Visigothic script from other regions and the manuscript's relatively late dating. The descender may be straight or slightly curved to the left.

The letter *h* has a low bowl and a tall ascender. In the letters *m* and *n*, both square and rounded forms are combined. The vertical strokes end in straight terminals, although in some cases they are slightly curved to the right. The letter *q* usually has a straight descender, although instances with a slightly leftward-curved descender are also found (e.g., f. 240r, l. 2, *quadragesime*), though not to the extent of the "modern 9" shape that Mundó associates with Toledan script.<sup>75</sup>

The letter *r* is clearly differentiated from *s*. In final position, the pointed angle is thin and markedly upward-curving (f. 240r, l. 3, *claudatur*), though this feature may also, albeit exceptionally, appear in medial position (f. 240r, l. 1, *obseruandis*). As for the letter *t*, its horizontal stroke may be straight or slightly ascending in final position, yet it lacks the highly stylised form noted by Camino for the *ti* and *to* nexus in the manuscripts *Collectanea scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* (BRAH MS 80) and *Apologeticus of Samson* (BNE MS 10018).<sup>76</sup> The inverted beta form for *t* is likewise absent. The dental *ti* is distinguished from the sibilated *tj*.

Of particular note is the frequent occurrence of the superscript *v* (e.g., f. 240r, l. 6, *monstretur*) and the form of *x* with a "deep and strongly extended lower left stroke".<sup>77</sup>

|      |   |      |   |      |   |
|------|---|------|---|------|---|
| a, u |  | b, c |  | d    |  |
| e, f |  | g    |  | h, l |  |
| i    |  | m, n |  | o    |  |
| p    |  | q    |  | r, s |  |

<sup>68</sup> Thus distancing itself from the later Toledan codices, according to Mundó, "La datación", 12. This distinction, however, is particularly noticeable in *De virginitate Sanctae Mariae*, Toledo, Biblioteca Capitular, ms. 35-7, and Florencia, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. 17, studied by Rodríguez Díaz, *Codicología y Paleografía toledanas*, 90 and 104.

<sup>69</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 184, footnote 596.

<sup>70</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 134.

<sup>71</sup> Elena E. Rodríguez Díaz, "Fragmentos y cultura escrita: la persistencia de la tradición romana en la Andalucía altomedieval", *Boletín Millares Carlo*, 13 (1993): 70.

<sup>72</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 132.

<sup>73</sup> Mundó, "La datación", 12.

<sup>74</sup> Both manuscripts, generally associated with a Mozarabic context, preserve Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. The manuscript RBME P-I-6 is also available online: <https://rbmecat.patrimoniacionacional.es/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=1718>

<sup>75</sup> Mundó, "La datación", 2.









<sup>76</sup> Camino, "La escritura visigótica", 130.

<sup>77</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 159.

|   |   |      |   |   |   |
|---|---|------|---|---|---|
| t |  | v, x |  | z |  |
|---|---|------|---|---|---|

Regarding the capital alphabet, the strokes are sinuous, executed without much artifice, and somewhat irregular. It is common for letterforms to be adorned with knots or tiny ornamental thickening elements, noticeable in letters such as *D*, *E*, *I*, *L*, *N*, *T*, *O*, and *Q*. These features are not systematic, yet they appear with considerable frequency—a phenomenon already attested from the 9th and 10th centuries in codices from both the northern and southern regions of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>78</sup>

Of particular prominence is the use of the double-barred capital *A* with a straight upper terminal, a form also found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (RBME MS T-II-24, e.g., f. 33r), in *Biblia Hispalense* (BNE MS Vit. 13-1, e.g., f. 277r) as well as in inscriptions from Córdoba.<sup>79</sup> The *C* is square-shaped. The *D* often shows a knot halfway up the interior of the bowl. The letter *E* appears in both its capital and uncial forms; its middle horizontal stroke frequently displays small thickenings. The straight-stroked form of *G*, typical of northern scriptoria, is absent. Instead, the preferred form is the curved variant with bifid upper terminal — a characteristic feature also shared with manuscript T-II-24 of El Escorial.

|      |   |      |  |
|------|---|------|--|
| A    |    | O, Q |    |
| C, D |   | R    |   |
| E, G |  | I, T |  |
| M, N |  | V    |  |

The *I* is always of greater module when in initial position and occasionally features a knot on the main vertical stroke. The *M* is formed with outer strokes that converge upwards and inner strokes that are curved, a form that already appears in a Córdoba inscription dated to 977.<sup>80</sup> The open uncial *m* with a rightward opening, resembling a pre-Caroline *a* as described by Mundó for late Toledan codices,<sup>81</sup> is not attested. The *N* has a wavy central stroke and occasional knots on the verticals, a feature also seen in T-II-24 of El Escorial. The *O* consistently shows a thickened area, which may appear on either the right or left side of the letter, as does the *Q*. We designate this as a “double-footed” letter due to a slight rectilinear appendix extending to the left from the base—an element not corresponding to the usual initial stroke of this character.

The *R*, of capital tradition, does not feature the open loop that is commonly seen in numerous Andalusí manuscripts. Particularly noteworthy is the letter *T*, which has a leftward loop and an appendix that descends toward the baseline.<sup>82</sup> This graphic form belongs exclusively to the Andalusí variant of Visigothic script and has been attested in numerous Cordoban inscriptions,<sup>83</sup> as well as in codices such as the *Apologeticus* of Samson (BNE MS 10018), in the *incipit* and *explicit* of Book I, which Díaz y Díaz already attributed to an unquestionably Cordoban origin;<sup>84</sup> in the *Biblia Hispalense* (BNE MS Vit. 13-1), a manuscript completed in Córdoba (*hunc codicem compta perfectum*) before being

<sup>78</sup> Rodríguez Díaz, *Codicología y Paleografía toledanas*, 93.

<sup>79</sup> Julián González Fernández, *Inscripciones mozárabes de Andalucía* (Sevilla: Athenaica, 2016), 45 (n. 4), 50 (n. 6), 58 (n. 9).

<sup>80</sup> González, *Inscripciones mozárabes*, 58 (n. 9).

<sup>81</sup> Mundó, “La datación”, 11.

<sup>82</sup> A singular graphic form *I* introduced in 2022 during the 19th *Jornadas de la Sociedad Española de Ciencias y Técnicas Historiográficas* and later published in Pereira, “La epigrafía y la escritura mayúscula de los códices visigóticos”, 166.

<sup>83</sup> González, *Inscripciones mozárabes*, n. 2, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 34, 36, 44, 49 and 53.

<sup>84</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 57-60.

delivered to the See of Seville,<sup>85</sup> and in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (RBME MS T-II-24), which, although Díaz y Díaz assigns to a region outside Córdoba,<sup>86</sup> should be grouped—along with the Escorial MS Ar. 1623—within the same geographic area.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the *V* is bisected by a single or double crossbar, resembling an inverted capital *A*. This form—particularly in its double-crossbar variant—has been attested in a Cordoban inscription dated to the year 977.<sup>88</sup>

Among the various **nexus and ligatures**, those involving the letter *t* are particularly noteworthy—for instance, in the combinations *ti* and *te*. However, as noted previously, the inverted beta form is not attested. The letter *e* is also frequently found linked to the following character. A notable instance of a ligature occurs in the word *prouincias* (f. 369v, l. 15), where a cursive *a* is joined to an *s*.

**Abbreviation** is generally indicated by means of a simple horizontal stroke or two parallel dots. This contrasts with the use of a stroke surmounted by a dot—more typical of northern manuscripts—which appears here only once (f. 240r, l. 5, *sollemnitate*). To abbreviate the letter *m*, as well as in other contractions, the two-dot sign is preferred. Nevertheless, on occasion (f. 240r, l. 17, *inconueniens*; f. 369v, l. 4, *sunt*; f. 369v, l. 8, *non*), a simple horizontal stroke is used to abbreviate *n*, and in some cases to indicate other abbreviations, such as *gloria* (f. 240r, l. 10). A special mention should be made of ordinal numbers, which, in the case of book divisions, titles, and paragraph marks referred to by means of a capital *C* (f. 369v), are abbreviated using a horizontal stroke with two vertically aligned dots placed above it.

The ending *-us* is systematically abbreviated by means of the *episemon* in the form of an elevated *s*, whose lower end touches the vertical stroke or upper part of the corresponding letter—this same form is also used in the abbreviation of *que*. The syllable *per* is represented, as is customary, by a stroke that forms the bowl and crosses the descender, terminating in a small leftward-facing hook.

The abbreviated words encountered are those commonly attested and well known within this type of script: *dni* (*domini*), *dnice* (*dominice*), *epspo* (*episcopo*), *gla* (*gloria*), *sca* (*sancta*), *ul* (*uel*), *xpi* (*Christi*), among others.

Lastly, it is worth addressing the use of **punctuation marks**. A mid-height dot is used to indicate a short pause, while a long pause is marked before each capital letter by two dots—sometimes arranged obliquely—followed by a diagonal line.

|                     |  |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Nexus and ligatures |  |  |  |  |  |
| Abrev.              |  |  |  |  |  |
| -us/-ue             |  |  |  |  |  |
| -per                |  |  |  |  |  |

The paleographic analysis of manuscript 1623 (*al-Qānūn al-muqaddas*) reveals a script that, while firmly rooted in the Visigothic tradition, exhibits distinctive Andalusí features. This is particularly evident in the letter *T*, which

<sup>85</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 57-60.

<sup>86</sup> Díaz y Díaz, *Manuscritos visigóticos*, 134.

<sup>87</sup> Recently, Rodríguez Díaz (*Codicología y Paleografía toledanas*, 107-109) has identified this same manner of forming the letter *t* in certain headings and decorated initials in the copy of *De virginitate* by St Ildelfonsus preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, Ashburnham collection, no. 17 (ff. 67r, 6v, 63v, 75v, 87r). It is also attested in the Liber Horarum of the Library of the Cathedral of Toledo (BCT, 33-3), although the variant with a flying serif predominates there. Although its use is documented in Toledo—an indication of the presence in the scriptorium of a member trained in Andalusian milieu acting as corrector to a scribe of Castilian or Riojan origin—it must nevertheless be regarded as a sporadic occurrence, in contrast with the frequency with which this feature appears in Cordoban contexts, both in codices and in inscriptions.

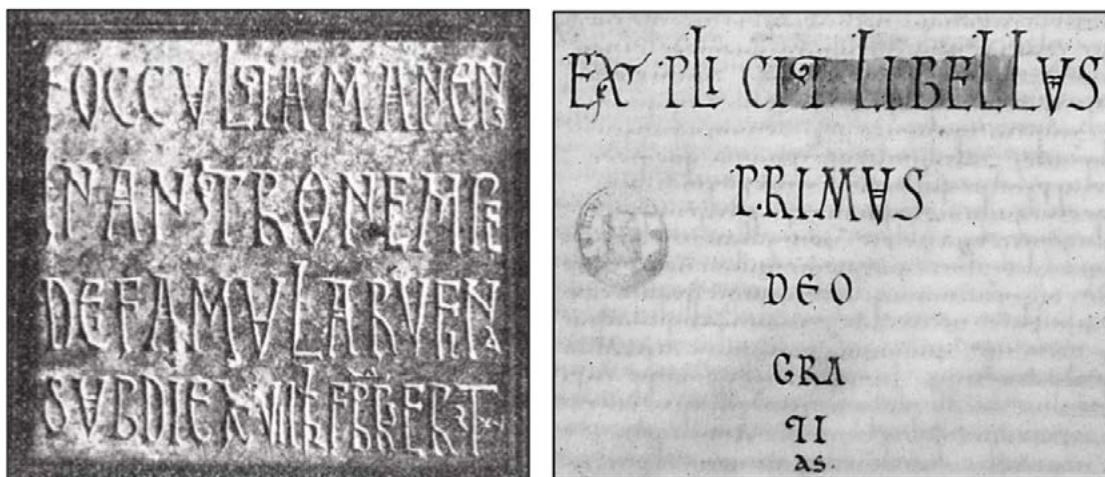
<sup>88</sup> González, *Inscripciones mozárabes*, n. 9.

demonstrates a close connection to models documented in Cordoban codices and inscriptions and reflects how its original morphology was altered. The bifid terminals on ascenders—which Díaz y Díaz considered indicative of a practice employed outside Córdoba but are also seen in manuscript T-II-24—may represent an evolutionary stage of the script. This evolution was likely influenced by external models first introduced gradually in codex T-II-24 and subsequently adopted systematically in MS Ar. 1623. The manuscript's relatively late date could explain this phenomenon, reflecting minor variations that nonetheless do not affect its fundamentally local character. These changes thus invite a broader investigation into the mechanisms of script transmission. It raises the question of whether such distinctive forms—shared with other manuscripts and epigraphic sources—might point to the activity of a specific centre of production. The following chapter will examine epigraphic parallels to shed further light on the manuscript's provenance and assist in identifying its scriptorium.

### Epigraphic Parallels: Exploring the Path to the Manuscript's Scriptorium

The existence of calligraphic schools within the Visigothic scriptural tradition of the Iberian Peninsula is well established. To speak of a regional school or variant implies the adoption of a clearly defined model. This was precisely the case within the Christian communities of al-Andalus: their historical development and sociocultural context, along with progressive Arabisation, gradually transformed the way writing was practised. Within what we now identify as the Andalusí Visigothic variant, one or more centres likely emerged where these practices were learned and transmitted, resulting in a network of active *scriptoria*<sup>89</sup> which, despite minor local adaptations, shared a common graphic identity.

Numerous studies have underscored the connection between codices and inscriptions.<sup>90</sup> Before a text could be incised in stone, it had to be prepared by a trained scribe or literate specialist, who was responsible for arranging the content, adapting it to the medium, determining appropriate abbreviations and nexus, and ensuring a balanced visual layout. Both book and epigraphic production—particularly in connection with monastic or cathedral centres—often revolved around a single *scriptorium*. Even when inscriptions were not executed *in situ* or by the same individual who rubricated the manuscripts, a close functional relationship almost certainly existed between the *scriptorium*, where scribes were trained, and the epigraphic workshop. This observation has led to the notion of *epigraphic scriptoria*.<sup>91</sup>

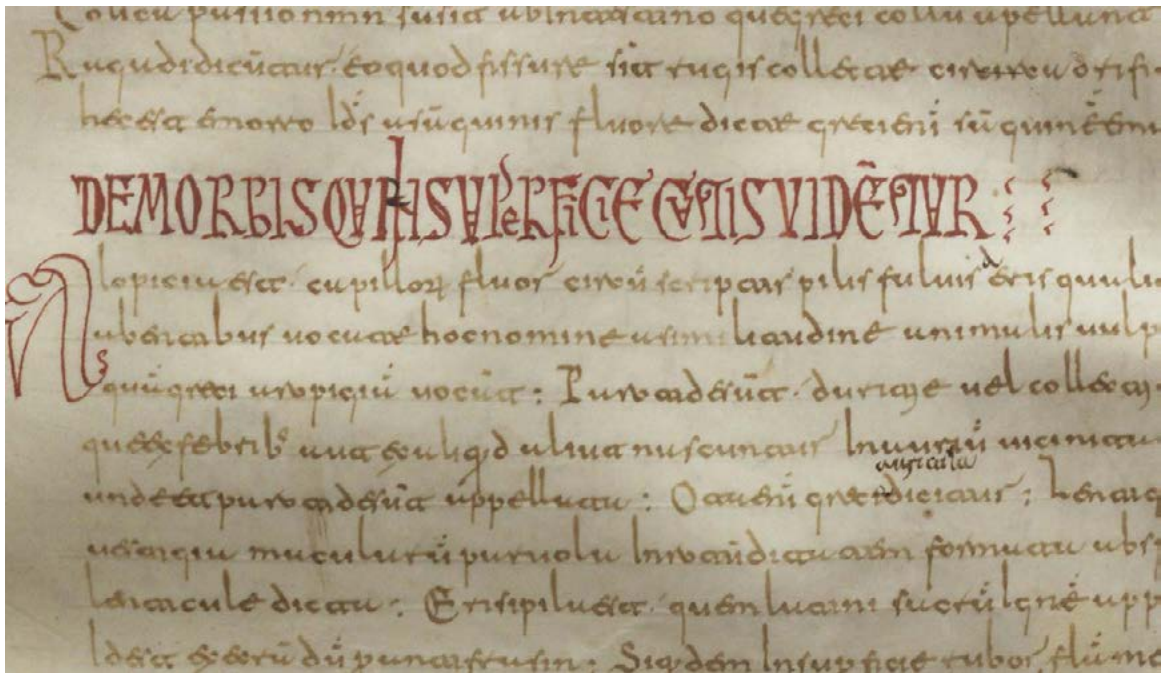


*Epitaphium sepulcrale* of Rufina (Córdoba) and the explicit of the *Apologeticus* of Samson  
(BNE, MS 10018, f. 111v)

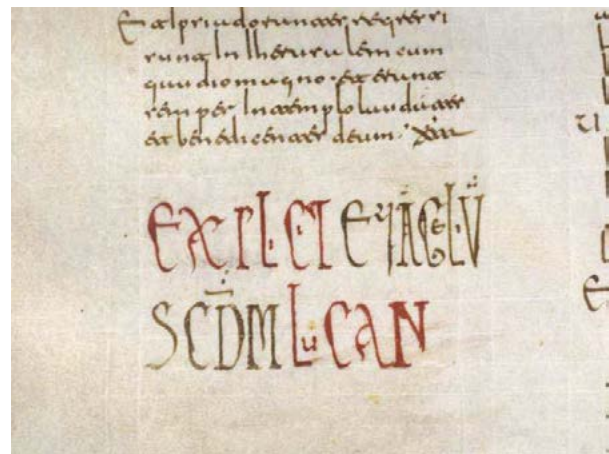
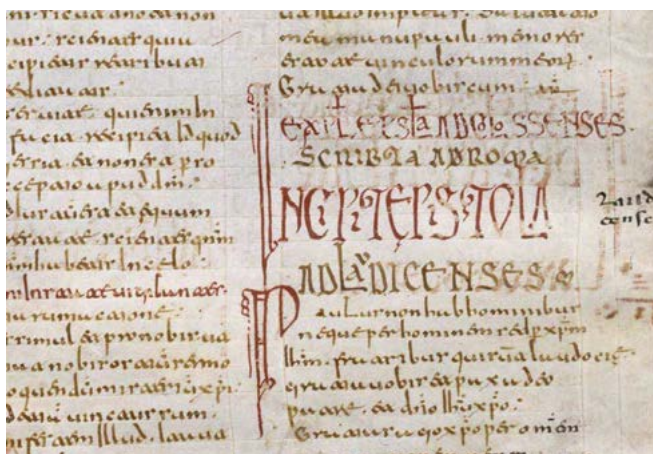
<sup>89</sup> Rodríguez Díaz, *Codicología y Paleografía toledanas*, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Vicente García Lobo, "La escritura visigótica publicitaria", 61-91; García Lobo, Vicente, and Encarnación Martín López. *Impaginatio en las inscripciones medievales*. (León: Universidad de León, 2012); Catherine Brown, *Remember the Hand. Manuscript in Early Medieval Iberia*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2023).

<sup>91</sup> See María Encarnación Martín López, "Centros escriptorios en la provincia de Palencia", in *De litteris, anuscritis ins-criptionibus. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Walter Koch*, edited by Walter Koch, Theo Kölzer; Franz-Albrecht Bornschlegel, and Christian Friedl (Viena: Böhlau, 2007), 203-227



Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, MS T-II-24, f. 54v



Biblia Hispalense. BNE, MS Vitr. 13-1, f. 311r and 343v

Soterraña Martín Postigo<sup>92</sup> and Vicente García Lobo<sup>93</sup> have convincingly demonstrated that a codex and an inscription could not only originate from the same *scriptorium* but could in fact be executed by the same hand. In her study comparing the script of the Beatus of Silos and the *Monumentum aedificationis* of the Church of San Frutos (dated 1110 and associated with the monastery of Santo Domingo), Martín Postigo argues that both were produced by the same individual: the presbyter Munio, who appears in the colophon as the *titulator* responsible for rubricating the majuscule text, also drafted the inscription. “The composition of the letters, their specific treatment, the *ictus* and *ductus*, the proportional arrangement, and the execution of interlaced and joined forms—even the triangular ornament terminating the upper left of each letter—all point to complete identity”.

A similar scenario may be suggested when comparing the *Epitaphium sepulcrale* of Rufina with the explicit of Book I of the *Apologeticus* of Samson (BNE MS 10018, f. 111v), which display an evident graphic affinity.<sup>94</sup> Core morphological features of Andalusí Visigothic script—such as the double-barred A and V, and the left-looped T with a sinuous descending appendix—are attested only in a select group of inscriptions and codices. These include the *Biblia Hispalense* (BNE MS Vitr. 13-1), the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (RBME MS T-II-24), and *al-Qānūn al-muqaddas* (MS 1623), strongly suggesting a shared *scriptorium* or at the very least a common scribal tradition. This

<sup>92</sup> María de la Soterraña Martín Postigo, “Un códice y una inscripción. El “Beatus” Silense (s. XI-XII). La inscripción de S. Frutos (a. 1110)”, *Hispania Sacra*, 25 (1972): 209-225.

<sup>93</sup> Vicente García Lobo, *Las inscripciones de San Miguel de Escalada* (León: El Albir, 1982).

<sup>94</sup> Irene Pereira García, “La epigraffa cristiana andalusí: distribución y variantes”, *Hispania Sacra*, 76/154 (2024), 1100. <https://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2024.1100>

supports the case for systematic comparisons between codicological and epigraphic majuscule scripts as valuable tools for dating and locating Visigothic manuscripts.

Out of the 62 Christian inscriptions produced under Andalusi rule catalogued by González only twelve exhibit these distinctive features,<sup>95</sup>—traits which diverge from the broader Visigothic tradition, where A and V lack the double crossbar, and the T does not feature a descending appendix. These twelve sepulchral inscriptions are geographically concentrated. Nine come from Córdoba or its immediate surroundings, two from Granada, and one from Lucena, which lies between the two cities. The Cordoban examples are the earliest, with dated inscriptions from the years 906, 977, 982, c. 984, 999, and 1109; those from Granada are dated to 1102. This strongly suggests that these new graphical forms originated in Córdoba and were disseminated from there—providing further evidence that the *scriptorium* responsible for Escorial MS 1623 was located in or around this city.



*Epitaphium sepulcrale of Cipriano (Granada)*

It is important to note that not all Cordoban inscriptions share these features; most preserve more traditional forms of Visigothic script, connecting them with earlier pre-Islamic examples. However, within this broader group, there appears to have been a particularly innovative centre—possibly more deeply arabised—associated with manuscripts such as MS 1623 (*al-Qānūn al-muqaddas*), which consciously diverged from prevailing conventions and initiated a distinct graphic trajectory.

A final yet significant detail arises from the study of these twelve inscriptions, which share a consistent execution of Visigothic majuscule. The oldest among them, from the tenth century, are all dedicated to women: Basilisa, who “consecrated her life to Christ” (*propositum Christo servabit*), Rufina, Paula (*lectrix*), María (*Servi Dei filia*), and María II (*famula Dei*). Only later were similar traits extended to ecclesiastical figures, including a bishop named Leo. This pattern invites speculation that women’s communities may have been more receptive to graphic innovation, perhaps even initiating it. The epitaph of Rufina, for example, comes from the village of Fragellas, north of Córdoba, where the *sanctuarium* of Saint Eulalia once stood, according to the calendar of Recemundo.<sup>96</sup> It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that such places of worship may have served as the incubators for the graphic innovations that found an echo in the anonymous scribe of MS Ar. 1623 from El Escorial.

<sup>95</sup> González, *Inscripciones mozárabes*, n. 2, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 34, 36, 44, 49 and 53.

<sup>96</sup> See Cyrille Aillet. *Les mozárabes. Christianisme, islamisation et arabisation en Péninsule Ibérique (IXe–XIIe siècle)*. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010), 70-82.

## Conclusion

The palaeographic analysis of Escorial MS Ar. 1623, considered alongside epigraphic evidence, has reaffirmed the existence of a distinct Andalusí variant of Visigothic script, characterised by its own formal traits and internal coherence. Based on the graphic features identified—especially in the treatment of majuscule letters—it is only reasonable to situate the manuscript's production within the cultural sphere of Córdoba, a milieu in which inherited scribal traditions intersected with new dynamics, giving the script its singular character.

Comparison with epigraphic testimonies strongly supports this hypothesis, revealing graphic correspondences that cannot be regarded as either incidental or isolated. The capital forms, in particular, reflect a degree of elaboration that goes beyond the mere preservation of the original Visigothic canon: they demonstrate a clear intent toward adaptation, stylisation, and—in certain cases—innovation, especially in the execution of forms such as *A* and *T*. This phenomenon suggests the presence of an active *scriptorium*—one fully aware of its graphic heritage, yet open to transformation.

Significantly, this transformation took place within a context marked by sustained contact with Arabic script and intellectual culture. Rather than resisting external influences, Andalusí Visigothic script appears to have engaged with them, responding with innovative graphic solutions that subtly reflect the multilingual and multicultural environment of Córdoba. This interplay of traditions—Latin and Arabic—helped shape a visual identity that was both rooted in the past and responsive to the present.

Thus, the manuscript does not simply illustrate the survival of Visigothic script in al-Andalus for liturgical or religious purposes; rather, it reveals its reinterpretation within a specific cultural and linguistic context. Far from being a static or marginal script, Andalusí Visigothic emerges as a dynamic graphic system—adapted to its Cordoban environment and enriched by contact with Arabic writing. This development can only be fully understood if we recognise the existence of a regional centre of diffusion, with Córdoba not merely acting as a recipient or conservator of certain traditions, but as an active agent in the evolution and transformation of early medieval writing systems.

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