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Exotic Textiles from Medieval Christian Church Treasuries: Circulation, Utilization, and Integration

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that the ornamental motifs of Islamic textiles imported to medieval Europe were important sources for the artistical creation in the Occident, which had largely inspired the mythological animals on the capitals of the cathedrals, on bronzes, in the initials and the columns of the canon-tables of the Romanesque period. [75, p. 44] Textiles have been regarded as important artistical transmitters and cultural intermediaries, which had introduced new styles, iconographies, or significations from the Islamic world into the West. Art historians' approach has focused mainly on the transmitted information brought by the movement of art objects [39, pp. 17–50; 19, pp. 1–60; 67, pp. 81–93; 68, pp. 101–119]. The imported art objects of the high level of craftsmanship in the Christian world had been largely admired and utilized to decorate the venerated objects [21, pp. 79–101].

1.1. The importation of oriental textiles into the Occident

The sericulture was believed by the Romans to have originated in China. The importation of the silks of the Orient into the West could be dated back to the 1st century A. D. In the Early Middle Ages, there existed only the manufacture of wool and linen textiles in Western Europe; silk textiles were mostly imported from the Byzantine Empire or Sassanian Persia. A Sassanian-style silk fabric decorated with images of hunting scenes has been found at a 5th century site in Arles, France (then the capital of the Roman Empire's Gallic province) [12, p. 243]. Visigoth King Theodoric II (r. 456–466 A. D.) decorated the king's throne with fuchsia Sassanian silk at royal ceremonies, which Western rulers at the time called “*étoffes d'outre mer / overseas fabrics*” [15, p. XCIX]. In 761 A. D., the Frankish king Pépin le bref (r. 751–768 A. D.) donated Byzantine silk to the Monastery of St. Calman in Mozac [64, pp. 811–848]. As we can see, there are a remarkable group of oriental textiles conserved in the West, which are believed to be the products of the Byzantine Empire or the Sassanian Persia. In addition, we can also see a group of Central Asian textiles which are supposed to be produced by imitating the Sogdian textile Zandanjī (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) [71, pp. 257–282; 25, pp. 213–222; 73, pp. 207–213].

As textiles are easily transportable, the circulation of the oriental textiles into the Occident can be easily explained. The Islamic textiles of high quality and great variety reached the Occident in great quantity. Textiles are also considered as one of the most popular art objects in the Medieval Europe. In addition, the textiles were the important intermediaries of new techniques of textile production and new decorations, such as vegetal motifs, mythological animals, combined figures, and figural images of the sovereigns, as well as the decorative inscription bands known as “*tiraz*”. These elements of decoration provided new inspirations for the artisans in the Occident [42, pp. 197–240].



Fig. 1. Shroud of Saint Mengold 9–10th century, Église Notre-Dame, Huy, Belgium, 200×130 cm © Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique



Fig. 4. Pyxis decorated with four medallions (medallion with a falconer), Madinat al-Zahra, region of Cordoba, Spain. Musée du Louvre, Lens (OA 2774), © Louvre Lens



Fig. 2. Shroud of Saints Columba and Lupus, detail, 9th century; Sens, Musées de Sens, Trésor de la Cathédrale de Sens, inv. no. I.3 ©Musée de Sens



Fig. 3. Fragment of the Shroud de Saint Lazare of Autun, 55×30 cm; Musée de Cluny-Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris (Cl. 21865), © Musée de Cluny

1.2. Textile production in the Islamic Spain

Under the Spanish Umayyad Dynasties, Cordoba was the center of Andalusian production. As in other centers of production around the Mediterranean and in the Near East, the finest silks were produced in strictly controlled palace workshops for the use in elaborate court rituals, or for distribution as diplomatic gifts and ceremonial robes. Soon, however, the workshops began to produce high quality silks for sale and more general consumption. In the 10th century, Andalusian silks were exported to Fatimid Egypt, where they figured among the gifts that the caliphs gave to their servants. After the fall of the Umayyad Caliph of Córdoba (1031 A. D.), the center of silk production shifted from Córdoba to Almeria, a thriving commercial and industrial center on the southeast coast of the Iberian Peninsula [60, pp. 265–279].

The Andalusian Umayyad court required a large quantity of silk to respond to the imposed ceremonial, as did the Abbasid court. It is for this reason that the weaving workshop known as the *tiraz* in Cordoba was created by Abd Al-Rahman II. It was the first of these establishments in Al-Andalus. Like the state factories of Iran and Byzantium, the *tiraz* proved to be such an excellent source of income that the Muslim rulers, establishing their courts in the conquered territories, naturally integrated the factories of silk that already existed or about to be established [41, vol. 1, p. 66]. When Abd al-Rahman III was in power, there were many such workshops in the Iberian Peninsula; the products were exported to Egypt, various Iranian provinces, and other silk weaving centers. The rich Andalusian fabrics circulated throughout the peninsula and other continental kingdoms, but also rivaled in richness and beauty those of other Islamic territories [61, pp. 187–206].

The great importance of Al-Andalus as a center of silk manufacturing in the Middle Ages is well-known. Arab historians such as Ibn Hawkal, Yakut, and Al-Makkari give glowing accounts of the large production and the high quality and wide variety of textiles produced. The cities most often cited as silk weaving centers are Cordoba, Almeria, Malaga, and Seville. Al-Andalus's first *tiraz* was to be the one attached to the Umayyad 'Abd al-Rahman Palace in Cordoba. Almeria soon overtook Cordoba in its manufactures. Makkari reports that in Almeria alone there were thousands of looms producing silk and brocades:

“It was a factory for the manufacture of precious coats of fashioned silk. There was a brocade factory there which no other country could surpass, and an arsenal. According to someone: in Almeria there were 800 looms for the weaving of the *tirazi* silk garments, and for the precious coats and the splendid brocade... Almeria was, at the time of the Almoravids, the city of Al-Andalusians (who had the most extensive relations with the rest of the Muslim world); there were found the most striking artisanal productions. For silk weaving, it had 800 *tiraz* factories. They made fabrics there such as capes (*hulla*), brocades, *siklatun*, *Isfahani*, *Djurdjani*, curtains with vertical stripes, fabrics with circle patterns, the fabric called 'Attabi, and that which is called *fakhir*, in short, all kinds of fabrics” [1, p. 88].

Among the many medieval silks that can be attributed to the Muslim workshops of Al-Andalus, the products of Almeria under the Almoravids stands out above all from an iconographic and technical point of view. Stylistically and technically, Baghdad-style silks form a homogeneous whole that bears witness to Oriental influence.

According to Ibn Hawkal, within textile production, there are imitations of the Baghdad style. According to him: “Travellers who have been to Baghdad say that Cordoba is like one



Fig. 5. Chasuble of Thomas Becket, 11th or 12th century, Cathedral of Fermo, Italy, © Muse Diocesano di Fermo

of the sides of Baghdad, it has excellent clothes and dresses of soft linen, excellent silk” [40, p. 110]. The Andalusians were fascinated by the fabrics coming from the various oriental textile centers, whether Persian, Byzantine, Islamic, or Central Asian. In some cases, they arrived as diplomatic gifts, but they were also distributed through trade routes; they came from the most diverse manufacturers, in markets that were beginning to establish themselves in different places. The interest in oriental fabrics generated imitation or counterfeit products to increase the value of the pieces, which led to the erection of regulations on the practice of counterfeiting, since Al-Andalus was considered the periphery of the Islamic world [32, pp. 63–90].

2. Andalusian textiles in the Occident

In this research, I would like to present a group of precious Islamic textiles conserved in the treasuries of Christian churches. They have been dated between 11th and 12th century and were produced in the Andalusian workshops in the Islamic Spain. Stylistically and technically, this group of textiles are rich gold-embroidered pieces which were royal products of Al-Andalus. It is supposed that these textiles were regarded as a symbol of royalty and luxury associated with the Umayyad Caliphal court or the Almoravid sovereignty.

The Shroud of Saint Lazare (Fig. 3) has large multi-lobed medallions that enclose riders or sphinxes and are separated by smaller medallions decorated with eagles carrying off their prey. Most of its fragments are preserved in the Cathedral of Autun; a small piece is in the Cluny Museum, two others most important at the Historical Museum of Textiles in Lyon (inv. no. MT. 27600). On one of the pieces of Lyon, the shield of one of the riders bears an inscription which unfortunately is no longer legible. Another inscription in the same place on the piece of Autun reads “Al-Muzaffar” (المظفر), i.e., “the victorious” [47, pp. 815–816].



Fig. 6. Chasuble of the Henry II (r. 1014–1024), 1st quarter of 11th century, Domschatz of Bamberg (3.3.0003), Germany, © Diözesanmuseum of Bamberg

This mention can only relate to Abd-al-Malik who succeeded his father Al-Mansur in 1002. He maintained the Caliphate's military hegemony over the Christian kingdoms, forcing their rulers to respect truces and accept him as arbiter in their disputes. Following his victory in 1007 over Sancho García, Count of Castile and Alava, he bore the title of Al-Muzaffar shortly before his death, in October 1008 [54, pp. 3–87]. It is supposed that the fabric was offered to him at the end of the year 1007, after his victory had been celebrated in Cordoba in October of that year. The shroud of the patron saint of Autun Cathedral is thus a rare example of precisely dated Islamic fabric. It is claimed that on October 20th, 1146, the relics of Saint Lazare were transferred from the Church of Saint Nazaire to the new church constructed in Autun in honor of the Saint [30, pp. 721–723].

The shroud's decoration consists of medallions roughly 22 centimeters in diameter arranged in horizontal rows. Each medallion is composed of two concentric hexalobes formed by pearled ribbons in gold on a red background. Some of the medallions contain sphinxes in procession or confronted while others contain horsemen. By all its characteristics, the shroud is similar to the productions of contemporary Arab art and represents one of the oldest creations of Islamic embroidery in Spain. Most of the riders are falconers carrying a bird on their fist and brandishing a prey in their other hand; one of them is attacked by a lion jumping on a horse's rump.

We find similar representations in the Seljuk art, in the 9th and 10th centuries, on one painting from Nishapur and on ceramics discovered in the same region. The same iconography can be seen on the contemporary Andalusian ivory caskets (Fig. 4). Similar images are also presented on the chasuble of Saint Thomas Becket and the Bamberg mantle [33; 6, pp. 41–46]. And the figural depiction of birds reflects the fondness for hunting that game bird, which became the most highly prized of such prey in the Al-Andalus in the beginning of the 9th century [48, p. 441].



Fig. 7. Fragment of Gold brocade with Griffin patterns, 1100–1150 A. D., Almeria, Spain, 52.7×63.5 cm, Provenance: Catedral de Santa María de Sigüenza, Spain. Conserved in the Cleveland Museum of Art (1952.152), © Cleveland Museum of Art



Fig. 8. Fragment of Gold brocade with Griffin patterns, 1100–1150 A. D., Almeria, Spain, 52.7×63.5 cm, Provenance: Catedral de Santa María de Sigüenza, Spain. Conserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (58.85.1), © Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 9. Gold brocade with medallion and eagle pattern, 1100–1150 A. D., Almeria, Spain, 36.8×40.6cm, Provenance: Catedral de Sigüenza, Spain. Conserved in Cleveland Museum of Art (1952.15), © Cleveland Museum of Art



Fig. 10. Gold brocade with medallion and eagle pattern, 1100–1150 A. D., Almeria, Spain, 43.2×33 cm, Provenance: Catedral de Sigüenza, Spain, Metropolitan Museum of Art (58.85.2), © Metropolitan Museum of Art. Arabic inscription: بركة / benediction

The textile of the Shroud is believed to be woven in a Muslim workshop in the southern Spain. It is probable, given the outstanding quality of the work, that the Shroud of Saint Lazare was woven in one of the most famous centers of Al-Andalus, Cordoba, or Almeria. These two cities seem the most probable; Almeria, where Fermo's chasuble comes from some hundred years later, supplanted Cordoba at an uncertain date, taking over its artistic traditions. Between these two centers of Muslim textile art, it is prudent, in the present state of our knowledge, not to choose [53, p. 53].

The chasuble of Saint Thomas Becket (Fig. 5) conserved in Fermo counts among the largest surviving pieces of medieval vestment. The semicircular chasuble is made of a double-face silk of blue and white couched with golden threads, which are laid parallel and vertical. The embroidery is couched on the blue side of the silk, which creates an impressive appearance of a thick textile made from two contrasting colors of blue and gold.

It is believed that the blue and gold colors are well known in other medieval royal and sacred contexts. It calls to mind the frequent combination of gold and blue tesserae in Byzantine mosaics and especially of those dated to the Umayyad period. Moreover, this combination seems to have been widely adopted by the Umayyads for decorating public and sacred spaces and especially for monumental inscriptions, in which Arabic script appears in golden lettering on a blue background.

The main pattern of this textile consists of large, populated medallions, all of them are bound to each other by smaller ones. The areas located in between these roundels are decorated by an eight-pointed star-like motif. All these roundels and stars are decorated with figural motifs, typically animals. The figural motifs of most of the roundels consist of wild and fabulous animals such as eagles, winged lions, griffins, sphinxes, elephants, horned quadrupeds, and phoenix.

According to Sigrid Müller-Christensen's research of the weave analysis, this sumptuous vestment was sewed together with several pieces which were all cut from the same embroidery. These pieces vary considerably in size and grain of the fabric [69, pp. 66–79]. It is obvious that the original shape of the textile is totally different from what we see today, this difference can prove, in addition, different functions of this textile in the Islamic world and after its import to the Christian West [64, p. 356].

The date and place of production of the Fermo double-face silk cannot be established easily. Chronologically, it could have been produced at any time between 1020 and 1140, while geographically, although its production in Spain seems obvious, an import from the Middle East cannot be excluded. To reach a more precise conclusion, the Arabic inscription should also be taken into consideration, even though the reading of the Fermo chasuble inscriptions remains uncertain and enigmatic. According to the reading of Mohamed Abd el-Rahim, one of these inscriptions can be read as: "the whole fortune be to you, whenever the night emerges, praise be to Allah, blessing, and rank for god's connoisseur the King of Cordoba" [69, pp. 60–65], nevertheless, the term "King of Cordoba" is not frequently present. The readings of David Storm Rice and Abdullah Ghouchani have identified the word "Al-Mariyya", which corresponds to the center of the textile production in Al-Andalus, Almeria.

The mantle of Emperor Henry II (Fig. 6) could also be attributed to the first half of the 11th century. The semicircular mantle contains 13 large medallions in two and a half rows. It is believed to be possessed by Holy Roman Emperor Henry II (1014–1024). These roundel motifs contain the images of a ruler on horseback, who is distinguished by a pendilia (pen-

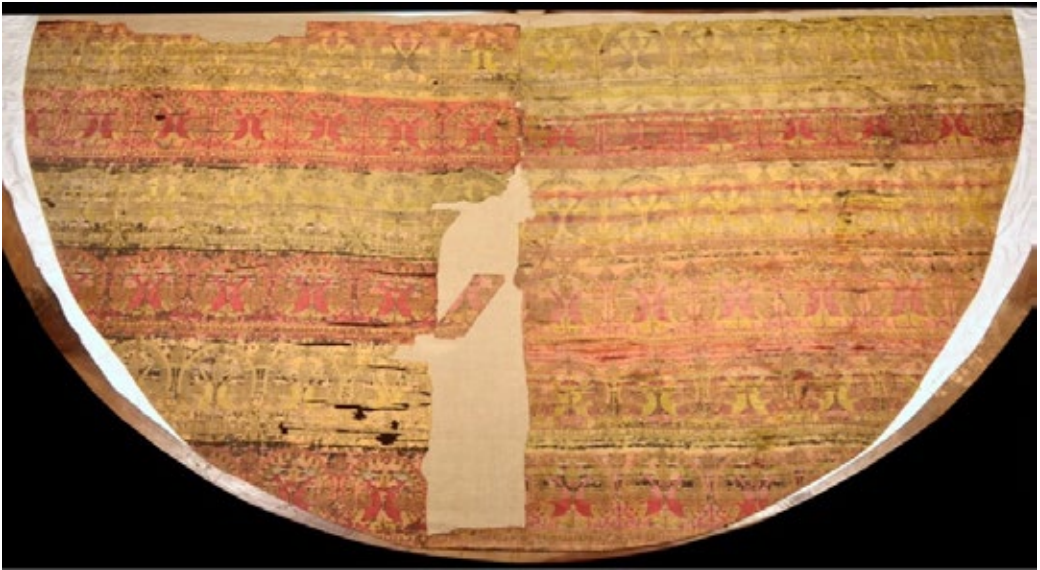


Fig. 11. Chasuble of Saint Exupère, Toulouse, Basilique Saint-Sernin, Almeria, Spain, 1st half of the 12th century, H. 153.5 cm, L. 287 cm, © Réunion des musées nationaux



Fig. 13. Chasuble of San Juan de Ortega, 1st half of the 12th century, Parochial Church, Quintanaortuño, Burgos, Spain, © Arzobispado de Burgos

Fig. 12. Fragment of Chasuble de Saint Exupère, Paris, Musée de Cluny-Musée National du Moyen Âge (Cl. 12869) © Musée de Cluny

doulia) crown, a large scepter with vegetal decorations, and a fluttering cloak. His horse rides over three defeated foes while being attacked from the front by a lion. The medallion frames are filled with wavy tendrils whose branches alternately enclose a bird and quadruped. The connecting circles of the large medallions each contain a candelabra tree with opposite birds. The spandrels between the medallions are filled with axially symmetrical subdivided diamond and tendril motifs [45, pp. 108–139; 7, pp. 93–126].

An Arabic inscription band is below the straight edge of the hem, the Arabic inscriptions in Kufic characters are repeated and represented in mirror symmetry. It says: “al-mulk li-llāh” (The dominion belongs to God) supplemented by “al shukr” (the gratitude) and below it “baraka” (benediction) [44, pp. 36–39].

Few Hispano–Arabic fabrics can be precisely dated. Besides the fragments of Sigüenza, prior to 1147. Four fragments are originally conserved in the Cathedral of Sigüenza, they were cut from the Shrine of San Librada (Fig. 7–10). These pieces can also be attributed to the products of the Almeria workshops of first half of the 12th century [55, pp. 1–3].

Two fragments display a pattern of roundels bearing addorsed griffins with gazelles below their forelegs, within a border of pairs of fantastic animals. The interstitial motif consists of an eight-pointed star enclosing a rosette and surrounded by pairs of confronted quadrupeds. The pattern, popular in both Muslim and Byzantine worlds, recalls earlier silks of the eastern Mediterranean and, ultimately, of Central Asia [70, pp. 373–382]. The design of the other two textiles is comprised of a single-headed eagle and composite quadrupeds and harpies in the outer band and a leonine quadruped within a roundel on each shoulder. There is a band of pseudo-epigraphy; Kufic script that could be translated as “benediction (Barakat)” beneath its talons. Both technical and stylistic characteristics relate this entire group of silks so closely that it is impossible to conceive them anything other than the products of the same center if not of the same workshop. The underlying design concept is that of rows of large-scale tangent circles with elaborately decorated frames enclosing birds or animals and richly ornamented interstitial motifs based on a palmette device which grows out four directions from a central star. The colors, with a few exceptions, are identical: the design is dull orange–red and dark, somewhat bluish, green against an ivory ground and some minor details are in a golden yellow, while the heads of animals or birds and occasionally other details are brocaded in gold.

As the written sources have documented Castilian King Alfonso VII (reigned 1126–1157 A. D.), captured the textile center of Almeria in 1147. The circulation of this group of textiles could also be connected to the victory against the Almoravids and the capture of Almeria in 1147 [57, pp. 231–233].

Another similar liturgical vestment, the Chasuble de Saint Exupère (Fig. 11–12) could be attributed to the product of Almeria of the first half of the 12th century, under the reign of the Berber Dynasty, the Almoravid. It is difficult to date the arrival of this textile in Toulouse, but we can, on the other hand, give some indications on its use in the basilica. It probably was used since 1258 as a shroud to wrap the relics of Saint Exupère.

This textile presents a sumptuous decoration of peacocks facing each other around a plant axis, scattered in superimposed registers. Between the legs of the peacocks, two small quadrupeds look at them, while a strip of Arabic inscription, arranged in a mirror, runs at the base of the motif. It is a wish to the possessor, which can be translated as “the perfect benediction”.

Several elements indicate that this fabric is of Spanish origin: in particular, it has been compared to a group of silks made in the first mortuary of the 12th century in Almeria and reused



Fig. 14. Manuscript of *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS. T. I. 1, fol. 131r. © Patrimonio Nacional

after the sack of the city by Catholic King Alfonso VII in 1147 for wrap the relics of the holy martyr Librada, in the Cathedral of Sigüenza. These fabrics present, in fact, an angular inscription including the same word *baraka*, inscribed in a similar way and arranged in a mirror, but also an animal decor with certain details similar to the fabric of Toulouse. Thus, the presence of small quadrupeds located between the main motifs of eagles or lions recalls that of the animals located between the peacocks of the chasuble of Saint-Sernin [63, pp. 262–263].

The technique used for this silk fabric, the samit, is oriental and would have been introduced in Al-Andalus only in the 11th century. Complex, it was reserved for luxury textiles. The high quality of this fabric has been confirmed by dye analyses: the different shades of blue, in fact, are obtained from indigo, a plant imported at great expense from the Near East, but also from the Maghreb since the 10th century and therefore reserved for the richest weavings. The latter often come from

the city of Almería, which is particularly famous for its textile workshops [8, pp. 165–166].

If it remains impossible to date the arrival of the fabric in Toulouse, we can, on the other hand, give some indications on its use in the basilica. It was probably used since 1258 as a shroud to wrap the relics of Saint Exupère [49, p. 149], renowned for their miracle-working power: they were soaked in holy water, then drunk by the sick [63, p. 66]. The inventory drawn up in 1246 by Abbot Bernard II of Geniac, twelve years before the translation during which the shroud would have been used, does not allow us to identify it with certainty among the many liturgical vestments kept in the monastery, but mentions the presence of two black samit chasubles in the sacristy [25, p. 10]. It is tempting to see in one of them the shroud of Saint Exupère, which indeed has a blue–black background.

Another Almoravid gold brocade textile with Arabic script embroidery is the chasuble of Bishop San Juan de Ortega (Fig. 13). It is, first of all, one of the rare testimonies of Castilian liturgical vestments of the 12th century, the chasuble being even the oldest of this type preserved for the Iberian Peninsula. The fabrics used to make it also reflect the creativity, originality, and refinement of the Almoravid court culture: the chasuble is the only preserved textile bearing

the name of a memory of this dynasty.

Several fragments survive, including two in a private collection in Madrid and one in the Quintanaortuña church in Burgos, Spain [70, pp. 373–382]. The main decorative image is composed of a roundel with two symmetrical lions and a tree of life inside. There is a horizontal Arabic decorative band between the regiments with an inscription “تصر من الله أمير المسلمين على”, which means “victory from Allah, the Muslim Amir, Ali”. Ali mentioned in the inscription is the fourth chieftain of the Almoravid dynasty, ‘Ali ibn Yusuf, who reigned from 1106 to 1143 A. D. Bishop San Juan de Ortega, the owner of this golden brocade dress, died in 1163 A. D., after the

fall of the Almoravid dynasty. Therefore, it can be supposed that the fabrication of this textile could be dated the first half of the 12th century, and its circulation from the Andalusia into northern Spain could be related to the wars that followed the fall of the Almoravid dynasty [9, vol. 3, pp. 300–301].

This chasuble has also been linked to the Siguënza fragments and attributed to Almería. The technical analyzes of this set of fabrics show that they have a few things in common with the chasuble of Toulouse: the same twist of the threads in “Z” shape or widths with similar dimensions. It is therefore probable that the Toulouse chasuble also dates back to the first half of the 11th century. On the other hand, these other fabrics are not samits, but lampas (for the figural images) or taquetés (for the horizontal band of epigraphy band) [10, p. 79]. This important difference limits comparisons and encourages caution in attributing our chasuble to a specific production center [59, p. 387].

3. Analysis of Iconography

This group of textiles are characterized by large medallions, which are connected to one another. Within the medallions, there are figural images, the majority of which consist of wild or mythological animals such as eagles, elephants, hares, winged lions, griffins, sphinxes, quadruped with a horn, and a phoenix [31, pp. 114–116]. The same human iconography is also represented in several pieces of textiles, as well as in the contemporary ivory objects: the image of a falconer astride a horse, holding a falcon on his arm, and the iconography of a governor seated frontally on a throne accompanied by two courtiers.

The image of medallions with animal or human iconography has a long tradition, especially in the art of Ancient Iran and Central Asia. In the early medieval times, these images appeared



Fig. 15. *Maqamat* of al-Hariri. Pilgrims' caravan to Mecca (with the *Mahmal*), Syria or Baghdad, 1st half of the 13th century. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms arabe 5847, fol. 94v. © Bibliothèque nationale de France

on different media, such as the mosaic of the late Antiquity, the Fatimid and Byzantine ivories and Central Asian textiles [36, pp. 192–224].

According to Zoroastrian belief, the presence of certain creatures, including birds, evoked the prospects of happiness, success, and longevity for the owners of the objects they adorned. In the cosmogonic texts of Zoroastrianism, in the Pehlevi script, Bundahishin, birds, or bird-like beings, are described as adversaries of evil who were created to oppose harmful creatures. The combination of a male human head with a bird's body could represent a benevolent being. The fight of the harpy against the lion, represented on the Boston fragment, could therefore be interpreted as the harpy fighting the demon [56, pp. 2–9].

Since the head of these griffins is represented as the head of an eagle with the long beak, it is likely that the iconography of this animal is interchangeable with that of the mythical Persian bird, the Simorgh. In the chapter on the classification of animals of the Bundahishin, the Simorgh is described with three toes and called the largest of the birds. According to Avestan, the Simorgh is a mythical bird, originally a raptor, eagle, or falcon, and the deity of victory. In Sasanian artistic productions, the Simorgh is often depicted as a compound animal, often as a three-toed winged lion [18, pp. 198–204]. In post-Sasanian times, the Simorgh also appears in epic, folk tales, and mystical literature.

The human figure, the eagle, and the lion each have their own magical power and their own territory. When they combine, they become a guardian for the sovereigns. These symbols were common signs of dominant royal power in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, Greece, and India, with different names and descriptions, they had great significance in mythology and art. The first lion-man statues were made by the Egyptians in the middle of the 3rd millennium B. C. These figurines showed Pharaoh with a human head and beard, and the body of a hunched lion, a symbol of supernatural powers. The Mesopotamians added a pair of wings to this mix. After that, the Mesopotamian Sphinx had become a combination of four formidable and important creatures, with the head of a man, the body of a bull, the feet of a lion, and the wings of an eagle. The griffin and the sphinx appeared in Iranian art since the end of the 2nd millennium BC. We find them in the art of the Elamite period, Luristan, the North region and the Northwest in the Iron Age, and finally, in the Achaemenid and Sassanian art. In Iranian mythology, the griffin is a creature that takes care of celestial bull. Nevertheless, the Sphinx in ancient Greek art and mythology is a monster with the head of a woman, the body of a lioness, the wings of an eagle, and a snake-headed tail. The sphinx is malevolent and sinister. It causes damage and misfortune [20, pp. 84–89].

As a pattern, the motif of the medallion is a specific artistic method of arranging decorations. In this sense, and like any pattern, it has its mediative character. It organizes the cosmos in a specific order in which each species depicted in the roundels can be seen in practical isolation from the rest, specifically framed by a circle [72, pp. 1–5]. The depicted fantastic and wild animals were probably intended to convey an impression of courage and power. This genre of imagery corresponds well with the nexus of ideas usually discussed within the royal iconography in Islamic art, which is also closely connected with the tradition of Ancient Mesopotamia and the Iranian world. The animals of power: the eagle as the king of the sky, the lion as king of all terrestrial animals, the elephant as the most powerful animal on earth, the phoenix as an elegant authoritative creature, and even the winged lion, the griffin, and the sphinx, are often represented as fabulous hybrid animals that can easily travel between heaven and earth, all transmit the idea of strength and power [52, p. 174].

All animals manifest their power and self-importance through their firm posture and elegant stance. In this context, the falconer on horseback accompanied by his falcon and a hunting dog emerge as the chiefs of the animal world, the image of fighting animals is also regarded as symbolizing the power and might of one ruler over another, probably his subject [22, p. 173]. The monarch on his throne appears as the ultimate king of the universe. The above discussed issues concerning iconography and style suggest a close connection with the tradition of the Islamic world and that of the Oriental Antiquity. However, it is difficult to situate the textile into a particular historical moment and to suggest a possible signification behind its manufacture, because of the absence of written sources. Therefore, for the visual evidence, it is important to support the hypothesis [27; 28, pp. 124–26].

4. Changing Functions: from portable pavilion to Holy treasuries

It is highly probable that the original function of these textiles is the fabrication of tents, and they were reused as the chasubles or shrouds of Christian saints. This change of functions is remarkable. The monumentality of these textiles is the first aesthetic quality that is presented before the possessors, as the medallion patterns are quite big. The size of these roundels and the assumed weight of these pieces suggest that they were probably used in an architectural context, namely soft architecture, which primary function had to be a barrier and divider in an architectural space. Canopies, palanquins, and tents are soft architectural devices which are important in the Islamic world.

In several medieval Spanish illustrations of the codices *Cantigas de Santa María* (Fig. 14), painted during the reign of Alfonso X (r. 1252–1284 A. D.), in the second half of the 13th century in the Kingdom of Castilla, large curtains are represented as dividers of architectural spaces. These curtains bear large rectangular frames in which pseudo-Arabic inscriptions can be seen [46; 62, pp. 66–100].

These examples, as well as several others, such as the Kufic Arabic inscriptions that adorn the pilgrims' tents depicted in the 13th-century *Maqamat* of al-Hariri (Fig. 15), clearly suggest that the original function of these textiles with motifs of medallions could have been in an architectural context. The depictions of tents are also frequently presented in the Mongol miniature paintings, such as in the *Diez Album* [13, pp. 264–266]. These gold-embroidered pieces could have been used as a canopy or a tent. As the Arabic inscription suggests, the piece in Fermo, could have been a portable soft architecture for Cordovan Umayyad Caliph Hisham II.

The movements and diffusions of art objects, artists, and artisans, as well as artistic ideas, have propelled scholarly interests in the art history domain. It is true that many objects of Islamic origin, especially luxury artifacts that were used in royal contexts, were adapted for Christian sacred use [4; 14, pp. 1–22].

The aim in this short section is to show how textiles transmitted specific ideas and to trace the changes that came about through the processes of transculturation and migration caused by their movement. Textiles offer, therefore, a profound insight into the use and reuse of objects in an intercultural context. The drastic shifts of textile functions as it enters various environments – mainly secular and sacred – involve the almost total negation of its previous identity, or the sale and destruction of most evidence of its former biography; in fact, one can argue that it was reinvented [38, pp. 103–119].

It is possible that the ideas have also been spread along with the circulation of the objects. The interference of a new context for those objects, namely its insertion and reinvention into

the Christian sacred world, generates new layers of ideas and meanings for this textile. In fact, the Latin word *casula*, from which chasuble has been derived, means “small house” or “hut”. Thus, we can suppose that the reuse of these exotic textiles as chasubles or shrouds could be alluded to the idea of covering or protecting the body of the saints. The intersecting iconographies of the garment and the tent can also be seen in the image of the Virgin of Mercy, the chasuble of the Madonna della Misericordia could be seen as a protective cloth, or a tent for the visitors around the Madonna [17, pp. 48–49; 66, pp. 59–93].

Maurice Lombard described Islam as a “textile civilization”, to the point that this production was fundamental for the economy and this source of wealth favored the commercial and political exchanges of Islamic society [51, pp. 176–181]. The various production processes occupied a large number of people. Local industries produced simple fabrics with local fibers and dyes, while luxury fabrics were made in state-controlled tiraz workshops. The textiles have, in addition, largely been integrated into the architectural sphere within the Islamic world.

Understanding the functions of textiles as furnishings requires a broader perspective that takes into account textual, architectural, and archaeological evidence. It is essential to analyze the written sources in order to understand textile functions as furnishings. Medieval Arabic sources have also documented lavishly decorated tents and other ornamental textiles used as curtains in royal palaces. Early medieval Islamic textual sources offer evidence that the functions, meanings, and associations of textiles in the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd contexts were conceived as part of palatial or domestic decoration. Sources from the ‘Abbāsīd era are particularly rich in providing a sense of the luxurious decorations favored by court and elite owners. Thus, the “Book of Monasteries” (*Kitāb al-Diyārāt*) by Al-Shābushtī indicates that the palaces of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs at Sāmarrā’ featured extensive floor coverings, making it possible to imagine the luxurious furnishing textiles that once adorned imperial residences [3, pp. 364–371]. The 9th-century “Book of Brocade” (*Kitāb al-Muwashshā*) by Al-Washshā’ describes in detail the interior spaces of the upper class of Baghdad, including descriptions of the curtains and cushions of the capital’s domestic environment, many of which have horizontal inscriptions of poetic verses woven on them [2]. The later Fatimid sources provide additional details confirming the textiles utilized in Egypt, especially in architectural contexts. Among the texts found in the Cairo Geniza are the contracts regarding women’s possessions upon marriage. These include extensive, detailed lists of the pillows, curtains, cushions, floor coverings, and hangings belonging to brides and listed according to the textile type and their monetary values [35, vol. 4, pp. 310–44].

In addition, the movable architectural structures fabricated with textiles are also frequently utilized in the medieval Islamic world, such as the pavilions carried by the camels (*mahmal*). This structure is closely linked with the annual transportation of the Kiswa, the covering of the Kaaba. It is also a symbol of the Caliph’s authority during the parade of this pilgrimage caravan [58, pp. 249–268].

More importantly, the portable structures are usually characterized by their human-size dimensions, individually designed and fabricated for the human body, for the one carried or sheltered within. Thus, the king’s body, namely his earthly power, and his kingdom were indicated through this type of soft architecture. These structures, therefore, could be regarded as the personal architecture for the sovereigns in the Islamic world. In sum, even if the original use of these textiles did not migrate with the physical objects, it is likely that there existed a link in the new sphere in which these reconstructed robes operated. The idea of soft architecture for the Saints intersected with the original function of textiles.

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Title. Exotic Textiles from Medieval Christian Church Treasuries: Circulation, Utilization, and Integration

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Abstract. This essay focuses on a group of medieval textiles produced during the 11th–12th century in the workshops of Islamic Spain. Nevertheless, they were transported into the Occident and were conserved in church treasuries. These textiles are characterized by the decoration motifs of oriental style, such as the adaptation of the grand medallions, the images of mythical animals, and the iconography of sovereigns. The luxurious Islamic textiles were utilized, in the liturgical contexts, as chasubles or shrouds; nevertheless, it is highly probable that these textiles were originally used in architectural contexts in the Islamic world. It is supposed that the function of these reconstructed textiles relates to their original use. The conception of soft architecture in the new sphere intersected with the original function of textiles.

Keywords: Islamic textiles, Al-Andalus, Christian treasuries, soft architecture

Название статьи. Экзотические ткани в сокровищницах средневековых церквей: распространение, использование, интеграция

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Аннотация. В статье основное внимание уделено группе средневековых тканей, созданных в XI–XII вв. в мастерских мусульманской части Испании, которые затем были перевезены в другие центры Западной Европы и сохранились в сокровищницах христианских церквей. Для этой группы изделий характерны орнаментальные мотивы восточного стиля, что проявляется в использовании крупных орнаментальных медальонов, в изображениях мифических животных и иконографических особенностях изображений правителей. Роскошные исламские ткани использовались в литургических целях в качестве риз или саванов; тем не менее, весьма вероятно, что этот текстиль изначально (в мусульманской среде) использовался в архитектурном контексте. В статье, с привлечением концепции «мягкой архитектуры», обосновано предположение о том, что функция рассматриваемой группы тканей может быть связана с первоначальным контекстом их использования.

Ключевые слова: исламский текстиль, Аль-Андалус, христианские сокровища, мягкая архитектура