

MUSEUM OF THE COUNCILS AND THE VISIGOTHIC CULTURE

The Church of San Roman, headquarters of the museum of the Councils and the Visigothic Culture, is located at one of the highest points of the city of Toledo. It's origins can be traced back to the Visigoth period, due to the discovery in 1968 of a crypt under the great chapel during its restauration. The crypt was identified as an apse built on that time period. In the course of time, it may have been used as a mosque, because until 1572, many Muslim sepulchral lauds were kept there.

It has been documented as a Latin parish for the first time in the beginning of the 12th century, on 1125, but the current building itself was consecrated by Archbishop Jiménez of Rada in 1221.

The building presents elements of clear islamic influence, not only on the architecture but also on the decorations of arches, pilasters, and windows. It has a basilica plan with three naves, with the middle one being higher and wider, spaced out with horsehoe arches with voussoirs alternating in between and framed by the surround 'alfiz'.


The naves are sustented using an Toledano mudejar's first scheme of the 12th century, atop Roman shafted columns attached to brick pillars, with twelve reused capitals atop them, some of them from the Visigoth. They all have diferent sizes and atop this arcade, a tribune with half point arches is developed.

In 1552, a new reform is given life by Alonso de Corvarrubias, with the intent to expand the the great chapel. It was adapted to fit in with the old headboard. The space was covered with a ribbed vault, and between it and the dome, atop the pendentive crossing, a great barrel vault is located. Pilasters, decorated with grotesques, support the capitals and sustain the toral arches decorated with angel's heads an florets.

The magnificent altarpiece was made by Diego Velasco. It is worth noting that the walls are made with the masonry technique, within one or two brick yarns. On them, a spectacular pictorial set is developed, frescoed and with figurative representations and decorating elements.

The **tower**, inspired by the Caliphal Minaret, was built as a free standing one at the end of the 13th century or the beginning of the 14th, and joined the headboard in the 16th century. It is made out of a smooth low body and a wide lobular arches' body, topped off at the triple window in the bell tower. They both are separated witha narrow floor, with blinded lobular arches on the sides.

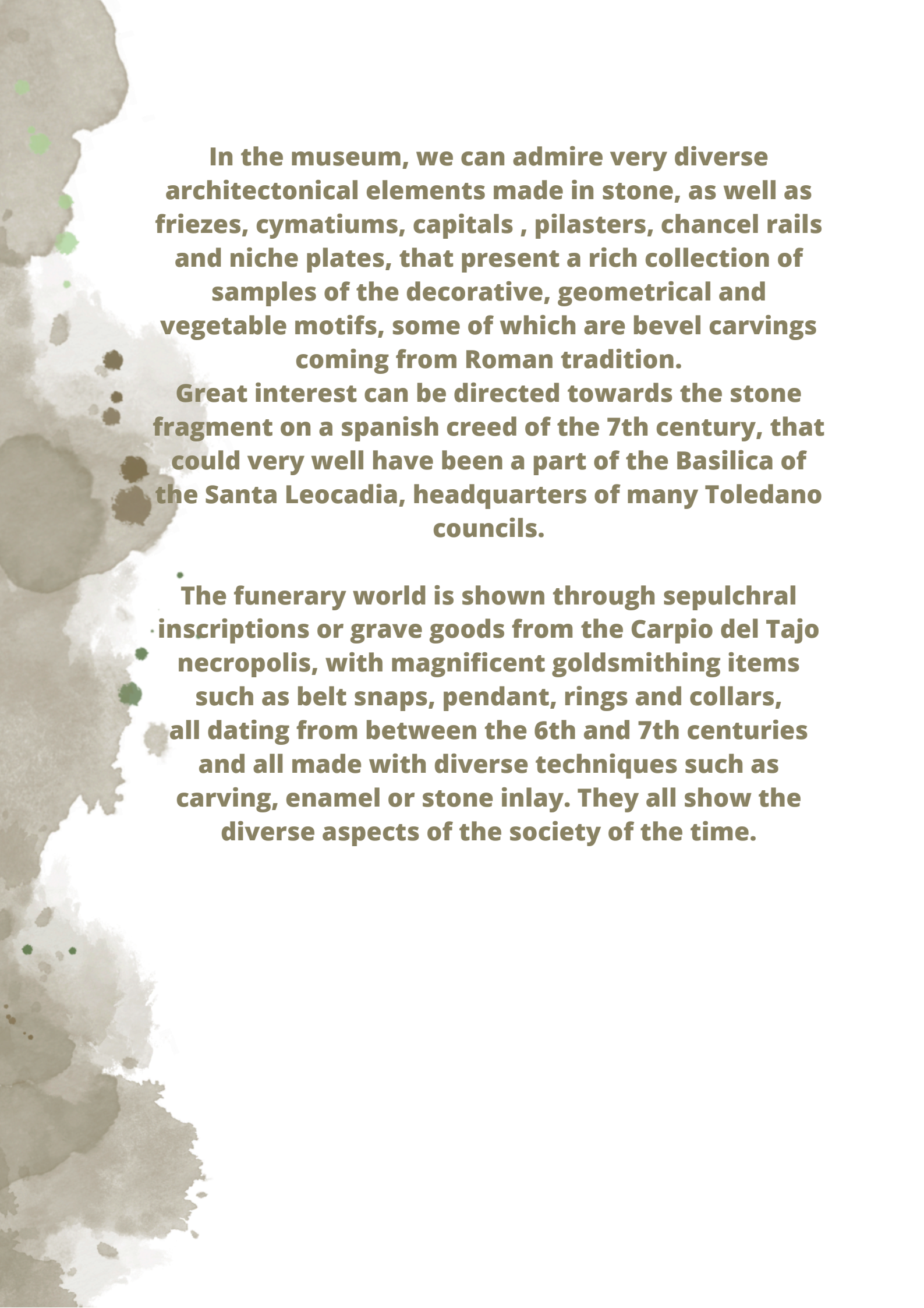
The church was declared an Artístical Historical monument by decree the 3rd of June of 1931, and it had an uninterrupted use for cult until the 19th century, when, during the 1842 reform, it stops being a parish and is then merged with the church of Santa Leocadia. In 1969 it was lent by the Catholic Church as the headquarters of the Museum of The Councils and the Visigoth Culture.



In 1971, the Museum of the Councils and the Visigoth Culture was opened, with the intent to exhibit as many historical-artistic testimonies related to that culture as possible, whose kingdom's capital and political, religious and artistic center was Toledo. In the year 2014, the community of Castilla La Mancha and the Santa Cruz museum took care of the renovation of all the museography.

The archeological materials that get exhibited and show the importance of the visigoth court in the latter third of the VI century, come directly from the funds of the Santa Cruz museum, of recent excavations, church deposits and funds coming from the National Archeological Museum. The latter come from old excavations on the province of Toledo, that give us some insight on the beautiful civil and religious buildings of the Visigoth Kingdom of Toledo.

Beginning the tour, the pieces found in Vega Baja (Toledo) and Carranque archaeological sites will be the first thing that the visitors will see.



In the museum, we can admire very diverse architectonical elements made in stone, as well as friezes, cymatiums, capitals , pilasters, chancel rails and niche plates, that present a rich collection of samples of the decorative, geometrical and vegetable motifs, some of which are bevel carvings coming from Roman tradition.

Great interest can be directed towards the stone fragment on a spanish creed of the 7th century, that could very well have been a part of the Basilica of the Santa Leocadia, headquarters of many Toledano councils.

The funerary world is shown through sepulchral inscriptions or grave goods from the Carpio del Tajo necropolis, with magnificent goldsmithing items such as belt snaps, pendant, rings and collars, all dating from between the 6th and 7th centuries and all made with diverse techniques such as carving, enamel or stone inlay. They all show the diverse aspects of the society of the time.

ESSENTIAL PIECES



- 1** Table foot from the roman village of Carranque, made in red porphyry and shaped like a lion's paw.



- 2** The Tamujas' plaque, called like that because of the estate it was found in, Malpica de Tajo, is a piece of great iconographical interest, with it being one of the few figurative reliefs that exist in visigoth art. There are many hypothesis of who the person it's representing is. It seems to be a man of the church, lecturing or blessing, since the bottom and posterior parts of the plaque suggest a chancel rail and an exedra respectively. Other authors wanted to see the figure of Jesus Christ in the Jerusalem temple, or in his baptism, in which case the bottom part would represent the Jordan river.



- 3** Half a capital's fragment (made to mount on the wall)
It's structure is very interesting. It looks like a derivative of an Ionic Capital, since it presents two small and simple volutes. In one of it's faces, a schematic decoration of a deer with a splendid antler can be seen.



- 4** Even though they are not a part of the archeological collection, the wall paintings of figurative Romanesque style are themselves an essential artwork of the museum. They are divided in two areas, separated by inscriptions showing four scenes of the four winged evangelists, portraits of archbishops, Saint Stephen and Saint John and the Last Judgment.



5

Fragment of late Roman sarcophagus. The front is decorated in relief, with a perimeter molding on the sides and upper area with oval decoration. It is composed of three consecutive scenes that narrate episodes from the life of the Prophet Jonah. In the first, a ship is represented above the waters of the sea with three characters, one with arms outstretched and another about to throw the Prophet Jonah overboard, to be devoured by a sea monster. In the next scene, located in the central area, the monster expels Jonah from his jaws, represented with his arms outstretched and his head raised. In the third, the prophet is observed, resting under a climbing plant.



6

Pisciform belt clasp. It consists of an elongated and embossed flat plate. It adopts the shape of a fish, with decoration that starts from the spine, formed by small incisions like symmetrical scales, the eyes are circular.



7

Equal-armed cross of oval shape carries decoration of circles with a rosette of five petals inscribed in the center, and palmettes of Byzantine inspiration in the arms. In the center of the arms, it bears circular inscriptions.



8

Visigoth *Tremís* (Currency) . The obverse shows the bust of the king in a frontal position, and the legend includes his name and title next to the representation of the cross (+ SISENANUS RE).



9

Reproduction of the treasure of Guarrazar, found by chance in the mid-nineteenth century in an orchard in the town of Guadamur, in the vicinity of the Church of *Santa María de Sobraces*, when torrential rains revealed a series of boxes containing the treasure. The original, today divided between the National Archaeological Museum, the Armoury of the Royal Palace of Madrid, and the Cluny Museum of Paris, consists of several pieces of gold, pearls and precious stones. Although they are popularly known as “crowns”, in reality they are not.

These are pieces of decoration and ornaments that various Visigothic kings donated as offerings to the Church.



10

Fragment of a cylindrical casket, with carved decoration on the external face. On the left we can see a male character whose face is not preserved. In the center, a well is observed, with a female figure next to it holding the rope of the well. Possibly this is the New Testament scene of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

A BIT OF HISTORY...

As different Germanic peoples (Vandals, Alans, Suevi) had entered within the Western Roman Empire borders since AD 409, Rome made a federation pact with other Germanic people, the Visigoths.

They would receive territories in South Gaul in exchange for helping Romans to expell those peoples from Hispania.

In the course of time the Franks, settled in northern and central Gaul, defeated the Visigoths in the battle of Vouillé, AD 507, consolidating their domination over that Roman province and forcing the Visigoths to move southwards, beyond the Pyrenees. There, in former Hispania, they established a capital city in Toledo.

In the second half of 6th century King Leovigild defeated both Suevi Kingdom and he king began the path in the fight against the Byzantines in Hispania, which would culminate during the reign of Suintila, already in the 7th century, and also fought against the Cantabrian peoples of the north, founding the city of Victoriacum in Vasconia.

He also tried to reach the religious unity under arianism, a version of Christianity.

His son Reccared converted to Catholicism in the III Council of Toledo, in AD 589. Since then, the councils of Toledo played a key role in political life, and Kings will govern and passed laws through them.

During the 7th century, King Recesvint established a common code of laws for Hispano-Romans and Goths. Its is the *Liber Iudiciorum*, or 'the Book of Judges', from AD 654. In this way, he consolidated the legal unification of the Kingdom.

The Visigothic monarchy was elective, and it brought about many problems. Conflicts among noble families were frequent.

On the other hand, the royal authority was always under the Church's power, who arrogated the power to crown a King, and that therefore it could also depose him if he did not act according to its interests.

Economy was based on agriculture (dry crops) and animal grazing. Urban life and commercial activities, that had prospered in Roman times, were slowly declining, like in other Germanic Kingdoms.

However, Visigothic kings minted coins, called *tremís*, trying once again to imitate the Roman Emperors.

In terms of social organization, Visigoths were a minority within the population. They had adopted Roman customs and way of life for centuries, so they were very romanised when they arrived to the Peninsula. Existing social groups were similar to those of other Germanic Kingdoms: Nobles (including the royal family), Clergy (regular and secular), and Peasants (who were most of the population).

Jews were tolerated, but Visigothic laws always reflected a strong antisemitism.

The end of the Visigothic Kingdom took place in the context of a civil war. King Witiza had died in AD 708 and Roderick has been elected as new King, but Witiza's relatives did not accept this. They asked for help to the Berbers, from northern Africa, who were dominated by the Arab Muslims.

In AD 711 Generals Tarik and Muza crossed the straight of Gibraltar and defeated Roderick in the battle of Guadalete. A new stage of the History of the Iberian Peninsula had started.

IMAGE GALLERY

