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## THE CASKET OF HISHAM AND ITS EPIGRAPHY

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### Resumen

La arqueta andalusí que se conserva en la Catedral de Girona es una pieza sin igual de la platería califal cordobesa; es única tanto por su información histórica como por su valor artístico. Mandada hacer por al-Ḥakam II para obsequiar a su hijo, el futuro califa Hišām II, se fecha en 976 o poco antes. Este artículo ofrece por primera vez la lectura completa del epígrafe de la dedicatoria que la decora exteriormente. Se hace un amplio recorrido historiográfico de los trabajos que han tratado de ella. Se comentan los nombres de los personajes mencionados en la inscripción exterior y en la del cierre, la fecha de realización y su posible función. Se plantean algunos interrogantes que suscita su estudio y que quedan por investigar, como su aparición en Girona en el s. XIX sin que haya noticias sobre su anterior paradero.

**Palabras clave:** Platería califal, s. X, al-Ḥakam II, epigrafía árabe, arqueta de Hišām, Girona.

### Abstract

The casket now in the Museum of the Cathedral of Girona is an unparalleled piece of silversmithing from the Caliphate of Cordoba. It is a unique object both because of the historical information it provides and due to its artistic value. It was commissioned by al-Ḥakam II as a gift for his son, the future Caliph Hisham II, and it can be dated to 976 or a little earlier. This essay offers for the first time the complete reading of its external dedicatory inscription, and it also includes an extensive historiographic review of the studies devoted to it. The names mentioned in the casket inscriptions are then discussed, as well as the date of its production and its possible use. The author raises some of the questions suggested by this object that need to be further researched, as its appearance in Girona in the 19<sup>th</sup> century without evidence about its provenance.

**Key Words:** Silversmithing, Caliphate, 10<sup>th</sup> c., al-Ḥakam II, Arabic epigraphy, casket of Hisham, Girona.

The Andalusian casket preserved in the Museum of the Cathedral of Girona is an outstanding product of the workshops of the Caliphate of Cordoba. It responded to the will of Caliph al-Ḥakam II to gift his son, the future Caliph Hisham II, perhaps on the occasion of naming him heir. Despite the time elapsed, it is still in perfect condition and represents an unparalleled example of the silversmithing of Umayyad Cordoba in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig.1. Front of the casket of Hišām II. Cathedral of Girona.

<http://blog.costabravas.fr/musee-tresor-cathedrale-gerone/>

(Consulted 01/04/2015)

It is a wooden box plated with embossed, nielloed, and gilded silver plates with vegetal decoration. It is quite large: 27 cm in height—14 cm of which correspond to the box and 13 to the lid—38.5-39 cm in width, and 23-23.5 cm in depth. The lower edge of the lid bears a 3 cm high epigraphic band on its four sides, with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script (*alif* height: 2 cm). The letters are inlaid with niello and highlighted in black on a light background.

At the beginning of this work, my only purpose was to offer a thorough reading of the inscription, which for too long was published incomplete or wrongly transcribed. Then I added some thoughts and observations that have emerged throughout the research process. I will say in advance that, in my view, the main conclusion to be drawn from the published studies dealing with the casket is that there is a need for a serious, calm, and in-depth analysis resulting from the collaboration between specialists in all pertinent disciplines.

A good understanding of Arabic and the Arabic sources for the medieval history of al-Andalus would lead to a correct reading of the legends engraved on the piece and yield more accurate data about the characters mentioned in it. Modern techniques should also be used to analyse

the composition of metals, niello, and welds, the way in which each of the parts and elements it comprises was crafted—silver plates, ironwork, lock, handle—and all the aspects of its artisanal production.

On the basis of archival sources, the history of the Cathedral of Girona—and, particularly, of its stonework, elements (altar, altarpiece, relics, the objects in its treasure, etc.), reforms, and repairs—could document and explain, if not all, some of the stages of the journey of this casket from Cordoba to its present location.

### I. THE MYSTERIOUS APPEARANCE OF THE CASKET

The existence of this casket has been known since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was pointed out by Schulcz: “La reliquaire posé sur la console de la droite est un magnifique ouvrage d’art, bosselé sur or et d’origine arabe” (SCHULCZ 1869: 10).

Fidel Fita, Enrique Girbal, and Eduardo Saavedra took an interest in the casket; in fact, the first mention of its inscription that I know of is the one by Fita (FITA 1873: 66 note 1; 1874: 177 note 4) who, while editing the 1470 inventory of the treasury of the Cathedral, listed among the objects of Arab origin that did not appear in the catalogue “dos relicaris del altar major; un d’ells ab inscripció cúfica, atanyent al califa Alhakem II Almostansir Bil-láh.” A few years later, Girbal wrote a first article about the casket in which he offered the transcription of the epigraph according to Fita and Saavedra (GIRBAL 1877: 332). Girbal, who was the first director of the Museum of Girona and a correspondent of the Spanish Royal Academy of History, strove to make the casket known in successive publications and to disseminate what was written about it (GIRBAL 1886, 1890, 1893).

On the occasion of the historical-European Exhibition of Madrid (1892-1893), where the casket had a preeminent role, it was closely examined by Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos (RÍOS 1892), Francisco Codera, and Antonio Vives, who devoted an excellent study to it (VIVES 1893). The casket was also displayed at the International Exhibition of Barcelona (GÓMEZ MORENO 1929: 68), and since then it has been included in almost every work on Andalusian art, and has been constantly travelling and being exhibited, although it is regrettable that this has not resulted in a better understanding of the piece. The excellent replica of the casket made by silversmiths Fernando Marmolejo and Rafael Rubio, exhibited in the Archaeological Site of Madinat al-Zahra, and commissioned for the opening of its Museum (2009) did not foster further studies either.

It is not known how or when the casket arrived in Girona. No data have been published about it, and that gave wings to the imagination: many authors have suggested that it arrive among the spoils of war, brought by the Catalans who ransacked the Andalusian capital at the end of

the Caliphate. This hypothesis, which has no documentary basis for now, is more plausible than others that have been put forward, some of them impossible.<sup>1</sup> However, all are pure speculation, and none of them explains where it was from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it appeared as if by magic on top of the altarpiece of the cathedral. No one seemed to have ever noticed it before, neither there nor elsewhere in the building. Rightly, Girbal is surprised to find that:

Los antiguos inventarios del tesoro de esta Santa Iglesia nada dicen respecto de tan interesante particular, y aún ni siquiera se comprende en ellos nuestra arqueta-arábica. Los historiadores eclesiásticos, que han enseñado por otra parte hasta con nimios detalles otras joyas litúrgicas de nuestra Catedral, guardan asimismo un completo silencio sobre el asunto, ya sea porque les pasara desapercibida la naturaleza del monumento, o ya porque desconocieron por completo su valor histórico-artístico.

[The old inventories of the treasure of this Holy Church say nothing regarding this interesting particular, and our Moorish casket is not even listed in them. Church historians, who in contrast have showed even the minute details of the other liturgical jewels of our Cathedral, also remain completely silent on the matter, either because the nature of the monument went unnoticed or because they completely ignored its historical and artistic value] (GIRBAL 1877: 335).

No one even raised the possibility that it had been elsewhere. Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos noted that the piece was well known both through drawings and photographic reproductions and through its display at the 1892 Exhibition in Madrid. Moreover, he was also surprised that “ni el docto Villanueva, ni el diligente P. La Canal, ni Piferrer, ni Girbal mismo” [neither the learned Villanueva, nor the diligent P. La Canal, Piferrer, or Girbal himself] mentioned it (RÍOS 1915: 185).

The fact that Villanueva (d. 1824) did not mention it is not entirely accurate. In his *Viaje literario* (VILLANUEVA 1850, XII: 184), he claims: “También hay en las extremidades [del retablo] dos arquillas, que sin duda serán de reliquias” [On both ends (of the altarpiece) there are also two caskets, which must undoubtedly contain relics]. If these are the same that Schulcz saw in 1869, Villanueva’s description would document at least forty years before the presence of the casket already installed in one of the brackets or false ledges of the main altarpiece.

Indeed, I have not found any reference to the casket in the volume of *España Sagrada* dealing with Girona (LA CANAL 1832, XLV: 9). Piferrer did not mention it either: “Aunque desde el pie del presbiterio parece que este altar [se refiere al retablo] remata en tres cruces, que por cierto le dan mucha gracia, sin embargo las pasamos por alto porque no forman parte de él, y son las que sirven para las funciones de la iglesia” [Although looking from the foot of the presbytery, it seems that this altar (the altarpiece) is topped by three crosses, which certainly make it graceful but we will not discuss because they do not belong to it, and are used for church functions]

<sup>1</sup> According to ROURA 1988: 42, the casket was a gift from al-Ḥakam II to Gotmar, bishop of Girona, with the aim of reciprocating the copy of the Chronicle of the Frankish kings that the latter had brought with him during his journey to Cordoba in 940. However, the casket was not manufactured until 976. On this embassy, see BRAMON 2000: 294, and note 120.

(PIFERRER 1884, II: 82 note 1). Girbal himself—who since 1877 devoted several articles to the casket because he deemed it especially interesting—in his *Guia-cicerone* (GIRBAL 1866: 63-64) shows no indication of having seen it on the altarpiece. The casket does not appear either in the descriptions of the cathedral and its wonders made by the travellers from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Moreno studied (MORENO 2004); the travellers and men of letters analysed by Aragó did not mention it either (ARAGÓ 2004), and none of the national or foreign travelling women who visited Girona in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to have seen the casket (RIBOT 2014). However, we know that it was there.

These silences and blind spots—which will become fully fledged hallucinations in later descriptions of the altarpiece until its disappearance in 1808—should not surprise us. In fact, almost all the authors dealing with the cathedral copy or summarize earlier texts, particularly the highly detailed descriptions by Roig, without checking their validity, as did PONZ (1788: 80). ROIG (1678: 211-213) did not report the presence of a casket at the top of the altarpiece, although he did describe the three gilded silver crosses also mentioned by other authors.

Who came up with the idea of adding the ledges? They had to be ordered, paid for, and mounted on the altarpiece, a fact that might be recorded in the agreements of the council of canons. In a similar way, their removal was decided, already in present times, because they were not part of the 14th-century work, and the caskets were transferred to the Treasury-Museum. In April 2011, the chapel of the presbytery was consecrated (for the fourth time) as the culmination of a process of restoration and renovation of spaces. The transfer of part of its components to the Museum and the new placement of liturgical furniture and of the elements associated to the altar have not been without controversy, which has left its trace in the documents (ESPAÑOL 2011; FREIXAS 2011a, 2011b).

Among other changes, a tabernacle was created in the centre of the altarpiece. Although I do not know on what basis, Pla claims that:

Las ménsulas fueron colocadas poco después de 1579; en ellas figuraban el ‘bueno y el mal Ladrón’ (contiguos a la Cruz del Redentor) que fueron quitados de su lugar primitivo al poner el Sagrario. Tal vez fuera algo posterior la colocación de las tres cruces y de los ‘Juratorios’, que figuraban como remate del retablo.

[The brackets were placed shortly after 1579; they held the Penitent and the impenitent Thief (adjacent to the Cross of the Redeemer) which were removed from their original place when the Tabernacle was added. The three crosses and the *Juratorio*’ at the top of the altarpiece were probably somewhat later additions] (PLA 1943: 152, note)

Monsalvatje already maintained that “en el siglo XV se añadieron al retablo las dos repisas ó consolas laterales, sustentoras de dos preciosas arquillas, una de ellas árabe” [in the 15<sup>th</sup> century two ledges or side consoles were added to the altarpiece to hold two beautiful caskets, one of them Moorish] (MONSALVATJE 1908: 174).

The work of Francesca Español (ESPAÑOL 2005) that focuses on the altar, the altarpiece, and the canopy does not provide any reference that helps pinpoint the exact moment when the two caskets were added to the altarpiece. What happened to the scenes of thieves? When was it decided to place the caskets on the brackets?

In the drawings of the Austrian architect Ferencz Schulcz (SCHULCZ 1869: Fig. I and II) two easily recognizable caskets appear on two ledges at the ends of the upper part of the altarpiece (fig. 2): on the right, we find the casket we are discussing; on the left, there is an ivory casket also preserved in the same museum (TCG no. 73). In contrast, Street illustrated his description of the cathedral of Girona with a drawing of the altarpiece that does not depict the brackets, the caskets, the crosses, or the *juratorios* (STREET 1865: 327).

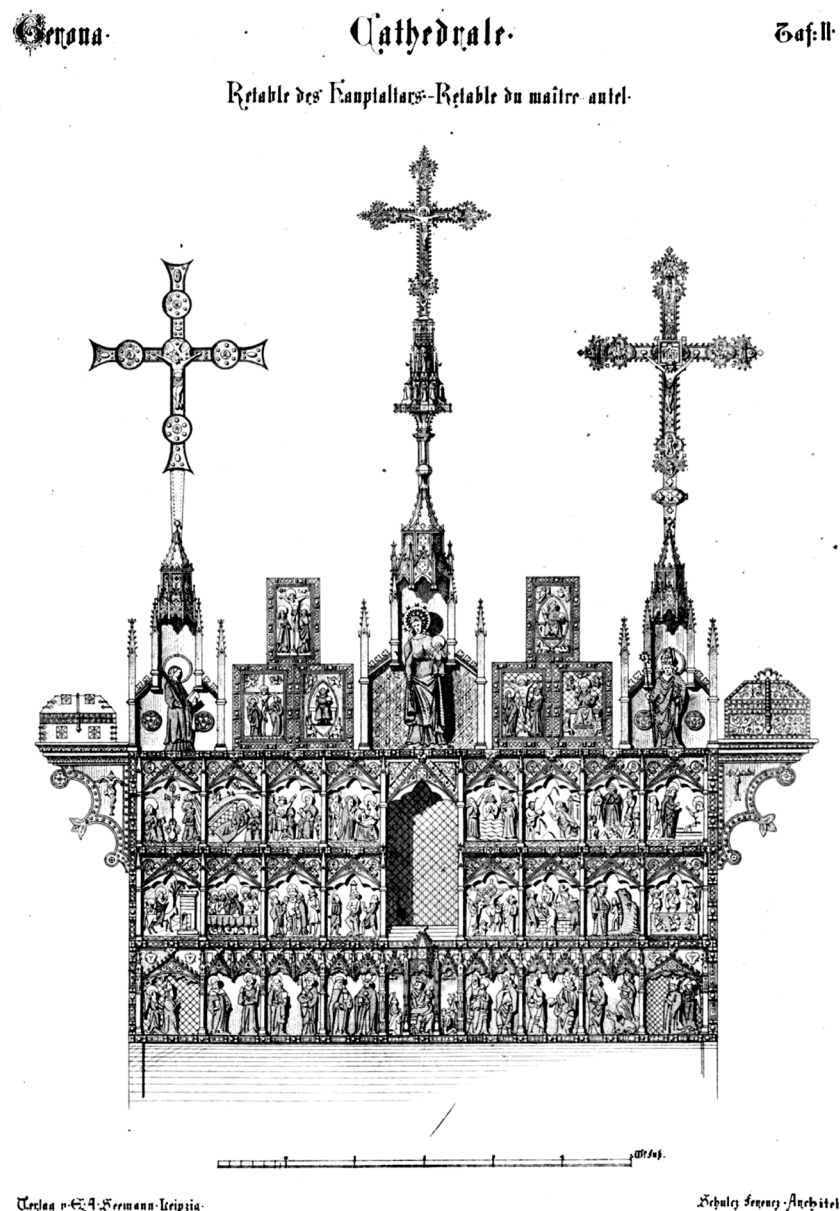


Fig. 2. Position of the casket in the altarpiece around 1869. F. SCHULCZ, Taf. II.

A picture taken in July 1936 by Durán (PLA 1943: 151; SUBÍAS 1953: Plate IX) shows all the additions that had been piled up on the altarpiece, but the two caskets on the ledges are not the ones that could be seen in the 1869 drawing; the silver and the ivory casket had been removed.

The fact is that, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “aparece velada en sombras y visible apenas la Arqueta arábiga” [the Moorish casket appeared veiled in shadows, and barely visible] (RÍOS 1915: 185) on the side of the altarpiece. Did it always belong to the Treasury of the Cathedral? Why then is it not mentioned in the inventories? Or is it that we have not been able to recognize it? Was it somewhere else until an unspecified date? Where? Who had it? When and how was it transferred to the cathedral? While no further inquiries are carried out in the archives, we only know the last two stages of its journey from Cordoba; 200 years in which it was first on the altarpiece and then in the Museum.

## II. EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF THE CASKET’S INSCRIPTIONS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As I have already mentioned, the casket bears an inscription that runs along the bottom edge of the lid on all four sides. Its Arabic text and / or translation appear in multiple publications and have given rise to various commentaries on the history, age, and biographies of Caliph al-Ḥakam II of Cordoba, and his son Hisham, both mentioned in the epigraph. In addition to this commemorative, public, and external sign, the casket also has a little hidden legend in the inner part of the lock, as a label. Not all the interpretations that have been published are the original work of scholars who know Arabic; many are copies dependent on previous editions made by others. I will present below only some of the readings that have been edited, focusing on those with differences between them and those that contribute new developments.

### 1. First attempt at reading the inscription: Juden, son of Bozla

The first edition of the text of the casket I know of is the one by Eduardo Saavedra and Fidel Fita that was included in the Girbal’s article (GIRBAL 1877: 332). These scholars read:

*bi-smi-llāh. Baraka min Allāh wa-yumn wa-sa’āda wa-surūr dāyīm / li-’abd Allāh al-Ḥakam amīr al-mu’minīn / al-Mustanşir bi-llāh. Mimmā amara bi-’amali-hi li-Abī-l-Walīd Hişām walī ’ahd al-muslimīn. Namma ’alā yaday Ḥwḍn bn Bṭlh.*

Apart from using the form *dāyīm* instead of *dā’im*, the small misprint *namma* for *tamma*, and the invented name they read at the end of the epigraph, this edition is almost correct. Their version does not use a scientific system of transcription, instead of the current *musulmanes* [Muslim] they use *muslimes* [Moslem], and they write *Alá* in place of translating *Allāh* as God. This first attempt is somewhat confusing at various points and it is incorrect at the end but it was enough

to recognize the Umayyad caliphs al-Ḥakam II and Hisham II and to propose a timeline for the casket. They translated:

En el nombre de Alá. Bendición de Alá y prosperidad y ventura y alegría perpetua / al siervo de Alá Alhakem, Emir de los creyentes, / Almostanser Bil-láh, por cuanto mandó que hiciese obrar [esta arquilla] Abulvalid Hixem, heredero del trono de los musulimes. Llevóse a cabo por manos de Júden, hijo de Bozla.

[In the name of Allāh. Blessing of Allah and eternal prosperity, and joy, and happiness / to the servant of Allāh, Alhakem, Emir of believers, / Almostanser Bil-lāh, because Abulvalid Hishem, heir to the throne of the Moslems, had [this casket] made. It was carried out by Juden, son of Bozla] (GIRBAL 1877: 332).

Riaño (RIAÑO 1879: 13 *It was finished by the hands of Hudzen Ibn Bothla*) and Davillier (DAVILLIER 1879a: 17-18) follow the previous interpretation, and Davillier attributed the casket to *Juden, fils de Bozla*.

Although he admitted to having used the work of Fita and Saavedra, Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos (RÍOS 1892: 510) modified it to read *amara ya 'malu-hu* instead of *amara bi-'amali-hi* going against grammar (as he did in all the texts he edited). However, his translation, improves the previous one in several ways: “[Esto es] de lo que mandó se hiciese para Abú-l-Gualid Hixém” [(This is) what was commissioned for Abū-l-Wualid Hishem] and “bajo la dirección de...” [under the direction of...]. The name *Judzen-ben-Botslāh* is transcribed here with an *h* at the end. Although he is not explicitly quoted in the catalogue of the historical-European Exhibition, the transcription and translation of the Arabic epigraphs included there (MADRID 1893: Room VIII n. 85) give away the hand of Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos, for they are identical to those in his article of 1892. However, a misprint has crept into the translation: “bajo la dirección de Judzén ben-Botslán,” ending with an *n* instead of an *h*.

## 2. The correct transcription: *Ŷawḍar*

Antonio Vives was aware of the reading *Hudzen ben Botsla* suggested by Saavedra, Fita, Riaño, and Ríos, but he was not weighed down by it, and read and identified correctly the name of the character under whose direction this work of art was made. As he himself recounts:

Al llegar la arqueta a la Exposición, fue detenidamente estudiada por los señores antes citados y D. Francisco Codera, estudio que dio por resultado la lectura de Djaudar en lugar de Hudzen, dejando el apellido sin leer por la dificultad casi insuperable de puntuar las cuatro letras de que se compone. Una vez leído correctamente el nombre de Djaudar, resultó ser el de un eunuco, personaje de gran categoría en el palacio de Alháquem, que según Dozy<sup>2</sup> llevaba el título de gran [h]alconero, y que tenía gran influencia en palacio.

[When the casket arrived to the Exhibition, it was carefully studied by the aforementioned gentlemen and D. Francisco Codera; this study resulted in the reading Djaudar instead of Hudzen,

<sup>2</sup> He refers to “Dozy, R.: *Historia de los musulmanes españoles*, III: 165.” See DOZY 1982, III: 117.



leaving the surname unread due to the almost insurmountable difficulty of punctuating its four letters. Once properly read, the name Djaudar turned out to be that of a eunuch, a character of great category in the palace of Alhaquem who, according to Dozy, bore the title of grand falconer, and had great influence]

Thus, the new translation read: “Se terminó bajo la dirección de Djaudar, hijo de ...?” [It was finished under the direction of *Ŷawḍar*, son of...?] (VIVES, 1893: 99).

Furthermore, in this brief work, Vives provides for the first time a drawing and reading of the inner side of the lockplate: *'amal Badr wa-Ṭarīf 'abīdi-hi* “Obra de Bedr y Tarif sus siervos” [The work of Bedr and Tarif, his servants], and wonders “¿de Alháquem?” [of Alhāquem] (VIVES 1893: 99-100). Williams endorsed the content of Vives’s article in English (WILLIAMS 1908, I: 46-47).

In his classic work on the Arabic inscriptions of our country, Lévi-Provençal edited the text of the casket from Riaño, Migeon, Williams, and Ríos (RÍOS 1915) and, in a footnote, he referred to his headstone no. 16, which also showed the name *Ĝawḍar* (LÉVI-PROVENÇAL 1931: 185). Since this was a well-identified character, Lévi-Provençal was aware that the *nasab* [patronymic] proposed by the previous editions was incorrect. He then replaced it arbitrarily with a word of similar length (*fatā-hu*), which was historically consistent but did not respect the flow of the text seen in the casket. He translated: “(*Cela*) fut terminé sous la direction de *Ĝawḍar*, son officier (?)” Gómez Moreno claims that it was commissioned by al-Ḥakam II «por conducto de su oficial Gaudar» [through his officer Gaudar] (GÓMEZ MORENO 1951: 337) in a translation and transcription that betray Lévi-Provençal’s work.

The catalogue entry written by Manuel Casamar about this piece for the exhibition of Granada and New York (AL-ANDALUS 1992: 208-209) circumvents the problem of the end of the inscription with an ellipsis; he refrains from reading suggestions, and removes the missing word from the translation, although his version “bajo la dirección de su oficial *Ŷaudar*” [under the direction of his officer *Ŷaudar*] still echoes Lévi-Provençal. He also noted that the back of the lockplate is engraved with *'amal Badr wa-Ṭarīf 'bd-h* “obra de Badr y Ṭarīf, sus siervos” [work of Badr and Tarif, his servants]. It actually reads *'abīdi-hi*, in the plural, as befits the translation and as shown in the picture accompanying the entry; perhaps forgetting the *yā*’ was just a misprint.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *L’Islam i Catalunya* the edition by Robert Aceña suggested to read the end of the inscription as *bn Slh ?*, but he did not convey it in the translation “Fou acabat sota la direcció de *Ŷawḍar* b. (?.)” [it was finished under the direction of *Ŷawḍar* b. (?.)]. He also resumed Casamar’s reading of the lockplate *'amal Badr wa-Ṭarīf 'bd-h*, including its misprint, as “obra de Badr i Ṭarīf, els seus serfs” [work of Badr and Ṭarīf, his servants] (ISLAM I CATALUNYA 1998: 58-59, no. 40).

In an article aimed at art historians and accessible online, Molina offers a Catalan version of the casket's inscription in which, although it is annoying to find *Alá* instead of *Déu*, it is pleasant to read the name Jawdhar / Yawdar (*sic*) (MOLINA 2005: 158).

### 3. Not everybody is up-to-date: The 19<sup>th</sup> century is still alive

Not everyone has taken note of Vives's article, which includes the correct reading, nor of the works mentioned in the preceding section. Although the name *Yawḍar* was transcribed and identified since 1893, here and there we still find references insisting on the old misreading of "Juden ben Botsla," with variants that modify it in many different ways. Migeon (MIGEON 1907:154) copied Davillier (DAVILLIER 1879a) and, which is more suprising, Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos still wrote (RÍOS 1915: 187) "Fué terminada [su labra] bajo la dirección de Judzén-ben-Botsláh" [(Its engraving) was finished under the direction of Judzen-ben-Botslāh].

In *Catálogo de la Exposición Internacional de Barcelona de 1929*, the Duke of Berwick (BARCELONA 1931, I: 94) claimed that "its maker was named Djudel" and quoted Migeon (MIGEON 1907: 18) who, despite being among those that still attributed the casket to Juden, son of Bozla, did not deal with that topic on that specific page.

Many years later, Pla copied, with several mistakes in the names, Ríos's translation "Fue concluido bajo la dirección de Indzen-ben-Botsláh" [It was finished under the direction of Indzen-ben-Botslāh] (RÍOS 1892: 510). However, when he combined it with sources that provided the names inscribed on the lockplate of the casket and the correct reading, the character was splitted into two different characters: "Fueron autores de este delicado trabajo Ber y Tarif, siervos de Djaudar, alto personaje de la corte cordobesa, y del conjunto de la arqueta Jutzin-Ben-Botan o Bozla" [The authors of this delicate work were Ber and Tarif, servants of Djaudar, an important figure of the court of Cordoba, and (the author) of the casket as a whole was Jutzin-Ben-Botan or Bozla] (PLA 1943: 159-160). Palol also splitted this figure into two characters; according to him it runs along the edge of the casket's lid:

un largo renglón de escritura cúfica, que lleva la invocación a Alá y se lee que fué hecha para el hijo de al-Hakem Hixem. Es obra de dos orfebres, Bedr y Tárik (*sic*), siervos de Djáudar, personaje de la corte de Córdoba. Aparece además el nombre de Bozla como artífice director del conjunto

[a long line of Kufic script that bears the invocation to Allāh and reads that it was made for the son of al-Hakem Hishem. It is the work of two silversmiths, Bedr and Tarik (*sic*), servants of Djāudar, a character of the court of Cordoba. Moreover, Bozla appears as the director of the ensemble] (PALOL 1955: 114).

However, the opposite also happened: the two names became one and the political leader was turned into a worker when Sarthou and Navascués pointed out "una arqueta árabe, cordobesa,

siglo X, chapada de plata repujada, obra de Bery Tarif y Yutzin-Bolza. Fue regalo de Al-Hakem II a Hixem II *según tradición*” [a Moorish casket, from Cordoba, 10<sup>th</sup> century, embossed silver plated, the work of Bery Tarif and Yutzin-Bolza. *According to tradition*, it was a gift from Al-Hakem II to Hishem II] (SARTHOU y NAVASCUÉS 1988: 124) among the objects preserved in the cathedral of Girona.

On the same date, Roura published two Catalan versions of the translation by Fita and Saavedra, passed on through a different route:<sup>3</sup> “Fou acabat sota la direcció de Judzen-ben Bostla” [It was finished under the direction of Judzen-ben Bostla] and “Es féu obrar per Juden, fill de Bazla” [It was commissioned from Juden, son of Bazla] (ROURA 1988: 45).

In 2015, the official website of the cathedral of Girona shows a picture whose caption still says “Arqueta àrab d’Hixem II, argent daurat. Judà Ben Boçla. S. X” [Moorish casket of Hishem II, gilded silver. Judah Ben Bozla. 10<sup>th</sup> century].<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Judzen becomes a Jewish silversmith

The misreading of the name also resulted in an imaginary “platero judío cordobés Juda ben Boçla que trabajó en la segunda mitad del siglo X” [a Jewish silversmith from Cordoba, Juda ben Boçla, who worked in the second half of the 10th century] (FONT 1952: 37). I do not know who was the first to make this claim, but also Calzada, when discussing the casket, says “la hizo un orfebre judío: Juda ben Botslá” [it was made by a Jewish silversmith: Juda ben Botslá] (CALZADA 1979 and 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1995: 8).

Ylla-Català states that she followed the transcription of the text of the epigraph carried out by Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos in “Monumentos del Arte mahometano” (RÍOS 1892), although the translation “Fou acabat sota la direcció de Judzen Ben Botslan” [It was finished under the direction of Judzen Ben Botslan], ending with an *n*, includes the misprint of the *Catálogo* of the 1893 Exhibition of Madrid. At any rate, she borrowed the text through Font (FONT 1952) and she also cites Calzada (CALZADA 1979) among the bibliographic references. Thus, her claim that “La inscripció també fa saber el nom del seu autor Judzen ben Botslan, *plater jueu* cordovès que treballà durant la segona meitat del segle X” [The inscription also reveals the name of its author, Judzen ben Botslan, a Jewish silversmith from Cordoba who worked in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century] (YLLA-CATALÀ 1988: 156) is not that surprising. The same author revisited the casket a year later without mentioning the “Jewish silversmith” because this time she used

<sup>3</sup> Among a series of mistakes, he attributes one of them to Juan de Dios de la Rada (1872), in lieu of GIRBAL 1877, and for the second one he refers to a publication by Saavedra—providing the wrong date, 1877, for it—and to FITA 1874. SAAVEDRA 1872 does not mention the casket. FITA 1874, which we have already discussed, is devoted to the 1470 inventory of the Treasury of the cathedral.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.catedraldegirona.org/visita/cat/tresor/altres/index.html> [Consulted 26. 01. 2015].

different literature: she already knew that the name was read Djaudar, but does not omit Judzen Ben Botslan / Bostlan. She presents the reading of the inscription on the lockplate as “Obra de Bder i Tarif els seus servents, d’al-Hakam” [The work of Bder and Tarif, al-Hakam’s servants] including Vives’s question (YLLA-CATALÀ 1989: 106).

Nadal also notes that the casket “sense una certesa absoluta, s’ha atribuït a *l’orfebre jueu* Judà ben Boçla” [has been attributed, albeit uncertainly, to the *Jewish silversmith* Judah ben Boçla] (NADAL 2002: 54). The caption of a picture of the casket reads: “L’arqueta califal d’Hixem II (976-1013), obrada a Còrdova per *l’argenter jueu* Judà ben Boçla, tal com es dedueix de les inscripcions cúfiques” [Casket of the Caliphate of Hishem II (976-1013), made in Cordoba by the Jewish silversmith Judah ben Boçla, as can be inferred from its Kufic inscriptions] (NADAL 2002: 172 fig. 138). The fact that this author (NADAL 2002: 54) mentions the catalogue of the exhibition of Granada and New York (AL-ANDALUS, 1992) when referring to the hypotheses about how the casket could have arrived in Girona but does not use it to read the inscription is quite puzzling.

### 5. “Ŷawðar’s surname”

The image of the casket is in many places, accompanied by brief descriptions of its formal characteristics. However, with few exceptions, the published photograph shows only its front side; few studies reproduce its rear side (GÓMEZ MORENO 1951: 334, TORRES BALBÁS 1957: 764). The sides are hardly ever shown, at best one of them can be seen foreshortened. Vives, who illustrated his article with a drawing of the side, whose reading eluded him, is an exception (VIVES 1893).

The inner side of the lockplate, with the names of the authors, was drawn in Vives’s article (VIVES 1893: 100) and its photograph appears in several modern publications (AL-ANDALUS 1992: 208, BLAIR 1998: 101, SOUTO 2005: 261).

Aside from going to Girona to see the casket, photographs were the only way to partly verify the published transcriptions of the inscription. Therefore, the inclusion of a pretty good drawing by Jordi Vigué of the whole perimeter legend was more than welcome (YLLA-CATALÀ 1988: 156, ROURA 1988: 44-45). The only publication that I know of with photos of the epigraphs of the four sides is the one by Roura (ROURA 1988: 44-45).

As we have seen, with the exception of the end of the inscription, the epigraph that runs along the casket was almost completely transcribed in 1893 by Vives, who claimed that: “la dificultad que la inscripción nos ofrece es la lectura del apellido de Djaudar” [the difficulty presented by the inscription is the reading of Djaudar’s surname]. Therefore, “el apellido sin leer por la dificultad

casi insuperable de puntuar las cuatro letras de que se compone” [the surname (remained) unread due to the almost insurmountable difficulty of punctuating its four letters] (VIVES, 1893: 99).

Actually its reading poses no problem. There is no need to know Arabic to notice that the character at the end of the name *Ŷawḍar* is identical to the one all scholars have read as the *n* in *bn*; and that those two letters are the same as the first two of the word *baraka*—it would have been very serious to propose a surname for God, the word that follows, and that is perhaps why they read it right. It is also true that in the calligraphy used in this epigraph, the grapheme *r* is nearly equal to the final *n*, as already noted in other pieces of the period (OCAÑA 1970: 42-43).

What remains to be read is not “the surname of *Ŷawḍar*” but the subject of *tamma* [it was carried out / it was made], that is, *tazyīnu-hu*: its decoration.

The subject of the sentence not placed immediately after the verb may have misled researchers; although both constructions are correct, that is, after all, the most common one.

### III. THE INSCRIPTIONS AND THEIR CONTENT

After reviewing the different readings and interpretations of the epigraph of the casket (Fig. 3), and after deciphering its end, it only remains for me to offer its complete reading and translation.

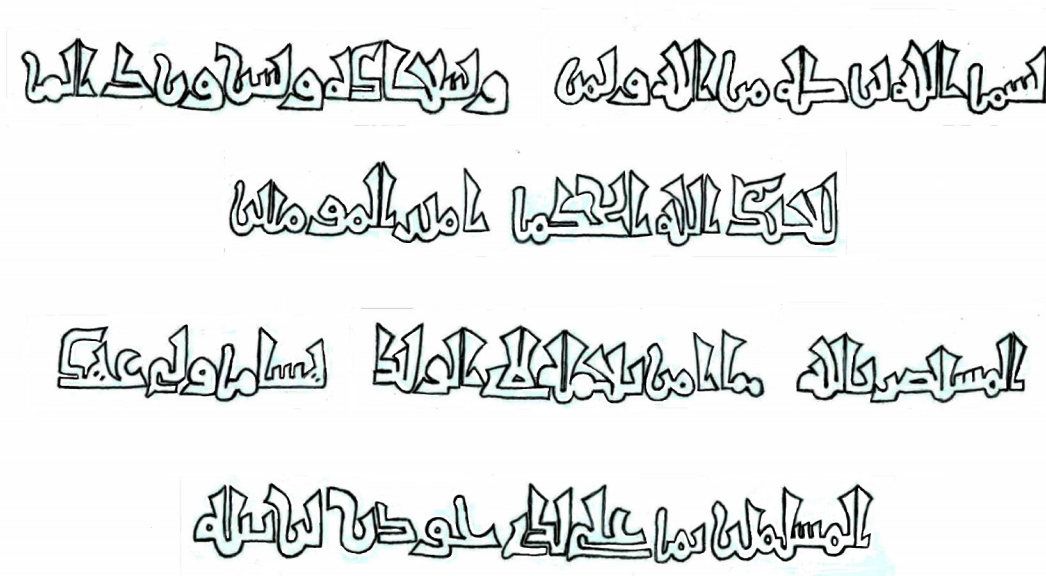


Fig. 3. Inscriptions on the four sides of the casket. (Drawing: Ana Labarta)

## 1. Text of the epigraphs

It should be noted that the words were harmoniously distributed in the spaces available, none were cut, smaller, or overlapping each other. The text was engraved before the edging of points bordering it; as evidenced by the missing edging that would have followed *walī 'ahd*. In my transcription || marks metal fittings and / signals the end of one of the sides of the casket.

Transcription:

*Bi-smi-llāh. Baraka min Allāh wa-yumn || wa-sa 'āda wa-surūr dā'im /  
li-'abd Allāh al-Ḥakam amīr al-mu'minīn /  
al-Mustanšir bi-llāh || mimmā amara bi-'amali-hi li-Abī-l-Walīd || Hišām walī 'ahd /  
al-muslimīn. Tamma 'alà yaday Ŷawḍar tazyīnu-hu.*

Translation:

En el nombre de Dios. Bendición de Dios, prosperidad, felicidad y alegría perpetua para el siervo de Dios al-Ḥakam, el príncipe de los creyentes al-Mustanšir bi-llāh. Lo mandó hacer para Abū-l-Walīd Hišām, el heredero designado. Se llevó a cabo su decoración durante el mandato de Ŷawḍar.

[In the name of God. God's blessing, prosperity, happiness and everlasting joy for God's servant al-Ḥakam, Prince of Believers

al-Mustanšir bi-llāh. It was commissioned for Abū-l-Walīd Hisham, the designated heir. Its decoration was carried out during the mandate of Ŷawḍar.]

The text on the back of the lockplate (fig. 4) reads:

*'amal Badr wa-Ḍarīf 'abīdi-hi*, “Obra de sus siervos Badr y Ḍarīf” [The work of his servants Badr and Ḍarīf]



Fig. 4. Text on the back of the lockplate of the casket. (Drawing: Ana Labarta)

## 2. Date of completion of the casket

The inscription indicates that the caliph of Cordoba al-Ḥakam II commissioned the casket for his son, Prince Hisham. This happened sometime before 1 October 976, the date of the caliph's death, but following the appointment of Hisham as heir, for the epigraph of the casket grants him this treatment (*walī 'ahd al-muslimīn*).

According to Dozy, Caliph al-Ḥakam II The caliph summoned the nobles of the kingdom to a solemn assembly on 5 February 976 and made them sign the act of appointment of heir to the throne in favour of Hisham; many copies were made, and sent to the provinces (DOZY 1982, III: 116). Dozy borrows this account from Ibn 'Idārī (BM II: 265-266) who noted that the *bay'a* took place at the beginning of Jumada II of the year 365. In that case the casket would have been made between February and September 976. This is what Vives claimed following Dozy's *Historia* (VIVES 1893: 99).

However, the date of the appointment is not so clear. The *Anales Palatinos de al-Ḥakam II* (M7 T: 223) describes that on 1 September 974, the day of the celebration of the Festival of the Sacrifice, it was the first time Prince Hisham received everybody in solemn audience. Among the poems that were composed for the occasion, the chronicle cites one that calls him "heir to the Caliphate" three times:

"he made him heir to the Caliphate when he was a child (*ḥammala-hu 'ahd al-jilāfa*)," later on: "Then they went to the heir to the throne (*walī al-'ahd*), in the hall," and almost at the end: "heir to the throne, listen (*yā walī al-'ahd*), the call of a thirsty man..." (M7 f. 103v.; M7 T: 225-226).

This information would push back the date of completion of the casket a couple of years, assuming it was made "on the occasion" of his "official" appointment as heir.

## 3. Figures mentioned

### Ŷawḍar

The fact that the casket mentions Ŷawḍar undoubtedly indicates that it was made while he was in charge of the matters relating to the jewellers of the Caliphate. Indeed, it is known thanks to Ibn 'Idārī (BM II: 259) that at the time of the death of al-Ḥakam II, in 976, Ŷawḍar was responsible for jewellers and falconers (*ṣāhib al-ṣāga wa-l-bayāzira*), a political position of trust. I am not aware of the date of his appointment, but he was already *ṣāhib al-bayāzira wa-l-ṣāga* in July 973 (M7: 70v), a date that supports the casket being made coinciding with the first public appearance of Hisham II in 974, or shortly before.

Arab sources mention ʿĀwḍar, a *mawlah* who enjoyed the fullest confidence of the caliph, a general of the army (*qā'id*) and *fatah kabīr*. He occupied a prominent place on the Breaking the Fast Feast of the year 973 and was described as a companion of Caliph al-Ḥakam when he moved his residence from Madīnat al-Zahrā' to Cordoba in 975 during his sickness (M7: 118 v), and he stood beside his deathbed. He was executed in 979 for conspiring repeatedly to support another candidate to the throne of Hisham II (MEOUAK 1999: 217-218). His name is also documented by epigraphy: he appears as *fatà kabīr* in the foundational inscription of a building commissioned by al-Ḥakam II whose date is lost. He was erroneously attributed another piece (SOUTO 2010 § 2. 34) in which his name does not appear (BARCELÓ 2004: 182).

He was one of the great figures of the administration of the caliphate of al-Ḥakam and it is not possible to attribute him any kind of craft or manual work.

### **Badr and Zārīf**

The nature of the involvement of Badr and Zārīf in the piece is unclear; these two figures are described as *'abīd* on the back of the lockplate. The term *'amal* ("work"), accompanying their names (as well as other objects) would suggest that they were the craftsmen who made the physical work; but in this case it is much more plausible that they supervised it and took care of the project, and the decorative and epigraphic composition. The presence of these same names on various architectural elements and other pieces, does not always support the idea that they were the creators of the design; and also raises the question whether behind each name there is a single person or several homonymous figures.

The name Badr is documented between 953 and 971 in the most outstanding buildings of the caliphate: at the site of Madīnat al-Zahrā' and in the extension of the Great Mosque of Cordoba by al-Ḥakam II<sup>5</sup> (SOUTO 2010 § 2. 15; 2001: 285 § 2.2).

The name Ṭarīf appears in decorated building elements between 954 and 965 (SOUTO 2010 § 2. 83; SOUTO 2005). Both Badr and Ṭarīf appear in the epigraphic band of the inner plinth of the mihrab of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, dated to the end of 965. Although this name has usually been read as Ṭarīf, in my opinion we should consider reading Zārīf, at least in the present case. This patronymic is more frequent and more consistent with the names borne by slaves at that time; in Kufic script, with no diacritics, both have the same spelling.<sup>6</sup> We should note that, even if refers to a different character, a certain Zārīf with diacritics appears among the names engraved on the pottery of the caliphate (CANO 1996: 124, fig. 64, SA/ 397).

Rāgīb, in a work devoted to the names of slaves and freedmen, suggests two possibilities: "œuvre

<sup>5</sup> The extensive catalogue compiled by Juan A. Souto (SOUTO 2010) provides bibliographic references for each one and releases me from reviewing it here.

<sup>6</sup> SOUTO 2010 § 2.86 includes a questionable entry for the name Zārīf.



de Badr et de Ṭarīf ou Zārīf son esclave.” Since he followed Casamar’s edition (AL-ANDALUS 1992: 208-209), which included the misprint *’bdh*, without verifying the inscription through the photograph, this author mistakenly infers that “Comme le mot *’abd* est au singulier, alors que le duel s’impose, le second devait être l’esclave du premier; autrement dit, l’esclave d’un esclave et non celui du calife” (RĀĠIB, 2013 § 74).

#### IV. THE CONTENTS OF THE CASKET

##### In Cordoba

What was the original function of the casket? What was it designed to contain? Was it a valuable object itself, or was it merely a “luxury package” for something even more precious, an “expensive wrapping paper,” in the words of Hillenbrand (ROSSER-OWEN 2012: 307)?

The casket seems too large to accommodate heavy things, because its ironwork is meant to articulate the box and the lid and to ensure its closure, but it does not provide solidity. Why the high top instead of a low flat lid, as that of some ivory boxes? The content should explain the shape of the lid.

The lists of objects that the caliphs of Cordoba gave away as sumptuous gifts to their loved ones mentioned glass bottles, jars, and small and large boxes—some of them made of silver and some made of ivory—and also indicated the content of many of them. Was our casket meant to contain perfume? Under the dictates of common sense and according to the little information provided by Arab sources, aromatic substances were kept in smaller containers; unless the box was divided into several inner compartments that held different receptacles it seems unlikely that this was the purpose of the casket.

Although we have no explicit evidence of the purpose for which the casket of Hisham was intended, I would like to recall an object whose description suggests a rather similar piece. In 934, according to Ibn Ḥayyān, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III gave Mūsah b. Abī-l-‘Āfiya: *daray fidda jilāfi kabīr; munaqqaš al-ṣafā’ih, mudahhab al-tanqīš, abyad al-arḍ, mulabbas al dājil, bi-l-urḡuwān dājila-hu*, that is, “una arqueta califal grande de plata, con las chapas repujadas, dorados los relieves y blanco el fondo, con el interior forrado de tela, que contenía púrpura” [a large silver Caliphate casket with embossed plates, gilt reliefs on a white background, and a fabric lined interior that contained purple] (M5: 352 f. 238). The content of the casket was lost in translation by Viguera and Corriente: “Un gran escriño califal de plata, con planchas en relieve dorado, fondo blanco e interior revestido de púrpura” [A large silver Caliphate coffer, with gilt-embossed plates, white background and purple-lined interior] (M5 T: 264).

In the absence of new data, we can assume that our casket also guarded a valuable purple cloth.

## In Girona. Relics? Whose relics?

As we have already seen, according to Villanueva's description in his *Viaje literario*, on both ends of the altarpiece of the cathedral of Girona there were “dos arquillas, *que sin duda serán de reliquias*” [there are also two caskets, *which must undoubtedly contain relics*] (VILLANUEVA 1850, XII: 184). Fita also thought that our casket was one of the “dos relicaris del altar mayor” [two reliquaries of the high altar] (FITA 1873: 66 note 1; 1874: 177 note 4); and Girbal described it as the “casket-reliquary” of the cathedral of Girona in the title of his article (GIRBAL 1877).

In 1971, to mark the millennium of the birth of Abbot Oliva various cultural events were held, including an exhibition of objects and documents of his time. For the occasion, the curator, Federico Udina, chose three objects from Girona: the act of consecration of the altar of the cathedral, a reliquary, and the casket. Reporting the events, the review (MARQUÈS 1971: 17) explained that,

los árabes se servían de esas arquetas para guardar joyas y perfumes. Los cristianos las adquirían y las donaban a los templos para guardar reliquias de santos. La de Gerona figuró durante siglos en el retablo del altar mayor de la Seo y contenía reliquias que acrecentaban la estima y valoración del altar.

[Arabs made use of these caskets to keep jewelry and perfumes. Christians acquired them and donated them to temples to hold the relics of saints. The casket of Girona stood for centuries on the main altarpiece of the Cathedral and contained relics which enhanced the esteem and appreciation of the altar]

It could have had that purpose, but there are no specific references that attest to it, which arises a series of questions whose answers I would like to know: Did our casket really contain relics as some suggest and others outright claim, or was it empty? And if so, when and who put them in there? What kind of relics were they? When were they removed and what became of them? Or are they still inside?

Just as it is said that the Caliphate ivory coffer known as casket of Leire (now kept in the Museum of Pamplona) was used as the reliquary of Saints Nunilo and Alodia, the contents of other boxes of the Cathedral of Girona are well known; for example, among the objects that were kept in the treasury, Roig pointed out,

Un relicario assi mismo de plata dorada, en el qual estan recondidas Reliquias de los Santos quatro Martyres Germano, Iusturo, Paulino, y Scicio. Otro Relicario de plata dorada, en que está colocada una de las Espinas de la Corona de Christo, y baxo de aquella santissima Reliquia están dos bultos de dos Angeles hechos también de plata dorada, circuidos de muchas perlas

[A likewise gilded silver reliquary, where the relics of the four martyr Saints Germano, Iusturo, Paulino, and Scicio are kept. Another gilded silver reliquary, in which one of the thorns of the Crown of Christ is placed, and under that most holy relic there are two figures of angels also made of gilded silver, encircled with pearls] (ROIG 1678: 219).

This theme connects again with the problem of how the casket came to the Cathedral of Girona, as is the case with a number of objects (of varying quality) made in Muslim lands and preserved in the treasuries of Christian European churches Europe, often linked to relics. Rosser-Owen, who has recently dealt with this topic, considers a series of different hypotheses about it (ROSSER-OWEN 2015).

## V. TO CONCLUDE

The casket is a unique, perfectly preserved piece of Andalusian silversmithing; we know that it came out of the workshops of the Umayyad Caliphate and we also know the place (Cordoba) and the approximate date of manufacture (974 ~ 976). Every single detail, even the smallest, constitutes exceptionally valuable historical evidence about the artistic work and aesthetic taste of a particular time, as evidenced by the interesting study by Rosser-Owen about the locks and hinges of caskets, which deals with their shape, decoration and locking method (ROSSER-OWEN 2012). Besides giving a date to each item, our casket assigns a “brand” to an artisanal and artistic luxury object. Viewed from this perspective, the casket poses a new set of questions whose answers may provide objective data to help set the history of Andalusian silversmithing on solid foundations. I hope to return to this topic soon.

## ARABIC SOURCES<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I follow the system of initials used in the series *Estudios Onomástico-biográficos de Al-Andalus* edited by the CSIC.

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<sup>8</sup> I have included here some publications that feature the casket, even if they are not mentioned in the article.

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