museo d'arte orientale

LUSTER AND LUXE FROM ISLAMIC SPAIN

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Liquid Frontiers and Entangled Worlds

Curated by
Filiz Çakır Phillip

In collaboration with
The Bruschettini Foundation
for Islamic and Asian Art

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museo d'arte orientale

LUSTER AND LUXE FROM ISLAMIC SPAIN

Liquid Frontiers and Entangled Worlds

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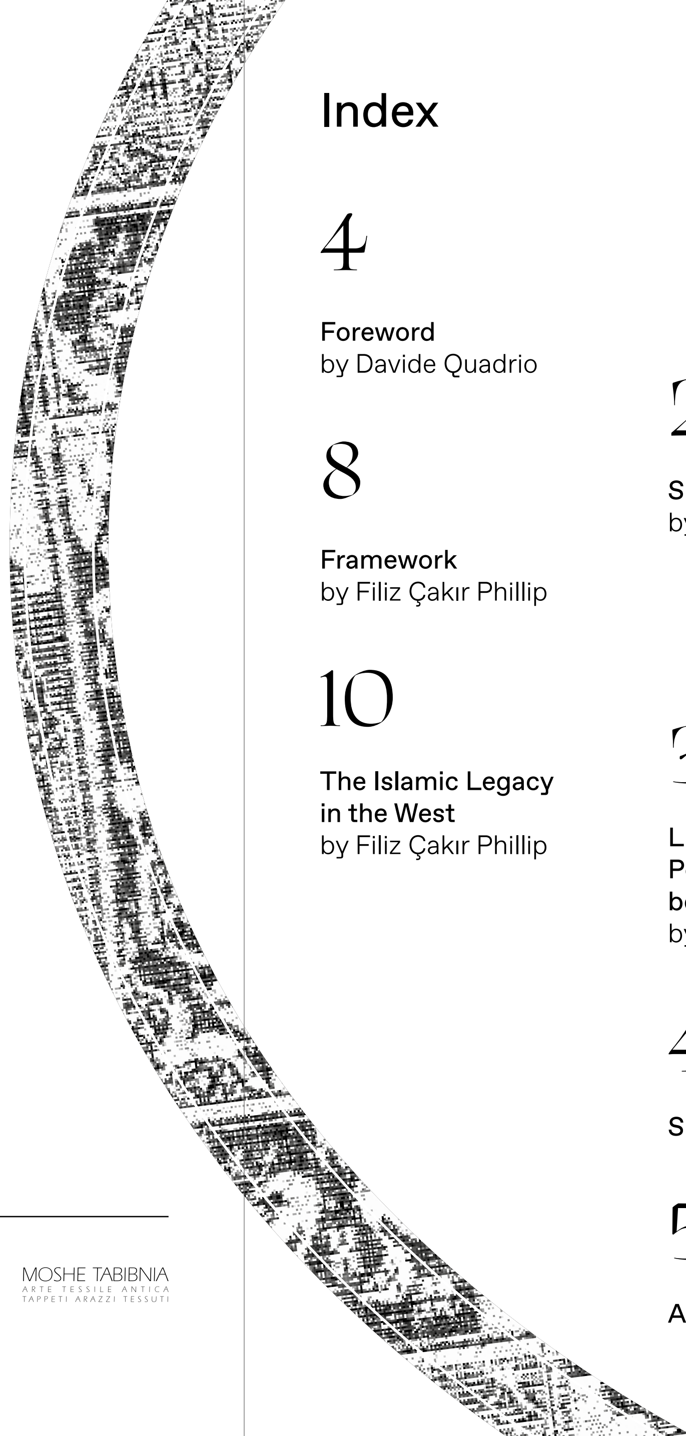

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Foreward

by Davide Quadrio

Over the past year, the MAO Museo d'Arte Orientale has become a place where the collections progressively transform, revealing the potential of a museum to become a dynamic creative laboratory.
The museum's collection is an extraordinary resource when understood as a reservoir of malleable, alterable material culture that lends itself to multiple, complex narratives that can provide a stimulating experience and opportunities for in-depth historical and scientific exploration.

MAO and its collections satisfy the specific wish of its first director, Professor Franco Ricca (from 2008 to 2014), to present a particular view of Asia through select geographic areas explored in detail with acquisitions made possible by various public and private parties. Today, MAO is marked by its wealth of collections edited by the work group gathered by Professor Ricca, a passionate connoisseur and skilled organiser. It is clear that the aspiration to collect works in this accumulative and expansive spirit is in the museum's DNA: it is a collection with liquid borders that requires an editorial capacity at once both constant and precise.

Under the current directorship, the aim is to guide MAO towards an "editorial" vision that is, on the one hand, increasingly essential, but also committed to alternative, simultaneous and unexpected narratives, valorising the permanent collections and at the same time opening it to local and international collaborations.
The exhibition *Luster and Luxe from Islamic Spain. Liquid Frontiers and Entangled Worlds*, curated by Filiz Çakır Phillip, curator and specialist in Islamic Art, has also taken shape as a project that opens the collections to new possible readings.
In this case, it is MAO's Islamic Art Gallery that shall be hosting extraordinary textiles and ceramic pieces from The Bruschettini Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art, Genoa, the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid, Palazzo Madama - Museo d'Arte Antica, Turin and the Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan.

The works reveal the cultural and artisan permeability between the Arab and Spanish-European worlds during a specific historical period, from the tenth to the sixteenth century, unearthing the profound Mediterranean exchange of not only styles but also techniques, taste and outstanding features that created a kind of luxury and lustre that was at once hybrid and exotic but also unquestionably "nostrum", just like the name given to the Mediterranean in the time of ancient Rome.

With this exhibition, we are launching planning for 2023 and 2024 that hinges on composite research, aimed to analyse the tension between Asia and the European continent in terms of the artistic and cultural trajectories undeniably tied historically by continuous trade, references and hybridisation. Hence the increasingly powerful drive to open the Islamic Art Gallery to new interpretative directions through other collections and curatorial exchange, which this initial project — in collaboration with The Bruschettini Foundation and the curatorship of Filiz Çakır Phillip — is bringing to MAO.
It is appropriate that, following in the footsteps of the museum's founder, we give space to collections and experts of high stature and editorial weight: private collections, certainly, but built with years of impeccable study and in-depth analysis with a specific eye towards the history of objects that have, over time, shown themselves to be culturally rich and fundamental for the scholarly writing of history.
Through this project, MAO is therefore continuing its mission to become a platform for research, but also for collaborations in full. *Luster and Luxe from Islamic Spain* aims to present objects and images that can transport visitors to little explored territories, opening new trajectories of knowledge and reflection. The exhibition is therefore accompanied by this booklet rooted in-depth visual and textual analysis with contributions from the curator Filiz Çakır Phillip, Alberto Boralevi, architect and expert in textiles and carpets, and Cristina Maritano, conservator at Palazzo Madama.

Starting from this initial thematic incipit, the major exhibition planned for autumn 2023 shall take shape with the involvement of other institutions and collections — including The Aron Collection — the contribution of international experts and the participation of contemporary artists with new productions and installations. Finally, this project continues to modify and revitalise the exhibition space of the museum, where plans to redesign the Chinese Gallery and the Himalayan Gallery are also underway, towards creating a museum marked by activity in continuous transformation.

Turin, 12 January 2023

Framework

**LUSTER AND LUXE FROM ISLAMIC SPAIN.
LIQUID FRONTIERS AND ENTANGLED WORLDS**

**EAST IN THE WEST:
ISLAMIC ART IN SPAIN**

Interconnectedness: Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities of artisans

Intercultural exchange with the East in materials, techniques, forms and styles

Marble – Continuity of Late Antiquity in materials, techniques and styles

Establishment of Islamic artistic vocabulary

Ingenuity and originality: Spanish knot on carpets

Turkish inspiration in medallions – Connection to Turkey and Holbein carpets

Luster painting on pottery – Connections to Egypt and Iran

Trade of luxurious goods – Mirror of commerce and wealth

ISLAMIC LEGACY IN THE WEST

TRANSITION FROM ISLAMIC TO CHRISTIAN RULERSHIP

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FRAME: 10TH – 16TH CENTURY WITH A FOCUS ON 15TH CENTURY

The Islamic Legacy in the West

by Filiz Çakır Phillip

Over a period of more than 700 years, the Iberian Peninsula made up the occidental frontier of the Islamic World. The first interest of Islamic rulers to expand their territories into Europe was awakened in the early 8th century. Spain witnessed the first Muslim invasion in the year 711, the dawn of the caliphate period (711-1031), resulting in the cities of Malaga, Granada and Cordoba becoming part of western Islamic territories. The term "Andalusia" (Arabic: *al-Andalus*) was soon coined, referring to Islamic Spain. The cities received new settlers mostly from Yemen and Syria together with thousands of Berbers from North Africa.
In the Mediterranean costal cities, the new settlers planted sugarcane and cotton, fig and olives trees, and in the provinces of Malaga and Granada oranges and vine. The Valencia region turned into a fruitful territory through

the installation of artificial water channels, an advanced agrarian technology brought by the Arabs. In the region of Murcia black mulberry trees were planted that became crucial for the silk production of the region's legendary textile industry of later periods. All in all, the region of Granada became the most important production center in Andalusia dedicated to silk and cotton, and their dyeing, as well as leather manufacturing. Toledo became the center of *al-Andalus*' arms and armour production. The region of Almeria (meaning "Mirror of the Sea" in Arabic) and the port city of Almeria became known for their magnificent silk manufactories, but also embraced the establishment of workshops of pottery.[1] According to al-Idrisi, the city of Chinchilla in the province of Murcia produced wool carpets since the 12th and 13th centuries.[2]
The carpets were colourful with vivid patterns derived from indigenous Iberian designs, luxury silks, and imported Turkish carpets mainly from the city of Ushak in western Turkey. These carpets are characterised by large patterns, and have later been named after Renaissance painter Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543), who represented these Ushak carpets in his paintings. During the 15th century, Spanish carpets were manufactured for Christian patrons, by Muslim weavers using materials from Jewish producers. The city Manises, near Valencia, was a famous center of ceramics that produced from the 14th to the 17th century. Earlier sources mention Malaga as the origin of the potters, who founded the workshops in Manises.

1 Markus Hattstein, *Geschichte. Die Eroberung Spaniens für den Islam und die frühen Jahre (711-756)*, in *Islam. Kunst und Architektur*, Köln 2000, pp. 208-217 (p. 213).

2 Edoardo Concaro and Alberto Levi, *Sovereign Carpets. Unknown Masterpieces from European Collections*, Milano 1999, p. 179.

The enormous dishes and bowls, decorated with overglaze in luster, were their specialty. Luster, originally a technique from Iraq dating back to the 9th century, was practiced in Egypt and Iran and spread to many parts of the Islamic world. Spanish luster painted dishes, ewers and bowls were produced under both Muslim and Christian patronage. The ceramic production of Islamic Spain was important for the Mediterranean and European trade and had a particularly great impact on the Italian manufacturing centres of ceramic, namely the centres of maiolica.

All these efforts and investments, carried out by the new Islamic rulers, focused on agriculture and hereto related productions, such as silk and cotton, to boost the economy of their newly established realm. This realm was later to become one of the most important alliances in the West for the Mediterranean trade, bringing with it increasing wealth. The establishment of a new and independent administration in Cordoba also led to it becoming the center of power of Islam on the Iberian Peninsula. This religious and ideological conception, in its own intellectual complexity, was presented at its best with the construction of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, which started around 785 during the rule of Abd al-Rahman I (731-788) and finished two hundred years later with many additions. The Great Mosque of Cordoba is the only monument in Spain that reveals many different styles of Islamic architecture. The mosque was built on the grounds of a Christian church dedicated to Saint Vincent of Saragossa to underline its connection to the Visigoth Christian heritage and the effort to built a new synergetic and hybrid aestethic. Although, it was certainly following the Umayyad tradition of the al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built 70 years earlier on the southern part of the Temple Mount or Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Later in the 10th century the Arab-Andalusian chronist al-Bakri counted 417 mosques in the city of Cordoba. The most distinguished example of royal architecture of the caliphate period is the palace complex of Madinat al-Zahra near Cordoba. Built in the 10th century, it reveals emerging stylistic elements of late antiquity in both materials and techniques, including the usage of marble and distinct carving techniques.

The Arab scholar from Baghdad, Ibn Hawqal wrote in the same century that no other city was as big as Cordoba, comparing it with Egyptian and Syrian cities, as well as any other cities of Magreb (the western part of North Africa). The greatness of Cordoba was underlined through its universities and libraries, which attracted many scholars and made it the heartland of medicine, mathematic, philosophy and literature. The caliphate of Andalusia gradually fragmented into a multitude of independent small kingdoms, so-called *reinos de Taifas*, which did not last long and created a vacuum of power over decades. Three states eventually emerged from this turmoil; the Almoravids (1060-1147)[3] and the Almohads (1133-1269)[4], both of Berber origin, and the Nasrids (1232-1492) of Arab origin. During the reigns of the Almoravids (1060-1147) and the Almohads (1133-1269) the western Mediterranean became a unified economic area and gold was the

3 The Almoravids ruled parts of the Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, and Spain and controlled important ports as well as trans-Saharan trade.

4 The Almohads replaced the Almoravids in Morocco and took the cities of Seville, Cordoba, Badajoz, and Almeria in the Iberian Peninsula. Seville became their capital in Andalusia, while they retained Marrakesh as their center of power in North Africa.

currency. Both realms controlled the major trade routes to the most famous gold mines in West Sudan. The Andalusian port cities developed into the most popular hubs for the gold trade to western and central Europe. The greatest trade businesses had their focus on silk and were the most important artery of Andalusian economy and wealth. The silk production centers of Almeria, Murcia, Malaga, Valencia and Seville were primarily competing with their Byzantine counterparts. The geographer al-Idrisi, who traveled to Spain, counted alone in Almeria 800 weaving mills in the 12th century. The Muslim rulership in Andalusia continued until the Reconquista, which gradually wiped out the Muslim and Jewish communities in Spain. The results of the Reconquista, which started as religious intolerance and ended up being an expulsion in the name of purification, were devastating for the diverse cultural richness and heritage of Spain. Many of its Muslims and Jews emigrated to north African countries such as Morocco.[5] The Ottoman Emperor of the time, Sultan Bayezid II also recognised the benefit of inviting Jewish groups to settle in Constantinople, which boosted the Ottoman economy immensely due to the nature of their contribution to diplomacy, education and trade. Settled Sephardic Jews especially nurtured Ottoman art and music with a distinguished Spanish flavour. The last Islamic realm in Western Europe was that of the Nasrids in Granada. Their government of 250 years

5 The last ruler of Granada emigrated with ten ships and more than 1.130 advisers towards Fez. Accompanied by 2.919 Andalusians from the port of Ghadra and 1.166 from the port of Mankab. Between 1526 and 1570, nearly 200.000 Moriscos from Valencia, Oliva, Almeria, Cullera, Castille, Palmeira and Alicante also settled in Morocco. All in all, more than 800.000 Andalusians relocated to Morocco. Cf. Naima El-Khatib Boujibar and Mohamed Mezzine, “Andalusian Morocco”, in: *Andalusian Morocco. Islamic Art in the Mediterranean. A Discovery in Living Art,* Vienna 2002, pp. 50-63 (59-60).

represents the pinnacle of nearly 800 years of Andalusian-Arabic culture. Nasrid art, notably through the Alhambra, became synonymous with luxury. Islamic Spain has fascinated many historians and served as an inspiration for the European desire for the exotic orient, which arose with Romanticism and flourished at the end of the 18th century.

THE LUST FOR ADORNMENT

The cultural interchange between Muslim and Christian Spain was continuously fluid, as was the exchange with North Africa. Muslim rulers and other patrons of art and architecture understood the impact of providing an art form that could be understood and equally appreciated by the Muslim, as well as the Jewish and Christian population, the original communities of Spain. The integration of figural, or human and animal elements with vegetal elements was part of this conception of ornamentation and decorative vocabulary, which however was mainly applied on secular artworks. Animal figures were part of the artistic repertoire in a religious capacity with a symbolic meaning as depiction of power. The representation of the state focussed on art and scholarship. In the 10th century the inventory of the library of Caliph al-Hakam II (reg. 961-76) consisted of 400,000 volumes and had no European parallels of the time. During the 12th and 13th centuries Europe developed a thirst and passion for ancient knowledge, which also led to a strong reception of Islamic thinkers, who became important as mediators between diverse cultures. Among them Ibn Rush (1126-1198), Latinized as Averroes, a great Muslim philosopher from Cordoba and commentator

of Aristoteles. Alfonso X (1252-1284), known as El-Sabio (the Wise), or the Christian Arab on the throne, was a patron of knowledge and scholarship and gathered many Muslim philosophers at his court and supported the establishments of many translation centres in Toledo, a foundation of European knowledge. Already during the caliphate reign, diplomatic relationships were fostered with the Christian World, including the Byzantine Empire in the East, while still maintaining the relationships with the Muslim world. The Mediterranean basin was a place of diplomacy and economy, where luxury goods such as silk and silver were preferred compensations or payments when goods changed hands.

MUDEJAR

As a result of the Reconquista, Muslims were ultimately forced to leave the Iberian Peninsula or convert to Christianity. Initially, the term "*mudejar*" was used for groups of Muslims, who during an interim period had been allowed to practice their faith. In the aftermath of their emigration or conversion it eventually referred to the converted Muslims and their descendants. The art of the community was also coined "*mudejar*", and integrated Christian forms into Islamic art and tradition, creating a new hybrid aesthetic unique to Spain and Portugal.

A FRAGMENTED HERITAGE OF SPAIN

The study and display of Islamic Art in general, but especially that of the art of the books, textiles and carpets mainly focus on fragments. There are many reasons for this, amongst them the greed of the 19th century art market. Firstly, there are of course natural causes such as the climate. Some regions of the Islamic world, such as Iran or India, which suffer under strong humidity that does not allow for many carpets or textiles to survive in their entirety. Many complete textiles and carpets have been preserved and treasured in Western collections, for example in Italy through diplomatic gifts, special commissions or trade. They found representation in Western paintings, papal and princely inventories, as well as in church treasuries and especially in burial context. Secondly, handcrafted artworks are created out of luxurious materials, in our case textiles and carpets, which is why even the last bits of them were reused and repurposed. Thirdly, their portability, a curse and blessing at the same time. Fourthly, a reason which offers more intellectual satisfaction, the proportionally great impact of a small fragment piece, which opens an intimate window to an endless horizon; not only to the system of ornamentation of the carpet or textile itself, but also to the culture it represents. The selected textiles and carpet fragments in this exhibition offer this kind of intellectual satisfaction and sparks curiosity.

LUXURY CULTURE OF ANDALUSIA – TEXTILES

Silk production was the origin of early rivalry between the Chinese and the Iranians, a vying driven by the markets' insatiable desire for luxury goods. The breeding of silkworms for the production of silk textiles originated in China in the 3rd millennia BCE. In the 6th century CE, pre-Islamic Iranian kings of the Sasanians had established workshops of textiles, earning the reputation for producing silk textiles in a quality fit for kings. The evidence of such textiles

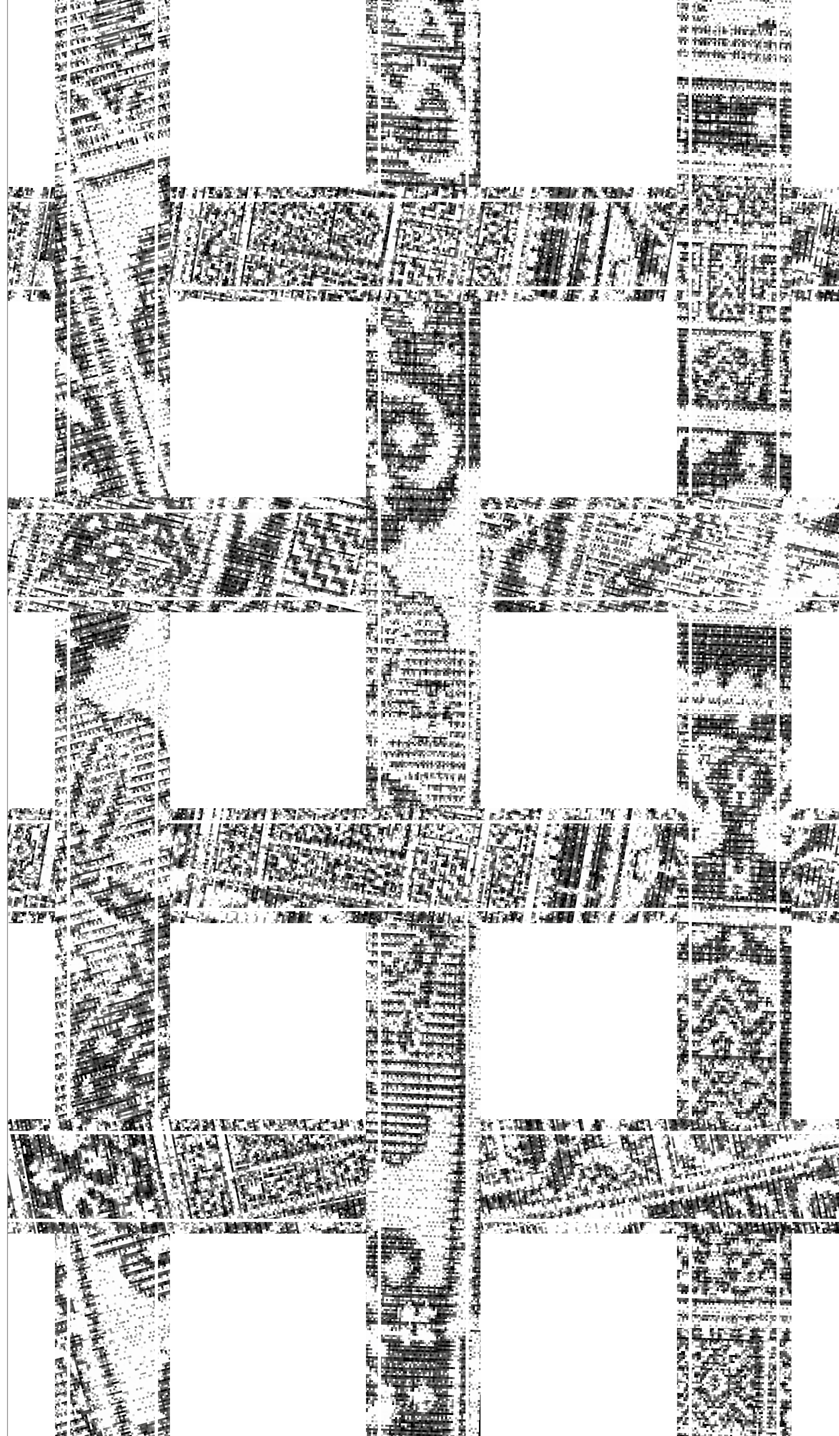
was discovered in tombs, where reliquaries were wrapped with these luxurious fabrics to be preserved for eternity. The Iranian textiles not only reveal the superb skills of their makers but also a characteristic iconography including roundels containing human or animal figures, surrounded by a border of circular forms resembling pearl or coins. This iconography is part of the magnificent tradition of Iran that found circulation through Islamic textiles in a vast geography spanning from Central Asia to Spain. Large roundel patterns and their local derivations remained in vogue for centuries. Lampas is another Iranian contribution to the artistic heritage of this world, an innovative weaving technique developed by the 11th century, which combines two structures and hence a combination of different weaves; whether plain, twill or silk, within one fabric. Through their portability textiles were carriers of the transformation of techniques and styles over centuries. Silk for clothing and decoration of domestic interiors became highly cherished, not only in the East but also in the West.

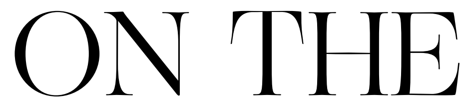
With the introduction of silkworm breeding to the Iberian Peninsula through the Arabs and the establishment of a royal workshop for silk production, first in Cordoba, the textile industry began to flourish. They became renowned and gained an excellent reputation, and were even mentioned in the papal inventories for their exceptional quality. Although the Nasrid art, a synonym for luxury, had grown from Almohad traditions, it offered far more variety and splendour than its predecessors. Its intricate designs with figural medallions had their forerunners in the caliphate period and were competing with those woven in Abbasid Baghdad following the ancient Iranian tradition of the Sasanians.[6] Andalusian textiles produced in the 10th century reveal a combination of Coptic weaving techniques of Egypt and Sasanian iconography of Iran. The eastern Islamic type of main motives, which were mirrored, became widespread in the 12th century. The figures applied in the medallions were eagle, griffon, lion or sphinx, images of power. Textiles are truly transmitters and agents of artistic ideas carried westwards and objects of admiration. In the 14th century the centers of Valencia, Almeria and Granada had become famous with their luxurious textiles. Even Chinese elements, regardless borrowed directly or indirectly through eastern Islamic lands such as Egypt and Syria, were part of the artisans' repertoire. By the end of the 14th century, silk patterns showed a such variety and mixture in excellent quality that it is difficult to attribute them to a specific center of production. Textiles, as objects of mobility par excellence, required a level of technical knowledge and present the unique momentum of interaction between artistic and technological innovations. In the 15th century preferred patterns of artisans' portfolios were pomegranates, the symbol of Granada, palmettes, lotuses and escutcheons, combined with confronted or addorsed animals such as birds. The 15th century marks a shift in production of luxurious goods, as the Muslim cities came under Christian rulership. The weavers, in search of peace and stability, moved further south to the mountain state of Granada to recoup their fortunes. The textile production went through a major shift as the commercial market grew steadily. Italy was one

6 The style and quality of Baghdadi textiles were an aspiration for Andalusian weavers. The name stood for exquisite quality and the term also entered the language of the Italian textile industry as "bagadell".

of the European countries that became a major importer of Spanish textile goods, especially silk yarns.[7]

7 John Gillow, *Textiles of the Islamic World*, London 2010, pp. 50-53.





ON THE EXHIBITED WORKS

Spanish Carpets

by Alberto Boralevi

Knotted carpets began to be made in Spain at least as far back as the thirteenth century, during the period of Arab rule when a vein of textile production developed in the context of Moorish art and culture that quickly took on local features and remained active even after the Christian *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, the Spanish word for carpet, *alfombra*, seems to have its root in the Arab term *al-ḥánbal*, which means 'mat'.

Beginning in the early fifteenth century, Hispanic-Moorish, or *Mudejar*, carpets were primarily woven in Alcaraz, Letur, Liétor and Hellín as well as in other towns in the province of Albacete in the region of Castile-La Mancha, but Arab literary sources also cite earlier production in towns like Cuenca and Chinchilla de Monte-Aragón, also in the region of Castile-La Mancha and the bordering region of Murcia. The makers

of these carpets were mainly *Mudejar*, Arabs who remained in Spain after the Christian reconquest, who then became 'Moriscos' when, after 1492, they were forced along with the Spanish and Portuguese Jews to either emigrate or convert to Christianity.

The salient characteristic of Spanish carpets is the particular type of knot used, the Arab-Spanish knot, which is tied around only one warp thread, instead of pairs like in Oriental carpets. This unique feature makes them easy to recognise, especially when examined from the back.

The patterns were partly local, but also influenced by the Oriental carpets that arrived through trade. Besides local textile motifs, wreaths, wheels and the 'heraldic' carpets, decorated with the coats of arms of Spain's most important noble families, we also find motifs with Turkish and Ottoman roots, including those of the Holbein type.

These carpets were very often framed by borders decorated with pseudo-Kufic motifs that recall a particular style of the Arab alphabet. This decoration was also widespread in contemporary Turkish carpets and other types of Spanish and Italian textiles. In the Spanish carpets, however, we often find the Kufesque writing paired with curious figurative imagery, like stylised humans and animals, which make them unique and of special interest.

Spanish carpets from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are commonly called Alcaraz, even when they were made in other cities, whereas those from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are generically referred to as Cuenca. They are categorised in four different main groups, in turn divided into thematic

subgroups, based on pattern:

1. **Mudejar Carpets,** which include carpets with large octagons and the ones with the heraldic coats of arms of the admirals, *alfombras heráldicas del Almirante*, in the middle of which we find the coat of arms of the Enríquez family, the hereditary admirals of Castile, or that of Maria of Castile, queen of Aragon.
2. **Gothic Carpets**, mostly with a thistle motif or a pattern of palmettes inserted within ogival grids and derived from silk textiles and velvets.
3. **Renaissance carpets**, with distinctive large wreaths or other motifs derived from textiles.
4. **Later Carpets**, the production of which is usually traced to Cuenca, often featuring late-Renaissance or Baroque textile motifs or patterns inspired by Turkish weaving.

Heraldic carpets are depicted in Spanish paintings, like Jaume Huguet's *Saint Vincent before Dacian* (c. 1455-1460), at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

There is a Mudejar carpet with a star pattern in a fresco by Matteo Giovannetti in the chapel of St Martial in the Palais des Papes in Avignon (1344–46).

FOCUS

Carpets and Carpet Fragments

by Alberto Boralevi

Fragment of the border of a carpet

Spain (Alcaraz)
Late 15th c.

Wool
175 x 52 cm

Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid
Inv. 3862

Bibliography: Sanchez 1986, pp. 370-1

Although only a part of a border, this fragment has much to say, coming from a carpet in the group of Mudejar rugs decorated with heraldic coats of arms that must have been truly splendid. In the band on the left with a blue ground, we find heavily stylised pseudo-Kufic elements that form squares containing a tree or a vase of flowers flanked by stylised birds in alternation with figures of animals, including a rampant lion, a bull and a hare. At the top, we see a depiction, the upper part of which is unfortunately cut off, of a "wild man" with a dappled red body, covered in fur, holding a kind of shield in one hand and in the other, which we cannot see, probably a sword or a lance, like in other exemplars with the same scene and in particular a splendid complete carpet at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (no. 55-65-21, published in Ellis 1988, pp. 240–47).
On the right, we instead find geometric, stylised floral motifs,

also on a blue ground, arranged in a grid of lozenges outlined in red. This was not part of the field, which is entirely missing and was probably covered with stars or tiny geometric motifs, but rather an inner border, which is present in all the other known carpets in the group.

Fragment of a carpet with lattice pattern

Spain (Alcaraz or Letur)
Second quarter of 15th c.

Wool
108 x 104 cm

The Bruschettini Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art, Genoa

Provenance: ex-Bernheimer, Munich; Marino Dall'Oglio, Milan; Moshe Tabibnia, Milan

Bibliography: Bernheimer 1959, pl. 121; Bernheimer 1996, n. 75, p. 83; Mills 1999, p. 92; Toronto 2017, n. 29, pp. 168–171

This fragment, the palette of which is unusually pale and includes no red, comprises about half the width and possibly one-tenth the length of the original carpet. There is another, larger fragment of the same carpet at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C. (see Kühnel - Bellinger 1953, pl. IX; Mackie 1977, fig. 13, p. 25; Toronto 2017, p. 171).
The pattern comprises a palmette motif arranged in parallel, offset rows and enclosed within an ogival, intertwined lattice of clear textile derivation that is shared by a series of other exemplars that make up what is known as the 'Gothic' group of Spanish manufacture.
Comparison with the Washington fragment highlights a unique feature of this carpet, namely that it started to be made with a border of pseudo-Kufic motifs that was typical of heraldic Mudejar carpets, and then switched to a different border pattern, demonstrating that the two types coexisted during the same period and very probably came from the same looms. After this curious

'change of mind', the border that was decided upon in the end features a complex yellow woven textile pattern similar to only one other known exemplar, also at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C. (Mackie 1977, fig. 17, p. 28), which has the same hues but an entirely different pattern for the inner field.

Two fragments of a wreath carpet

Spain (Alcazar or Letur)
Early 16th c.

Wool
30,5 x 73 cm; 29,5 x 73 cm

The Bruschettini Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art, Genoa

Provenance: ex-Marino Dall'Oglio, Milan; Alberto Boralevi, Florence

Bibliography: Unpublished

Together, these two pieces create a circular wreath typical of the group of carpets from Alcaraz categorised as 'Renaissance' and known as *coronas* carpets in Spanish. There are various known exemplars of this type with one or more rows of dark green wreaths on a red ground enclosing abstract curvilinear scroll motifs that wind around flowers arranged orthogonally at the four cardinal points. The pattern is very graphic and linear, using just three hues: red for the ground, green for the decoration and yellow for the outlines. A complete carpet of the same type is also on view in this exhibition (Inv. 197808).

Mudejar carpet fragment with a geometric pattern of interlacing knots

Spain (Alcaraz)
15th c.

Wool
248 x 75 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 103535

Provenance: Ex-Count Welczeck, Berlin; Marino Dall'Oglio, Milan

Bibliography: Bennett 1978, p. 6; Mills 1999, p. 193, Mills 2018, p. 97

This fragment was part of a large court carpet, two other pieces of which survive. One just like it, at one time joined with this one, was in the collection of C. Alexander, who believed it was from the ninth or tenth century. The two fragments, originally linked by a thin strip of fabric and published in that form by Bennett, were displayed in Berlin in 1933 as part of the vast collection of Spanish carpets belonging to Count Johannes von Welczeck, ambassador of Nazi Germany in France before World War II, who also played a key role in influencing German politics in Spain. Another, larger fragment is at the Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt.
The pattern features rounded octagons linked by intertwining knots and containing other intertwining elements arranged around small, star-shaped stylised flowers. According to J.S. Mills, who closely examined the fragment and wrote about it on two occasions, it 'bears no trace of Spanish Christian influence (much less Turkish), and one can reasonably suppose that it was produced in the Muslim world, in all probability in the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada'. Moreover, the pattern was inspired by that of the ceilings in old Spanish palaces, in particular the one in the Throne Room of Aljafería Palace in Zaragoza, dating to the end of the fifteenth century.

Fragment of a carpet with star motifs

Spain (Chinchilla, Letur or Liétor)
15th c.

Wool
101 x 89 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 121711

Bibliography: Sánchez Ferrer 1986, pls. 20–21, pp. 321–323

Two other fragments from the same carpet are known. One is at the museum of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid and the other is at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (N. T.87-1918). All three fragments show part of the border and the inner field decorated with small octagons containing little eight-pointed stars alternating with geometric motifs of various kind on a dark blue ground, decoration typical of 'heraldic' or 'admiral' Mudejar carpets, which are probably the oldest Spanish carpets that have come down to us. The double border is also typical of this group, with the outer band decorated with pseudo-Kufic elements framing geometric motifs of small, stylised animals and flowers on a blue ground and the inner band, enclosed within two smaller ones, featuring more naturalistic renderings of shoots with leaves, flowers and birds. Despite its fragile state of preservation, this fragment still retains its bright hues and is quite beautiful, suggesting that it was from one of the most stunning carpets in the group.

Fragment of a wreath carpet

Spain (Alcaraz)
15th c.

Wool
65 x 30 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia,
Milan
Inv. 129861

This charming little fragment is also from the group of wreath carpets, but it represents a variant on the other two exemplars on view in the exhibition, in that it has a much richer palette, including the bright yellow of the border, two shades of green, a light blue, ivory and the corroded black/brown in the outlines of the motifs. It is likely that this more complex iteration of the type is older than that of the other wreath exemplars with fewer colours and, so to speak, simplified ornamentation. What is certain is that it is found in a very small number of exemplars, including two fragments from the same carpet at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C. and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, as well as a fragment, unique of its kind because it has the figure of a heraldic lion inside the wreath, that was purchased in Florence from the antiquarian Stefano Bardini by W. Von Bode and is now at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. C.G. Ellis noted that in the case of these exemplars, which he held to be the oldest, the wreaths are less rounded and have a shape closer to the octagons in the Holbein carpets, from which they are supposed to have derived.

Fragment of a carpet with plant motifs

Spain (Cuenca)
Early 16th c.

Wool
70 x 43 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia,
Milan
Inv. 147012

The carpets made in Cuenca during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are an almost total departure from the earlier Hispanic-Moorish and Mudejar exemplars, even if in some cases they still feature wreath motifs or were inspired by Ottoman Turk carpets, like the arabesque patterns of the ‘Lotto’ carpets.
Moreover, one also sees a clear change in taste insofar as the colours used for the inner field, which here tend to be lighter with a lot of yellow and ivory and little red. The most popular motifs were floral patterns that recall the thistle carpets (*alfombras con cardos*) that are part of the ‘Gothic’ group woven in the province of Albacete in the fifteenth century. The fragment on view here seems to straddle these two types, even if the scroll motif decorating the wide border with a yellow ground suggests an attribution to Cuenca in the early sixteenth century. The inner field is covered with stylised flowers on a blue ground that form a kind of grid of lozenges outlined in yellow.

Fragment of a carpet with lattice pattern

Spain (Alcaraz)
Mid-15th c.

Wool
142 x 73,5 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 180040

This carpet's pattern of palmettes in an ogival grid is similar to the one from The Bruschettini collection on view in the exhibition, but the colours are quite different, far brighter and with an abundance of red.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York has an identical fragment, made up of two pieces (accession number: 57.150.9, formerly in the McMullan Collection), and it is very likely that they are all from the same carpet, which must have been originally fairly large in size and framed by a border that has been entirely lost. There is a large, complete example with the same motif and similar colours in the Cloisters collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession number 61.49, published in Dimand and Mailey 1973, fig. 222, pp. 160–1). Lastly, a second complete example at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C. (accession number R44.2.1, published in, among others, Kühnel - Bellinger 1953, pls. 18 and 19) with the same pattern but the palmettes in red instead of yellow, is framed by a splendid border with Kufic elements and little figurative scenes like the exemplars in the group of heraldic carpets. Consideration of all of these points of comparison helps date this fragment to around the middle of the fifteenth century.

Carpet with lattice pattern and palmettes

Spain
15th c.

Wool
177 x 96 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 184860.2

Although it has been reduced in length and part of the horizontal borders has been rewoven, this carpet is complete in appearance and represents a quite rare and unusual variation on the pattern of palmettes within an ogival grid derived from textile design. To our knowledge, there is only one other fragment with a very similar inner field and identical palette, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (accession number T.882-1919, published on the museum website).
The pattern of the inner field is blue-green on a red ground with no other colours, which are instead found in the border decorated with a motif of intertwined, continuous yellow ribbons outlined in red on a blue ground. On the vertical sides, this border seems to be complete and original, whereas on the horizontal sides we find a different pattern and the border was almost entirely redone, and so it is not certain that the rewoven motif, different from the vertical bands, is faithful to the original. The inner field and border are separated by a black band decorated with leaf motifs, or a meander of white thistle flowers. The use of just two colours for the inner field recalls the wreath carpets in the 'Renaissance' group, to which this example is probably contemporary.

Carpet with large octagon pattern

Spain (Alcaraz or Hellín)
15th c.

Wool
238 x 137 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 190458

Provenance: Ex-Marino Dall'Oglio, Milan

Bibliography: Mills 1999, p. 194

Fifteenth-century carpets like this one, with large octagons inside squares, are also known as 'wheel' carpets and were inspired by Turkish carpets from the same period or earlier that are commonly called Large Pattern Holbein (LPH) carpets, because depicted in a famous painting by the artist Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors, at the National Gallery, London, even if in reality similar carpets were depicted by many other painters, especially from the Italian school. The octagon motif, encircled by a string of arrowheads and inscribed within a square with minute decoration in the resulting corners, is typical of Turkish carpets, but the overall composition of the Spanish exemplars is different from that of the Anatolian carpets, where we usually find a single row of octagons or even just one large octagon in the middle, surrounded by four smaller ones. As observed by John Mills (Mills 2018), the flanking square pattern of the Spanish carpets is very reminiscent of the wooden coffered ceilings in Moorish architecture. This is especially true for the exemplars in which the decoration inside the octagons differs from the more typically Turkish embellishment that we instead find in this exemplar, with a star in the middle with elements that radiate outward and a row of little stars alternating with horizontal bars in the inner frame of the octagon itself. The octagons of other exemplars instead contain various types of interwoven ribbons or large sixteen-point stars, which are far more typical of the Arab style.

Wreath carpet

Spain (Alcaraz)
Early 16th c.

Wool
288 x 178 cm

Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Milan
Inv. 197808

This is a fine, complete example of this carpet type. There is a fragmentary carpet, similar in terms of the details of the design but with just one column of wreaths, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (accession number n. 1955.65.36, see Ellis 1988, n. 71, pp. 260–263). The two carpets also have the same border decorated with columns of vases, outlined in yellow on a dark green background, suggesting that they came from the same workshop. According to C.G. Ellis, wreath carpets first appeared in the early sixteenth century, developed from the 'wheel' or 'large octagon' carpets from the immediately preceding period and were the first to introduce Renaissance elements, especially in the borders. This is probably not entirely true and there are also wreath carpets with more colours and a more complex pattern that can be dated to the second half of the fifteenth century.

Lustreware on the Iberian Peninsula: A Bridge between East and West

by Cristina Maritano

Western civilisation has often found itself admiring the technical and technological progress of eastern civilisations, China and Islam, as well as the beauty of their art. During the Middle Ages, there came a phase marked by the passing on of techniques and knowledge for which the Mediterranean basin was a place of privileged exchange. The interchange and integration of different cultures made the Iberian Peninsula particularly fertile on the artistic plane. Pottery, understood as a universal language, is an interesting interpretative key for gaining a better understanding of the encounter between the Islamic and western civilisations.

The history of lustreware begins between the ninth and tenth centuries in the Near East, in the areas that are now part of Iraq, Syria and Egypt. There, Muslim artisans had refined the difficult technique of incorporating metal oxides into the glassy surface of their pottery.

After being shaped and fired once, the clay objects – for the most part basins and vases – were covered with a tin and lead enamel and fired a second time. After the second firing, the objects were painted with a mixture of metal oxides (copper and/or silver), clay, ochre and vinegar. At that point, the pottery was fired again, at low temperature in a reduction atmosphere, which is to say with little oxygen: this complex finale made it possible for the metal ions to penetrate the glass, transforming them into nanoparticles and releasing their shine.

This technique, which lent the objects astonishing gold and silver reflections, spread throughout the Islamic world and the first exemplars soon began to circulate in the West. Already in the tenth century, lustreware basins were imported into Italy and France and used to decorate the exterior of religious buildings, paying no heed to the fact that many of them bore inscriptions in praise of Allah. The powerful Maritime Republic of Pisa, at the centre of a vast trade network, was a great admirer of this pottery, and many of the city's bell towers and religious buildings, as well as public and private secular buildings, were decorated with Islamic pottery.

With the advance of the Islamic conquest, first in the Maghreb and then in Andalusia, the lustreware technique arrived in Europe. The first important centre of production was Málaga, in the kingdom of Granada. The famous 'Alhambra' vases (so named for the important collection in Granada) date to this period: large, purely decorative vases that are easily the most famous type of Spanish lustreware object. With the advance of the Catholic reconquest, the Muslim potters moved from Málaga to the region of Valencia, which is rich in argillaceous soil.

Although the area had already been reconquered by Christians in the thirteenth century, the Muslims were allowed to continue to work. And so, phenomena emerged in Spain like *Mudejar* art, which is to say Muslim art under Christian rule.

This period marked the apex of lustreware production, flourishing in particular in Manises and Paterna.

The decoration was mainly drawn from the plant kingdom, and one of the most popular patterns in the middle of the fifteenth century was that of 'Bryony flowers and leaves', referred to in Florentine documents as 'fiordalisi' (fleur-de-lis). Later on, the 'ivy-leaf' pattern became popular. Generally speaking, the lustre was gold lustre and applied over cobalt blue paint.

From the differences in quality, material and hue compared to the simple, almost humble pottery produced by European potters, we can immediately understand the allure these objects held. In Flanders, France and Italy, orders multiplied for lustreware from the potters of Manises and Paterna. This was fine pottery, luxury objects that could outshine gold and silver tableware. The way their surface imitated the reflections of the costliest metals conjured the fantasy that the boldest alchemical dreams had come true. It is no accident that Hispano-Moresque pottery is so frequently depicted in Flemish and Italian painting from the time. In Tuscany, and Florence in particular, noble families competed to acquire lustreware decorated with their coats of arms. The Muslim potters adapted the designs of the coats of arms and the Latin and Christian inscriptions in their own fashion. Basins decorated with the monogram of Christ, 'IHS', were a huge success.

Some plates have original holes for

hanging at the top, since the enamel dripped inside before the firing. They tell us that the plate was not meant to be used at the table but rather hung, as a gleaming household embellishment. The holes are often not found in the middle of the upper part of the brim, such that the inscription is not horizontal when the piece is hung. The artisan, with knowledge of Kufic writing but not Latin, probably did not pay attention to these details.

In Italy, where the pottery tradition was appreciable and widespread, potters began to imitate the majolica technique of covering a terracotta object with a white enamel made of tin and lead. In the middle of the fifteenth century, potters in Deruta, a small village in the Tiber Valley not far from Perugia, discovered how to make lustre. Production followed there on industrial scale, often decorated with geometric motifs or stylised plants. The small town of Gubbio also specialised in lustreware, reaching unparalleled heights thanks to the master potter Giorgio Andreoli, who was honoured with a papal bull for his skill and the magnificence of his majolica.

The difficulty of the technique was appreciable. Cipriano Piccolpasso, who wrote an important treatise on the potter's art in the sixteenth century, wrote that out of every hundred pieces, only six turned out well. For this reason, as well, lustreware was more expensive than other pottery.

We can conclude that one of the most important artistic phenomena of Renaissance Europe, Italian majolica, emerged from this Islamic technique. According to some scholars, the term 'majolica' itself derives from 'Maiorica', the island of Majorca, one of the main centres for the circulation of the lustreware made in Spain.

Others instead argue that the term ‘majolica’ can be traced to Málaga (in Arabic, ‘Màlaqa’ ‘Melik’, ‘Màllica’), which, as we have seen, was an important centre for the production of lustreware.

The success of lustreware was matched by that of the Spanish tiles known as *azulejos*, which from the fifteenth century on were embellished with geometric decoration such that when put together they created intertwined shapes comparable to those of the carpets and suggested the infinite repetition of the pattern, cancelling out the distinction between the individual tiles.

The trade of these tiles reached its apex between the second half of the fifteenth century to the mid sixteenth century in Genoa, a key Mediterranean port. The fashion for decorating floors and walls with Spanish tiles spread through the homes of the upper and middle classes as well as churches and monasteries. The term *azulejo* derives from the Arabic word *Al-zulayj* and means glazed terracotta, and indeed the tiles were made of terracotta, with at least one side covered with enamel or glaze. This technique, which probably originated in Persia, was spread by Muslim artisans throughout the countries along the southern coast of the Mediterranean and arrived in Spain with the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula.

In the fourteenth century, the tiles were embellished with monochrome decoration, cobalt blue on a white ground or metal lustre with intricate motifs called *atauriques.* During the fifteenth century, tiles decorated *a cuerda seca* became popular, splendidly polychrome with geometric patterns inspired by Islamic art. The technique, used in various cities in

southern Spain, involved marking out the design on the tile with a greasy substance mixed with manganese oxide. When fired, the greasy substance dissolved, but the trace of the manganese remained in relief, making it possible to paint the tile in different colours without them running together. The production process was sped up by the development of a variation on this technique in Seville, *a cuenca o arista*: this method entailed impressing the decoration on the still wet clay using wooden or metal stamps; the resulting cavities were then filled with colour.

In Ligurian documents from the time, the practice of covering floors and walls with tiles was referred to as *inlagionare*. The importation of these luxury products from Spain ended in the mid sixteenth century and the workshops of Ligurian ceramists took over production of the *lagioni*, initially maintaining the Islamic patterns and then gradually moving away from them to, finally, adopt typically Renaissance motifs.

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