



# THE TREASURE OF GUARRAZAR

Votive Crowns in Visigothic Iberia

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## Who Were the Visigoths?

### History

Late Antiquity - Germanic people united under single king, living with Roman Empire

395-410: Reign of Alaric I, first king of the Visigoths (Balkans)

410: Sack of Rome

476: Fall of Western Roman Empire

5th-8th centuries: Visigothic Kingdom across southwestern France and Iberian Peninsula

- successor state to Western Roman Empire
- Created by settlement of Visigoths under King Wallia in Gallia Aquitania
- Maintained independence from Eastern Roman Empire
- Romanized central European foederati of Rome
  - Wanted to restore Roman rule against Vandals, Alans & Suebis
- founded the only new cities in Western Europe between the fifth and eighth centuries
  - Reccopolis - Zorita de los Canes
  - Victoriacum - Vitoria-Gasteiz
  - Lugo id est Luceo
  - Ologicus - Olite
  - Bayara (possibly) - Montoro (possibly)

6th-7th centuries: Regnum Toletanum (Kingdom of Toledo)

570s: Conquest of Kingdom of Suebi in Gallaecia (Galicia & N. Portugal)

589: Visigoths renounce Arianism in favor of Nicene Christianity  
626: Visigoths expel Byzantines from Hispania  
654: Visigothic Code removes legal distinctions bw Hispano-Romans and Visigoths

711: Umayyad Conquest of Hispania  
Visigothic/Christian Kingdoms reduced to northern regions  
Kingdom of Asturias founded by Visigoths fleeing Umayyads

## Catholic Kingdom of Toledo

4th century: bishop Wulfila (310-383) invented script for Gothic language, translated Bible into Gothic, converted Goths from paganism to Arianism

- As Visigoths traveled west, encountered Latin Christians who viewed Arianism as heretical, but refused to convert

586-601: Reccared I

Converted from Arian to Chalcedonian Christianity

Adopted name "Flavius" (family name of the Constantinian dynasty) & styled self successor to the Roman Empire

589: oversaw Third Council of Toledo

Reccared had previously attempted to reconcile schism in kingdom between Arian & Nicene Christians - eventually converted to Catholicism

Third Council of Toledo marks Visigothic entry into Catholic world

- Opening declaration declared that God had chosen Reccared to lead Visigoths and Suebi to the "true faith"
- Anathematized Arian, aligned self and kingdom with councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon
  - Pronounced anathema on any who returned to Arianism

601: Liuva II

603: Witteric overthrows Liuva II; ends Reccared's dynasty

610-631: period of frequent overthrows and regicide

612-621: Sisebut - forced conversion of the Jews

621-631: Suintila

- 625: final defeat of Byzantines in Iberia

631: Suintila deposed by the Franks; replaced with Sisinand

633: Fourth Council of Toledo excommunicated and exiled Sisinand; replaced by Chintila

633-639: King Chintila

Church councils were now the most powerful institution in the Visigothic state; they took the role of regulating the process of succession to the kingship by election of the king by Gothic noble 'senators' and the church officials. They also decided to meet on a regular basis to discuss ecclesiastical and political matters affecting the Church. Finally, they decided the kings should die in peace, and declared their persons sacred, seeking to end the violence and regicides of the past.

639: Church deposed Chintila

639-642: King Tulga

642-653: Chindaswinth

- Began creation of Visigothic Code
- Strengthened monarchy (at expense of nobility)
- Claimed right to execute clergy who worked against the government

653-672: Recceswinth

## Recceswinth

Visigothic King of Hispania (Iberia) and Septimania (southwestern France)

19 years of (mostly) unbroken peace

Completed & promulgated Visigothic Code - legal code that replaced Breviary of Alaric

- Common law over both Goths and Hispano-Romans
- Based on Roman common law

654: outlawed essential Jewish practices, including male circumcision, dietary laws (kashrut), marriage laws and ceremonies, and the celebration of Passover.

## Religion in the Visigothic Kingdoms of Hispania

Prior to Middle Ages, Visigoths practiced varying strains of Germanic paganism - were Christianized outside bounds of Roman Empire (along with Ostrogoths and Vandals)

- Retained some traditions and practices from Germanic paganism
- Converted to Arianism rather than Nicene Christianity - Romans followed Nicene Christianity & considered Arians heretics

Hispano-Roman residents of Hispania were Catholic (Nicene) Christians

- Contributed to tolerance of Arianism - schisms among Catholic groups pulled focus away from other variants
- Visigoths more interested in public order than interfering with Catholic practices
- Visigoths remained Arian until Reccared I converted to Catholicism (

Arianism -

1. God alone is self-existent (not created by another)
2. Therefore, Jesus (Son of God) was created by God
3. Denial of the Trinity (3 entities as part of a whole)

### Nicene Christianity -

1. Trinitarian: One God exists in three coequal divine persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
2. Jesus was "begotten" (not made) by God
3. Nicene Creed is defining statement of belief
  - a. First Council of Nicaea (325)
  - b. "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible."

### Chalcedonian Christianity -

1. Subset of Nicene Christianity
2. Jesus is single person in whom dwells a union of two natures (divine and human)
3. Accepts Chalcedonian confirmation of the Nicene Creed

## What Are Votive Offerings?

A **votive offering** or **votive deposit** is one or more objects displayed or deposited, without the intention of recovery or use, in a sacred place for religious purposes. Such items are a feature of modern and ancient societies and are generally made in order to gain favor with supernatural forces.

As early as Neolithic era in Europe, reaching peak in the late Bronze Age. Also present in:

- Denmark: Nydam Mose votive ship burial
- Ancient Greece
- Mesoamerica
- pre-Etruscan Italy

The tradition of votive offerings has been carried into Christianity in both the East and the West. The particular type of the votive crown, originally Byzantine, was also adopted in the West.

### Votives in Eastern Christianity

*Tamata*: metal plaques symbolizing the subject of prayers

Other offerings include: candles, prosphora (small loaf of unleavened bread used as the Eucharist), wine, oil, or incense. In addition, many will leave something of personal value, such as jewelry, a pectoral cross or military decoration as a sign of devotion.

**Constantine the Great**: donated cross carried during Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312); cross is supposedly preserved at Mount Athos (NE Greece)

#### **Saint John of Damascus:**

Legend: while he was serving as Vizier to Caliph Al-Walid I, was falsely accused of treachery and his hand was cut off. Upon praying in front of an icon of the Theotokos his hand was miraculously

restored. In thanksgiving, he had a silver replica of his hand fashioned and attached it to the icon. This icon, now called "Trojeručica" (The Three-handed) is preserved at Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos.

## Votives in Western Christianity

Offerings made to fulfill vow to God or repayment for favorable occurrence

Examples: votive candles, flowers, statues, vestments, monetary donations

Dates to early 4th century

Ex-voto: offering to saint or deity to fulfill vow (*ex voto suscepto*: "from the vow made") or in gratitude/devotion (usually restricted to Christian usage)

1. gift/payment to deity/saint for their help
2. Testimony of divine intercession for later visitors

Examples: models of afflicted body parts, inscribed stone tablets, folk art paintings of an incident of danger, and model ships donated by sailors who have survived a dangerous voyage.

Medieval examples include:

- Several votive crowns, such as those in the Treasure of Guarrazar
- Probably the Iron Crown of Lombardy
- Henry III of England had a golden statue of his queen made and placed on the shrine of St. Edward at Westminster
- A falcon in wax at the shrine of Saint Wulstan by Edward I
- A diamond and a ruby, adorning the tomb of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury
- Numerous crutches, left in the grotto at Lourdes
- The song "O Wilhelme, pastor bone" composed by John Taverner is a Votive Antiphon dedicated to Cardinal Wolsey

## Votive Crowns

A **votive crown** is a votive offering in the form of a crown, normally in precious metals and often adorned with jewels. Especially in the Early Middle Ages, they are of a special form, designed to be suspended by chains at an altar, shrine or image. Later examples are more often typical crowns in the style of the period, either designed to be placed on the head of a statue, or re-used in this way after donation.

The main body of suspended crowns is usually flat around the top as well as the bottom rim; some are merely an open framework of flexibly linked metal pieces. Such crowns were probably found widely across Christian Europe in this period

- The Iron Crown of Lombardy
- Crown of Leo VI (Constantinople)
  - 601: given to the Emperor Maurice (r. 582-602) by wife Constantina and the dowager Empress Sophia for Easter - donated to Hagia Sophia
  - 800s Emperor Leo IV coveted it and took it for his own use.

- Legend: crown was decorated with carbuncles (jewels), and Leo, who was an iconoclast, soon after died of an outbreak of carbuncles (abscesses)

- Crown of Leo VI (r. 886-912)
  - decorated with cloisonné enamels
  - Later addition of rock crystal reliquary

## Iron Crown of Lombardy

Dates to 8th-9th century

- Possibly combination of two different pieces made between 4th-5th centuries and 8th-9th centuries

Circlet of gold around inner silver band (iron nail from One True Cross)

- 6 segments of beaten gold joined by hinges
- 22 gemstones in shape of flowers and crosses
- Partially enameled
- May have originally been an arm ring or votive crown

Legend: commissioned by St. Helena (mother of Constantine the Great)

- Passed to Pope Gregory
- Passed to Theodelinda, princess of Lombards
- 628: donated to church at Monza
- Used in later years for French and Italian coronations
  - 774: Charlemagne
  - 1312: Henry VII
  - 1355: Charles IV
  - 1431: Sigismund
  - 1530: Charles V
  - 1805: Napoleon I
  - 1838: Ferdinand I of Austria

## The Treasure of Guarrazar

Largest number of surviving examples of Christian Early Medieval suspended votive crowns and crosses (customary for Visigothic kings and nobility to donate to “great churches”)

excavated in 1859-1861

7th century Visigothic Hispania - Guarrazar (Toledo)

- Hidden in 2 specially prepared holes lined with Roman concrete
  - Within Visigothic cemetery
  - Nearby building may be oratory or church
  - Probably hidden from invading Moorish armies
  - Presumably was portion of liturgical artifacts/votive offerings to church in Toledo
- Excavation triggered by discovery of inscribed stone slab of 7th c. presbyter named Crispin

Royal treasure: includes at least 2 royal crowns (Recceswinth and Suintila)

- Assumed to be Roman or Byzantine
- 26 gold votive crowns, crosses from royal workshop in Toledo
- Too small to wear
- Feature pendilla (ornaments on chains hanging from main crown)
  - Jewels
  - Letters spelling word or phrase
  - Possibly influenced by Justinian's offerings at Hagia Sophia (30 crowns, now lost)

Scientific analysis:

- Gold mined in southern Spain
- Garnets from Europe
- Sapphires from Sri Lanka
  - Several are pierced/engraved
  - May have been repurposed from earlier jewelry (potentially Roman)

The Crowns of Recceswinth and Suintila

Two most important votive crowns of Treasure

Recceswinth crown:

Most complex of crown collection - Was preserved whole

- Double cylinder construction
  - Inner plain
  - Outer decorated w/ pierced pattern (leaves, scrolls)
- Divided into halves connected by hinges
- Inlaid with garnets, sapphires, pearls
- pendilia composed of letters
  - spell "RECCESVINTHVS REX OFFERET", or "King Recceswinth offers this"
  - Worked in cloisonne with inlaid garnets
- Cross: most ornate & unique structure
  - Miniature building made of 105 separate gold pieces soldered together



- only cross in collection that is definitely associated with crown that hangs from it

These findings, along with others from some neighboring sites and with the archaeological excavation of the Spanish Ministry of Public Works and the Royal Spanish Academy of History (April 1859), formed a group consisting of:

- National Archaeological Museum of Spain: six crowns, five crosses, a pendant and remnants of foil and channels (almost all of gold).
- Royal Palace of Madrid: a crown and a gold cross and a stone engraved with the Annunciation. A crown and other fragments of a tiller with a crystal ball were stolen from the Royal Palace of Madrid in 1921 and its whereabouts are still unknown.
- National Museum of the Middle Ages, Paris: three crowns, two crosses, links and gold pendants.

### The Lost Collection

Much of the collection was sold and melted down shortly after discovery - sold in 1856 to several Toledo jewelers.

“Numerous pieces were dismantled in order to keep them from the authorities. Those that remained intact ended up in the hands of the diamond trader José Navarro who sold them to the Cluny Museum in France. The Spanish government subsequently tried to retrieve them but Napoleon III would not cooperate, dodging the requests with a variety of excuses. Eventually, in 1941, during the Nazi occupation of France, Nazi henchman Heinrich Himmler returned a good portion of the jewels to General Francisco Franco, as well as archeological pieces such as the Lady of Elche bust. Now, much of the treasure can be admired in the National Archeological Museum and the Royal Palace in Madrid, while others remain at the Cluny Museum.” (*El Pais*)

Remaining items include: 10 crowns, 9 crosses, 16 pendants, chains, and other pieces

Lost items:

1. Portions of large processional cross that matched Recceswinth Crown
2. Crown of Suinthila
3. Crown of Theodosius (non-royal -donation as homage to God)
4. Crown of Sonnica (non-royal -donation as homage to God)

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