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MEDIEVAL ENCOUNTERS 25 (2019) 457–498

Medieval  
Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture  
Encounters  
*in Confluence and Dialogue*  
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# Of Archers and Lions: The Capital of the Islamic Rider in the Cloister of Girona Cathedral

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## Abstract

In the south gallery of the cloister of the Cathedral of Santa María, Girona, we find one capital that is differentiated from the rest because of its formal as well as its iconographic characteristics. The four faces of capital no. 4 contain two repeated and two alternating motifs: the archer on horseback and the lion attacking a bull. Both the dress of these horsemen and their physical traits identify them as Muslim horsemen. This identification creates an interpretive context for the capital as a whole that also conditions the reading of the conquering lion. Both images will be examined within their constructive context in the light of events and legends that surrounded the cathedral of Girona in the twelfth century. Moreover, we will trace the origin of these motifs that have their parallels in ivories of the art of the caliphal and *taifa* periods as well as in Catalan Romanesque and Sicilian-Norman art. This overview will enable us to interpret the meaning and significance of the capital in its historical-artistic context and enrich our knowledge of the artistic transfers between Andalusian and Romanesque art.

## Keywords

Romanesque art – Cathedral of Santa Maria, Girona – Christian-Muslim relations – Catalan Romanesque – Sicilian-Norman art

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A little criticism enables us to discern the legend within the History.

More criticism helps us to reconstruct the History in the legend.

GEORGES CIROT, *Études sur l'historiographie espagnole. Mariana historien*  
(Paris: Feret et Fils, 1905)



The Romanesque cloister of the cathedral of Santa María, Girona, contains a capital that stands out from all the others for its carving and subject matter. Capital no. 4 in the south gallery, whose sculpture can be classified within the theme of combat motifs, is interspersed among the historiated capitals of biblical subjects (Figs. 1 & 2).<sup>1</sup> Its four sides depict two repeated scenes of an archer on horseback on the east and west faces and a lion attacking another animal on the north and south faces. The high quality of the modeling is particularly evident, given that the figures stand out from the rest for their elegant and harmonious proportions and dynamism. Immaculada Lorés has observed that these horsemen are noticeably different from the human types characteristic of this ensemble, mainly because their heads are smaller than the other figures in the south gallery attributed to the first workshop. The animals are also characterized by a more careful modeling, a fact that has led Lorés to classify this capital as “different from those in the rest of the cloister.”<sup>2</sup> She does, however, analyze other elements that allow us to assume that the sculptor of this piece worked contemporaneously with the other artists in the south gallery. For example, the abacus, the vegetal elements of the background, and the pairs of striated stems arising from the center of the faces to form palmettes in the angles seem to imitate those carved by this circle (Fig. 1). In addition to her observations, we find that there is also a subtle difference between the vegetal motifs of this capital, which reveals the presence of tiny holes drilled into the background, in contrast to the pearl-like points in relief in the rest of the capitals (Fig. 3). Thus, from a formal point of view, the capital

1 Carlos Cid Priego, “La iconografía del claustro de la catedral de Gerona,” *Annals de l’Institut d’Estudis Gironins* 6 (1951): 52–65.

2 Immaculada Lorés, *L’escultura dels claustres de la catedral de Girona i del monestir de Sant Cugat del Vallés. Formació, desenvolupament i difusió* (Barcelona: Publicacions Universitat de Barcelona, 1992), 196–97. See this work for the numbering of the cloister capitals.



FIGURE 1 *Archer on horseback*, ca. 1160–80. West side of capital no. 4, south gallery; Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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FIGURE 2 *Archer on horseback and lion attacking a bull*, ca. 1150–80. East and North sides of capital no. 4, south gallery, ca. 1160–80; Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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FIGURE 3 *Lion attacking the hindquarters of a bull*, ca. 1160–80. South side of capital no. 14, south gallery, Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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appears as a *unicum* within the cloister.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see later on, its distinctive modelling seems to respond to the deliberate intent on the part of the sculptor to evoke Andalusian ivories.

As for the lion mounted on another animal, it is more deteriorated than the archer and has practically disappeared from the south face (Fig. 4). The north face is also mutilated, which makes it difficult to interpret; but the defeated animal is usually identified as a member of the horse family (Fig. 5). The victorious beast is easier to identify, given that its fur, face, and claws are typical of a lion.<sup>4</sup> A detailed analysis of the conquered animal, however, reveals that it is not a horse, because its appearance is very different from the mounts rid-

3 These holes are also absent in the other Catalan cloisters I have been able to observe such as Sant Cugat del Vallès (prov. of Barcelona), whose sculpture is attributed to Arnau Cadell, the well-documented second master of the cloister of Girona Cathedral. See also Immaculada Lorés, “Arnau Cadell,” in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture* 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155–56.

4 Cid Priego, “Iconografía,” 54. Eduard Junyent, *Rutas Románicas: Cataluña* (Madrid: Encuentro, 1992), 2:39, merely describe the group as “a hunting scene with horsemen and lions.” Lorés, *L'escultura dels claustres*, 196, also mentions a hunting scene but points out that the quadruped could “possibly be a dog.”



FIGURE 4 *Lion attacking a bull*, ca. 1160–80. South side of capital no. 4, south gallery, Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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FIGURE 5 *Lion attacking a bull and Archer on horseback*, ca. 1160–80. Northwest view of capital no. 4, south gallery, Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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den by the archers who accompany it, and it also has horns. Capital 14 in the same gallery depicts a lion attacking the hindquarters of a bull, whose chest is marked by parallel lines that suggest ribs (Fig. 3). This same representational convention is also present in the conquered beast in capital no. 4, which allows us to assume that it is also a bull, since it has cloven hoofs (Fig. 4).

In the following pages, we will elaborate on the two motifs of the archer on horseback and the conquering lion. An in-depth study of the two separately and together will ultimately lead to their message as a whole. We will see that this unusual capital can provide us with an especially valuable testimony of the visual culture of its time, given that it bears witness to the existence of the transfer and translation between Islamic art and Romanesque art in twelfth-century Spain.

As the necessary point of departure, the work will be placed within its constructive and iconographic context in the cloister in which it is located. First, a formal and iconographic analysis of the archers will enable us to identify them as Andalusian warriors who often used their bows in battles against their Christian enemies. In order to understand the imagery invoked by these Muslim horsemen in the minds of viewers in twelfth-century Girona, it will be necessary to review the bellicose campaigns carried out by the Catalan counts against the Muslim *taifas* in the region and recount the legend relating to the foundation of the cathedral on the site of the earlier Great Mosque of the city. Second, we shall see that the figure of the conquering lion refers specifically to the ivories of al-Andalus and transmits the idea of territorial victory.

Finally, an analysis of the two motifs together with the study of the parallels between them in the Andalusian and Christian art of the period will enable us to formulate a combined reading of the capital as a whole as well as broaden our knowledge of the artistic exchanges in the peninsula during the twelfth century.

## 1 The Constructive and Iconographic Context

Before going more deeply into the individual analysis of these figures it will be necessary to situate the capital within its constructive context. The cloister has an irregular trapezoidal shape, with four galleries unequal in length and number of capitals (Fig. 6). Construction was begun on the southern wing and probably drawn out over two decades due to problems in adjusting to the irregularity of the terrain. The earlier eleventh-century Romanesque cathedral was replaced by the present Gothic building that absorbed the space of the

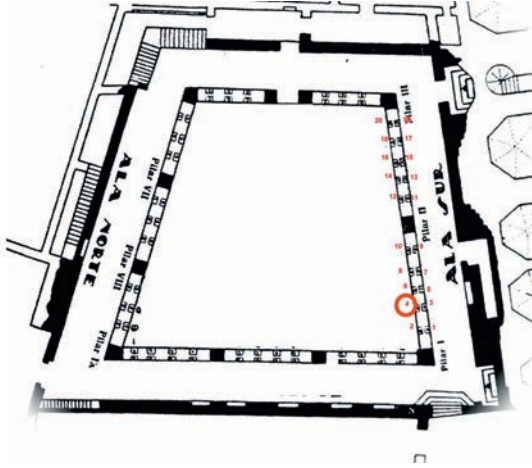


FIGURE 6  
Plan of the cloister of the cathedral of Santa María, Girona  
SOURCE: CARLOS CID PRIEGO, "LA ICONOGRAFÍA DEL CLAUSTRO DE LA CATEDRAL DE GERONA," *ANNALS DE L'INSTITUT D'ESTUDIS GIRONINS*, 6 (1951)

primitive chapter house in the south gallery.<sup>5</sup> The sculpture of the cloister is usually dated around 1180, according to stylistic considerations, given that the second sculpture workshop also seems to have worked in the neighboring cloister at Sant Cugat del Vallés, documented from 1190 on.<sup>6</sup>

Capital no. 4 is located on the second pair of columns in the south gallery on the outside facing the garden (Fig. 6). The numbering of the capitals begins precisely at this southeast corner, due to the fact it coincides with the door to the entrance of the cloister. This is where the biblical narration of the historiated cycle begins and is developed throughout the entire south wing. Here, too,

5 This section of the cloister is 6 meters lower than the head of the cathedral. Of a total of 122 capitals within the cloister, distributed between the pillars and the columns, 74 rest on columns grouped in pairs. See Eduardo Carretero Santamaría, "El Claustro de la Seo de Girona. Orígenes arquitectónicos y modificaciones de su estructura y entorno," *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 45 (2004): 194. It is known that an earlier cloister existed in the eleventh century that was probably simpler and without monumental sculpture. See Lorés, "Aspectes relatius a la construcció del claustre de la catedral de Girona," *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 33 (1994): 279.

6 There were two workshops in the Girona cloister. The first worked in the south gallery; the second worked at a later date and seems to have been formed in the style of the earlier workshop. Both exhibit a good knowledge of the school of Toulouse while at the same time incorporating numerous elements of local tradition; Lorés, "Aspectes Relatius," 281–87. See also Peter K. Klein, "Le cloître de la cathédral de Girona: fonctions et programme iconographique," in *Patrimoine Artístico en Galicia y otros estudios. Homenaje al Prof. Dr. Serafín Moralejo Álvarez*, coord. Ángela Franco Mata, Eugenio Romero Pose, and John Williams (Santiago de Compostela, 2004), 3: 139–40.

is where our capital is interspersed with the profane subject matter. In order to interpret the meaning of the capital it is fundamental to know the iconographic milieu into which it is integrated and analyze its role within the overall discourse of the cloister.

The sculpture of the south gallery is differentiated from the others in that its decoration and iconography are more highly developed.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is that it is adjacent to the church and is immediately accessible from the door to the cloister where liturgical ceremonies such as processions took place.<sup>8</sup> This explains why most of the reliefs of biblical subjects are concentrated in this gallery, which is composed of ten pairs of capitals and three pillars at the beginning, middle, and end. The first and third pillars tell the story of Genesis, while the second pillar depicts Christ's Descent into Hell.<sup>9</sup> Their purpose is to insist on the idea of Redemption through Christ, which is further reinforced by the incorporation of several capitals in this gallery devoted to his infancy and public life. Nevertheless, the subject matter of Christ's life is arranged without any chronological order or apparent logic, given that it does not follow a coherent sequence within the succession of capitals. Instead, it alternates with vegetal and animal motifs and one Old Testament subject.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, five of the twenty capitals in this gallery were replaced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries due to deterioration.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars believe that the sculpture in this gallery is not displayed in its original location and that the capitals may

7 Pamela A. Patton, *Pictorial Narrative in the Romanesque Cloister: Cloister Imagery & Religious Life in Medieval Spain* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 166–67.

8 Klein, "Cloître," 139–44.

9 The narration begins in the friezes of the southeast pillar with scenes of the Genesis cycle: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah surrounding the three internal faces of the pillar. The biblical chronological order of the first pillar continues with the third pillar at the end of the gallery depicting the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The middle pillar, on the other hand, introduces a temporal leap showing Christ's Descent into Limbo and Hell, composed of a number of sinners and punishments. The insertion of this subject introduces a scatological interpretation of the story of mankind, which explains the selection of the Genesis themes of the first pillar, with special emphasis on Original Sin.

10 For a complete description of the iconographic cycle and the sculpture of this gallery, see Cid Priego, "Iconografía"; Junyent, *Rutas románicas*; Lorés, *L'Escultura*; and Patton's observations in *Pictorial Narrative*, 164–67. The Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents are depicted on capital 5, the Presentation in the Temple on 7, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on 11, the Washing of the Feet on 13, and the Annunciation, Nativity, and Epiphany on 18. Capital no. 17 shows the Dormition of the Virgin Mary and no. 19 the Rich man and Lazarus. Of the Old Testament capitals, only no. 7, Moses with the Tablets of the Law, is reliable, while Daniel in the Lions' Den on no. 3 is doubtful.

11 This is true of capitals 1, 2, 9, 10, and 15, probably destroyed by inclement weather due to the decomposition of their limestone base: Cid Priego, "Iconografía," 79.



have occupied a different place according to a more linear program.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, a certain consistency in that almost all the historiated capitals are facing the inside of the gallery.<sup>13</sup> Of the twenty capitals in this gallery, eight or nine contain biblical subjects, while six or seven exhibit “profane” motifs that combine human figures with animals such as lions, griffins, and bulls.<sup>14</sup> Generally speaking, these profane capitals are considered to complement the meaning of the others by alluding to the spiritual struggle between good and evil.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, they cannot be interpreted in relation to the biblical capitals due to the absence of a linear program. Also, the disappearance of a few capitals and others that are not in their original location makes it impossible to establish links between them. Specifically, capital no. 4 with the archer horseman is paired with another very mutilated capital (no. 3) whose inner face, made up of animal and human figures, could be, according to scholars, a doubtful Daniel in the Lions’ Den (Figs. 7 & 8).<sup>16</sup> The adjacent capitals (nos. 1 and 2), with vegetal motifs, belong to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, whereas the next two depict the Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents (no. 5), and some confronted griffins (no. 6) (Fig. 7). In sum, the interpretation of capital no. 4 should be restricted to its own reliefs because it is not possible to determine the iconography of the capitals that flanked it at one time, or even if it interacted with them.<sup>17</sup>

We can, however, count on several elements within the capital itself that will enable us to delve deeper into its interpretation. Scholars who have studied the sculpture of this cloister have merely limited themselves to pointing out the “Eastern” or “Persian” aspect of the bowmen, while interpreting the group as

12 Klein, “Cloître,” 139.

13 Except capital n° 18 (scenes of the Infancy of Jesus).

14 No. 6 contains a pair of confronted griffins; others contain wolves’ heads (8), felines (12), a lion attacking a bull (14), men among griffins (16), and men with plants (20), in addition to the aforementioned five capitals added later on.

15 In the psychomachic sense of the “prison of the soul”; Marc Sureda i Jubany, “Els precedents de la Catedral de Santa Maria de Girona. De la plaça religiosa del fòrum romà al conjunt arquitectònic de la seo romànica (I BC–AD XIV),” (Ph.D. diss., Universitat de Girona, 2008): 661, <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/7853> [10/11/2016].

16 Cid Priego, “Iconografía,” 30.

17 Recent works have analyzed the cloister as a space where a strictly linear program does not necessarily exist. This is due to the will to reflect variety from an aesthetic point of view with the intention of producing an “affectio animi,” as Mary Carruthers points out in *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 146–48. While there was undoubtedly an extensive intellectual elaboration behind the iconographic program of each cloister, the transformations effected over a period of time often hinder us from having a coherent reading for the cloister as a whole.



FIGURE 7 Capitals no. 3 and no. 4 from the garden (northwest view), and no. 5 and 6 in the second image plane, ca. 1160–80. Cloister of Santa María, Girona

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FIGURE 8 *Daniel in the Lion's Den* (doubtful), capital no. 3, southeast view of capitals no. 3 and no. 4 from the gallery, ca. 1160–80. Cloister of Santa María, Girona

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a whole as a hunting scene.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the clear relationship between the horsemen and the conquering lions, a separate analysis of these two motifs reveals their condition as semantic elements that are capable of functioning both independently and as a group.

## 2 The Archers

The following section will show that the dress, weapons, and physiognomy of these horsemen identify them as Muslim archers of a military nature. The Bowman on the west side (Figs. 1 & 9) wears a veil around his head that is fastened at the neck. This corresponds to the male veil (*taltim*) typical of the Almoravid soldiers known as “the veiled ones” (*al-mutalattimūn*).<sup>19</sup> Both warriors ride decorated mounts whose saddles are covered with a cloth adorned with beaded motifs (Figs. 1 & 10). This was a typical characteristic of Muslim warriors, who decorated the trappings of their horses more than the Christians.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the Bowman’s head on the east face seems to be covered with a more conventional turban (Figs. 10 & 11), wrapped around it like a crown, but without being tied under his chin. In the art of this period the turban is the typical attribute of Muslims, and even though it was not usually worn by the majority of Andalusians, it was associated with military environments. In effect, during the twelfth century—the date of our capital—the turban became more common among the Muslim warriors in the peninsula due to the Berber influence of the Almoravids, in contrast to the traditional Muslim headdress (*qalanis*) worn in earlier times.<sup>21</sup> The short

18 For the Persian aspect see Cid Priego, “Iconografía,” 54–55. The hunting theme is mentioned by Lorés, *L’Escultura*, 196–97, and Junyent, *Rutas románicas*, 38–40.

19 Manuela Marín, “Signos visuales de la identidad andalusí,” in *Tejer y vestir: de la Antigüedad al Islam*, ed. Manuela Marín (Madrid: CSIC, 2001), 150–52.

20 This practice was inherited from a Persian tradition which arose from the belief that it replicated the trappings of Mohammed’s horse. See David C. Nicolle, *Early Medieval Islamic Arms and Armour* (Cáceres: CSIC, 1976), 145–46.

21 In spite of the fact that the turban was also a distinctive part of Andalusian Arabs in military environments, “There must have been a time when the equation turban + Berber = soldier became generalized.” Marín, “Signos visuales,” 155–58. The turban became a part of military attire when the custom was adopted from the Berber troops by the Arabic soldiers; Marín, 156. See also Maribel Fierro, “El alfaquí beréber Yahyà b. Yahyà al-Laytin (MS 23/848), el inteligente de al-Andalus,” in *Biografías y género biográfico en el Occidente islámico* (Madrid: EOba, 1997), 8: 325–26. Original sources such as Ibn al-Hatib testify to the fact that North African soldiers wore turbans; Rachel Arié, “Quelques remarques sur le costume des Musulmans d’Espagne au temps des Nasrides,” in *Études sur la civilisation musulmane* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 95. The turban was occasionally worn exclusively by religious and military leaders; Nicolle, *Early Medieval Arms*, 153.



FIGURE 9 Bowman with the veil (*taltim*), ca. 1160–80. West side of capital no. 4, south gallery; Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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FIGURE 10 Archer on horseback with decorated mount, ca. 1160–80. East side of capital no. 4, south gallery; Cloister of Santa María, Girona  
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FIGURE 11 *Archer with turban and Black African facial features*, ca. 1160–80. East side of capital no. 4, south gallery; Cloister of Santa María, Girona

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spurs and stirrups on the feet of this horseman are also exclusive elements of the Spanish Muslims warriors.<sup>22</sup> Thus the dress and appearance of these archers refers back to the neighboring world of the time and, more concretely, to the combat milieu. This is further reinforced by the bows they draw, whose impressive size allows them to be classified as Arabic bows called *higazi*.<sup>23</sup>

A study of the use of the bow within the context of the High Middle Ages in Spain reinforces the interpretation of the Girona riders as Andalusian warriors, for it was a weapon used very effectively by Muslim armies against the Christian hosts in the Iberian Peninsula. The bow had been used in antiquity, particularly in the Middle East, although the Islamic peoples were the ones who introduced

22 This is how they are depicted in Islamic art. See Julie A. Harris, "The Leire Casket in Context," *Art History* 18.2 (1995): 217. For Otto K. Werckmeister, this element enables us to detect influences of Islamic art in the Girona Beatus, "The Islamic Rider in the Beatus of Girona," *Gesta* 36.2 (1997): 101–106.

23 Antoine Boudot-Lamotte, *Contributions à l'étude de l'archerie musulmane* (Paris: Institut Français de Damas, 1968), 6.

its usage on horseback.<sup>24</sup> Elite archers (*rumat*) played a key role in Andalusian military strategy before the coming of the Almoravids because their arrows were capable of penetrating coats of mail.<sup>25</sup> Hispanic sources—both Latin and Arabic—and the chronicles of the Crusades in the Near East record the havoc those arrows wreaked on the Christians.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of the Muslims as daring archers on horseback was widely extended among the Christians of this period, as revealed in the epic poems that were recited in public spaces and were very popular in both Spanish and Frankish milieus.<sup>27</sup> In these texts the Christians are depicted with lances and swords, the noble arms proper to the knights of God. Muslim weapons, in contrast, are unworthy and have pejorative connotations because they allow the Muslims to attack in cowardly fashion from a great distance.<sup>28</sup>

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- 24 In the Roman Empire the bowmen were foot soldiers. During the Romanesque period, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, it was used by Muslims in both the East and the West, particularly in al-Andalus. There is evidence suggesting the use of the bow by Mohammed and his people from the very beginnings of Islam. A number of hadiths take up the Prophet's recommendation to practice archery as an exercise; Boudot-Lamotte, *Contributions*, 7–26. For the use of the bow in Islam see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of Archery," *Ars Islamica* 10 (1943): 105–18; David Nicolle, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era* (New York: Kraus International, 1984), 1: 236–37; Álvaro Soler del Campo, "Sistemas de combate en la iconografía mozárabe y andalusí altomedieval," *Boletín de la Asociación de Orientalistas* 22 (1986): 62.
- 25 Ferdinand Lot, *L'Art militaire et les armées au Moyen Âge et dans le Proche Orient* (Paris: Payot, 1986), 2: 259.
- 26 Such as the *Primera crónica general de España* and the *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*; see Ron Barkai, *Cristianos y musulmanes en la España medieval: el enemigo en el espejo* (Madrid: Rialp, 1984), 242; and Álvaro Soler del Campo, *La evolución del armamento medieval en el reino castellano-leonés y en al-Andalus (ss. XII–XIV)* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones del EME, 1993), 64. The Arabic chronicler al-Turtusi (1059–1130) describes the tactics of confrontation between archers and other corps; Pierre Guichard, "Combattants de l'Occident chrétien et de l'Islam. Quelques remarques sur leurs images réciproques (fin X<sup>e</sup> s.–XII<sup>e</sup> s.)," in *Identidad y representación de la frontera en la España medieval (siglos XI–XIV)* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez-UAM, 2001), 246; and *Histoire anonyme de la Première Croisade*, ed. and trans. Louis Bréhier (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1924), 2: 10–11; 9: 46–47; 18: 90–91; 29: 152–53; 32: 176–77.
- 27 Both the *Cantar de mio Cid* (ca. 1140) and the *Poema de Fernán González* (middle of the thirteenth century) describe the use of the bow as a technique proper to the Muslim enemy; Anonymous, *Cantar de mio Cid*, ed. Francisco Marcos-Marín (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1997), lines 834–35, 266–67; Anonymous, *Poema de Fernán González* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1972), xvi: 73. See also Gerald Herman, "Unconventional Arms as a Comic Device in Some Chansons de Geste," *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1969): 319–30. For the Frankish poems, see Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi* (Marseille: Université de Provence, 1982), 2: 957.
- 28 Paul Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste*: 957.

Romanesque art echoed this idea and frequently depicted Muslims armed with bows.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the most emblematic example we have in this period is the figure of Ismael in the Lamb of God Tympanum in San Isidoro de León, as John Williams has masterfully shown.<sup>30</sup> Here the young archer, who wears a turban and rides his horse *a la jineta*, with short stirrups and his legs bent, is a symbol of the Muslim enemies of the period (Fig. 12).

Nevertheless, it is not possible to establish an automatic interpretation of the Romanesque archers as depictions of Muslims because we also have a few significant examples of Christians using a bow, although they are usually on foot, not on horseback. This is the case, for example, of the Norman archers at the Battle of Hastings who are depicted in the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry. It is possible, however, to state that the archers and crossbowmen of this period are usually depicted in a very negative light.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to the horsemen of the Girona capital, there is one more element to reinforce their identification as an Andalusian archer of the period: the African facial features of the horseman on the east face (Fig. 11). His large almond-shaped eyes and flat nose, although mutilated, combined with very thick lips, sum up the medieval stereotype of black Africans. We should point out that the first time the black appears in medieval western iconography is precisely in twelfth-century Spain, and that its art is the pioneer in these images by virtue of its Muslim presence in the peninsula. In this way the dark-colored

29 See Inés Monteiro, *El enemigo imaginado. La escultura románica hispana y la lucha contra el Islam*. Méridiennes (Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, 2012): 365–386. A significant example is the frieze of Saint-Pierre d'Angoulême, ca. 1120; Deborah Kahn, "La Chanson de Roland dans le décor des églises du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 40 (1997): 337–72. This portal has recently been reinterpreted as depicting the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange, where the archers and crossbowmen continue to be identified with Muslims; see Timothy J. Hunter, "Quid milites pugnantes?: An Early Representation of Chanson de Geste on the Romanesque Frieze of Angoulême Cathedral Reexamined," *Studies in Iconography* 34 (2013): 133–74. Muslims also appear attacking Christians with bows and crossbows as seen in illuminated manuscripts of the Crusades; see Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37, 59, 139, 149.

30 See John Williams, "Generaciones Abrahae: Reconquest Iconography in León," *Gesta* 16.2 (1977): 3–15.

31 The same negative interpretation of the bow and crossbow that we find in the epic poems (Gerald Herman, "Unconventional Arms," 319–30) also appears in Romanesque art, where the Muslims are armed with these weapons and the Christian knights give priority to swords and lances, Inés Monteiro, *El enemigo imaginado*, 230–267; 365–386. See Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *The Legend of Roland in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (London: Phaidon, 1971): 98–99. The crossbow appears in Sainte-Foy-de-Conques with a negative connotation. See Kirk Ambrose, "Attunement to Damned of the Conques Tympanum," *Gesta* 50.1 (2011): 1–17.



FIGURE 12 *Ismael represented as an Andalusian rider, ca. 1124. Left side of the Lamb tympanum at the south side of San Isidoro, León*

PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA

figures are often identified with Muslims in the Romanesque art of Spain, where they take on very negative connotations bordering on demonization.<sup>32</sup> Historical factors explain the proliferation of the figure of the black in the art of this period. From the time of the Almoravids (1085–1147) and Almohads

32 See Jean Devisse, *L'Image du Noir dans l'Art Occidental. Des premiers siècles Chrétiens aux "Grandes Découvertes,"* vol. 1, part 2 (Paris-Freiburg: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1979), 72–82; new English edition, David Bindman and Henry L. Gates Jr., eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art, vol. 2: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery," part 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 75–84. In his monumental study of the Black in Western art, Devisse points out that the Black African was a "scorned, animalized, and demonized figure in art" throughout history, but that in this period it unequivocally represented Muslims. Several Romanesque examples in Inés Monteiro, "Destierro físico, destierro espiritual. Los símbolos de triunfo sobre el infiel en los espacios secundarios del templo románico: las cabezas cortadas," in *Relegados al Margen. Marginalidad y espacios marginales en la cultura medieval.* Inés Monteiro, Fernando Villaseñor and Ana Muñoz (eds.) (Madrid: CSIC, 2009): 129–142; and Inés Monteiro, "I musulmani nella scultura romanica: archetipi e modalità di rappresentazione," in *Il Mito del Nemico. I Volti Mutevoli dell'Altro e la Costruzione delle Identità Europee.* Ed. and Coord. Irene Graziani e Maria Vittoria Spisso. (Minerva: Bologna, 2018): 5–12.



(1148–1267) al-Andalus gradually begins to integrate a greater number of black Africans into their territories.<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly the polychromy that probably covered these capitals would have made the depiction of these Berber archers clearer and more evident.

Given the analysis of clothing, weapons, and physical features of the Girona mounted bowmen, we can therefore conclude that these figures would unequivocally evoke the Muslims on the battlefield for the audience of that time and that it would be unthinkable for them to be devoid of content.<sup>34</sup> The negative connotations that the Latin chronicles assign to the Muslims' use of the bow and the features of black Africans allow us to deduce the pejorative nature of these depictions. Moreover, it is also necessary to take into account the interpretive context of the cloister whose range of subject matter was directed to the clerics of the cathedral who, in turn, were undoubtedly sensitized by the values of the Gregorian Reform and the promotion of war as a sacred enterprise by the popes.<sup>35</sup> The local context of territorial confrontation with Islam within the areas of Catalonia, Aragon, and Valencia allows for a more nuanced interpretation, as we shall see later on.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, we should assume that the capital was not only seen by the priests and the canons of the cathedral. This is true because we know that the south gallery of the cloister was occasionally frequented by the community of worshipers during important feast days when processions were organized precisely in this particular wing. These processions entered through the main

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- 33 The first group was a dynasty originating in Western Sahara, a center of permanent North African influence, Lot, *L'Art militaire*, 258; Guichard, "Combattants de l'Occident," 228, 237.
- 34 Joan Albert Adell i Gisbert, Joan Molina i Figueras, and María Lluïsa Ramos i Martínez, "Fontana d'Or," in *Enciclopèdia Catalana: Catalunya romànica* (Barcelona, 1992), 1: 174–77, believe that the capital is of a merely decorative nature.
- 35 This ideology crystalized at the end of the eleventh century and began to leave its mark on Romanesque iconography when the influence of Cluny and the pope came together with the ideology of the *Reconquista* to fashion an image of the Muslim as a "singular mythic and reductive 'other.'" Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "Islam, Christianity, and the Problem of Religious Art," in *The Art of Medieval Spain. a.d. 500–1200*, exhibit. Cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), 33. The militarization of the church in this period is reflected in the creation of military models of sainthood. See Katherine Allen Smith, "Saints in Shining Armour: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050–1250," *Speculum* 83.3 (2008): 572–602. Concerning this ideology, see Jean Flori, *La guerra santa. La formación de la idea de cruzada en el Occidente cristiano* (Madrid: Trotta, Universidad de Granada, 2003).
- 36 The context of the local frontier needs to be taken into account in order to understand the redefinition of identity reflected in the Spanish Romanesque. See the study by Janice Mann, *Romanesque Architecture and its Sculptural Decoration in Christian Spain, 1000–1120. Exploring Frontiers and Defining Identities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

door leading into the cloister in the southwest corner and returned to the temple at the north transept through a door which no longer exists today.<sup>37</sup> Another indication that points toward the wide range of the capital's subject matter and its ability to be understood by laymen is the fact that it was imitated in a nobleman's palace in the same city a few decades later, as we shall see in the following analysis.

### 3 Christian Artistic Parallels

There is, in effect, one artistic parallel within the Catalan environment that testifies to the timid diffusion of this iconography. This is a capital on the outside of a Romanesque civil building called the "Fontana d'Or" located in the city of Girona proper. Capital 15 on the second floor, done in 1220, contains a bowman on horseback aiming at a quadruped, perhaps a dog attacking a bull (Fig. 13).<sup>38</sup> The sculptor may possibly have taken the cloister capital as his model, and the rider also has short stirrups and probably wears spurs. The fact that this capital was imitated in the palace indicates that this subject had a value within a secular context, given that it appeared in a strategic place next to a city gate.<sup>39</sup>

Because capital no. 4 in Girona is practically a *unicum* in Romanesque sculpture, it is necessary to discuss the origin of its figurative representation. The identification of these horsemen as Muslims inevitably leads us to the famous figure of the rider in the Girona Beatus (fol. 134v). This image is equally unique within the copies of the illustrated manuscripts of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* of Beatus of Liébana and presents certain similarities with the archers on our capital (Fig. 14). Although the Girona Beatus was illuminated

37 Klein, "Cloître," 139–44.

38 Lorés has related another capital in the presbytery of Tarragona Cathedral with these two, even though it depicts an archer on foot who is aiming at a he-goat attacked by a dog and the workmanship is very different; Jordi Camps y Soria and Immaculada Lorés, "Una línia d'influència occitana reflectada en l'escultura del presbiteri de la catedral de Tarragona," *Lambard: Estudis d'art medieval* 5 (1989–1991): 53–78. For an illustration of this capital, see *Enciclopèdia Catalana. Cataluà romànica: El Tarragonès, el Baix Camp, l'Alt Camp, El Priorat y La Conca de Barberà* (Barcelona, 1995), 21: 137.

39 Adell, Molina, and Ramos, "Fontana d'Or," 174–77, interpret the conquered animal as a horse. This palace belonged to the Sitjars, a prominent family in medieval Girona. Capísol Juan, the head of the cathedral schools, was the one who donated it to Girona Cathedral. See Eduard Canal, Josep Canal i Roquet, Josep María Nolla, and Jordi Sagrera i Aradilla, "Història urbana de Girona: el monar reial del Mercadal a Girona," *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 35 (1995): 55.



FIGURE 13 *Bowman on horseback and dog attacking a bull*, 1220. Capital no. 15, Fontana d'Or palace, Girona (currently Caixa-Forum building)  
PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA

in the Leonese monastery of Tábara and signed in 975, this manuscript arrived in Girona in the eleventh century, at which time *Capíscol* Juan donated it to the cathedral in 1078.<sup>40</sup> It is known that at least one copy of this *Beatus* Commentary was illuminated in the cathedral scriptorium and that it was completed around 1150, at a date closer to when the sculpture in the cloister was begun.<sup>41</sup> Several scholars have found a direct thematic correspondence between the biblical passages of the Old and New Testaments of this *Beatus* codex and those of the south gallery of the Girona cloister and, in particular, the famous scene of the *Descensus ad Inferos* (fol. 17v) on the central pillar.<sup>42</sup>

40 *Capíscol* Juan was a notable canon and archivist, as well as the director of the cathedral schools. He was known to be considerably wealthy and maintained a close relationship with the counts of Barcelona. See Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Beato de Liébana. Manuscritos iluminados* (Barcelona: M. Molero, 2005), 106.

41 This copy is the famous *Turin Beatus* (Turin: Biblioteca Nazionale), Sgn. LIIIo. The figure of the Islamic rider, however, is absent, but we know that this manuscript was damaged in a fire. See Jaime Marqués, "El 'scriptorium' de la Seo de Gerona," *Revista de Girona* 73 (1975): 38–41. It is possible that several copies of the *Beatus* manuscript were made during this time, although most of them are lost.

42 Patton, *Pictorial Narrative*, 167, for the coincidence between the Old Testament patriarchs and female figures such as Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel. See also Jaime Marqués, "Proyección del Beato de Gerona en el arte," *Revista de Girona* 73 (1975): 24–31, for a systematic review



FIGURE 14  
*Islamic rider spearing a serpent.* Girona Beatus,  
 975, Cathedral Treasury, Girona  
 FOTO: M. MOLEIRO EDITOR (WWW.MOLEIRO  
 .COM), BEATO DE GIRONA, F. 134V

Thus it seems that the iconographic plan carried out by the clerics of Girona for their cloister was influenced by the iconography of this Beatus manuscript which, in turn, could also have served as a model for the preparatory notebook of models for the sculptors.<sup>43</sup>

Werckmeister identified the figure in the Beatus Commentary as a Muslim rider, based on the analysis of his dress and certain details originating in caliphal art that he interprets in a polemical sense of religious confrontation.<sup>44</sup> The context in which this Beatus was produced clearly supports this interpretation, since the Mozarabic community was immersed in a profoundly anti-Islamic ideological climate and commemorated the voluntary martyrs of Córdoba in a special way.<sup>45</sup> It is possible that the Beatus rider could be a source

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of these passages, in which he cites the genealogies of the Beatus (fols. 8v & 15) that correspond directly to the reliefs of the southwest and southeast pillars. The scenes of the Annunciation and the Birth of Christ (fol. 15) also appear in this Beatus.

43 For the artists' notebooks, see Neil Stratford, "Le problème des cahiers de modèles à l'époque Romane," *Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa* 37 (2006): 7–20.

44 Otto K. Werckmeister, "The Islamic Rider in the Beatus of Gerona," *Gesta* 2 (1997): 36, 101–6. The negative image of this figure comes from its comparison with Herod.

45 Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For the ideological climate see John Victor Tolan, *Saracens. Islam in the*

for the elaboration of capital 4, given the fact that, in both cases, we are dealing with figures that are marginal or complementary to the iconographic program in which they are included. Nevertheless, the Romanesque capital contains some differentiating traits (the bow and the presence of the victorious lion) that lead us to search for its meaning within its own historical and artistic context.

#### 4 Territorial and Ideological Contexts

Although we have seen that the dress, weapons, and physical traits of these figures unequivocally refer back to the Andalusian warriors in the sources of the period, we should ask ourselves to what extent the ideological environment of the war against Islam was present in the setting of the cathedral of Girona during the second half of the twelfth century. The Islamic presence in the city of Girona lasted only 71 years, from the Muslim conquest in 714 to the Carolingian occupation in 785. Shortly afterward in 801, Barcelona also became integrated into the counties dependent on the Frankish empire that made up the Marca Hispanica, or Spanish Marches. The bishopric of Girona, half of the bishopric of Barcelona, and most of Vic comprised what would be known from the thirteenth century on as Old Catalonia. But southern Catalonia, from the Llobregat River on, remained in Muslim hands until the middle of the twelfth century and received the name of New Catalonia.

The lack of documentation and dubious dating of the Girona cloister prohibit us from stating with certainty which of the counts and bishops promoted the sculptural program. The generally accepted date—between 1180 and 1190—is based on stylistic criteria related to the Toulouse workshop that was working at approximately the same time. The archeological investigation carried out by Sureda i Jubany, however, shows that work in the cloister galleries may have been in the planning stage or even in progress around 1153.<sup>46</sup> According

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*Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 71–104.

46 In 2004 he found documents proving that the north gallery had already been built in 1153, Marc Sureda i Jubany, “El dormitori nou de la seu, noves dades per la datació del claustre de la catedral de Girona,” *Annals de l’Institut d’Estudis Gironins* 45 (2004): 679–85. But the author subsequently changed his interpretation in his doctoral dissertation. In it, he indicates that this documentation could also correspond to a modification carried out in the east gallery of the cloister that would not have interfered directly with the construction of the galleries. In other words, the 1153 document did not affect the construction of the cloister galleries. Nevertheless, in his dissertation, based on extensive archeological

to this chronology, it is conceivable that work may have begun during the time of Count Ramón Berenguer IV (r. 1132–62), who was actively involved in the *Reconquista*.<sup>47</sup> He completed the conquest of Tortosa and Lleida in the middle of the twelfth century, in 1148 and 1149, respectively, thus achieving the definitive defeat of the Almoravids in New Catalonia.<sup>48</sup> In spite of the fact that these strongholds were separated from the city of Girona by more than 200 kilometers, many things having to do with their conquest took place and were decided in the cathedral itself. This was true, for example, of the meeting held there in 1143 in the presence of Ramón Berenguer IV at the request of a papal representative, in which some *taifa* castles were donated to the Templars.<sup>49</sup> The taking of Tortosa was promulgated by Eugene III, who issued a papal bull (23 June 1147) authorizing a religious crusade in order to encourage many knights to participate in the siege.<sup>50</sup> Catalan bishops and prelates played a key role in the reordering of the new territory, whose conquest was conceived as a legitimate recovery of their ecclesiastic domains.<sup>51</sup>

If Sureda's proposed date is correct, the ideologist of the south gallery may have been Berenguer de Llers, the bishop of Girona between 1147 and 1160.<sup>52</sup>

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research, Sureda presents more evidence (in the bonding of the lower part of the west façade) which indicates that the cloister could have been in the planning stage or even in progress in 1153; Marc Sureda i Jubany, "Els precedents de la Catedral," 602–03, 609–12. I am grateful to the reader of this article for alerting me to the change in Sureda's interpretation and to Dr. Sureda himself for patiently clarifying his position. My thanks also to Immaculada Lorés for her kind reply to my inquiry in this regard. She holds that sculpture can be dated no earlier than 1170–75 on stylistic grounds.

47 *Reconquista* (Reconquest), the widely-used term for the expansion of Christian kingdoms is currently being questioned by Spanish historiography and is considered to be correct only when it is used to describe an ideology. For an excellent summary of this question, see Francisco García Fitz, *La Reconquista* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2010), 11–56.

48 The last town to be taken was Siruana in 1153. See Thomas N. Bisson, "Cataluña la Nueva: ¿Laboratorio para una nueva sociedad?" in *Islam y Cataluña* (Barcelona: Lunwerg, 1998), 211–20, esp. 212.

49 Sureda, "Els precedents de la Catedral," 58–59.

50 Manuel Riu, "Reafirmación del poder feudal en la Cataluña Nueva," in *El Islam y Cataluña* (Barcelona: Lunwerg, 1998), 222.

51 See Bisson, "Cataluña la Nueva," 212.

52 It is conceivable that the bishop of the cathedral was the ideologist and supervisor of the Girona sculpture. There is, in fact, an exceptional testimony in the cloister concerning the direction of the sculptors by the bishop, even though it corresponds to the campaign of the second workshop: the figure of a bishop appears blessing alongside a stonemason and workman at his left on pillar no. 11 in the west gallery. Lorés thinks that he could be Ramon Guissall, bishop of Girona from 1179 to 1196. See Lorés, "Arnau Cadell," and Immaculada Lorés, "Le travail et l'image du sculpteur dans l'art roman catalan," *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa* xxvi (1995), 27–33.

We know that the bishop's family was closely allied with Ramón Berenguer IV because his brother, Arnau de Llers, played an important part in the conquest of Lleida. In return for his services, the count gave him a castle and the honor of being buried in the porch of the earlier Romanesque façade of the cathedral of Girona itself.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, today most scholars continue to date the Girona cloister from around 1170–80 because of the obvious similarity of its sculpture with the third workshop of Notre-Dame de la Daurade in Toulouse, which would locate it within the time frame of Alfonso II of Aragon (r. 1164–96).<sup>54</sup> This son and successor of Ramón Berenguer IV, continued to resettle the lands around Lleida and Tortosa with Christians. The Muslims, on the other hand, were relegated to outlying districts and their property and mosques were confiscated, a fact that provoked the flight of many inhabitants to Castellón, Valencia, and Murcia that were still in Islamic hands.<sup>55</sup> Those Muslims in Catalonia who had withstood Christian incursions for decades have been described as a terrified society.<sup>56</sup> But the new settlers were also harassed by the indigenous population.<sup>57</sup> Both situations bear witness to the existence of a climate of confrontation even after the conquest, for Christians and Muslims continued to coexist—but not live together peacefully—for several centuries.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, even though New Catalonia had already been conquered, Alfonso II the Chaste continued to be involved in the occupation of neighboring *taifas*. Following the example of his father and grandfather, he fought against the Almohads. By carrying out attacks against Valencia and Murcia in 1172 he was able to collect a considerable amount of tribute. Throughout the entire twelfth century these *parias* guaranteed an enormous injection of gold into

53 Jaime Marqués Casanovas, "Hallazgos arqueológicos en la Catedral," *Revista de Girona* 44 (1968), 3–8; and "El castillo y los señores de Cerviá de Ter," *Revista de Girona* 46 (1969), 8.

54 Lorés, "Aspectes Relatius," 281–87; Klein, "Le cloître de la cathédral de Girona," 139–40; Jordi Camps i Soria, "Toulouse, Gilabertus i el seu reflex en l'escultura romànica a Catalunya," *Quaderns del MEV* 3 (2009), 29–41, esp. p. 38.

55 Riu, "Reafirmación," 222, 225.

56 Jesús Brufal Sucarrat, "La sociedad almorávide en el distrito de Lérida (1102–1146). La representación del poder mediante las propiedades rurales," *Medievalismo* 17 (2007): 21.

57 Bisson, "Cataluña la Nueva," 216.

58 The idea of *convivencia* ("livingtogetherness") between Christians and Muslims is more frequently applied in relation to al-Andalus; however, it has become increasingly questioned. See Francisco García-Fitz, "¿La 'España de las tres culturas'? El tópico de la tolerancia y los límites de la coexistencia en la España medieval," in *Diálogo de Civilizaciones Oriente-Occidente. Aporte al entendimiento internacional*, coord. M. J. Merinero (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva-Universidad de Extremadura, 2102), 127–55; and Marya Soifer, "Beyond Convivencia: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1 (2009): 19–35.

Catalan coffers.<sup>59</sup> This wealth, together with the booty from the conquests, was undoubtedly indispensable for the building boom of Romanesque churches and cloisters throughout this region.

The territorial struggle with Islam also became a part of the very history of Girona Cathedral, or rather, of its legend, which was commemorated every year in the ceremonies of the Adoration of the Holy Cross. The first consecration of the cathedral of Santa María de Girona for which there is documentary evidence dates from 908. It was erected on the site of the Great Mosque built in 717 which, in turn, was supposedly built on the earlier church of San Félix.<sup>60</sup> Documents dating from the eleventh century, however, recount a local legend about Charlemagne as the founder of the cathedral and the conqueror of Girona.<sup>61</sup> In 1173 these local traditions fused with the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, contributing to its consolidation.<sup>62</sup> In this legend the Frankish emperor is visited by Saint James and the Virgin Mary. They urge him to cross the Pyrenees to fight against the Muslims and conquer Girona, where he is to build a cathedral. After several failed attempts to capture the city the legend takes on fantastic dimensions. An enormous luminous red cross appeared over the mosque on a Friday and shed drops of blood that were transformed into crosses as soon as they touched the ground. This miraculous rain was the sign of the imminent defeat of the enemies of the faith, who fled in disarray, afflicted by the plague. The emperor then made a solemn entry into the city in the midst of the enthusiasm of its inhabitants. The story ends with the building of a cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary, to which Charlemagne gave many gifts and ordered

59 See Enric Bagué, Joan-F. Cabestany, and Percy E. Schramm, *Els primers comtes-reis. Ramon Berenguer IV. Alfons el Cast. Pere el Catòlic* (Barcelona: Vicens Vives, 1985), 84; and Brufal, "La sociedad almorávide," 14–15.

60 There is no evidence for this in spite of the fact that it is repeated in a number of studies about the cathedral. It was a seventeenth-century historian named Roig who justified building the cathedral over the site of the earlier mosque by saying that the Muslims had "profaned the earlier sacred space"; Roig, part 1, xxii (1678); quoted in Sureda, "Els precedents," 116–18.

61 The earliest known source is the *Chronicon alterum Rìvipullense*, a chronicle in the monastery at Ripoll, dating from the middle of the eleventh century. See Juan Molina i Figueras, "Arnau de Montrodon y la Catedral de San Carlomagno. Sobre la imagen y el culto al emperador Carolingio en Gerona," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 34.1 (2004): 423–24.

62 In this year Arnaldo de Monte, a monk in the monastery at Ripoll, copied this chronicle from the *Codex Calixtinus* in Santiago de Compostela; Nikolas Jaspert, "Carlomagno y Santiago en la memoria histórica catalana," in *El camí de Sant Jaume i Catalunya: Actes del Congrés Internacional celebrat a Barcelona, Cervera i Lleida 2003* (Abadía de Montserrat and Barcelona: CSIC, 2007), 91–104.



an altar raised to the Holy Cross in memory of the heavenly sign that preceded the taking of the city.<sup>63</sup>

The circulation of the Girona legend reached its height precisely in the twelfth century when “Saint Charlemagne” was the object of an irregular canonization.<sup>64</sup> In the second half of the century an important effort was made to try to legitimize the power of Counts Berenguer III and Ramón Berenguer IV. This was done by transforming them into the direct descendants of the Carolingian line, as reflected in the *Gesta comitum Barchinonensium* (1162–84), which exalts their heroic struggle against the Saracens.<sup>65</sup> The influence of this legend in the long-standing tradition of Girona Cathedral from the Middle Ages to the present is even more evident in the celebration of the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday. Processions were already held in the south gallery of the cloister during the Romanesque period, which gave a lay audience the opportunity to contemplate the capitals.<sup>66</sup> It is also known that religious plays depicting the supposed finding of the True Cross were performed during Easter.<sup>67</sup>

Because the story of Charlemagne’s participation in the taking of the city was so famous, it was inevitable that the spectators would view the horsemen of capital no. 4 as fierce Muslim enemies, and perhaps as those very warriors who were conquered by the mythical founder of the cathedral. This theory is not so far-fetched if we take into account that the twelfth-century wooden statue of the seated Virgin and Christ Child venerated on the high altar of the cathedral was thought to be the image Charlemagne carried with him on his horse at the very moment when he captured the city. Finally, the emperor’s story is also recalled in other parts of the cathedral such as the eleventh-century bishop’s

63 Molina i Figueras, “Arnau de Montrodon,” 424–25. The legend is an amalgam of texts written and rewritten over a time span of five centuries, with numerous additions and omissions, depending on their versions. This legend may have influenced the fact that the cycle of the Holy Cross was included in the magnificent Genesis Tapestry (ca. 1097) in the cathedral. The commission for this embroidery, whose bottom edge contains fragments of scenes relating to the legend of the Holy Cross, has been associated with the promotion of the First Crusade and the commemoration of victories against the Muslims; B. Baert, “New Observations on the Genesis of Gerona (1050–1100). The Iconography of the Legend of the True Cross,” *Gesta* 38.2 (1999): 124–25.

64 By antipope Paschal III in 1165. This canonization became regularized in 1345. See Sureda, “Els Precedents,” 118; Molina i Figueras, “Arnau de Montrodon,” 417.

65 Stefano Maria Cingolani, ed., *Les “Gesta comitum Barchinonensium” (versió primitiva), la “Brevis historia” i altres textos de Ripoll* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2012).

66 Klein, “Le cloître,” 144.

67 Teresa Romaguera i Güell, “Drames litúrgics del cicle de Pasqua en la ciutat de Girona,” *Annals de l’Institut d’Estudis Gironins* 35 (1995): 183–89.

throne known as “Charlemagne’s Throne,” the Romanesque bell tower that bears his name, and the statues and altars dedicated to him.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, the archers on capital no. 4 do not depict mere hunters because the multiple elements we have analyzed here identify them as Andalusian warriors, and they lack the horn, which is the distinctive feature of the hunter. Moreover, we have seen how the prominent Catalan political and religious authorities were involved in the war with Islam at the time when the cathedral was being built and that the crusading ideology was ever-present in the imagery and in the legends associated with the cathedral itself. In the following section we will analyze the motif of the lion conquering the bull that accompanies the horsemen in order to formulate the correct interpretation for the archers and the capital, since the two scenes together combine to formulate one message as a whole.

## 5 The Conquering Lion in Islamic Art

Contrary to the figure of the archers, whose specific details seem to have no immediate parallels in the art of that time, the lion-bull combat is a very concrete motif, with a significant artistic trajectory. Although this motif had its origins in ancient artistic contexts, it was developed more extensively mainly in Islamic art, both in the East and the West.<sup>69</sup> In this art the bull usually symbolizes the peoples under the domination of Islam and its rulers, who are incarnated in the lion.<sup>70</sup> The Umayyad ivory known as the al-Mughira Pyxis (967–968) displays a lion conquering a bull in one of its four lobed medallions (Fig. 15). The wealth of iconographic material for this piece combines princely

68 E. Girbal, “Carlomagno en Gerona,” *Revista de Gerona* 8 (1884): 227; Molina i Figueras, “Armau de Montrodon,” 475. See the wooden statue in *The Art of Medieval Spain. a.d. 500–1200* (cat. 167b).

69 The subject goes back to the Eastern art of antiquity, and to Sassanid art in particular, where it is associated with astronomical symbols and takes on strong connotations of political and military power. See Richard Ettinghausen and Willy Hartner, “The Conquering Lion, the Life of a Symbol,” *Oriens* 17 (1964): 164–66. See also Dorothy G. Shepherd, “Banquet and Hunt in Medieval Islamic Iconography,” in *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner*, eds. Ursula E. McCracken, Lilian M.C. Randall, and Richard H. Randall Jr. (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1974), 79–92.

70 Ettinghausen and Hartner, “Conquering Lion,” 165. On the door of the Great Mosque in Diyarbakir (Turkey) there is a paradigmatic twelfth-century example of a lion conquering a bull that allegorically depicts the victory of the local Nisanid rulers over the Inalids; see Francisco Prado-Vilar, “Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus,” *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 24.



FIGURE 15 *Lion conquering a bull*. Al-Mughira Pyxis, ivory, 967–68  
 PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE. PHOTO: MARIE-LAN NGUYEN (2005), PUBLIC DOMAIN; [HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/PYXIS\\_OF\\_AL-MUGHIRA#/MEDIA/FILE:PYXID\\_AL\\_MUGHIRA\\_OA\\_4068.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyxis_of_al-Mughira#/media/File:Pyxid_al_Mughira_OA_4068.JPG)

symbols of a general nature with more specific messages relating to the succession of al-Hakam II.<sup>71</sup> Although we do not know when this pyxis came into

71 This iconography is largely interpreted as referring to princely images of power that attempt to be an encouragement and support to al-Mughira as a potential successor to the caliphal throne. See Sophie Makariou, “The Al-Mughira Pyxis and Spanish Umayyad Ivories. Aims and Tools of Power,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories*

Christian hands, or even if it could be admired at the courts of northern Spain in the twelfth century, we do know, however, that many other portable pieces were already in Christian hands at the time when the Girona cloister was being built.

One of the most well-known examples of works that came to the north is the Leire Casket, an outstanding example of royal iconography from the Umayyad court of al-Andalus.<sup>72</sup> It was made in 1004 for the favorite son of Almansur, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar, in commemoration of the conquest of León in the same year. The iconography of the lid and back of this large casket celebrates this military victory over the Christians in symbolic fashion and shows the triumphant lion attacking a gazelle in two medallions (Fig. 16). The images of the medallions on the front are related to the political circumstance in which ‘Amiri ordered the casket. In them he presents himself as the new ruler, in an attempt to replace the Umayyad caliph, Hisham II.<sup>73</sup> This explains why al-Muzaffar chose an unusually large casket that explicitly imitated the size of the silver casket made for his rival, Hisham II by his father, the caliph al-Hakam in 976. By chance this silver casket arrived in Girona in 1010 from a campaign carried out in Córdoba by Catalan mercenaries, who probably donated it to the cathedral, where it remains until this day. Even though the Catalans collaborated with the Muslim rulers of the Marca Hispanica against the armies of Córdoba, Hisham II’s casket surely became a symbol of Christian victory over Islam “transformed into a visual expression of the myth of bipolar opposition between Christians and Muslims,” in the words of Jerrilynn D. Dodds.<sup>74</sup>

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*from Syria to Spain*, eds. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 313–15, and Glaire D. Anderson, “A Mother’s Gift? Astrology and the Pyxis of al-Mughira,” *Journal of Medieval History* 42.1 (2016): 107–130, who both interpret it in astrological terms. For another reading of the pyxis as a hostile and deliberate warning to al-Mughira against seeking the caliphal throne, see Francisco Prado-Vilar, “Enclosed in Ivory: The Miseducation of al-Mughira,” *Journal of the David Collection* 2.1 (2005): 138–63.

72 According to Harris, “The Leire Casket,” 213–21, it may have been used to consecrate the crypt of the monastery of Leire in Navarra ca. 1057, although Cynthia Robinson has moved it back several decades. See Cynthia Robinson, *In Praise of Song. The Making of Courtly Culture in al-Andalus and Provence, AD 1005–1134* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 375–76.

73 See Cynthia Robinson’s brilliant interpretation, “Love in the Time of Fitna: ‘Courtliness’ and the Pamplona Casket,” in *Revisiting al-Andalus: Perspectives on the Material Culture of Islamic Iberia and Beyond*, eds. Glaire D. Anderson and Mariam. Rosser-Owen (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 99–112.

74 Dodds, “Islam, Christianity,” 32. See the silver casket in *The Art of Medieval Spain. a.d. 500–1200* (cat. 38a). Shalem indicates, in regard to this piece, that “almost every looted object was regarded by the Christians as the future symbol of the liberation of the Iberian Peninsula,” Avinoam Shalem, *Christianized Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasures of the Latin West* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 79–80.



FIGURE 16 *Lion conquering a gazelle and hunters*. Leire Casket, ivory, 1004  
PAMPLONA, MUSEO DE NAVARRA (PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA)

Many other examples from the caliphal and *taifa* periods include the figure of the lion assaulting animals such as gazelles or deer, not only on ivory objects but also on other supports such as textiles or stone basins.<sup>75</sup> We also know that Almohad power in twelfth-century Spain used the image of the lion on ceramics for political propaganda,<sup>76</sup> and that the identification of the prince with the lion was also wide-spread in Andalusian sources.<sup>77</sup> Peninsular Arabic chronicles such as that of Ibn Sahib al-Sala (1159–73) evoke the image of the lion devouring another animal in order to explain how the Christians would fall before the Muslim armies, in this case, the Almoravids.<sup>78</sup> Thus it seems plausible that, in specific contexts of combat between Christians and Muslims, this image would enable the Andalusian rulers to depict the political-religious conflict symbolically, as in the case of the Leire Casket. The presence of gazelles or deer instead of strong bulls might imply the idea of weak adversaries or emphasis on the superiority of the sovereign.

75 This is the case of the famous Basin of Xátiva, made in the eleventh century; see Milagros Guardia Pons, “Á propos de la Cuve de Xátiva,” *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxà* 4 (1996): 95–113. Another important example is the lesser-known ivory casket in the David Samling Collection in Copenhagen (Inv. nº 5/2002) decorated with a conquering lion mounted on a bull.

76 In this case it was against the Almoravids. See Manuel Ación Almansa, “Cerámica y propaganda en época almohade,” *Arqueología Medieval* 4 (1996): 183–92.

77 This can be seen, for example, in legal sources; Luis Maside Miranda, “Cuestiones relativas a las fuentes del derecho islámico,” *Anuario de Facultade de Dereito da Universidade de Coruña* 9 (2005), 524.

78 Ibn Sahib al-Sala, *Al-Mann Bil-Imama*, ed. Ambrosio Huici Miranda (Valencia: Textos Medievales, 1969), 275, p. 79.



FIGURE 17 *Figures of bowmen and lions conquering bulls.* Casket of St. Dominic of Silos. 1026, ivory and enamel panels, ca. 1150  
MUSEO DE BURGOS (PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA)

## 6 The Journey of Forms

Undoubtedly the most emblematic piece of Islamic art for the study of capital no. 4 in the Girona cloister is the reliquary casket of St. Dominic of Silos that was made for the rulers of Cuenca in 1026. It contains figures of bowmen as well as victorious lions. The front panel shows four archers on foot, one at each end, who aim their arrows at pairs of crossed lions. Behind them are four attacking lions mounted on bulls (Fig. 17). The warriors wield large bows and carry daggers at their waists. Avinoam Shalem proposed an interesting interpretation for these archers, whom he connects with an ancient legend going back to 711. It tells of some wall paintings in Toledo with archers on horseback who have the power to prefigure and provoke the Arab conquest of Spain. According to Shalem, the choice of this subject matter for the Silos casket can be explained by the aspirations of the rulers of Cuenca over Toledo, to which they wished to transfer their capital. By making a casket decorated with these archers, they would be evoking a Toledan legend that foretold their control over this capital,

in an attempt to associate their rule with the heroic days of the conquerors of al-Andalus.<sup>79</sup>

Even though the bowmen of this ivory are not on horseback, their military attire and bow (*hijazi*) do share certain similarities with the horsemen of the Girona capital. Nevertheless, it is the lions mounted on the bulls that are more similar to those on the Romanesque capital. These lions are biting the bull on the neck while standing on its hindquarters as in the ivory (Fig. 17). This is different from the al-Mughira Pyxis where the lion is biting the hindquarters of the animal (Fig. 15). On the other hand, if we observe the bulls on this pyxis and the ones on the Silos casket closely, we can see the three incised parallel lines on the animal's chest, a detail that coincides with the lines on the chest of the bulls and lions in the Girona cloister (Figs. 2 & 3). The lion's curly fur is also similar to the fur in those ivories and its pose is also rare in Romanesque sculpture: its head is twisted so that it faces forward while its body is viewed in profile. This posture is also typical in lion figures of Amirid and *taifa* reliefs, such as the conquering lions on the right-hand side of the Silos casket (Fig. 18).<sup>80</sup> Finally, the drilled holes bored inward that differentiates capital no. 4 from all the others (Figs. 9 & 10), as we indicated earlier, can be understood as an explicit reference to the Spanish Muslim ivories, whose decorative, geometric, and vegetal borders are frequently perforated with little holes (Fig. 15). This would explain why the Fontana d'Or capital that imitates the one in the cloister would maintain, and even exaggerate the presence of these holes as an inseparable part of the iconographic subject matter (Fig. 13).

All this evidence is sufficiently solid to sustain that this capital took its inspiration from a portable Andalusian piece, probably done in ivory. The very presence of what were clearly Muslim riders, as shown in numerous details recognizable to a spectator of that period would also enable us to create a specific interpretive context that would bring to the Christian spectator's mind the cultural and visual universe of his Andalusian neighbors. It is not known when or under what circumstances the Silos casket came into the monastery at Santo Domingo where it was used as a reliquary casket. In any case, it must have been before 1150 when the enamel panels depicting St. Dominic and the

79 Shalem, "From Royal Caskets," 29–35.

80 Another example is the eleventh-century marble basin of King Badis as noted by Rose Walker, "Sculptors in Medieval Spain following the 1085 Fall of Toledo," in Rosa Bacile and John McNeil (eds.), *Romanesque and the Mediterranean: Points of Contact across the Latin, Greek and Islamic Worlds c. 1000 to c. 1250* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2015), 268.



FIGURE 18 *Conquering lions with twisted heads*. Casket of St. Dominic of Silos. 1026, ivory and enamel panels, ca. 1150  
MUSEO DE BURGOS (PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA)

Lamb of God were added to the sides in order to “Christianize” the object.<sup>81</sup> Even at that time a legend existed that considered this casket to be booty of war obtained by Fernán González, one of the most prominent heroes of the so-called *Reconquista*.<sup>82</sup>

81 It is first mentioned in a 1440 inventory of the Benedictine abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos, Burgos; Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, 86–87. For the use of this casket as a trophy and a symbol of victory over Islam, see also Alejandro García Avilés, “Arqueta de Silos,” in *Sancho el Mayor y sus herederos: [Exposición]: el linaje que europeizó los reinos hispanos*, Isidro Bango Torviso, ed. (Pamplona: Fundación para la Conservación del Patrimonio Histórico de Navarra, 2006), 514–21, who has documented this work extensively.

82 José Ferrandis, *Marfiles árabes de Occidente*, vol. I (Madrid: Imprenta Estanislao Maestre, 1931), 51–52. Even though the Castilian count Fernán González (d. 970) died before the



Although it would be tempting to relate the Toledo legend with the horsemen of the Girona capital, as far as we know, it does not appear in peninsular Christian texts until the thirteenth century.<sup>83</sup> Nor is there any evidence to allow us to situate the Silos casket within the Catalan context of that time, for we do not know if the Catalan clergy or rulers implicated in the construction of the cloister ever visited the Burgos monastery. No other pieces have been preserved within the Catalan context that could point directly to a link between Islamic art and the cloister. There are, however, numerous indications that show a direct daily cultural and commercial interchange with al-Andalus.<sup>84</sup> Many pieces of metalwork, textiles, and Andalusian and Sicilian ivories from the eleventh to the thirteenth century are still in existence, and the five Andalusian caskets still preserved today in Girona Cathedral bear witness to this fact.<sup>85</sup>

Many scholars have studied the important role of portable artworks in the cross-cultural interchange between the medieval Islamic and Christian kingdoms in the Mediterranean.<sup>86</sup> The case of the Iberian Peninsula is special for several reasons: the obvious geographic proximity of the two peoples, the process of territorial confrontation that provoked the movement of frontiers, the changing of hands of territories, and the allocation of a particularly triumphalist significance to the appropriation of enemy possessions. Islamic objects were frequently exhibited in the cathedrals during ceremonies; they were converted into reliquaries and made sacred by their new ecclesiastical use or by the application of additional parts, as in the case of the Silos casket. Avinoam Shalem points out that, within the Hispanic environment, these objects were

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casket was made, his so-called donation became a part of his legend. The legend kept on growing until the thirteenth century when the famous epic poem that mythified his exploits against the "Moors" was composed. The relevance of his figure for the Benedictine community is due to the fact that he was the one who donated the land on which the monastery of Silos was built.

- 83 It appears in the chronicles of Lucas de Tuy and Jiménez de Rada. See J. Hernández, *La península imaginaria*, 194.
- 84 Coins from Córdoba dating from the beginning of the ninth century have been found with inscriptions in both Arabic and Latin; Eduard Carbonell, "Las influencias de la estética musulmana en el arte románico catalán," in *El Islam y Cataluña*, Exhibit Cat. (Barcelona: Lunberg, 1998), 209.
- 85 In addition to the aforementioned casket of Hisham II, there is another large metallic casket and three others done in ivory and painted: nos. 26, TCG 74, 76, and 79, in the Cathedral Museum. For evidence of Islamic testimony preserved in Catalonia, see Carbonell, "Las influencias," 201–7.
- 86 See, for example, Eva R. Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth century," *Art History* 24.1 (2001): 17–50.

understood mainly as war booty, independent of the reason why they had fallen into Christian hands in each case. The fact that they were considered trophies is supported by literary sources and chronicles.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, Mariam Rosser-Owen has recently defended a different point of view. She argues that it is not possible to speak of the “triumphalist” function of these objects, given that they arrived in Christian lands primarily through trade networks, diplomatic exchange, or even as objects that originally housed the relics of Christian saints brought from al-Andalus. Her interesting contribution about the way certain caskets could have come into the church treasures does not, however, affect the symbolic representations elaborated around them later on.<sup>88</sup> The transformation of the meaning of these objects was already brilliantly analyzed by Jerrilynn Dodds. According to Dodds, the Christians of the north already knew that these pieces constituted a manifestation of power for the Andalusian rulers, and the context of increasing ideological rivalries led the churchmen to transform them into emblems of territorial and religious domination.<sup>89</sup>

Francisco Prado-Vilar has interpreted the conceptual redefinition of these objects when they were incorporated into the treasures of Spanish churches in a different way. He thinks that geographic and cultural nearness led to an absence of an awareness of otherness and foreignness of these pieces and their forms. Prado-Vilar believes that the artistic vocabulary of “the enemy” was adapted almost without resistance and without any ideological implications, and that some Islamic subject matter passed into Christian art because these forms were not considered to be entirely alien to it.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that the conquering lions of the Andalusian ivories had a triumphalist and territorial meaning makes the process of the changing of hands of these objects

87 Shalem, *Islam Christianized*. For the idea of a trophy, see pp. 72–92, and the various ways of Christianizing objects, pp. 159–64.

88 Mariam Rosser-Owen, “Islamic Objects in Christian Contexts: Relic Translation and Models of Transfer in Medieval Iberia,” *Art in Translation* 7.1 (2015) 39–64. On the other hand, we should take into account the fact that, from the caliph period on, ivory production was strictly supervised and directed by the Andalusian rulers, who created specialized artistic workshops for the exclusive service of the royal family. For this reason, the output of these workshops had a very marked propagandistic nature and its sale was completely forbidden. Thus the only outlet for these works to arrive in the north was by way of diplomatic gifts or booty; Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz, “Talleres estatales de marfil y dirección honorífica en al-Ándalus en época del Califato. El caso de Durri al-Sagir,” *Anales de Historia del Arte* 22.2 (2012): 281–95.

89 This symbolism, however, is not incompatible with the existence of an underlying esthetic admiration for them. See Dodds, “Islam, Christianity,” 30–32.

90 Prado-Vilar, “Circular Visions of Fertility,” 31–33.

and the transmission of its iconographic themes all the more interesting.<sup>91</sup> Julie A. Harris has shown that the Leire Casket was used with clear ideological connotations by the monks at the Romanesque monastery of Leire where it served as a reliquary for the remains of Nunilo and Alodia, the Christian martyrs who were beheaded by the Andalusian authorities for refusing to convert to Islam.<sup>92</sup> Cynthia Robinson has analyzed the artistic and iconographic influence of this piece on an enamel casket from Limoges from the twelfth century. She has shown that the Christians deliberately imitated and appropriated motifs of Muslim art and that they were aware of the message contained in the original casket, which they paraphrased and transformed.<sup>93</sup> We should ask ourselves, then, if the symbolism of the conquering lion in Islamic art was also passed on to capital no. 4 of the cloister in Girona Cathedral.

## 7 The Journey of Messages

The transmission and use of the conquering lion on the Girona capital is not a novelty, for we have an enormously significant parallel in Norman Romanesque art: the famous Royal Mantle of Roger II of Sicily. The Norman king wished to celebrate the Christian occupation of the island and the defeat of Muslim power in the region by commissioning this silk mantle embroidered with a large rampant lion crushing a camel (Fig. 19). According to Ettinghauser and Hartner, Roger II appropriated an Islamic emblem of territorial domination, both in form and in message, in order to depict his conquests symbolically. While the lion would symbolize triumphant Norman power, the camel would represent Islam.<sup>94</sup> Although this interpretation is commonly accepted, the motif of the conquering lion as exclusive of Islam in form and message has been questioned.

We should also point out that there was a significant relationship between Sicily and the Catalan counties. From the eleventh century on many Islamic textiles from Palermo arrived in Catalonia.<sup>95</sup> This relationship continued after the island came under Norman domination because they were united by the

91 See Inés Monteiro, "Símbolos de poder en el arte peninsular de los siglos X a XII: transferencias artísticas e ideológicas entre al-Andalus y los reinos cristianos," in *El Islam, presente de un pasado medieval. Semana de Estudios Medievales 28. 2017*. Nájera. Coord. Esther López Ojeda (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2018), 287–324.

92 Harris, "The Leire Casket in Context," 213–21.

93 Robinson, *In Praise of Song*, 271, 371.

94 Ettinghausen and Hartner, "The Conquering Lion," 161–71.

95 Carbonell, "Las influencias de la estética," 201–4.



FIGURE 19 *Two lions conquering bulls*. Gold embroidery and pearls on a silk ground made in Palermo, 1133–34

KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM IN VIENNA (PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN;  
[HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ROGER\\_II\\_OF\\_SICILY#/MEDIA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_II_of_Sicily#/media/File:Weltliche_Schatzkammer_Wienc.jpg)  
 /FILE:WELTLICHE\_SCHATZKAMMER\_WIENC.JPG)

common threat of Majorca to their maritime routes. In 1128, Roger II ceded fifteen ships *in servitium Dei* to the Count of Barcelona for a coastal attack on the Ebro valley.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the two sovereigns were closely related to each other: Roger II was the uncle of Ramón Berenguer, and his great-granddaughter, Princess Constance (the daughter of Alfonso II of Aragon), later married the new king of Sicily, Frederick II Hohenstaufen, in 1209. They were crowned emperor and empress consort of the Holy Roman Empire in a ceremony in which Frederick wore the Mantle of Roger II.<sup>97</sup>

The lion also has an important tradition in Christian art, and the image of another beast being attacked is also found on early Roman sarcophagi.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the lion was a significant symbol for the Norman monarchs,

96 David Abulafia, “The Norman Kingdom of Africa and the Norman Expeditions to Majorca and the Muslim Mediterranean,” in *Anglo-Norman Studies 7 Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Suffolk: Boydell, 1984), 32.

97 Marta Jaro, “The Vestments and Insignia of Norman-Hohenstaufen Origin in the Schatzkammer in Vienna: Scientific Analysis of Metal Threads and Dye-stuffs,” in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane, e Trame di Seta del Palazzo Reale di Palermo* vol. 1, Exhibit. Cat. (Catania: Maimone, 2006), 600.

98 Rotraud Bauer identified the subject and meaning of the mantle as a part of Western Christian tradition; “The Mantle of Roger II,” in *Nobiles Officinae*, vol. 1, 576–79. As for its workmanship, it may be Sicilian-Arab or Norman. See Isabelle Dolezalek, “Fashionable Form, and Tailor-made Message: Transcultural Approaches to Arabic Script on the Royal Norman Mantle and Alb,” *The Medieval History Journal* 15 (2012): 243–68.



FIGURE 20 *Lion devouring human figures representing the sinner's punishment, end of the twelfth century. Relief on the west façade of San Martín, (church in) Artaiz, Navarre*  
 PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA

independent of the Islamic iconographic theme.<sup>99</sup> The depiction of domination by way of the animal metaphor is also a widely extended subject in the Mediterranean. According to Hoffman, this motif became part of an intercultural language common to Muslims and Christians alike in the Mediterranean, thanks precisely to the portability of the objects that contained it.<sup>100</sup>

These nuances also hold true for the Girona capital. The lion is one of the animals most depicted in Romanesque art, where it is identified with Christ as well as with the devil.<sup>101</sup> We often find the motif of the lion devouring and crushing a human figure that symbolizes the sinner and his

99 Lucia Traviani, "Aspects of Sicilian Norman Copper Coinage in the Twelfth Century," *Numismatic Chronicle* 151 (1991): 159–74.

100 Hoffman speaks of "a broader cultural mechanism through which objects and images extended beyond themselves, both geographically and semantically." "Pathways of Portability," 21–22, 29.

101 The lion appears in a demonic sense in the frequent depictions of Samson and Daniel, while it is identified with Christ in places such as the famous tympanum of San Pedro de Jaca. On this extensive subject see Peter Bloch, "Löwe," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bandmann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1971) 3, 112–19; François Amy de la Bretèque, "Le motif du lion dans l'art et la littérature du Moyen-Âge: recherche sur la mentalité et la civilisation" (Ph.D. diss., Université de la Sorbonne, Paris III, 1986); Robert Favreau, "Le thème iconographique du lion dans les inscriptions médiévales," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 135 (1991), 613–36.

punishment (Fig. 20).<sup>102</sup> Although it would be impossible to analyze the numerous examples of the appearance of the lion in Romanesque art for lack of space, we have outlined here the evidence for the figurative provenance of the Girona capital in Andalusian art. But, like the rest of the iconographic program of the cloister, the interpretation of its significance depends on the cultural values and Christian mentality of the moment. As in the Norman case, the lion becomes a key symbol of royal power in the peninsular kingdoms that were expanding in detriment to al-Andalus. In 1135 Alfonso VII of León and Castile ordered a lion inscribed on his coins after he had himself crowned *imperator*, and introduced it later on in Aragonese heraldry.<sup>103</sup> Spanish chronicles of the conquest repeatedly refer to the image of the Christian king on the battle field as a “hungry lion” devouring his prey.<sup>104</sup> The *Chansons de geste* also describe the Christian hero in this way. Roland is “more haughty than a lion” in his defense of Christianity, and in the Spanish epic poems, Count Fernán González is described as “a brave lion” and as “a hungry lion” in the face of the infidels.<sup>105</sup>

Starting from these texts, we can interpret the depiction of the lion of the Girona cloister in the sense of territorial domination, as a victorious emblem. Here the lion may refer to the conquests carried out in Catalonia and its surrounding area, while the defeated enemies are depicted in the figure of the bull. It is interesting to note that the figure of the conquering lion had already appeared on the façade of the monastery of Santa María de Ripoll, patronized by Ramón Berenguer IV around 1150–60. The iconographic program of this portal has been interpreted in a political-religious sense as propaganda against

102 A reading of the inscriptions on the tympanum of San Pedro de Jaca has revealed the interpretation of these figures; Favreau, “Le theme iconographique,” 630.

103 The lion was first introduced into Hispanic heraldry in the coat of arms of the kingdom of León by Alfonso VII when he gave himself the title of emperor. When Alfonso I of Aragon died in 1134, Alfonso VII took over Saragossa and, in turn, incorporated the lion into the coat of arms of that city; Luis Valero de Bernabé y Vicente, *Simbología y diseño de la heráldica gentilicia galaica* (Madrid: Hidalguía, 2003), 158.

104 The *Historia Silense* (ca. 1118) speaks of Fernando I in his Toledo campaigns as a “hungry lion” when he sees a large flock of defenseless sheep grazing in an open field. *Historia Silense*, ed. Justo Pérez de Urbel and Atilano González (Madrid: CSIC, 1959), 195–97. Archbishop Bernardo of Toledo is described as a “hungry lion” fighting against the Muslims in the *Primera crónica general de España* (end of the thirteenth century). For this and other similar references in the Spanish chronicles, see Barkai, *Cristianos y musulmanes*, 234.

105 Ca. 1170. *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Cesare Segre, trad. Madeleine Tyssens (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 83; “Plus se fait fiers que léon ni leupart” (line 111). And middle of the thirteenth century, *Poema de Fernán González*, 57, 134; “león bravo” (line 285b) and “león fambryento” (line 490a).



FIGURE 21 *Conquering lion and centaur with a bow.* Façade of Santa María de Ripoll, right side. ca. 1150–60  
PHOTO: INÉS MONTEIRA

Islam.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, no coherent interpretation has been offered for the figures in the lower right-hand section below the portrait of a bishop and a soldier, where we find the conquering lion together with a centaur bowman (fig. 21).<sup>107</sup> Thus, it is very plausible that these motifs already had a victorious meaning in Catalan sculpture from the second third of the twelfth century. Perhaps further investigation would enable us to incorporate their analysis into the overall discourse of the Ripoll program, in accordance with the evidences presented here.

Returning to capital no. 4, the image of the triumphant lion could also refer to the legend of the mythical conquest of Girona by Charlemagne and the successive foundation of the cathedral, given that the legend is very

106 Maria Luisa Melero Moneo, “La propagande político-religieuse du programme iconographique de la façade de Sainte-Marie de Ripoll,” *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 46 (n° 182) (2003): 135–57.

107 On the representation of Muslims as centaurs pulling-back a bow in some Romanesque case studies see Inés Monteiro, “Escenas de lucha contra el Islam en la iconografía románica: el centauro arquero. Su estudio a través de los cantares de gesta,” *Codex Aquilarense* 22 (2006): 146–171.

much present in various parts of the building, as we have seen. The victorious symbolism of the lion may have spread to the capital as a whole, as confirmed by the horsemen. In spite of the fact that these archers do not appear explicitly to be suffering a defeat, they do have very clear pejorative connotations as enemies—such as the use of the bow and the Black African features—within the interpretive keys of Romanesque sculpture and Latin sources, as we have seen above.

## 8 Conclusion

The fact that these images are repeated in pairs indicates their symbolic nature, for they act as independent emblems whose meaning complement each other. I believe that the principal error in interpreting this capital rests on its reading in a linear narrative sense, as if it were a historiated relief in which the archers aim their arrows at the lions in order to comprise a hunting scene. But the figures on each face of the capital do not interact with each other; the only interaction is the message they transmit. While the Muslim archer defines the interpretative context of the capital, the conquering lion provides the key to the reading of the ensemble as a whole. The strongly metaphoric nature of this subject, both in art and in the texts of the period—either Christian or Muslim—leads us to read the two motifs in a figurative, not a literal sense. Both images had a great power of suggestion for the audience of the time, and they acted as semantic units that added to and reinforced each other mutually in order to form a joint message. The fact that those subjects are intertwined and appear on both sides of the capital offers a cadence of circular reading, forcing the spectator to read repeatedly “Muslim enemy” and “conquest,” no matter from what side the capital is viewed.

The archers in attack position are seen as formidable adversaries, and for that reason it is necessary to have the figure of the vanquished bull, also a symbol of power, adjacent to them. On the other hand, the lion symbolizes the Christian monarch on the battlefield. Nor should we discount here its traditional identification with Christ, since the war was constantly being consecrated by the authorities of the time and interpreted in terms of the struggle between Good and Evil.<sup>108</sup>

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108 See Flori, *La guerra santa*. For the perception of Muslims, see the excellent work by Tolan, *Saracens*. On the militarization of the Church, see also K.A. Smith, “Saints in Shining Armour,” 572–602.



It also seems that this use of the lion as a victorious symbol against Islam in Christian art was not used in a casual or marginal manner by Roger II in Sicily. While the message of the Girona capital had its origin in the cultural and ideological milieu of the Christians, its forms revert back to the artistic universe of the Muslims. It is fascinating to think that the clerics who thought up the idea for this capital were probably aware of the meaning of the conquering lion as an emblem of power in the art of al-Andalus. If this is true, then we are in the presence of what Hoffman termed “the reversal in the use of the motif that, in fact, goes beyond appropriation and demonstrates an act of expropriation.”<sup>109</sup> The conscious use of this motif by inverting its meaning would have been a perfect way to symbolize in visual terms the subversion of the political situation in a Christian occupied region.

In sum, capital no. 4 in the cloister of the cathedral of Santa María, Girona, offers an invaluable testimony on the vitality of intercultural artistic exchange in the Iberian Peninsula. It also illustrates the fact that this exchange was not neutralized, but rather enhanced, by territorial and ideological confrontation.

We are dealing here with a significant case because of the accompanying circumstances that it presents within a broad spectrum of artistic manifestations of the time, beginning with the Beatus manuscripts, passing through Andalusian ivories, and ending with Siculo-Norman art. It is not a question of whether or not the ideologues of the iconographic program of the cloister sought deliberately to establish the relationship between this capital and all the other works of art we have mentioned. The reason why this piece is so exceptional is because of its ability to conserve what was lost in other places, by preserving traces of a visual culture that was very wide spread in its time. As historians, we tend to classify images either by their support (monumental sculpture, manuscripts, ivories, or textiles) or by their cultural provenance (Christian or Muslim). In cases like these, however, those categories mask the existence of a visual language of the Mediterranean environment, whose efficacy lies precisely in its being comprehensible for both communities.

### Acknowledgements

This article is based upon work from the Research Project *Artistic dialogue between Al-Andalus and the Iberian Christian kingdoms*, ANMARC, IE University,

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109 In relation to Norman cases, see Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability,” 29–30. For the idea of reversal in the use of Islamic forms, see also Dodds, “Islam, Christianity,” 27–37.

MR: Inés Monteiro; and from the *COST ACTION IS-LE (CA 18129)*, MR: Antonio Urquizar.

I should like to acknowledge the invaluable advice and collaboration of colleagues who helped in bringing this article to fruition. Avinoam Shalem and Maribel Fierro supplied very useful bibliographic orientations. Scholars such as Marc Sureda and Immaculada Lorés were very generous in answering my questions by email. Jerrilynn D. Dodds's careful reading and wise suggestions were also of enormous help. Thanks to Juan Antonio Olañeta who located the image of a capital in Tarragona for my research and put me in touch with Baldiri Barat ([www.monestirs.cat](http://www.monestirs.cat)). I am also in debt to the Cabildo of Girona Cathedral for kindly facilitating my photographic work in situ. Thanks also to Selma Margaretten for her meticulous translation of this article. Finally, I am very grateful to the outside readers whose comments were especially pertinent and instrumental in bringing this article to its conclusion.