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Miriam Ali-de-Unzaga

Institute of Ismaili Studies, miriam.alideunzaga@sant.oxon.org

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Ali-de-Unzaga, Miriam, "Embroidered Politics: A Case Study between al-Andalus and Castilla" (2012).
Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings. 655.
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Embroidered Politics: A Case Study between al-Andalus and CastillaMiriam Ali-de-Unzaga¹miriam.alideunzaga@sant.oxon.org

Medieval documentary sources include numerous references of the superb quality and high quantity of Andalusí textiles.² Even though textiles were produced and mentioned about al-Andalus between the 8th and the 16th centuries in the hundreds of thousands, today only a fraction survives –albeit in a considerable number (my estimation is that there are approximately 700 pieces extant in Spain, no official inventory exists). Most of them, made with silk and gold – with sophisticated techniques displaying elaborated iconography: figural, animal, vegetal and geometrical as well as Arabic calligraphy – have been superbly preserved within Spanish Christian treasures thanks to their function as funerary shrouds for royals and ecclesiastics and as saint-reliquaries.

The embroidery preserved in Oña is part of this historical legacy, one of the earlier and most valuable extant Andalusí textiles, which nevertheless has not fully attracted the attention it deserves. This paper is a travelogue that goes back to the 10th and 11th centuries, and moves between the Andalusí and Castilian contexts in order to explore the biographical and political connections of this embroidery. In so doing it presents a twofold outcome; on the one hand it introduces new data on the identity of the figure represented in the embroidery as well as on the identity of the commissioner of the embroidery. On the other hand, it attempts to illustrate that a detailed micro-study of the materiality and the various biographies of a textile piece can yield significant and useful information that complements and perhaps contradicts essentialist perceptions that may arise from documentary sources and contemporary interpretations alike. As such, this paper proposes that in the midst of a convulse and complex medieval history of the Iberian Peninsula *thinking-through-textiles* is a necessary, worthwhile rewarding activity, which accounts for textiles as valuable and useful historical sources that help us to better understand our common human past.

Sancho García (r. 995-1017) was the powerful third Count of Castilla who in 1011 founded the Monastery San Salvador de Oña (60 Km from Burgos in today's Castilla and Leon), one of the richest, most influential ecclesiastical institutions in the medieval period; Sancho bequeathed it to his daughter Tigridia who was the appointed abbess.³ Sancho envisaged a family burial pantheon inside the monastery⁴ through which several medieval objects have been preserved. One of them is an embroidered tunic, which for the sake of clarity will be referred to here as the Oña Embroidery. The few studies that have dealt with this piece did not consider some crucial iconographic features which

¹ Thanks to the Institute of Ismaili Studies and to the Pasold Research I was able to attend and present my paper at the

² Textiles produced in al-Andalus have previously been classified as Islamic, hispano-moresque, hispano-muslim. Today's academic convention uses the adjective Andalusí.

³ J.L. Senra, "El Monasterio de Oña," in Alfonso VIII y su época. Centro de Estudios del Románico Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Aguilar de Campoo en Palencia (1992), pp. 339-354.

⁴ Royals buried in Oña: Sancho and his wife Urraca (d. 1025), their son García Sánchez (d. 1029), daughters Tigridia (d. 1029) and Muniadona (d. 1066); Muniadona's husband King Sancho III of Navarra (d. 1035); Sancho II King of Castilla (d. 1067); infant García (d. 1146) son of King Alfonso VII, and two sons of King Sancho IV of Castilla: Alfonso (d. 1291) and Enrique (d. 1299). Ibid.

can help establishing the identity of the embroidered figure.⁵ In addition, neither of them explored how the embroidery reached the monastery. This paper begins illustrating the materiality of the Oña embroidery to then reconsider the historical geopolitical context of the rulers of Castilla, their interactions with their Muslim counterparts and their connections with Oña.

Materiality and Visual Repertory

The Oña embroidery displays a background linen fabric embroidered with silk and gold.⁶ Discovered in 1968, its restoration (2003-2006) produced four fragments: fragment no. 1: 136 x 85 cm (figure 1a), fragment no. 2: 50 x 40 cm (figure 2a), fragment no. 3: 55 x 50 cm, (figure 3), fragment no. 4: 88 x 50 cm (figure 4).⁷ Organic traces from the fragments confirm that this garment had an ultimate use as a funerary shroud. We have also evidence that the textile experienced several cuttings and manipulations in different periods of time, which suggests that the tunic was adjusted for the use of different body-sizes.⁸ The fabric has withstood the passing of time due to the high quality of its materials and the dried conditions of the monastery. The metallic thread, rolled over a silk base, has a composition of 89% gold and 11% silver.⁹

The ornamentation consists of double rounded medallions. The borders of each medallion elongate to form a web of geometric figures: four-pointed and eight-pointed stars, which give visual continuation to the whole fabric. While the spaces between geometric motifs are filled with a combination of highly stylised opened lotus-flowers and branch-like-vegetable motifs, the geometrical figures enclose a variety of animal representations that amounts to sixty-seven¹⁰: six cats, five birds/falcons riding their respective horses, one incomplete griffin, one incomplete elephant, three pairs of peacocks with necks interlinked, four single eagles, four eagles attacking their respective gazelles, eighteen small birds, one sphinx, two single harpies with bird bodies, two harpies confronted resting on a tree, one harpy with a fish-tale, ten hares, twelve peacocks, and five ducks or bigger birds.

Out of all its animal repertoire, only the ‘bird (or falcon)-riding-a-horse’ motif has been thought to be exclusive of al-Andalus, but its meaning remains elusive (figure 1b).¹¹ The rest of the animal motifs partake from the repertory of antiquity. By now it is axiomatic that fabulous mythical animals such as griffins, harpies, and sphinxes were part of the pre-Islamic – i.e. Sassanid and Egyptian – aesthetics.¹² Those animals together with eagles, elephants and gazelles attacked by eagles, as well as

⁵ M. Casamar and J. Zozaya “Apuntes sobre la Yuba Funeraria de la Colegiata de Oña,” in *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval* 5 (1991), pp. 36-90; and S. Makariou “Quelques réflexions sur les objets au nom de ‘Abd al-Malik ibn al-Mansûr,” in *Archéologie Islamique* 11 (2001), pp. 47-60. Casamar and Zozaya considered it as part of the booty obtained by the first Castilian Count Fernán González from the first Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Rahmān III in 329/939. While Makariou argued that the piece was commissioned by ‘Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar (r. 392/1002-399/1008), son of the official founder of the ‘Āmirid dynasty known as al-Manşūr (r. 366/976-392/1002).

⁶ It fits the classification known as *kaşab mudhahab* –silk-linen and gold embroidered robes. R. B. Serjeant: “Islamic Textiles. Materials for a History up to the Mongol Conquest,” in *Ars Islamica* (1951), pp. 77, 142.

⁷ A small fifth fragment was reused to cover the interior of the lid of an ivory box. A. Malo et al. *Tejidos Medievales de la Aljuba Hispanomusulmana del Conde don Sancho García*, Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales de la Junta de Castilla y León CRBC JCYL, 2006, p. 21.

⁸ CCRBC JCYL, 2006, p. 18.

⁹ CCRBC JCYL, 2006, p. 82.

¹⁰ Casamar and Zozaya (1991, pp. 49-58) interpreted the meaning of each animal and considered that the bestiary iconography in Oña’s embroidery represented a combination of political and funerary discourse.

¹¹ The motif appears in two plates dated to the end of the 10th century (I thank Cristina Partearroyo for this information). A related theme is found in a Fātimid ivory frame where a dismounted falconer seems to be about to place his falcon on the horse’s rump. *Trésors Fatimides du Caire*, ed. M. Barrucand (Paris, 1998), cat. no. 81, p. 138.

¹² J. Allgrove McDowell “The Sasanians AD 224-642,” in *Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (2003), pp. 153-157. E. Baer *Sphinxes and Harpies in Medieval Islamic art. An Iconographical Study* (Jerusalem, 1965); J. Lerner, “A Note on

the ubiquitous peacocks, hares, cats, and birds were also employed in several medias produced under different dynasties in medieval times, both Muslim and non-Muslim.¹³



Figure 1a, left. Fragment no. 1.
Figure 1b, right. Detail of fragment no. 1.

Fragment no. 2 includes an incomplete blue inscription placed above a human figure. Two red inscriptions are found in fragments no. 1 (figure 1a, located at the middle section of the left-hand-side) and no. 4 (figure 4, located at the middle section on the right-hand-side). The epigraphic bands –which make it a *tirāz* textile (inscribed with calligraphy)– were transcribed, read and categorised as 10th century style in 1977.¹⁴ More than 30 years later we still can read in the blue kufic inscription: [In the name of God the Compassionate] ‘the Merciful praise to God Lord of the Universe’; and in the two red cursive inscriptions: ‘peace and prosperi[ty]’ and ‘...with peace and prosperity and blessings and peace and ...’

The first images of the embroidered tunic before restoration show that in tailoring the garment these inscriptions were cut and folded while the royal figure was placed in one sleeve.¹⁵ Most probable, in its Andalusí manufacture the inscriptions were not cut or folded; the textile could have a rectangular shape as a mantel or cape of the type *rida makrūma*. It should have been later, in the Castilian context, when it was manipulated, cut, sewn and made into a narrow tunic with the sides opened in a characteristic Castilian sartorial style.¹⁶

Sasanian Harpies,” in *Iran* vol. 13 (1975), pp. 166-171. It seems that during the Islamic period these unrelated motifs came together, and the Oña embroidery exemplify this situation.

¹³ For fabulous animals see *L’Etrange et le Merveilleux en Terres d’Islam*, ed. M. Bernus-Taylor exhibition catalogue (Musée du Louvre: Paris, 2001), and *Trésors Fatimides du Caire*, 1998. Combinations of fabulous animals and eagles, birds, peacocks, horses and hares, with princely figures seated and drinking appear in objects produced under the Fāṭimids (Baer 1965, pp. 107-124).

¹⁴ A. Fernández Puertas “Lápida del siglo XI e Inscripción del Tejido del siglo X del Monasterio de Oña,” in *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 26 (1977), pp. 119-127.

¹⁵ The bad quality of the image prevent its inclusion here. A. Lázaro López, “Una Riquísima Tela, quizá de la Época Fundacional de Castilla Encontrada en la Iglesia Parroquial de Oña,” in *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 165 (1969), pp. 48-53.

¹⁶ Al-Bakrī’s *Kitāb al-Masālik*, E. García Gómez: “Tejidos, Ropas y Tapicería en los Anales de al-Hakam II por ‘Isa al-Razī,” in *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 166 (1970), pp. 43-53.

Bellow the blue Kufic inscription we find a figure (figure 2b) in which every element conveys sovereignty. A bearded man displayed on profile seated on a pearled throne, flanked by two vegetal spikes on each side, is about to drink from a bottle.¹⁷ His vestments include an ample tunic decorated with cruciform motifs, white gloves, an elaborated head covering a ring in his left hand.¹⁸ This character displays three remarkable physical features that have not been noticed or mentioned before. These are: a black beard shadowed by grey hairs, which implies an evident sign of age; a conspicuous black mole on his cheek; and two plaits falling on his left side. On first sight, it could be argued that the embroiderer or rather the commissioner of the embroidery had precise information in order to portray a very specific character. Could this image characterize a real person, or it was rather a common and standard representation of a ruler?



Figure 2a, left. Fragment no. 2.
Figure 2b, right. Detail of fragment no. 2.

New Data on the Identity of the Figure Displayed

Within early Arabic historiography it was common to include descriptions of the physical characteristics of Muslim rulers. A recent study about the ‘word-portraits’ of the Andalusī Umayyad dynasty has highlighted how the biographical entry of each ruler –besides data about family genealogies, court entourage, and personality traits – included a description of his individual facial and bodily features: his appearance (*sifatu-hu*).¹⁹ In this vein, Ibn ‘Idhārī’s al-Bayān noted that the first independent Umayyad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I (r. 138/756-172/788) could only see from one eye; that he had a mole in his face, and two *dafiratan* – plaited hair that fall behind the ears on one or two

¹⁷ In pre-Islamic times, this motif was linked with eternal life and rebirth (M. Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Medieval Islamic Symbolism and the Paintings in the Cefalu Cathedral* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), pp. 29, 58. From the 10th century, it was understood as a symbol of royal power. B. Flood, “A Royal Drinking Scene from Alchi, Iranian Iconography in the Western Himalayas,” in *Image and Meaning in Islamic Art* (London, 2005), pp. 73-98.

¹⁸ Casamar and Zozaya (1991, p. 57) saw him as Mu‘āwīya I (r. 41/661-60/680) the first caliph of the Eastern Umayyad Dynasty.

¹⁹ M. Marín, “Una Galería de Retratos Reales: los Soberanos Omeyas de al-Andalus en la Cronística Árabe,” in *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 41/1 (2011), pp. 273-290, in p. 277.

sides of the head.²⁰ The realisation of such matching correspondences between the figure made with silk and gold and the portrait made with words is truly striking: the documentary description of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I ‘matches like a glove’ the figure in the Oña embroidery. Moreover, these precise three features of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I are not found repeated in the description of any of the other Umayyads. This is an important aspect, because the figure of the Oña embroidery exemplifies in material and visual terms what the written portraits did: reflecting “a physical reality known by the contemporaries of those rulers which was later translated” and possibly transmitted to the Andalusī collective imaginary.²¹ When was this embroidery commissioned and by whom?



*Figure 3, left. Fragment no. 3.
Figure 4, right. Fragment no. 4.*

Textiles and Politics in 10th Century al-Andalus : New Data on the Identity of the Commissioner of the Embroidery

Documentary sources tell us that an Andalusī production of *ṭirāz* textiles was firstly introduced by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (r. 207/822–238/852) – the same ruler who established the first mint in al-Andalus.²² According to this, a *ṭirāz* textile with the figure of Abd al-Raḥmān I – saviour of the Umayyad dynasty from the Abbasids and founder of the independent Umayyad Andalusī power – would have been produced after his time and employed as political propaganda by his successors.²³ From all the Andalusī rulers who could have commissioned such an embroidery, the first Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 300-350/912-961) has all the points in his favour. Initially, when ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was appointed ‘āmir by his grandfather in 300/912, the Andalusī Umayyads were at the

²⁰ He was also described as red haired, a feature shared by many Umayyads included ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III. From ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II onwards the practice of black dying hair and beard was widely spread and considered as a mark of the ruler. Marín 2011, p. 279.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Al-Suyūṭī’s cited by Serjeant “Islamic Textiles,” in *Ars Islamica* (1942), p. 165.

²³ To the best of my knowledge there are not extant textiles before the period of the first Andalusī caliph.

worst moment of their history.²⁴ He had to fight family discords, internal Berber and *Muwallad* (convert) rebellions, war-campaigns against the Castilians and the rivalry of the neighbouring Fāṭimid caliphate established in 296/909.²⁵

At that time, most probably intentionally, numerous circumstances of Abd al-Raḥmān's III public persona were paralleled to those of 'Abd al-Raḥmān I: both had the same name, used the *kunia* Abū-l-Muṭarrif; both succeeded their grandfathers and not their fathers; their closest collaborator was called Badr, and there were predictions about the greatness of the two 'Abd al-Raḥmān as saviours of the dynasty.²⁶ The alleged connections between the two characters were clearly employed by 'Abd al-Raḥmān III as an instrumental part of a deliberated strategy in his bold claim to an Andalusi caliphate in 316/928.²⁷

During his caliphate, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III not only kept gardens with domestic and exotic animals in his palatial city, he also commissioned representations of fabulous animals, such as the twelve fountain heads made of gold pearls and precious stones to adorn his audience hall in Madinat-Al-Zahara.²⁸ In fact, the bird-of-prey-motif –included in the Oña embroidery – is directly related to 'Abd al-Raḥmān III; it seems that he was the first Andalusi to have introduced it in his banners;²⁹ and it also links him with 'Abd Raḥmān I, known as 'ṣakr Quraysh' (falcon of the Quraysh).³⁰ In addition to the historical evidences, we have material evidence confirming the link between the first caliph and the production of the embroidery: the quality of the gold used in this piece (89%) is exactly the same as in the gold coins minted by 'Abd al-Raḥmān III.³¹

All these reasons make utterly plausible that, once installed as the first independent caliph of al-Andalus and perceived as the protector the Umayyads, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III commissioned a prestigious robe displaying the figure of 'Abd al-Raḥmān I, as a visual and political reminder of his strong connection with his ancestor, the first saviour of the dynasty.

One of the earliest and most visible signifiers of forging alliances, rewarding allies, soldiers and courtiers, as well as distinguishing family members, was to distribute and bestow on them honorary robes.³² Medieval chroniclers written in Arabic include numerous references of these prestigious garments distributed among soldiers and political allies during the Andalusi caliphate. The term used was *khil'a* (*khila'* pl.), which can be translated literally as a castoff because *khil'a* comes from the verb *khala'a* denoting the action of removing one's garment to dress someone else.³³ In several Muslim dynasties – the Andalusi Umayyad were not an exception – the practice of the caliph

²⁴ M. Fierro "Porque 'Abd al-Rahman sucedió a su abuelo el emir 'Abd Allah," in *al-Qantara* 26 (2005), pp. 357-370, in p. 359.

²⁵ Also, in the last years of the 9th century Umayyads, Astures and Fāṭimids were all occupied tracing their origins to legitimise their present. Fierro 2005, p. 369.

²⁶ Fierro 2005, pp. 360-364.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, quoting al-Maqqarī Nafḥ II, p. 112, in E. Lévi-Provençal, *Historie de l'Espagne Musulmane* vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1950), pp. 148-149.

²⁹ Ibn Hayyān mentions it in his *Muqtabis*. *Crónica del Califa 'Abd al-Rahman an-Nasir entre los años 912 y 942*. al-Muqtabis V, eds., MJ. Viguera and F. Corriente (Zaragoza, 1981), pp. 250-251.

³⁰ Ibn 'Idhārī al-Bayān, Lévi-Provençal 1950, p. 133.

³¹ Such high percentage has been only found in Andalusi coins minted at the time of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III. A. Cantó "de los Contenidos Metálicos en la Moneda Hispano-Árabe de Época Omeya," in *Anaqueles de Estudios Árabes* (1994), pp. 129-128, in p. 133.

³² S. Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor. The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 225-239.

³³ P. Sanders "Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. S. Gordon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2001), pp. 225-239.

donating his own garments resulted in *khil'a* becoming synonymous with investing authority.³⁴ Therefore these esteemed robes of honour were carefully passed down through generations.³⁵ In this case, the Oña embroidery – such a valuable caliphal textile, with such prestigious Umayyad connotations – would have been not only one of those objects highly esteemed and carefully kept as a piece of Umayyad heirloom, but more importantly it would have become an inalienable possession.³⁶ But what made it possible the transfer from al-Andalus to Oña's monastery?

Andalusi Textiles and Politics in 10th-11th Century Castilla

A detailed account of all the possible scenarios, hypothesis and trajectories that the textile may have experienced between al-Andalus and Castilla are beyond the scope of this paper.³⁷ Suffice to say here that from the 320s/930s, Umayyad and Castilian relationships were spun around a continuous struggle for power, moving between conflicts, tensions, intrigues and alliances. Thus, we read in the medieval chroniclers about frequent battles and disputes but also about regular truces, treaties, pacts and political deals.³⁸ In this vein, even though the beginnings of independent Castilian power initiated by Fernán González (320/932)³⁹ were dominated by confrontations against Andalusi forces,⁴⁰ by 381/991 a new situation emerged: Sancho García, Fernán González's grandson, rebelled against his father and took refuge in Cordoba allying himself with al-Manṣūr the caliph's chancellor. During subsequent years, when Sancho García was the third Count of Castilla (r. 384/995-405/1017) he alternated between clashes and settlements with the de-facto rulers of al-Andalus the Amirids al-Manṣūr (r. 366/976-392/1002) and his son 'Abd al-Malik (r. 392/1002-399/1008). This was recurrent until the time the Cordovan court started to crumble after the turbulent times following the violent deaths of al-Manṣūr sons. Then, Sancho García allied with and provided substantial support to Sulayman b. al-Musta'in one of the 'candidates' to restore the caliphate. Sancho García's assistance

³⁴ This custom took place under the Oriental Umayyads, but the term *khil'a* first appeared at the time of the 'Abbāsids and flourished under the Fātimids. Y. Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History: from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times* (Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 133. Eventually, due to the large numbers of costumes needed to distribute, the practice of receiving a cloth previously worn by the caliph was replaced by receiving cloths with the name of the caliph on them, produced in the caliphal *ṭirāz* factories. Sanders 2001, p. 226

³⁵ Stillman 2000.

³⁶ Inalienable things are those that become identified with the identity of the original owner, even after having given them away. See Weiner, A.B, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³⁷ M Ali-de-Unzaga "Rethinking the Role of Andalusi Textiles. The Case of Oña's Embroidery," in *The Chasuble of Thomas Beckett in the Cathedral of Fermo*, ed. A. Shalem (Genoa: Bruschettini Foundation forthcoming).

³⁸ This situation is equally applicable to Christian contexts –internal Castilian relations, or Castilian relations with other Christian kingdoms– and to Andalusi-Muslim contexts. E. Manzano Moreno "Christian-Muslim frontier in al-Andalus: idea and reality," in *The Arab influence in Medieval Europe. Folia Scholastica Mediterranea*, eds. D. A. Agius and R. Hitchcock (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997), pp. 83-99; and *Épocas Medievales. Historia de España dirigida por Josep Fontana y Ramón Villares*, vol. 2 (Crítica, 2010).

³⁹ In 327/939 'Abd al-Raḥmān III was defeated at the battle of al-khandaq/Simancas against the first Castilian count Fernán González (r. 932-970) and the kings of Leon and Pamplona. Chronicles tell us that 'Abd al-Raḥmān lost his personal regalia including his qur'an and that the booty –including gold, silver and numerous precious garments– was distributed amongst the victors; Muqtabis V, Viguera and F. Corriente 1981, p. 257; P. Chalmeta, "Simancas y Alhándega," in *Revista Hispania* (1976), pp. 359-446. Donating war booty to religious institutions was common practice. Fernán González did so to the monasteries of San Millán de la Cogolla (Logroño) and Santo Domingo de Silos (Burgos), where he bequeathed an ivory box with an inscription that it was made for 'Abd al-Raḥmān III's daughter. J.D. Doods ed., *al-Andalus. Las Artes Islámicas en España* (New York, 1992), cat. no. 1, pp. 190-191. No tangible traces link him with Andalusi textiles.

⁴⁰ The second count of Castilla García Fernández attempted to siege Gormaz and finally conquered it from the Umayyads in 371/978 obtaining a substantial booty. Immediately after this event he founded the monastery of Covarrubias (Burgos) donating a considerable amount of Andalusi textiles to his daughter Urraca, appointed abbess of the monastery. L. Serrano, *Fuentes para la Historia de Castilla. Cartulario del Infantado de Covarrubias* (Valladolid: Cuesta Editores, 1907), pp. 22 and 30.

enabled the victory of Sulayman, who became the fifth Umayyad caliph (r. 400/1009-401/1010).⁴¹ Subsequently, the third Count of Castilla entered the caliphal capital as a victorious force, receiving money, jewels, splendid textiles and garments and other luxuries as his reward.⁴²

But Andalusí-Castilian relationships were forged also through intermarriages, which developed cross-cultural family ties. The story of Oneca Fortúnez (b. 848) and her daughter Toda are a case in point.⁴³ Through her two marriages, first in Cordoba and then in Pamplona, Oneca⁴⁴ – daughter of the king of Pamplona – became ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III’s grandmother and García Fernández’s great-grandmother. Her daughter Toda was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III’s aunt and Sancho García’s great-grandmother.⁴⁵ Sancho García was described as ibn Mama Duna – son of Toda – in Arabic chronicles.⁴⁶ In addition, al-Manṣūr, the powerful ‘Āmirid and regent of the caliph, allegedly married Oneca, Sancho García’s sister, around 982.⁴⁷

To sum up, the circulation and exchanges of precious textiles between al-Andalus and Castilla would have been equally possible through the various and varied Castilian interactions either via Sancho García or members of his family: his father, grandfather, great-grandmother Toda, or his sister Oneca García – with either Umayyad or ‘Āmirid personae. Those interactions resulted and ranged from war booty to diplomatic and family gifts. However, until now, the only explanation available on how the embroidery was transferred to Castilian hands has been linked to antagonist relations between Andalusí and Castilians and therefore as war-booty/spolia.⁴⁸

The only absolute certainty and unquestionable tangible evidence we have is that the embroidery found its final resting place at the monastery founded by Sancho García in 1011. The contention of this paper is that the embroidery was brought to Oña by his founder. In this case, we face two credible scenarios; one is that Sancho received the embroidery from his family, the other is that he obtained it directly during his contacts with several rulers in Cordoba.⁴⁹ Lack of family evidence

⁴¹ Ibn ‘Idhārī al-Bayān vol. 3, p. 86, cited by P.C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba: Berbers and Andalusis in Conflict*, (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994), p. 188.

⁴² Ibn ‘Idhārī vol. 3 p. 91, in G. Martínez Díez *El Condado de Castilla 711-1038* (Valladolid, 2005), v. II, pp. 614-615.

⁴³ Oneca was the great-granddaughter of Iñigo Arista, King of Pamplona. Strong and close alliances existed between the Arista dynasty and the muwallad (Muslims of Iberian descent) dynasty of the Banu Qasi. Both dynasties allied against Cordoba in many occasions, until Fortún Garcés, grandson of Iñigo Arista and Oneca’s father was taken captive to Cordoba. Lévi-Provençal 1950.

⁴⁴ She was married to the seventh ‘āmir of Cordoba ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad (r. 275/888-300/912). When Oneca widowed she married her cousin Aznar Sánchez. One of her daughters became the queen Toda Aznárez (876-970) mother of Sancha, the first wife of Fernán González.

⁴⁵ Toda was a powerful political force. When her second husband died in 925, she placed her territory under the protection of her nephew ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III. Although she was involved with the coalition of Christian princes which defeated him at Simancas in 939. Years later, Toda requested the assistance of her powerful nephew, in order to get medical treatment for her grandson Sancho I of León. In 958 they both were invited to Cordoba, where they were received with full honours. This event is considered a landmark in the history of medieval diplomacy. M. Fierro *Abdarramán III y el Califato Omeya de Córdoba* (Nerea, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Idhārī al-Bayān p. 86 and 103, cited by Scales 1994, p. 71.

⁴⁷ It seems he first married first Urraca between 972-979, the daughter of Sancho II Garcés of Navarra; then he married Oneca García, but it remains elusive which one of the two mothered al-Manṣūr’s third son ‘Abd al-Raḥmān also known as Sanchuelo (little Sancho). R. Dozy, *Recherches sur l’Histoire et la Literature de l’Espagne Pendant le Moyen- Âge* (Leiden, 1859) vol I, pp. 209-210.

⁴⁸ According to Casamar and Zozaya (1991, p. 58), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III carried with him a funerary tunic in case he would find death in battle, which was seized by Fernán González at the battle of Simancas 327/939. This argument remains unsubstantiated see footnote 37. In addition, none of the tombs of any of the rulers of al-Andalus has been ever discovered; on the excavations of several Muslim necropolises in the Iberian Peninsula no textiles have been found.

⁴⁹ At this stage, it becomes less relevant to find out from which exact context Sancho received the embroidery, than to explore what did he do with the piece in his Castilian context. Nevertheless, I would argue that the second option seems the most convincing specially on the light of the information that in the aftermath of the Cordovan victory Suleiman, who

notwithstanding, we have documentary sources which did emphasise that Sancho García was known for being dressed in Muslim cloths.⁵⁰ Therefore, it is quite feasible that once in his hands the Andalusí embroidery was tailored into a ceremonial tunic and used by the powerful third count of Castilla. Through his intense contacts with Cordoba Sancho was familiar with the Andalusí visual articulation of power and authority, tangibly reflected in the employment of precious textiles highly decorated with figures of silk and gold. Thus, I would argue that, in reusing the Andalusí embroidery in his Castilian context he was not merely reproducing a sartorial fashion; he was replicating an understanding of what represented victorious power even if this understanding may have been originated at the Andalusí context. In other words, the contention of this paper is that Sancho used the embroidery to tailor his tunic because it previously belonged to a formidable Andalusí ruler. Therefore, Sancho who was a powerful Castilian leader had to be dressed and seen with a sumptuous garment appropriate for a ruler. On Sanchos' death, it is most conceivable that he bequeathed the prestigious tunic to his daughter Tigridia, the powerful abbess of Oña.

Concluding Remarks

Made of valuable silk and gold, displaying a royal figure, animals and inscriptions, this embroidery should be valued and attributed to Andalusí Caliphal production. Its materiality (materials and iconography) make of it a crucial piece to understand the formation of Andalusí Umayyad artistic expression. But this textile is also a valuable carrier of information and tangible evidence of Andalusí-Castilian political relations in the 10th-11th centuries. Moreover, such remarkable piece could help rethinking the role of Andalusí prestigious textiles during Christian-Muslim encounters in the Iberian Peninsula. The existence of an operating Andalusí cultural mode shared and put to use by the ruling elite of a Christian 'frontier' is by far more complex than the image often presented by medieval and modern historiography.⁵¹ Because Andalusí textiles acted as transcultural objects and mediated political and diplomatic relationships between competing powers, they constitute the materiality of the often-misinterpreted coexistence that took place between cultures and individuals who might otherwise differed in terms of religious affiliation.

In addition to all those values, the embroidery also has an intrinsic, critical importance because in representing the figure of 'Abd al-Raḥmān I with his specific physical features it offers a key twist to a generalised perception of what has been termed as the 'simple naturalism' of Islamic art:

"Portrayals of man are not a goal in Islamic art, which only rarely approach the artistic workmanship and significance which is so central to European art, clearly because the goal of the former was not to characterise the individual but to generalise."⁵²

It has been demonstrated here that the contemporaries of the first emir of al-Andalus as well as posterior chroniclers and rulers were aware of his physical features, to the extent that those could be not only recognised but also accurately used and purposely displayed such as the Oña embroidery displays. We have seen that the embroidered figure corresponded specifically to a historical character, and not to a standard stereotypical representation of a ruler as it has been previously argued.⁵³ The visual representation of specific Muslim rulers leads to a final critical point that it will

had previously promised Sancho lands, fortresses and castles had to content him instead with jewels, precious garments and other luxuries.

⁵⁰ Dozy 1859, pp. 109.

⁵¹ For a detailed critical analysis of contemporary historiography see Manzano Moreno 1997.

⁵² Gelfer-Jørgensen 1986, pp. 27, 112.

⁵³ M.T. Pérez Higuera, *Objetos e Imágenes de Al-Andalus*, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe (Madrid-Barcelona: Lunewerg, 1994), p. 38.

briefly be mentioned here: It contributes to reconsider textiles as tangible and key historical evidence which can complement but also challenge what we read in documentary sources. In this particular case, the representation of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I’s image in the embroidery help us revisiting the notion often quoted from Ibn Kḥaldūn:

“The pre-Islamic Persian kings used to make their tirāz with the images and figures of kings, but the Muslim rulers changed that and had instead their names inscribed together with other words of good omen or praises of God.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History, F. Rosenthal, trans., 3 vols (New York: Bollingen Series, 1958), pp. 65-7.