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Carpets of Andalusia (exhibition)

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CARPETS *of* ANDALUSIA

March 8 - August 10, 2003

The fall of Granada in 1492 reestablished Christian dominion in Spain after centuries of Islamic rule. The rapid expansion of Islam from Arabia in the 7th century encompassed the rich cultural legacy of the Late Antique world, forging a unified empire throughout the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean lands and across North Africa to Spain within a short span of several decades. Arab and Berber armies had crossed into Spain in 711, generating at once an effort that lasted for many generations to restore Christian rule. In Islamic times, the Iberian peninsula was called *Al-Andalus*, or Andalusia. Although we have scant evidence for early rug-weaving, rugs woven there in the 15th and 16th centuries represent diverse cultural traditions at a time of great political transformation.

The carpets of Andalusia, also called Spanish carpets, are among the oldest preserved in the world. They document a blending of cultural traditions, both reflecting an inheritance of earlier rug-weaving traditions and an Islamic cultural heritage (fig. 1) from Turkey and Central Asia, while heralding Europe's Renaissance (fig. 2). For the wide range of colors, carpet production depended upon the knowledge and technologies of dyeing, for which Jews held the highest reputation. Carpet production also relied upon sheep-rearing, and Spain's wool had achieved commercial recognition from supplying Flanders and England. The carpets of Andalusia thus document traditions of *convivencia* (living together), which characterized periods and places in Spain even in times of strained relations among the culturally diverse inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula.

Rug-weaving was centered in Andalusia, the south of Spain, in areas long held by Muslims. But rug-weaving continued in Spain after the consolidation of Christian rule. Elements of Islamic design may be seen in the various forms of interlace, geometric patterns, and the appearance of stylized Arabic scripts. New influences may be perceived in the 16th century, drawing upon textile patterns and reflecting Europe's Renaissance styles.

Despite the diversity of design sources, Spanish carpets bear a unique weave structure (fig. 3). The so-called Spanish knot is a single-warp knot; each knot is wrapped around a single warp. All other carpet-weaving traditions utilize paired warps in the construction of individual knots. As knots are tied on alternate warps, their offset placement affects the possibility of creating diagonal lines, which is often utilized in the design. These rugs have a particularly floppy handle and are relatively lightweight for their size in comparison to carpets from other rug-weaving traditions. This is due to the combination of several features: the single-warp knots, which are offset, the lack of warp depression, and a relatively low knot count. The designs and patterns are nonetheless complex, although they are achieved with a notable economy of materials.

Carpets of Andalusia is drawn exclusively from the collections of The Textile Museum. It provides a rare opportunity to explore the range of designs and diverse cultural traditions that contributed to the artistic richness of Spain during the final century of Islamic rule and after completion of the Christian reconquest.

Carol Bier, Research Associate, The Textile Museum



FIGURE 1 (DETAIL)

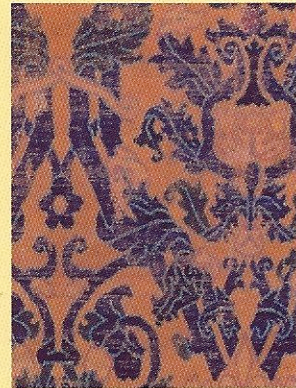


FIGURE 2 (DETAIL)

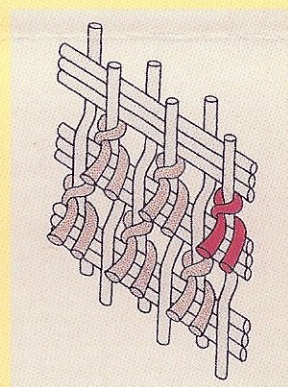


FIGURE 3

FIGURE 1

Pile carpet with stylized floral pattern

The Textile Museum 1976.10.3

Museum purchase, Arthur D. Jenkins Gift Fund and Acquisitions Fund

FIGURE 2

Pile carpet in Renaissance style

The Textile Museum R44.00.3

Acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1942

FIGURE 3

Spanish (single-warp) knot

Drawn by Milton Sondag in honor of Charles Grant Ellis

The Textile Museum acknowledges generous support for this exhibition from Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham, Saudi Aramco, and Sotheby's New York.

READINGS RECOMMENDED FOR CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Ashtor, Eliahyu

1992 *The Jews of Moslem Spain*. Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia and Jerusalem.

Barrucand, Marianne and Allison Bednoy

1992 *Moorish Architecture in Andalusia*. Taschen.

Dodds, Jerrilyn

1992 *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*. The Jewish Museum and George Braziller, New York.

Harvey, L. P.

1992 *Islamic Spain: 1250-1500*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, ed.

1994 *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*. 2 vols. E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Menocal, María Rosa

2002 *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Little, Brown and Company, Boston and New York.

Ruggles, D. Fairchild

2000 *Gardens, Landscapes, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*. Penn State University Press, University Park.



THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

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Washington DC 20008-4088

www.textilemuseum.org

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Lecture and Booksigning: *"The Cultural Legacy of Medieval Spain"*

María Rosa Menocal

Saturday, April 26, 2:30 pm

Moving beyond the perception of the Middle Ages as an unenlightened era of religious persecution, María Rosa Menocal will reveal a time and place in which religious differences were transcended by a shared respect for knowledge, learning and the arts. Dr. Menocal directs Yale University's Whitney Humanities Center and is a professor of Spanish and Portuguese. Her recently published book *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* will be available for purchase.

Fee: \$7/members; \$10/non-members

Advance registration required; call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.

Lecture: *"Splendor in Spain: The Alhambra Palace"*

D. Fairchild Ruggles

Wednesday, July 23, 6:30 pm

The Alhambra Palace in Granada was one of Andalusia's great treasures, built largely between the 13th and 14th centuries. In this lecture, landscape historian D. Fairchild Ruggles examines the interior and exterior space of the Alhambra Palace, providing a cultural context for appreciating the textiles in the exhibition *Carpets of Andalusia*. Dr. Ruggles is a professor of landscape and architectural history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Fee: \$7/members, \$10/non-members.

Advance registration required; call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64.