

THE VOTIVE GOLD CROWNS RECENTLY FOUND NEAR TOLEDO,
AND NOW PRESERVED AT THE HOTEL DE CLUNY, AT PARIS.

THE remarkable discovery of a most precious deposit of royal insignia of the seventh century, in the neighbourhood of Toledo, has been mentioned in some of the English Journals. I am not aware, however, that any detailed notice of that rich treasure has appeared in England, and I hope that the following particulars may prove interesting. I recently had the gratification of examining carefully the precious relics in question, and I am indebted to the courtesy of my friend Mons. Du Sommerard, the accomplished Administrator of the Musée des Thermes, established in the Hotel de Cluny at Paris, for the following authentic account of the discovery.

Early in the present year or at the close of 1858, in the course of excavations at *La Fuente de Guarrazar*, near Toledo, on the property of some private individual, this remarkable hoard of treasure was brought to light. No particulars deserving of record have been stated in regard to the position or the circumstances under which this deposit had been made; the light-brown earthy crust still adherent to the cavities of the gold might lead to the supposition that the treasure lay concealed in the soil, and had not been enclosed in any casket or depository of durable material. Of this, however, no details appear to have become known. The spot where the crowns were interred was uncultivated land, which the peasants by whom the discovery was made were breaking up. The treasure, consisting of eight crowns of gold richly jeweled, with the curious chains serving for their suspension, and four jeweled crosses appended within the crowns, was brought to Paris in the month of January, 1859, by the proprietor of the land where they were found. The crowns were immediately purchased by the Minister of Public Instruction for the National Collections at the Hotel de Cluny, which have been greatly augmented under the Empire. That highly interesting museum already possessed

the sumptuous votive altar of gold presented by the Emperor Henry II. to the Cathedral of Basle.¹ The price at which the negotiation was concluded, amounted to 100,000 francs, or 4000*l.* sterling; the intrinsic value of the gold being not less than 15,000 francs, or 600*l.*, whilst the value of the precious stones, consisting of rubies, emeralds, pearls, and sapphires of large size, amounts to a very considerable sum.

The largest of the crowns bears the following inscription, in letters jeweled and appended by little chains to its lower margin :—

RECCESVINTHVS REX OFFERET.

The letters measure about two inches in length, each being suspended separately by a small gold chain, and to each letter is attached a pendant pearl and sapphire. These letters are of gold, incrustated with precious stones set in *cloissonnés* cavities, and resembling in their workmanship certain ornaments of the Merovingian period, or the fibulæ of the Anglo Saxon times in our own country.

We are enabled by this inscription to ascertain the age of these most costly relics. The Gothic King Reccesvinthus, governed Spain from 653 to 675. The seven crowns of minor dimensions and value may have been those of his Queen, and of the princes and princesses of his family; some of them, judging by their size, being suited for children of early age. The whole had no doubt been a solemn offering in some church in Spain, founded or enriched by the piety of the Gothic monarch and his family, on some memorable occasion of which no record has hitherto been found. M. Du Sommerard pointed out to me that they are not merely imitative crowns formed for a votive purpose only, to be suspended over the altar, or in some other conspicuous position, in like manner as similar ornaments are to be noticed in early mosaics and illuminations. These Gothic crowns appear to be the insignia which had actually been worn by Reccesvinthus and the personages of his family, since they are formed with hinges and fastenings to facilitate their being fitted to the wearers' heads.² The chains for suspension and ornament were no doubt added on the occasion of the offering.

¹ Figured in the *Archæologia*, vol. xxx. p. 144.

² It is stated that Lewvigildus was the first king of the Visigoths who wore a

crown, or assumed any regal insignia. He reigned from 568 to 586, about sixty years before Reccesvinthus. *Art de Vérifier les Dates.*

I will proceed to describe the rich character of these remarkable ornaments, of the general appearance of which the accompanying woodcut may give an idea, inadequate as it may be to suggest the sumptuous magnificence of the originals. The crown of the king measures about 9 inches in diameter, or 27 inches in circumference. It is a hoop of gold, about 4 inches in breadth, and upwards of half an inch in thickness; not solid, but formed of massive golden plates soldered together. The margins of this hoop consist of two bands of *cloisonné* work, with incrustations of cornelian; and the hoop is enriched with thirty oriental sapphires of large size, *en cabochon*, and set in collets, giving to the gems a very prominent relief. Thirty very large oriental pearls are arranged alternately with the sapphires; the intervening spaces are pierced in open work and engraved, so as to represent foliage or flowers. To the lower margin of this hoop is appended the remarkable fringe composed of jeweled letters, already described, recording the offering of the crown by King Reccesvinthus. To the upper margin are attached four golden chains of beautiful design, serving for its suspension, and united together above in an elegant foliated ornament, which is enriched with numerous pendant pearls and sapphires, and surmounted by a capital or knop of rock crystal, elaborately carved and polished, and terminating in a globe of the same material. The massive cross before mentioned, of Latin form, is suspended within the crown by a long slender chain, so as to hang a little lower than the jeweled fringe of letters. This cross is set with six fine sapphires and eight pearls of remarkable dimensions, mounted in very high relief; jeweled pendants are also attached to the foot and limbs of the cross, and on its reverse is still to be seen the *acus* by which it might be attached when worn as a fibula on the royal robes. As nearly as I could ascertain the entire measurement of this remarkable combination of ornament, the length, from the gold hook for its suspension at the top to the lowest pendant sapphire attached to the cross below, is nearly 3 feet. The richness of the pure gold of which this massive ornament is formed, the brilliancy of the pale violet sapphires, uncut and irregular in their forms, the bold character of their mountings, the striking contrast of the alternating pearls, so unequal in dimension, combine with

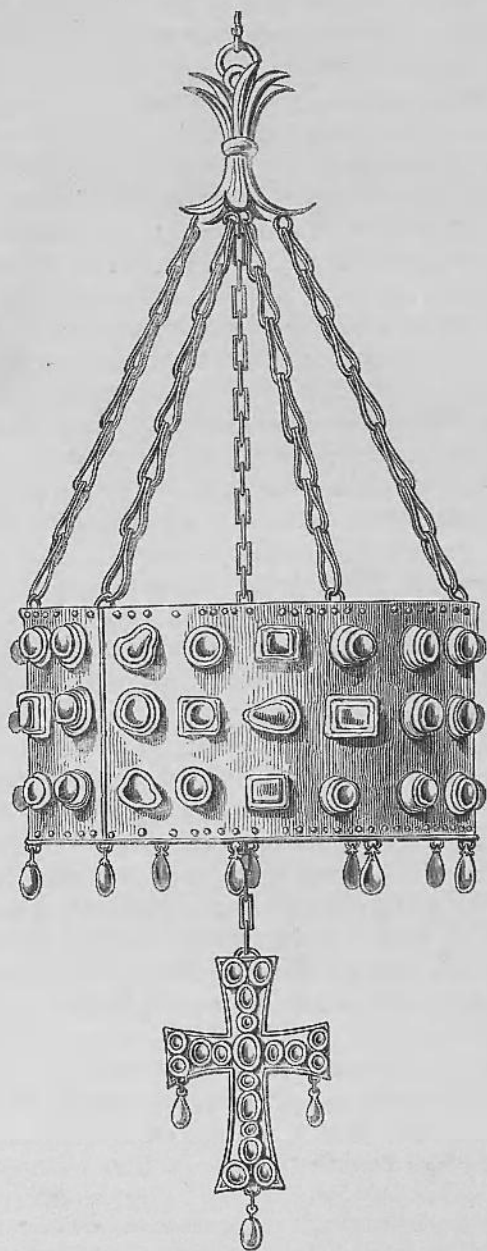
the beauty of the whole design and workmanship, to render this crown with its accessories one of the most gorgeous and remarkable relics of its age.

The crown and pendant cross, second in importance only to that above described, were probably worn by the Gothic queen, whose name is not known. The woodcut here given may suffice to show its fashion and proportions. In default of any more elaborate representation I have had recourse to that which accompanies M. Du Sommerard's notice in the *Monde Illustré*. The general arrangement is the same as in the crown of the king, but the enrichments are less sumptuous; in this costly ornament there is no inscription, nor any *cloisonné* work. The broad circlet is set with fifty-four rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and opals: eight pendant sapphires fringe its lower margin. It deserves observation that near both edges of this circlet, above and below, there are little loops which served doubtless to attach a lining or cap of some costly tissue within the golden hoop, protecting the brows of the royal wearer. The pendant cross is of less sumptuous character than that attached to the crown of the king: it is, however, richly set on both its sides with sapphires, oriental onyxes, pearls, and pieces of mother-of-pearl, and it has sapphires appended to the foot and limbs.

The six other crowns are of various sizes and fashions: they are regarded, with much probability, as having appertained to some children of the royal race. Three of these crowns are essentially different from those already described: instead of a broad hoop the circlet consists of an open frame-work of gold, formed with three horizontal hoops traversed by numerous uprights; and gems are set at the points of intersection. Each crown is enriched with not less than fifty-four precious stones and pearls, and has also the hanging fringe of sapphires and the pendant cross. On one of the crosses is engraved in large well formed characters the following dedication,—

+ IN DEI NOMINE OFFERET SONNICA SANCTE MARIE IN SORBACES.

After the word *NOMINE* a leaf is introduced as a stop, as often seen in ancient Roman epigraphy. *Sonnica*, M. Du Sommerard informed me, has been considered to be a male



Gold Crown and Cross, supposed to be that of the Queen of Reccesvinthus,
King of the Goths, A.D. 657.

appellative, the names of men among the Goths occurring not unfrequently with the terminal vowel :³ the personage by whom this offering to the Virgin was made has not been identified ; and no satisfactory explanation, as far as I could ascertain, had been given by the antiquaries in France of the name *Sorbaces*, which doubtless indicated the locality where the church in which this precious relic had been suspended was situated. It appears, however, very probable that, as my friend Mr. Weston S. Walford has suggested, *Sorbaces* may be *Sorbas*, a small town in the province of Almeria, in Andalucia, about twenty-five miles distant from the shores of the Mediterranean. There exist at that place, as we learn from the valuable Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of Spain, by Pascual Madozi (Madrid, 1846, 16 vols. 8vo.), a church dedicated in honor of the *Purissima Concepcion*, and some ruins of a Moorish castle.

The remaining three crowns are of much smaller size, and have no pendant crosses ; they are hoops of considerable breadth, jeweled, and ornamented with *repoussé* work and mother-of-pearl : one of them presents an arcade of little open round-headed arches, with elaborate ornament engraved or hammered up, in which foliated patterns prevail. The smaller crowns, as before observed, are of comparatively diminutive proportions, such as would only fit the heads of children. It will be remembered that in certain representations of the Imperial family in the times of the Eastern Empire, not only the Byzantine Emperor and Empress, but each of the younger personages of their august race appears wearing a broad jeweled circlet, or a crown.

There is no trace of enamel upon any of these rich ornaments : the *cloisonné* work already mentioned as similar to that occurring on Merovingian ornaments, and especially to the enrichment of the relics found in the supposed tomb of Childeric near Tournay,⁴ is remarkable ; the incrustations appear to be chiefly of cornelian, in place of which bright red glass, or as some suppose, garnet set over gold foil, is more commonly found in the enrichments of this class. A

³ The names of several predecessors of Reccesvinthus, namely, Liuva, Suintila, Chintila, and Tulca, may be cited in support of this observation. Wamba and Egica also occur among his successors on the throne of the Visigoths.

⁴ See Chifflet's *Anastasis Childerici*, and the recently published work by the Abbe Cochet, "*Le Tombeau de Childeric I., Roi des Francs, restitué à l'aide de l'Archeologie.*"

number of fictitious gems occur in the smaller ornaments, being, as M. Du Sommerard informed me, vitreous pastes of various colours ; but the paste has suffered during long deposit in the earth, and the colours are scarcely apparent. A more remarkable fact, in regard to the ornamentation, is to be found in the profuse introduction of small plates of mother-of-pearl in place of real pearls. This substance is well preserved, and of considerable brilliancy. Our talented friend, Mr. William Burges, it may be remembered, invited our attention, in his valuable Memoir on the relics of Theodelinda at Monza,⁵ to the use of mother-of-pearl, as recorded in the Treatise of Theophilus. I believe, however, that it is of very rare occurrence among the ornaments of the earlier periods which have been preserved to our times. The use of mother-of-pearl on works of such remarkable and sumptuous character as the Gothic crowns under consideration may be regarded as a proof of its rarity, and of the high estimation in which it was held in times when the comparative difficulty of communication with the distant East must have given a greater value to this beautiful material than it possesses at the present time.

There are few relics of the period now existing, deserving of comparison with the precious regalia which I have endeavoured to describe. The crown of the Lombard King Agilulfus, formerly in the Treasury at Monza and transported to Paris by Napoleon, unfortunately perished when the collections at the Imperial Library in Paris were plundered in 1804 ; we can now only form a notion of its similarity in character and workmanship to the crowns of the Gothic race, through the imperfect representation which has been preserved by Frisi, and has been frequently copied.⁶ The celebrated circlet of jeweled work at Monza, within which the iron crown of Lombardy is inclosed, is of great beauty of execution, but it differs materially in character from those found at Toledo, and falls short of them in the barbaric magnificence of enrichment, and in the impressive

⁵ *Archæological Journal*, vol. xiv. p. 14. Numerous pieces of mother-of-pearl occur with precious gems on the circlet called the crown of Theodelinda, at Monza. Theophilus, lib. iii. cap. 95, distinctly speaks of the practice by goldsmiths of cutting out pieces of shells, and forming therewith "*Margaritæ*, in

auro satis utiles."

⁶ *Memorie della Chiesa Monzese*, &c., dal Canonico A. Frisi, Milan, 1775, tav. iv. p. 42. It is also figured in the notes on Paulus Diaconus, *Rerum Italicarum Script.* tom. i., p. 460. See also the *Handbook of the Arts of the Middle Ages*, translated from M. Labarte, p. 206.

effect of so sumptuous a display of natural gems remarkable for their dimensions and lustrous brilliancy.⁷

Of the usage of suspending golden crowns as votive offerings in churches frequent notices are found in the lives of the Roman Pontiffs by Anastasius, and in ancient chronicles and documents. They are usually described as having been placed over the altar, and in many instances mention is made of jeweled crosses of gold appended within such crowns, an accessory ornament which is found to accompany four of the Gothic crowns now under consideration. Fontaninus, in a learned Dissertation on the Iron Crown of Lombardy, cites numerous examples, serving to illustrate his observations on the other crowns formerly preserved with it in the Treasury at Monza, namely, those of King Agilulfus and Theodelinda his Queen.⁸ The former, which was richly jeweled and ornamented with figures of the Apostles, bore the following inscription—AGILVLF · GRAT · D'I · VIR · GLOR · REX · TOTIVS · ITAL · OFFERET · S'CO · IOHANNI · BAPTISTE · IN · ECCL · MODICIA. To each of these crowns was appended a jeweled cross, described as exceeding in weight, in both instances, that of the crown itself. It must be observed, however, that according to Muratori these precious objects had undergone certain restorations in the fourteenth century. The original fashion and adjustment were doubtless preserved, and also the inscription, in which the expression OFFERET is not without interest, as identical with that in the inscription before noticed, formed by the letters appended to the crown of Reccesvinthus, and that on one of the crosses, which bears the name of Sonnica.⁹ The crowns suspended as offerings in churches suggested doubtless the sumptuous pensile luminaries frequently designated from a very early period as *coronæ*, and in which the form of the royal circlet was preserved, in much larger proportions, as exemplified

⁷ The iron crown is figured in the Dissertation by Fontaninus, and in Du Sommerard's Album, 10th series, pl. 14.

⁸ Justi Fontanini Dissertatio de Corona Ferrea; Romæ, 1719, pp. 91—97. See also the Hierolexicon by Dominic and Charles Macer, under the word *Corona*; Ducange's Glossary, under the words *Corona*, *Regnum*, *Spanoclystus*, &c.

⁹ On the gold plates covering the Evangelary presented by Theodelinda to the church of Monza, the word OFFERT occurs Frisi, Memorie della Chiesa

Monzese, p. 43. The crown of Theodelinda, with the pendant cross, is figured in Frisi, p. 76. See also the Encyclopédie Théologique, Dictionnaire d'Orfèvrerie, v. Couronnes. Many instances of crowns offered in like manner by sovereign princes might be cited. Clovis, at the suggestion of St. Remi, sent to the church of St. Peter, at Rome, "Coronam auream cum gemmis, quæ Regnum appellari solet." Hincmarus, in vita S. Remigii.

by the remarkable *corona* still to be seen suspended in the Cathedral at Aix la Chapelle over the crypt in which the body of Charlemagne was deposited. This *corona* was the offering of the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa, by whom the imperial tomb was opened in 1165.

The limits of this notice have not permitted me to advert to various points of interest to the student of ancient Christian Art, such as the forms and origin of crowns in early times, the distinction between imperial and royal crowns, and the signification of certain terms, *Corona*, *Regnum*, *Diadema*, &c., upon which much has been written by Ciampini, Ducange, and other authors.

I must lastly observe that not the least remarkable fact, connected with this precious assemblage of crowns to which I have sought to invite attention, is their perfect preservation: they seem to have suffered no injury, nor have any of the gems with which they are so richly set been displaced. The French archæologists appear to have left for future investigations to determine, on what occasion and in what locality so magnificent an offering was made by Reccesvinthus; and to what cause, in some time of invasion or predatory disorder, its concealment at the Fuente de Guarrazar may be attributed.

These votive crowns may have remained, as Mr. Weston S. Walford observed, when I first brought this subject under the notice of the Institute, scarcely more than half a century in the position for which they were destined by the Gothic king. In the Chronicle of Roderic, Archbishop of Toledo, which was finished by him in 1243, some notices occur of Reccesvinthus. At his instance three synods or councils were held at Toledo, and the chronicler remarks, "*altaria Christi ornamentis variis decorabat.*" Had the votive offering of the golden crowns been known to him, some allusion would doubtless have been made to so costly a gift. But they had probably disappeared long before. The invasion of Spain by the Saracens in the eventful reign of Roderic, last king of the Goths, took place about forty years after the death of Reccesvinthus. They plundered the towns but spared the peasantry. Whether these crowns were at Sorbas or elsewhere, it is probable that they were taken for security to Toledo. That city soon capitulated, after the fatal defeat of Roderic in 712. Some one may have taken flight with the

treasure, and, having buried the crowns for safety, may have lost his life before he could recover them or reveal the place of concealment.

It were much to be desired, that these precious relics should be permanently secured for the Musée des Thermes at Paris, where so admirable a series has been combined for public gratification, and where the archæologist always finds facilities and courtesy rarely afforded in other countries. I regret to state that the purchase of the treasure cannot yet be regarded as accomplished. The vendor, on whose lands the hoard lay concealed, accepted the terms of transfer agreed upon, but, in delivering over the acquisition to the French Government, he declined for the present to receive payment of the price. Before the transaction had become, by actual receipt of the purchase moneys, a *fait accompli*, the discovery of the treasure became known to the Spanish Government. Reclamation was forthwith made, on the ground that the crowns were National Regalia, inalienable heir-looms of the State, of which it were impossible under any circumstances that one nation should deprive another, with which it was allied in such close and intimate relations as subsist between the Empire and Spain. So complex and important a question of Treasure Trove has probably never before occurred. Meanwhile the vendor prudently declined to receive the price agreed upon, and he demanded restitution of the golden treasure, which, of course, the authorities by whom the affairs of the State Collections in France are administered, cannot render back. At the commencement of the late campaign in Lombardy, this intricate question awaited the Imperial decision. Amidst interests of more momentous import, the affair may possibly pass over, and the Gothic regalia may be permitted to remain for the gratification of the visitors of the collections increasing daily in interest and importance at the Musée des Thermes.

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SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES FROM THE SPANISH WRITERS
RELATING TO RECCESVINTHUS, AND THE LAST KINGS
OF THE GOTHS IN SPAIN.¹

To the foregoing account of a discovery of unusual interest, it may not be irrelevant to subjoin a few notices from the Spanish Chronicles, in regard to Reccesvinthus and the succession of the last sovereigns of the Gothic race. Considerable discrepancies are found in statements of some modern authors on this period of Spanish history. The fullest of the Chronicles appears to be that of Roderic, Archbishop of Toledo, to which allusion has already been made. He was living A.D. 1243. With this it may be well to compare the chronicle of Rodericus Santius, finished in 1469, that of Johannes Vassæus, who died in 1562, and the statements of Alphonsus a Carthagera, Michaelis Ritiæ Neapolitanus, and Franciscus Tarapha. All appear to agree generally in the leading historical events, and in the genealogy of the later Gothic princes. It will be seen by the following extracts that Reccesvinthus, or, as the name appears in the Chronicle of the Archbishop of Toledo, Recensuindus, was son of Cindasvindus,² who in his later years shared the kingdom with his son, and died A.D. 657. Reccesvinthus succeeded as sole sovereign, and he was eminent for his piety, as the Archbishop relates in the following passages in his Chronicle :—

“Cindasvindus Recensuindum filium suum regno Gotthorum præponit, regnans per se annis sex, mensibus novem, et cum filio suo Recensuindo annis quatuor, diebus quindecim. . . . Obit Toleti.

“Recensuindus post mortem patris successit in regno, æra Dxcv.,³ et regnavit annis xviii. et mensibus xi., in universo xliii. annis. . . . Illic fidem catholicam ex corde diligens a sciolis sanctæ scripturæ petebat dubia scripturarum et articulos fidei declarari, adeo quod eum divinæ Scripturæ semper collatio delectabat: altaria Christi ornamentis variis decorabat. . . . Obit Kal. Septembris, ibique [Bamba in territorio Palantino] sepultus fuit æra Dccxiii.”

On the death of Reccesvinthus, A.D. 675, leaving a son of early age,

¹ These Chronicles may be consulted in the “Rerum Hispanicarum Scriptores, ex bibliotheca clarissimi viri Dn. Roberti Beli Angli.” Francof. 1579.

² This king's name is written Chindasvinto by Mariana (Historia de Espana), who states (lib. vi. c. 20) that he had by Riesberga, his queen, three sons, Reccesvinthus, Theodofredus, and Favila, and a daughter, whose name is not given, who married the Greek Ardebastus, and was mother of Ervigius, who became king

of the Goths as above stated. The supposed daughter is called by the Chroniclers the *consobrina* of Cindasvindus. It is highly probable that Theodofredus was a brother of Reccesvinthus.

³ A. D. 657. The era of Spain commenced on Jan. 1, B.C. 38, that country having been conquered by Augustus, A.U.C. 715. To reduce the era year to the year A.D., 38 must be deducted from the former.

named Theodofredus, Bamba, a powerful chief, was chosen King; he retired into a monastery, A.D. 685. Of his successor, Ervigius, we read as follows :—

“ Huic [Bambæ] succedit Ervigius, eo quod esset Recensuindi sobrinus, sed tyrannide non de jure. Reliquerat enim Recensuindus filium parvulum Theodofredum, cui regni successio debebatur. Cœpit autem regnare Ervigius æra Decxxiii., et regnavit annis vii. Hic Cisilonem filiam suam magno viro Egicæ, Bambæ principis consobrino, dedit uxorem, propter Recensuindi filium Theodofredum, ne regni ejus primordia impediret.”

Ervigius died about A.D. 692, and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Egica, who reigned ten or thirteen years. Vitiza, son of Egica, was associated with him before his death, and succeeded him. Through the machinations of Egica, the youthful heir of Reccesvinthus had been exiled to Cordova, where he built a palace, and married a lady of royal race, Ricilone, by whom he had Roderic, who ultimately became king, known as “The last of the Goths.” Vitiza caused the eyes of Theodofredus to be put out, an act of cruelty which Roderic avenged in like manner upon the usurper himself.

“ Cum enim Theodofredus filius Recensuindi, qui in ætate parvula a patre fuerat derelictus, et in juvenili ætate placidus, elegantis formæ, et indolis gratosæ, ab omnibus amaretur, timens Egica pater Vitizæ ne juvenis tanti generis et tantæ spei ad regni fastigium aspiraret, a propriis finibus Cordubam exilio relegavit. Cumque sibi mansio Cordubæ placuisset, ibi palatium miræ fortitudinis fabricavit, quod et filius ejus ætatis robore adolescens et dilatavit, et obfirmavit, qui aliquandiu ibi moratus duxit uxorem de regali genere nomine Ricilonem, ex qua suscepit filium Rodericum.⁴ Cum autem Vitiza regni gubernacula post patrem suum Egicam suscepisset, æmulatione, qua pater, cœpit persequi Theodofredum, donec captum utroque lumine fecit orbum. Igitur Rodericus filius Theodofredi, quem Vitiza, ut patrem, privare oculis visus fuit, favore Romani Senatus qui eum ob Recinsuindi (*sic*) gratiam diligebat, contra Vitizam decrevit publice rebellare. Qui viribus præeminens cepit eum, et quod patri suo fecerat, fecit ei, et regno expulsum, sibi regnum electione Gotthorum et senatus auxilio vindicavit.”⁵

By the concurrent testimony of these early chronicles it thus appears that Roderic was the grandson of Reccesvinthus, whose regalia have been brought to light, as above related. Some later writers however represent him as the nephew. Mariana asserts, without stating any authority, that Reccesvinthus died without issue, and that Theodofredus, his brother, espoused Ricilona, and had issue Roderic. The date of Roderic's accession, and that of his death, have been variously stated. Some modern writers relate that he obtained the sovereignty and lost his life in the same year, A.D. 711, which is improbable. In the “*Art de Verifier les Dates*,” he is said to have been chosen king in 710 or 711, and his fatal defeat by the Saracens is placed in 712. According to the Spanish Chronicles, however, that event appears to have occurred in A.D. 714.

⁴ The Chronicle of Santius gives Retilene as the name of the mother of the Last of the Goths, and states that Theodofredus had by her another son, Costa,

who reigned before Roderic, during five years.

⁵ Ex Roderico Toletano de rebus Hispaniæ, *ut supra*, pp. 117, 178, 187, 190.