



**HAL**  
open science

# “Set the Gaze on Fire”: Gold-Cloth Furnishing and Sacred Propaganda in the Courts of Early Mediaeval Islam

Juan de Lara

► **To cite this version:**

Juan de Lara. “Set the Gaze on Fire”: Gold-Cloth Furnishing and Sacred Propaganda in the Courts of Early Mediaeval Islam. *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World*, 2023, 3 (2), pp.205-234. 10.1163/26666286-12340032 . hal-04689659

**HAL Id: hal-04689659**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04689659>**

Submitted on 5 Sep 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial 4.0 International License



BRILL

# “Set the Gaze on Fire”: Gold-Cloth Furnishing and Sacred Propaganda in the Courts of Early Mediaeval Islam

Juan de Lara | ORCID: 0000-0003-3404-416X

Director, Armenian Institute of London; PhD candidate, UCL Institute of Archaeology,  
London, UK

[juan.delara.19@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:juan.delara.19@ucl.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Three documents from Fatimid Egypt, ‘Abbasid Mesopotamia, and Taifa Toledo – dated between the fourth–sixth/tenth–twelfth centuries – describe the practice of decorating audience halls with gold-threaded furnishing textiles. By identifying fragments believed to be described in these texts, it is proposed that these vibrant interiors were an aesthetic and ceremonial phenomenon of the period. The colour potential of such fabrics, often emphasised in poetry, appears to have encouraged their use, given the symbolic significance associated with the palace and the caliph-imam as vessels and emitters of divine light.

## Keywords

caliph-imam – early mediaeval Islam – ekphrastic poetry – embroidery – gold – gold thread – kingship – light – textiles – wonder

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Gold thread was used in various forms in the late-antique Eastern Mediterranean and China, including metal strips and wires (Karatzani, 2012: pp. 4–6). However, thread fabricated using fine gold or gilt-silver sheets glued to an animal membrane and wound around a core yarn was unknown before the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries and most likely originated in Central Asia, Egypt, Iran, or Mesopotamia (Lamm, 1937: p. 109; Karatzani, 2012: pp. 5–6; Pennell, 2015: p. 51; Scibe et al., 2020) (Figs. 1–2). The function and development of textiles fabricated with this technique are one of the most intriguing aspects in the study of material culture from the early mediaeval Muslim world, especially given their fragility and the huge cost of production. These cloths could be manufactured either by weaving the gold thread into the fabric (using tapestry technique) or by couching the same thread onto a cotton, linen, or silk base (Karatzani, 2012: p. 57). The surviving material evidence indicates that the technique and their use appear to have peaked in the Muslim world during the fourth-sixth/tenth–twelfth centuries.

These textiles have rarely been paired with literary sources convincingly documenting their use and origin. Remarkably, three accounts from different courts in the Muslim world – never studied together – describe textiles with surprisingly close technical and decorative similarities to this corpus of surviving embroidered gold cloths. The three courtly texts are contemporary to the extant fragments, and pairing this evidence

FIGURE 1  
Macrophotography of a gilded  
membrane wound around a silk  
yarn issued from the *Tela de Oña*  
AFTER CABRERA-LAFUENTE,  
1995: P. 201

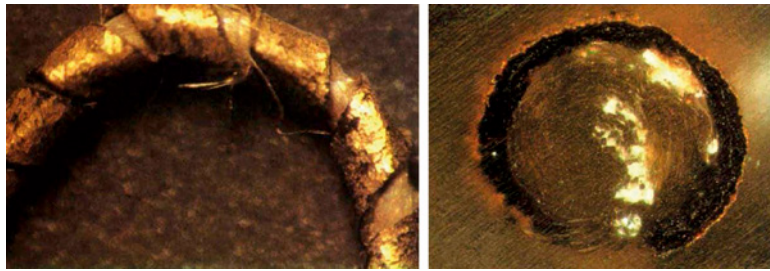


FIGURE 2  
Macrophotography of a thread  
constituted of a golden organic  
membrane issued from the *Suaire*  
*de Saint-Lazare*  
COURTESY OF MAIRIE DE  
RETOURNAC



suggests a concrete practice circumscribed to the same time frame, between the fourth-sixth/tenth-twelfth centuries, and that their use may have achieved widespread popularity in al-Andalus, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

This selection of texts illustrates the tradition of covering interiors with a gold cloth that would “dazzle the vision” or “set the gaze on fire,” revealing the important sensorial aspect obtained from gilt cloths during dinners or audiences. The use of gold suggests that these fabrics played a central role in the pomp surrounding courtly and ceremonial aesthetics. Furthermore, these texts reveal that light – a common element in both Muslim sacred literature and poetry (Contadini, 2015: pp. 142–3; Bloom and Blair, 2015) – interacting with the gold of the fabrics acted as a tool to manipulate spaces of power and legitimisation, in conjunction with grandiose and elaborately choreographed ceremonies (Shalem, 2006).

The methodology adopted in this article supports this association and is separated into two distinctive analyses. The first half presents a group of textiles discussed through the lens of selected texts based on function, production, and style. The second part speculates on the purpose of these fabrics, premised on the theological-cum-poetical style of the accounts, suggesting a link between their use and the necessity for sensorial stimuli to propel the early ideology of kingship. Ultimately, it is argued that court choreographies, in unison with these golden textiles, were destined to enhance the dramaturgy of the sovereign through a process that allowed sanctity to find expression within palace architecture.

## 2 The Written Accounts

Muslim travellers of the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries, dazzled by this textile display in court life, left testimonies of audiences where the phenomenon of furnishing interiors with gold embroidered cloths often occurred. Amongst several literary accounts, three concurrent passages have been identified, where “everything, floor and walls, was nothing but glittering gold” (Al-Qaddūmī, 1996: pp. 163–4). The practice appears to have been “internationalised” in the Muslim world, as the texts originated

from ‘Abbasid Mesopotamia, Fatimid Cairo, and Taifa Toledo. They also pertain to a narrowly circumscribed time frame and share similar elements of literary structure: the palace is prepared for a special occasion when an audience-seeker is led through different rooms filled with an array of wonders until finding a magnificent space covered with gold hangings. Finally, the effect produced on the audience is extolled as a dazzling sight.

In the earliest of these accounts, Ibn al-Khatīb al-Baghdādi (392–463/1002–71) narrates an event that occurred in 305/917. His account described the extraordinary Greek embassy from the Byzantine empress Zoe to Baghdad. The ambassadors were led through room after room and witnessed an incredible array of marvels such as golden trees, pools covered with lead, and even wild animals. However, their most remarkable experience is seeing the caliph himself, who is surrounded by an awe-inspiring display of gold embroidery and jewels, whose “sheen eclipsed the daylight” (Le Strange, 1897: pp. 35–45; Al-Qaddūmī, 1996, pp. 150–3). The central theme of the account is the presence of carpets, curtains, and hangings embroidered with gold, “all magnificently figured with representations of drinking vessels, and with elephants and horses, camels, lions, and birds” – attention must be paid to these motifs. At the end of the account, Ibn al-Khatīb provides vital information on the production centres of such materials, namely Wāsīt (Iraq), Basinna (Iran), Bahnasā and Dābiq (Egypt), the latter especially famous for embroideries.

A second report corresponds to Ibn al-Zubayr, a Fatimid court official in Cairo who lived during the second half of the fifth/eleventh century (Maguire, 2004: p. 115). In his *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, al-Zubayr narrates a similar custom at the Fatimid court under the reign of al-Ḥākim (375–412/985–1021) on the occasion of an embassy sent by Basil II (347–416/958–1025). Once again, preparation for the room mostly consisted of hangings and textiles of gold thread. The effects produced by this “golden hall” was recorded in an account: “when sunlight fell on it, the eyes could not look at it (without) becoming tired and dazzled” (Al-Qaddūmī, 1996: pp. 163–4).

The final account refers to draping palace walls with gold-threaded embroideries in Taifa al-Andalus. These are expressly Persian fabrics decorated with “figures of animals, birds, and trees with fruits” and have a running inscription along the edge that “could be read from a large distance.” This account is extracted from a letter from a courtier named Ibn al-Khabir, recorded in Ibn Bassām’s *al-Dhakhīra* (450–542/1058–1147) (Ibn Bassām, trans. al-Badri 1998: pp. 147–8; cited in Robinson, 2002: pp. 53–4). The fragment forms part of the description of setting a banquet celebrating the circumcision of Yaḥyā, the grandson of the Taifa ruler of Toledo, al-Ma’mūn Ibn Dhū al-Nūn (434–67/1043–75). Once more, the consequence of this visual arrangement was to “set the gaze on fire,” a similar climax to what we find in previous accounts.

### 3 The Material Evidence

The aforementioned descriptions shed light on certain characteristics of these hangings datable to the fourth–sixth/tenth–twelfth centuries: they are embroidered with a metal thread, can be ascribed to specific production centres (mainly Eastern), fall within the delimited time frame when the accounts were written, might have inscription bands, and in general, are decorated with figural depictions of animals, beasts, and humans – sometimes in roundels. This arrangement is mentioned in the *Arabian Nights* during a passage that must be contemporary to our previous accounts, “Zumurrud took the curtain and embroidered it with coloured silks and gold and silver thread, depicting

thereon all manner birds and beasts; nor is there in the world a beast but she wrought on the curtain the [semblance] thereof. Moreover, she made thereto a band, with figures of birds" (Payne, 1901: p. 46). William of Tyre (524–82/1130–86) also witnessed them in the Fatimid palace: "curtain strewn with figures of animals, birds, and people and flaming with rubies, emeralds, and a thousand precious stones" (Wiet, 1964: pp. 21–2). Aside from the iconographical programme to determine a category for wall hanging, curtains or other architectural furnishing textiles, the medallions and the inscription must have been considerable for reading and appreciation at a distance (Shalem, 2014a: p. 259).

These texts from a wide regional span have never been presented together, and no physical evidence has ever been proposed. However, it is possible to identify several textiles decorated with patterned medallions falling within these different categories, some even ascribed to production centres documented in the texts. Yet the most important fact supporting this correspondence is that they can be dated to the same time as the accounts.

One of the most impressive examples of a large textile with silk warps and cotton wefts (*mulḥam*) with gold embroidery, animal figures in roundels, and large calligraphy is the *Beast Cloth* – now split into a series of fragments in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (37.103) and the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (1938.300 and 1952.257), which originally may have formed one single cloth (Figs. 3–5). This example, testimony of a skilled workshop, was described by Wiet (1937: p. 62) as "one of the most luxurious and lavish we have ever discovered" (Wiet, 1937: p. 54; Pence-Britton, 1938: pp. 33–5; Underhill, 1939: pp. 4–5; Mackie, 2015: p. 158; Blessing, 2019: p. 163). The Boston fragment, measuring 69.5 × 50.5 cm, would have comprised the main body of the wall hanging. It is decorated with roundels measuring 35.5 cm contained within foliated interlaced borders, each displaying large representations of single animals and fantastic beasts: birds, gryphons, leopards, peacocks, and winged lions. The two Cleveland fragments form the borders that were meant to surround this textile, consisting of smaller roundels with birds and monumental Kufic script with generic benedictions (Wiet, 1937: p. 59).

Dated by Wiet to the fifth–sixth/eleventh–twelfth centuries, the fragments are believed to have been produced in Baghdad (Mackie, 2015: p. 158), which alongside Iran, was a renowned centre for *mulḥam* fabric during the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries (Lamm, 1937: p. 23). Pence Britton (1938: p. 35) also established technical similarities with another *mulḥam* featuring a lion embroidered with metal thread found in Egypt, yet also attributed to Mesopotamia, which she dated to the fourth/tenth century. This fragment is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (31.445), where a new date from the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries has been proposed. More relevant for the discussion on *mulḥam* is a large fragment measuring 23.37 × 75.05 cm in the George Washington University Textile Museum (73.276) with large patches of metallic thread depicting *pegasi* and dated by Lamm (1937: p. 125) to the sixth/twelfth century (Figs. 6–7). Interestingly, the textile was first catalogued as Fatimid "in the Persian style" in the Royal Academy of Arts Persian exhibition in 1931, London. It was subsequently attributed to Mesopotamia (Lamm, 1937: p. 125; Wiet, 1937), and Pence Britton (1938: p. 35) narrowed the dating to the fourth/tenth century.

Further examples fall within the category we have discussed above. In 1968, Abbot Lázaro López discovered in the Monastery of Oña, Burgos (Spain), an embroidered textile (Lázaro López, 1969: pp. 393–6; Ali-de-Unzaga, 2016: p. 112). The piece, commonly known as the *Tela de Oña*, is preserved in fragmentary condition (Figs. 8–10). The most significant part measures 1.36 × 0.85 m (Marcos-Marín, 1986: p. 358). The embroidery



FIGURE 3  
Fragments of the *Beast Cloth*  
(37.103)  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



FIGURE 4  
A fragment of the *Beast Cloth*  
(1952.257)  
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART,  
CLEVELAND



FIGURE 5  
A textile fragment embroidered  
with metallic thread and silk  
(1938.300)  
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART,  
CLEVELAND



FIGURE 6  
*The Pegasus Cloth* (73.276), the  
 Textile Museum Collection,  
 Washington DC  
 PHOTO BY BRETON  
 LITTLEHALES



FIGURE 7  
*The Pegasus Cloth* (detail), the  
 Textile Museum Collection,  
 Washington DC  
 PHOTO BY BRETON  
 LITTLEHALES

was added over a linen tabby sewn with coloured silk and gilt membrane thread (Alonso Benito, 2009: p. 409). The decorative scheme on the surface repeats the programme of roundels united by pearly interlaced borders. Each of the 20 cm roundels contains representations of eagles, elephants, gryphons, horses, human figures, and peacocks following our texts. The rims are also decorated with large inscriptions.

Lázaro López (1969: p. 395) dated the *Tela* to the end of the fifth/eleventh or early sixth/twelfth centuries. Nevertheless, Fernández-Puertas (1977: pp. 124–7) has suggested an earlier dating from the fourth/tenth to early fifth/eleventh centuries based on the themes and lettering of the epigraphical frieze he translated. Casamar and Zozaya (1991: p. 39), who wrongly identified it as the shroud of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, proposed a fourth/tenth-century dating (Cabrera-Lafuente, 1995: p. 204). While a mortuary shroud seems unjustified without any textual evidence, a relation with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I is





FIGURE 8  
A fragment from the *Tela de Oña*  
COURTESY OF FÉLIX ÁNGEL  
MARTÍN PUENTE, OFICINA  
CENTRAL DE TURISMO DE OÑA



FIGURE 9  
*Tela de Oña* (detail)  
COURTESY OF ANA MARIA  
CUESTA SÁNCHEZ



FIGURE 10  
*Tela de Oña* (detail), *Horse and Goshawk*  
 COURTESY OF ANA MARIA  
 CUESTA SÁNCHEZ

still supported by Ali-de-Unzaga (2017: pp. 115–7), who recognises the seated figure in one of the roundels as a representation of this caliph and dates it to the end of the fourth/tenth century (Fig. 8). Makariou (2001: pp. 47–60), on the other hand, argues that it was commissioned by Malik al-Muẓaffar (r. 392–8/1002–8), the de facto ruler of Cordoba and one of the sons of al-Manṣūr. However, both arguments appear unsubstantiated.<sup>2</sup>

To help date this piece, iconographical comparisons can be helpful. The image of a horse surmounted by a bird on its back found in the *Tela* is a very particular emblem disseminated in caliphal al-Andalus during the fourth/tenth century and is only comparable to similar depictions in ceramic plates from Madinat al-Zahrā and Medina Elvira, all dated earlier than 400/1010 (Marcos-Marín, 1986: p. 358; Armengol et al., 2013). In support of this dating, a comparable embroidered silk textile with Kufic and a peacock on the San Valero mitre in Roda de Isabena, Huesca, was dated by Niño Mas (1941: pp. 140–3) to the fifth/eleventh century and by Floriano (2006: p. 33) to the first half of the fifth/eleventh century. The similarities with the technique and iconography found in Oña might support a fifth/eleventh-century dating for the piece.

Lázaro López (1969: p. 395) proposed an analogy between Oña and a chasuble found in Fermo, suggesting both fabrics originated with the same school, a connection recently studied in Shalem’s 2017 publication. The *Chasuble of Fermo* is a large cloth made of double-faced silk and covered in forty-three roundels, each measuring approximately 40 cm, embroidered with metal threads containing motifs of eagles, elephants, gryphons, human figures, lions, peacocks, and other beasts (Shalem 2014b; Shalem 2017: p. 51) (Fig. 11). The textile is comprised of different fragments sewn together, and currently measures 1.60 m long with a circumference of 5.23 m (Shalem, 2017: p. 46). It



FIGURE 11  
Detail from the *Chasuble of Fermo*,  
Fermo Cathedral, Marche  
AFTER SANTANGELO, 1960: P. 275

is renowned as the earliest embroidered textile of this type fully dated and localised. A monumental oblong panel contains a sizeable Kufic inscription translated by Rice in 1959 bearing the year 510/1116 and locating it in “Mariyya” or Almeria (Simon-Cahn, 1993: p. 1; Shalem, 2017: pp. 55–60). Nonetheless, Shalem (2014b; 2017: pp. 63–5) has noted that a reliable reading cannot be obtained given the poor condition of the inscription.

Shalem suggested a mid-fifth/eleventh century production for the textile, after the fall of the caliphate in 422/1031, more specifically, during the Taifa period and the supposed re-appearance of caliph Hishām II, and probably by embroiders from Cordoba or others familiarised with the technique (Shalem, 2014: p. 259; Shalem, 2017: pp. 87–8, 96). His dating relies on part of the monumental inscription, alluding to protective and amuletic characters. Shalem believes this textile must have been part of the luxurious presents and tributes brought to the court in Seville. His dating is supported by the technique of the textile’s double-faced blue and beige weft silk body, a characteristic weave of the mid-fifth/eleventh to mid-sixth/twelfth centuries (Shalem, 2014b). Cabrera-Lafuente (2005: p. 119) attributed this date range to a similar Andalusi plain silk with wefts working separately in each face, creating a double face used in the dalmatic of the Cathedral of San Vicente in Roda de Isábena, Huesca (Cabrera-Lafuente et al., 2018: p. 8).

Inscriptions have often been the way to date these gold embroidered textiles, although not without controversy. The *Suire de Saint Lazare* (Fig. 12), now split between the Musée de Tissus in Lyon (MT 27.601/2) measuring 1.67 × 0.76 m and the Musée national du Moyen Âge Paris – Musée de Cluny (Cl. 21865) measuring 2.35 × 1.10 m, appear to be the earliest dated embroidery of this type, c.397/1007, a date inferred from an inscription reading “al-Muzaffar” (“the victorious”) on the belt of a horse rider (Salet, 1967: p. 317). This was the title given to ‘Abd-al-Malik al-Muzaffar, who took power in 392/1002 (Makariou, 2001: p. 52; Ali-de-Unzaga, 2017: p. 115). However, Ali-de-Unzaga has rightly noted that this formula is ubiquitous, and it is accompanied by other general



FIGURE 12  
*Suaire de Saint Lazare*  
 © MUSÉE ROLIN, AUTUN

inscriptions quoting glory and power found in at least four of the horsemen's belts. Therefore, it is very likely that these texts were not soubriquets but generic benedictions (Dor, 2017: p. 132). More recently, Rosser-Owen (2022: p. 300) attributed this textile to the Taifa 'Amirid court.

#### 4 The Controversy: Production Centres and Dating

Locating the production centres for these previously discussed textiles is beyond the scope of this article. However, it seems pertinent to outline some thoughts originating from the juxtaposition of the material evidence and the texts presented here. The origin of gold embroidery factories in the Muslim world is unknown, and it is maintained that the system derived from Sasanian Persia or the Coptic – Byzantine factories of Egypt (Contadini, 1998: p. 45) (Fig. 13). Yet by the second/eighth century, the production of embroidered goods to supply the 'Abbasid courts was well established, and these factories were dependent both on Iranian and Egyptian supplies (Serjeant, 1972: p. 16).<sup>3</sup>

The pigments in the *Tela de Oña* have been analysed, and the presence of certain dyes indicates an Andalusian production (Cabrera-Lafuente, 1995: p. 200; Gayo García and Arteaga, 2005: p. 130; Borrego Díaz, 2005). Effectively, dyes can be exported, yet the rendering of the iconographical motif of goshawk on horse, mentioned earlier, is a traditional symbol of Andalusian lore before 400/1010. The *Chasuble of Fermo* and the *Suaire de Saint Lazare* have been attributed to Andalusian factories (Shalem, 2017: p. 74; Jacoby, 2017), but this might have been a biased conclusion formed by their discovery in Western Mediterranean contexts. The Andalusian-origin hypothesis contradicts the texts documenting these fabrics, as none of the descriptions alludes to renowned production centres in the Iberian Peninsula, including Almeria or Cordoba. By the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries, al-Andalus had reached international fame for textile production (Partearroyo Lacaba, 1992: p. 105), yet the accounts altogether mention Eastern manufactured goods from Armenia, Bahnasā, Basinna, Dābiq, Qayrawān, Tustar (Shūshtar), and Wāsīt; other comparable texts describing wall hangings mention drapes of Phoenician (Levantine or Muslim) and Greek (Byzantine) origins (Wiet, 1964: p. 20; Tronzo, 1997: p. 67). Hence, we appear to face a general predilection or higher



FIGURE 13  
A Sasanian or Sogdian silk  
embroidery on plain-weave silk  
(2004.260), first/seventh century  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF  
ART, NEW YORK

esteem for Eastern Mediterranean and Iranian fabrics over Andalusí textiles in court environments during the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries. Although this discussion should remain content for another publication, the hypothesis is corroborated by additional observations:

- a) Ibn al-Khabir's account from the Taifa court of Toledo lists fabrics from Basinna and Tustar, both towns in Iran famous producers of curtains and textiles from as early as the third/ninth century (Le Strange, 1905: p. 246), and surprisingly dismisses any Andalusí production, which would have been more affordable and easier to source in Taifa courts.
- b) Two Spanish research projects reevaluating mediaeval textiles from church treasuries note an increasing number of early Baghdadi or Iranian silks in the Iberian Peninsula (Cabrera-Lafuente, forthcoming; 2019; Rodríguez Peinado and Cabrera Lafuente 2020; Martín, 2019; Serjeant, 1972: p. 28). These include, for example, a *lampas* silk from the Colegiata de San Isidoro at *León*, dated to c.349/960 (Kendrick and Guest, 1926: pp. 261–7) or the fabrics in the Monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses, Catalonia and the Oviedo Cathedral. This phenomenon is repeated in other European churches, namely the Cathedral of Sens, the church of Saint Servatius in Sieburg or the Cathedral of Apt. Another double-faced silk in Milan, similar to the Fermo textile and used to wrap the relics of St. Ambrosius, bears a Marwanid inscription.<sup>4</sup>

c) In 327/939, vizier Ibn Shuhayd offered Iraqi silken cloaks (possibly *mulham*) to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, some embroidered with gold thread (Jacoby, 2017: pp. 143–4). Table 1 reveals the problems of chronology and production centres for these vast numbers of gold threaded embroideries. I have attempted to stylistically identify patterns without chemical analysis, but the data is lacking. The overall decorative programme pertains to the international Mediterranean and Near Eastern vocabulary developed between the second–fourth/eight–tenth centuries, which was linked to Sasanian iconography (Hoffman, 2008: pp. 119–21). Indeed, the plethora of Sasanian motifs we find in these gold embroideries, such as confronted animals, pearled roundels, “trees of life,” and peacocks with ribbons symbolising the Iranian concept of *farr* (Compareti, 2011;

	Name	Museum number	Suggested origin	Technique	Calligraphy	Dating				Publication
						10th century	First half 11th century	Second half 11th century	12th century	
EMBROIDERIES	Beasts Cloth	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [37.103] Cleveland Museum of Art [1938.300; 1952.257]	Egypt	Mulham Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Kufic	●	●	●	●	Wiet (1937)
						●	●	●	●	Pence Britton (1938)
						●	●	●	●	Underhill (1939)
						●	●	●	●	Mackie (2015)
	Pegasus Cloth	GWU Textile Museum Collection, Washington [73.276]	Egypt	Mulham Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Pseudo-Kufic calligraphy				●	Royal Academy of Arts (1931)
									●	Lamm (1937)
						●				Wiet (1937)
									●	Pence Britton (1938)
					●			●	GWU Textile Museum Collection	
	Lion embroidery	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [31.445]	Egypt	Mulham Silk Couched membrane metal	No	●	●	●		Pence Britton (1938) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
	Tela de Oña	Monastery of San Salvador de Oña	Al-Andalus	Linen tabby ground Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Kufic	●	●	●	●	Lazaro Lopez (1969)
						●	●	●	●	Fernández-Puertas (1977)
●						●	●	●	Casamar and Zozaya (1991)	
●						●	●	●	Makariou (2001)	
●						●	●	●	Ali-de-Unzaga (2012; 2017) Cabrera-Lafuente (2019)	
Chasuble of Fermo	Cathedral of Fermo	Al-Andalus (?)	Silk samite ground Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Kufic unreadable		●		●	Talbot Rice (1950)	
						●			Shalem (2014)	
						●			Shalem (2017)	
						●	●		Schorta (2017)	
Suaire de Saint-Lazare	The Musée des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs, Lyon [MT 27601/2] The Musée de Cluny – Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris [Cl. 21865]	Al-Andalus (?)	Silk tabby Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Kufic various, including <i>al-Muzaffar</i>	●	●			Baer (1967)	
					●	●			Salet (1967)	
					●	●			Dor (2017)	
Mitra de Roda	Cathedral of San Vicente de Roda de Isábena	Egypt (?)	Linen Silk twill Silk Couched membrane metal threads	Kufic <i>aleizat lilah</i>		●	●		Niño Mas (1941)	
						●			Florianio (1942)	
Textile with three saints	MET Museum [29.106a, b]	Egypt	Cotton (mulham?) Silk Couched membrane metal threads	No				●	Metropolitan Museum	
TAPETRIES	Franja del Pirineo	Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid	Silk Tapestry metal thread	No	●	●	●		Borrego Diaz (2005)	
					●				Partearroyo Lacaba (2017)	
	Veil of Hisham II	Real Academia de la Historia [Inv. 749]	Al-Andalus (?) Egypt (?)	Linen Tapestry metal thread (membrane?)	Kufic (...) <i>Hisham</i> (...)	●	●			Borrego Diaz (2005)
Veil of St. Anne	Cathedral of Sainte-Anne d'Apt	Egypt	Linen Tapestry metal thread	Kufic			●	●	Wiet and Marçais (1934) Girault-Kurtzemann (2018)	
The Parakeet Ribbon	Al Sabah Collection [LNS 549 T]	Egypt (?)	Cotton tapestry membrane metal threads	Kufic <i>lo'a</i>				●	Al Sabah Collection	

TABLE 1  
Comparative table showcasing the chronologies of various gold-threaded cloths created through tapestry or embroidered techniques (Author)



FIGURE 14  
*Beast Cloth* detail (left and centre),  
 silk on linen embroidery from  
 Egypt, detail (right), (1971-50-23)  
 COOPER HEWITT MUSEUM,  
 NEW YORK

2015: p. 38), from the fourth–sixth/tenth–twelfth centuries, reflect the enormous influence of the Iranian textile industry throughout the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia (Feltham, 2010: p. 15).

Preserved in the Cooper Hewitt Museum is a Fatimid linen textile embroidered with silk (Fig. 14). The rendering of the silk figures is similar to the leopard-like figures in the Cleveland and Boston *Beast Cloth* textiles. It is a very specific style not found elsewhere in the Islamic world. Given these similitudes, perhaps these richly embroidered *mulham* pieces (e.g., the *Beast Cloth*, *Pegasus Cloth*, and the *Lion mulham*) were fabricated in Fatimid Egypt or by itinerant weavers familiar with the Coptic tradition. The answer might lie within their provenances. The *Pegasus Cloth*, now in the George Washington University Textile Collection, was acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1931 from dealer Elie Abemayor or Maurice Nahman during a visit to Cairo (Abdulfattah, 2020: p. 114). The piece might have been loaned to the Arab Museum of Cairo (today the Museum of Islamic Art) as credited in the 1931 Persian exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art. Nahman also appears to have been the source of four gold embroidered *mulham* sold to Emil Delmár, who visited Nahman around 1934 (Nahman, 1918: p. 44). Delmár then sold these fragments in the 1950s to the Cleveland Museum.

Furthermore, the dealer Paul Mallon sold the three fragments of the *Beast Cloth* to the Cleveland Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, between 1930–50. What is telling about the transaction is that the other objects Mallon supplied the museums were all a variety of Egyptian antiquities and Coptic textiles, suggesting Mallon had amassed a valuable Egyptian hoard or collection. In support of the Egyptian link with these textiles, one of the fragments of the *Beast Cloth* (1952.257) had been purchased from Alexandrian collector Jacques O. Matossian. Additionally, it should be noted that the embroidery design of the mitre of Roda finds a direct relationship with a Christian embroidered textile attributed to Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (29.106a, b) (Fig. 15), also sold by Paul Mallon to this museum. The complex networks connecting the above textiles to a few Cairene dealers suggest the source of the fragments may have been ongoing excavations in Fustat at the time, and not Iraq as previously reported.

Considering this discussion, it can be hypothesised that a large corpus of the surviving embroideries could have been produced in Fatimid Egypt, matching closely the descriptions of gold embroidered fabrics originating from Dābiq (*dābiqi*), near Damietta in the Nile Delta. On the other hand, it is possible to postulate that golden textiles with blue backgrounds (the *Chasuble of Fermo* and the *Suaire de Saint Lazare*) may have had an Andalusí origin and perhaps a later dating in the fifth/eleventh century. Such controversies demonstrate the need to reevaluate these fabrics by conducting



FIGURE 15  
*The Mitre de San Valero* in  
 Roda (top and bottom left),  
 After Floriano, 2006: p. 32. An  
 embroidered textile (29.106a, b),  
 allegedly from Egypt (bottom  
 right)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF  
 ART, NEW YORK

chemical analysis on dyes. The resulting data might be the best option to settle the question of production centres.

In summation, these relatable textiles share the same technique of gilded membrane coiled around a silk yarn, feature a similar decorative programme of roundels, and all contain inscriptions (Baer, 1967: pp. 36–8) – a description that quickly evokes the texts describing wall hangings presented in the selection of written accounts. For authors who studied these embroideries, their purpose has been elusive. Gold embroidery is an extremely heavy and delicate material, and a rare choice for clothing (Dor, 2017: pp. 135–7). Shalem (2017: p. 93) suggests the *Chasuble of Fermo* was most probably originally used as a tent.<sup>5</sup> This view cannot be ruled out, as it is worth recalling al-Maqrīzī’s account (Lane-Poole, 1901: p. 148), who expressed that textiles were kept in bulk and multipurpose, serving furniture decoration, palanquins, tents, or wall-hangings, and the like. Nevertheless, I argue that this corpus of textiles matches more closely with the larger quantity of described wall-hangings previously presented.

## 5 Vibrant Interiors of Gold

So, why would golden cloth of this type make such a ubiquitous appearance in the fourth/tenth century, and then suddenly wane in the sixth/twelfth century? One of the most overwhelming reactions extracted from the accounts listed above is the bewilderment caused by hangings and cloths during the *majālis*, whose decoration depended on elaborate golden backdrops. This is observed in the audience from Baghdad, which was not only decorated with gold-threaded hangings, but with golden trees, horses with golden saddles, and “thousands of gold breastplates” displayed in front of a ruler garbed in gold brocade (Al-Qaddūmī, 1996: pp. 150–4). Indeed, a whole palace in the Round City of Baghdad was named after gold, the *Qaṣr al-Dhahab* (Al-Ṭabarī, trans. Bosworth, 1999: p. 88).

The same extensive use of gold is documented in the Taifa palace of Toledo, as we see in the text describing the circumcision of Yaḥyā. Another example, noted by Ibn Khāqān (d. c.545/1150), describes the lavish display of gold and lapis in the ‘Āmirid palace, whose “sight wearied the eyes” (Lévi-Provençal, 1938: p. 94; Ruggles, 2000: p. 123). Yet its use is not more than the re-enactment of a much older tradition inherited from Andalusī caliphal customs. Before the fall of *Córdoba*, the architectural spaces destined to be furnished with hangings reveal that caliphal al-Andalus had areas in their palaces



named after gold, such as the *Majlis al-Dhahab* (Hall of Gold) (Ruggles, 2000: p. 67) and the *Salón Rico* at Madīnat al-Zahrā, a room decorated with golden mosaics, where pools of mercury sprayed rays of light over the golden walls creating a true spectacle of gleaming light (Al-Maqqarī, trans. Gayangos, 1840–3: pp. 236–7).

In Fatimid Cairo, the account describes golden thrones and drapery, and further written texts denoting names for the ceremonial route in the palaces are revealing. The main gate of the palace was known as *Bāb al-Dhahab* (Golden Gate), which led to the *Qaʿat al-Dhahab* (Golden Hall), the most celebrated wing of the Eastern Palace covered in gold with blue designs (Al-Maqrīzī, trans. al-ʿAdawi, 1853: pp. 316, 385; Sanders, 1994: pp. 68, 78; Rabbat, 1995: p. 119; Jairazbhoy, 1996: p. 43; Swelim, 2015). A glimpse of this golden room can be read in a description of the Cairene palace by al-Maqrīzī: “the hall was hung with drapes and covered with carpets. The caliph’s throne was covered in precious fabrics” (Sanders, 1984: pp. 33–4). Other accounts describe how “the Commander of the Faithful sat in state in the *Qaʿat al-Dhahab* after it was decorated and carpeted with brocade[d] drapes and beautiful gold curtains. All of the galleries were hung with drapes and covered with rugs (...) all [with] gold embroideries and precious brocades” (al-Musabbihī, eds. Fūʿād Sayyid and Bianquis, 1978: p. 29; cited by Sanders 1984: p. 39; for a comparable but slightly later text see also William of Tyre, trans. Atwater Babcock and Krey, 1943: pp. 319–22).

As we can interpret from the texts and their reactive response, these hangings, sometimes drenched in rose oil and water to cool and perfume the space (Baker, 1995: p. 53), acted in orchestration with golden architecture and golden ware. Altogether these strategies are encompassed as backdrops to intensify the emotional response from the audience by causing “pleasurable wonder.”<sup>6</sup> In the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, account 167 is the best-illustrated example of this conscious desire to force a reaction through wonder, understandably, gold, light, the strange, and textiles. When Chinese envoys marched to the court of a Sāmānid ruler with a threat to invade his kingdom, he instructs them to furnish his palace with gold-threaded embroideries and decorate the city with gold (armour, banners, clothing, staffs, etc.). The reaction is familiar: “it seemed to them as though the whole world were aflame with the glitter of metal, as the sunlight fell on those coats of mail and helmets” (Al-Qaddūmī, 1996: pp. 156–7).

Therefore, the idea of their desired outcome is clear – impressing the enemy with a lavish display of radiant and shimmering gold was not only a show of wealth, but power (Shalem, 2006; Bernstein, 2012: pp. 51–6; Bush, 2018: pp. 177–8). Textiles with gold threads in golden settings appear, at first glance, to find their rationale in a phenomenally expensive good and in the given qualities of gold, an element associated since antiquity with royalty and power. However, it must be noted that the emergent use of these gold-furnished textiles, accompanied by a new technique of gold on an animal membrane, coincides with the loss of military and political power for the ʿAbbasid caliphs, whose primary concern was maintaining a highly ritualised court in Baghdad. For this reason, I believe that the over-decoration of palace settings had a socio-religious subtext, which will be discussed below.

## 6 The Dazzling Sight

Oh[,] excellent palace: God has decreed that glory and honour  
 be forever renewed in her, never to fade away.  
 If Moses the Interlocutor walked advancing over her sanctified ground,  
 he would wear sandals.

Indeed, she is the place of kingship: In her is placed  
 all the hope of the traveller.  
 (...) In it, I forgot the Iwan of Chosroes, for I see  
 in it the unequalled lord of beauty.  
 It is as though before, Solomon Son of David  
 had not invoked terror into the *jinn* in his constructions.  
 And in him, one perceives the sun: as an inkwell, from which  
 ink is drawn out in order to portray his image.  
 (...) *When we were blinded by her light, bursting into flame,*  
*we used her brilliance as kohl for our vision.*

AL-MAQQARĪ, trans. Dozy, 1855–61: pp. 321–2; cited in Robinson, 2002: pp. 61–2

This panegyric written by Ibn Ḥamdīs al-ʿAzdī al-Ṣīqillī (d. 527/1133) pertains to a rare genre at the intersection of the poetic *qaṣīda* and *wasf* styles (Motoyoshi Sumi, 2004). Termed by Robinson (2002: pp. 62–3) *qaṣriyat* (literally “poems about palaces”), these compositions, which reached their peak in the third–fourth/ninth–tenth centuries, appear to praise and evoke the ruler and the personification of the palace and the caliph-imam by emphasizing their semiotic relationship in early Islam with radiance and brilliance. Pentcheva’s (2015) article evidences the important themes of glitter and radiance appearing in third/ninth-century ʿAbbasid *qaṣriyat* poetry (juxtaposing them to earlier sixth-century Byzantine ekphraseis of buildings). In this fragment from Ibn Ḥamdīs, but also in several of the texts analysed above, the reference to brilliance is revealed in the recurrent emphasis on a blinding image to describe the stupefaction caused by the sight of palaces, rulers, or these golden textiles, which had the capacity to set the “gaze on fire” or “burning the eyes” – a collective structure that I call here the “dazzling sight.”

An analysis of this rhetorical construction of dazzling sight confirms it to be an ekphrastic topos fostered in Arabic poetry of the fourth-fifth/tenth-eleventh centuries, and often found in the poetic descriptions genre (*wasf*) used almost in its totality as an allusion to the brilliance bestowed on the ruler or palace – the literary device seems then to decline after the sixth/twelfth century. For example, consider a quote from Ibn Ḥayyān (d. c.190–200/806–16) in reference to the audience hall in the palace of Madīnat al-Zahrā: “when the sun penetrated through these doors into the apartment, so strong was the action of its rays upon the roof and walls of this hall that the reflection was only sufficient to deprive the beholders of sight” (Al-Maqqarī, trans. de Gayangos, 1840–3: pp. 236–7). Correspondingly, we find the same device in the description of curtains concealing the caliph al-Wāthiq by al-Bayhaqī (c.fourth/tenth century): “my eye was about to be dazzled because of its gold” (Mahal, 2015: p. 138). Further lines come from Ibn Ḥamdīs (Al-Maqqarī, trans. Dozy, 1855–61: pp. 321–2; cited in Robinson, 2002: p. 199) praising the palace of the ruler of Bougie:

oh, Palace! If your vision is darkened by its light, you must endeavour to look upon  
 it again. ...  
 (...) I looked, and lo, I beheld the most incomparable of sights; then  
*I adverted my gaze, blinded.*  
 And I believed myself to [be hallucinating] in Paradise when I beheld the king in  
 his glory.

This same rhetorical device finds equal allusions outside poetry and primarily in earlier discourses of homiletic literature. In line with the *Sahih* of Muslim Nishapuri (d. 261/875),

the only occasion when one's gaze needs to be averted (blinded) is when a mortal looks at the face of God, whose countenance is covered by a veil of light, and whose sight would "set the eyes on fire" (Abdel-Haleem, 1990: pp. 170–1). Emitting dazzling light, lethal to men, is also one of the abilities that al-Ṭabarī (1991: p. 78) attributes to Moses after encountering God in Sinai, resulting in the prophet's need to cover his face with a veil to shield people from its radiance (Ibn Mājah 34, hadith 27; Abū Dāwūd 42, hadith 48; see also Houtsma, 1913: pp. 955–6). Similarly, caliphal appearances in Fatimid and 'Abbasid ceremonials suppressed opportunities to catch sight of the ruler via a curtain or veil. The major reason for the need to conceal the persona of the caliph appears to be related to the emanation of religious power and force from God (*baraka*) and the direct associations with the efflux of divine light that his sacred body radiated (Sanders, 1984: p. 61; al-Azmeh, 1997: p. 157; Klaniczay, 2002: p. 27). It is informative to learn that certain aspects of cosmological and sacral kingship of the 'Abbasid, Byzantine, and Fatimid rulers are particularly indebted to Sasanian court protocol (Babaie and Grigor, 2015: p. 129; Al-Ṭabarī, ed. Bosworth, 1999: p. 385). This "veiled face" was a relic from Sasanian ceremonials and the Indo-Iranian concept of the "Sun King" since their faces were so resplendent that it was impossible for ordinary mortals to behold (Widegren, 1959: pp. 247–9; Ettinghausen, 1972: pp. 28–9).

The regal embodiment of light is particularly prominent in Isma'ili Islam (Lange 2021; Baiz Khan, 2013), where the perception of the caliph-imam developed on divine brilliance, as noted by Contadini (2015: 144) and Bloom and Blair (2015: p. 10). God's light was directly transmitted to their imams, whose titles and epithets directly reference his brilliance and radiance (Sanders, 1984: p. 61, 135). Examples in Fatimid poetry provide further evidence for the association of the imam with divine light and heaven (Hunzai and Kassam, 1997):

they [imams] are the guiding light, like lanterns in [the] darkest night  
they are the rain-filled plain, when all else is dry  
imams, created out of light, whose light is  
the pure essence of God's unfading light.<sup>7</sup>

Also, in Ibn Hānī' (d. 362/973):

the [true] heaven of God is not the one you see, the  
earth which contains him [the imam] is [truly] heaven.<sup>8</sup>

This same orthodoxy was never elaborated in Mesopotamia and al-Andalus as it was in Egypt. However, the reference to light also finds analogous examples in Andalusī verses, as shown in Ibn Ḥamdīs' text, and in 'Abbasid poetry. The names of 'Abbasid rulers in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* are often accompanied by light-related epithets, including *ḍīya'*, *nūr*, *dhawu'l-nūr*, *wa'l-huda*, and *nūr al-khilāfah* (Crone and Hinds, 2003: p. 82, no. 151).

It was through kingship, and a caliph-imam often charged with quasi-demiurgical attributes, that God's majesty was reflected on Earth (Ringgren, 1959: p. 748; Al-Azmeh, 1997: p. 123; Rogers, 2004: p. 31). The visual centrepieces of the court and the audience's ornamentation – textiles and gold – added a new semantic nexus to the ritual as a channelling tool to represent the emanation of God's essence and light (*wujūd*) (Chittick, 1998: p. 158) and as mediators of the *'ajab* within the palace (Robinson, 1997: p. 147). These orchestrated court events provided a clear multi-sensorial message and stimulus against heavily orchestrated ritual backdrops. As al-Azmeh (1997: p. 131) suggests, these strategies served to dramatise the locus of power, but unavoidably heightened the

deep emotional properties of a cosmological “dramaturgy of kingship” and the “liturgy of power” in the court (El-Cheikh, 2014: p. 354).

The practice of the “veiled caliph” or even large golden interiors is not attested in Umayyad Syria (Farmer, 1994: pp. 67–8); or al-Andalus (Marin, 1998: p. 427; Fernandes Cardoso, 2015: p. 202), yet the shift to ‘Abbasid and Fatimid rulership must have entailed a new trend in a heavily ritualised court protocol (Hilāl al-Ṣābi’, trans. Salem, 1977). This time marks a desire for sacral propaganda, one when the caliph-imam enacted the central role within a universe of senses, where the palace acted as his scenery and link between his divine presence and humans (Necipoğlu, 1993: p. 5). The veil in the audience hall established a dramatic liminal boundary between the ruler and the ruled; it also accentuated the two distinctive realms existing within the palace – both terrestrial and hypothetically divine nature. Gold and golden textiles, much like the ones we have discussed, created a spectacle of glittering radiance, and when activated by the sun or the vibrating and flickering wicks of lamps, would capture light and spread it across the surface of the fabric and the room, creating a gradient of tonalities and hues, enhanced by the slight movement of the wind or a displaced curtain.

During this time, we can also find gold-threaded astrological cloths fabricated in Byzantium and the Near East, such as the *Sternenmantel* (c.411/1020) in Bamberg (Woodfin, 2008: pp. 36–7; Anderson, 2017: p. 52) (Fig. 16). Any narrative or astrological relation to the iconography in the textiles we have analysed, as Simon-Cahn (1993: p. 3) proposed, is questionable and refuted by Shalem (2017: p. 101). Their similar and repetitive themes appear to be the embodiment and metaphor of the very creatures associated with beauty, power, and sovereignty constellated around the figure of the king, rather than astrological symbols. Yet textiles with blue backgrounds – including those from Fermo (Fig. 17) and Autun – and architecture, namely the carvings in the Convent



FIGURE 16  
*Sternemantel* of Heinrich II,  
gold thread on blue silk damask,  
c.411/1020, Diocesan Museum,  
Bamberg  
COURTESY OF ALLIE CAULFIELD



FIGURE 17  
A digital reconstruction of the  
blue silk ground in the *Chasuble*  
of Fermo  
COURTESY OF LA VOCE DELLA  
MARCHE

FIGURE 18  
Painted carvings, probably  
fifth/eleventh century, Convent of  
Santa Fe, Toledo  
AFTER RABASCO GARCÍA, 2014:  
P. 147



FIGURE 19  
Arcade from Santa Fe, Toledo, 3D  
reconstruction  
COURTESY OF PABLO APARICIO  
RESCO (PAR-ARQUEOLOGÍA  
Y PATRIMONIO VIRTUAL/3D  
STOA 2019)



of Santa Fe in Toledo (Figs. 18–9), might have served to evoke and further contextualise the idea of the celestial sphere at court (Shalem, 2017: p. 91) (Figs. 20–1). This scenery built for the presence of the ruler supports the transformation of his entourage, elevating him to a sacred position made of the same absolute material permeating the eternal Heaven: gold.<sup>9</sup>

This cosmological “audience hall” is strengthened when integrated within a broader model of kingship present in the Near East for centuries, an outgrowth of late Roman and Persian ideologies (Canepa, 2009: p. 122).<sup>10</sup> The propaganda of the time was heavily stimulated by the cosmological elements of the “legendary” rulers Solomon and Khosrow (Lafrate, 2016: p. 12), an aspect encapsulated also within the “culture of *gharib* and *‘ajab*” (Tamari, 1996: p. 95; Rabbat, 2006). Solomon’s achievements through the dominion and mastery over the laws of nature and supernatural forces, such as the *jinn*, were manifested in the construction of his mythical temple and his magical wandering throne, said to have been placed in the Magnaura Hall in Constantinople (Fernandes Cardoso, 2015: pp. 200–1). Correspondingly, accounts of the cosmic throne of Khosrow permeated the entire caliphal world (Anderson, 2017: p. 20) where Khosrow incarnated the epitome of Sasanian grandeur, whose ceremonies, as we have seen, served very much as an inspiration for protocol models in Islam. His throne *Taqdis*, that is “equal to the firmament” (Herzfeld, 1920: p. 1) quickly became an important piece of the Muslim imaginary, related to the universal power he promulgated. Through this panoply, Khosrow “made himself into a god” within an astral and cosmic conception of his persona, becoming an object of veneration that must have been placed in Heaven, enthroned amongst the stars (Canepa, 2009: pp. 146–7; Anderson, 2017: p. 26).

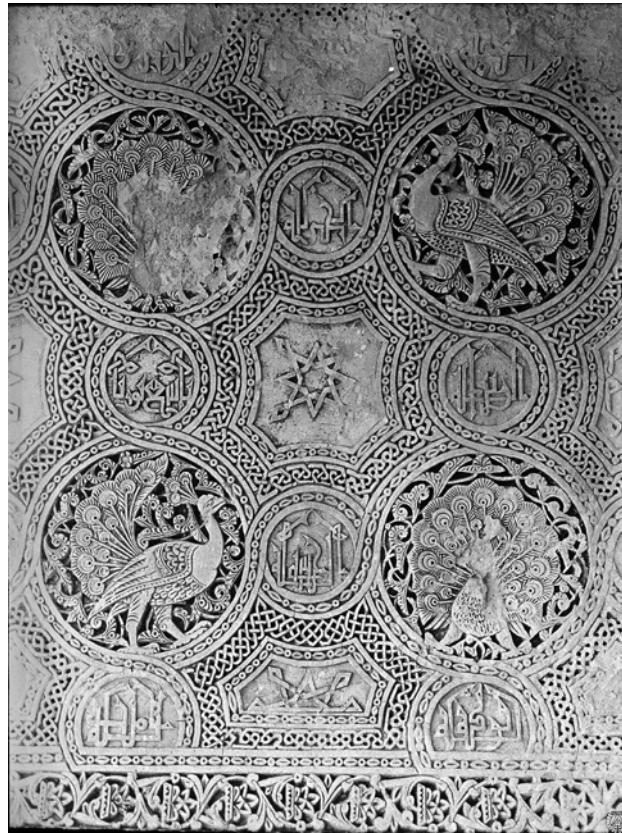


FIGURE 20  
A carved ceiling, c.583/1187, in the  
monastery of Las Huelgas, Burgos  
PHOTO BY LEOPOLDO TORRES  
BALBÁS



FIGURE 21  
A decorative panel (57.97.6) from  
the hermitage of San Baudelio  
de Berlanga, Castile and León,  
inspired by the textile tradition  
(possibly 523–8/1129–34)  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF  
ART, NEW YORK

It is possible that in a similar manner, the custom made its way into court practices of the early mediaeval caliphs in an adapted form, shaped within the theological doctrines of Islam (Al-Azmeh, 1997: p. 67; 2014: p. 513; Fernandes Cardoso, 2015: p. 206). While this model of sacred kingship is debated and not widespread, and the present reading remains a hypothetical reconstruction of what Contadini (2015: p. 146) calls the “period gaze,” Ibn Ḥamdīs panegyric is a bold and ambitious statement for a Muslim ruler, who announces his equality, if not superiority, to both Khosrow and Solomon, and whose seat of power burst in blinding radiance.

## 7 Conclusion

The article’s methodological approach has yielded three important points regarding gold-furnished walls in the court environment. Firstly, extant texts described the actual practice of decorating court environments with large golden cloths. This is further supported by a collection of fragmentary textiles embroidered with gold thread, which closely match the descriptions found in the texts. These fabrics display roundels with mythological beasts, animals, figures, and monumental inscriptions, all of which are consistent with the descriptions of the wall hangings. Although the cloths have been described as garments or tents, the similarities between the decorative schemes and techniques used in the preserved fragments and the textual descriptions of the wall hangings suggest that the cloths were originally used as drapery.

The article’s second key find centres around the analysis of existing gold-threaded cloths based on organic membranes revealing the inconsistencies in its sudden development by the fourth/tenth century. This finding has raised questions about the provenance and evolution of the technique and points to the need for further research in this area. The hypothesis presented in this article maintains that the rapid dissemination of the technique during this period was triggered by the increasing wealth of Muslim kingdoms and the institutionalisation of their religious and palatial ceremonial (El-Cheikh, 2014; Heck 1999; *Hilāl al-Ṣābiʿ*, trans. Salem, 1977). Gold-threaded cloths appeared as a ritual necessity in a protocol very much indebted to the continuum of power and wealth in the Near East, which must have been felt particularly by the ‘Abbasids and Fatimids, dynasties instigating a new policy of religious and prophetic propaganda inspired by the pomp and splendour found in the courts of Constantinople and Ctesiphon (Ringgren, 1959: pp. 723–4).

Finally, these conclusions have been supported by poetry from the third–fifth/ninth–eleventh centuries, with a specific desire to communicate the notion of divine light emanation radiated from the caliph-imam via the rhetorical form of the “dazzling sight.” To achieve this experience, the palaces – read as sacred spaces with a distinctive religious colouring (Necipoğlu, 1993: pp. 3–26) – became the best scenarios for ideological, political, and spiritual propaganda. Through extravagant ceremonial displays, golden textiles, and sumptuous crafts of precious metals, the audience hall entourage was altered to function as a backdrop manifesting and representing Heaven on Earth, or at least radiance on Earth.

By the late seventh/thirteenth century, the production of these large gold cloths had waned, while interest in gold cloths seemed to increase in Western Europe (Cabrera-Lafuente, 2014: p. 34). This shift was likely propelled by the sophistication process that the “culture of wonder” experienced and without a doubt by the relative poverty experienced after the loss of territories in al-Andalus and the destabilisation



FIGURE 22  
Jean Baptiste Vanmour, *Audience of Sultan Ahmed III*, c.1139/1727  
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

brought by the advent of the Mongols.<sup>11</sup> In the tenth/sixteenth century, the practice re-emerged with impetus when the courts of Mehmet II and his Ottoman successors, rescuing many aspects of the ‘Abbasid ceremonial vocabulary, decorated once more their Chamber of Petitions in Topkapi with lavish textiles woven with gold meant to “dazzle the eyes” (Necipoğlu, 1991: pp. 96–110) (Fig. 22).

### About the Author

Juan de Lara is the director of the Armenian Institute in London, elected fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, a trustee and board member of Global Learning London, and a member of the International Association for the Study of Arabia. Juan is finishing his PhD at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, and has a master’s degree in the architecture and archaeology of the Middle East from SOAS, and a BSc in digital engineering from CICE (School of New Technologies), Madrid. Juan has been a guest lecturer at Harvard University, The Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah, the University of Goldsmith London, and Sotheby’s Institute, amongst others.

### Bibliography

#### Sources

- Al-Maqrīzī, trans. al-‘Adawi, A. (1853). *Al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-al-I’tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār*, Volume 2. Cairo: Būlāq.
- Al-Maqqarī, trans. de Gayangos, P. (1840–3). *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, Volume 1. London: Routledge.
- Al-Maqqarī, trans. Dozy, R. (1855–61). *Analectes sur l’Histoire et la Littérature des Arabes d’Espagne par al-Makkari*, Volume 1. Leiden: Brill.
- Al-Musabbiḥī, eds. Fū‘ād Sayyid, A., and Bianquis, T. (1978). *Tome Quarantième de la Chronique D’Égypte de Musabbiḥī*. Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire.
- Al-Shujā‘ī, ed. Schäfer, B., (1977). *Tārīkh al-malik al-Nāṣir Muhammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Al-Ṭabarī, trans. Brinner, W. M. (1991). *History of al-Ṭabarī*. Volume 3: *The Children of Israel*. New York: SUNY Press.



- Al-Ṭabarī, ed. Bosworth, C. E. (1999). *History of al-Ṭabarī*. Volume 5: *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Al-Qaddūmī, G. H. (1996) *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf): Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh-century Manuscript on Gifts and Treasures*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Flavius Philostratus, trans. Berwick, E. (1809). *The life of Apollonius of Tyana: Translated from the Greek of Philostratus*. London: Payne.
- Hilāl al-Ṣābī, trans. Salem, E. A. (1977). *Rusūm Dār Al-Khilāfah: The Rules and Regulations of the Abbāsīd Court*. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
- Ibn Bassām al-Ṣantarīnī, trans. al-Badri, S. (1998). *Al-Dhakhīra fī Maḥāsīn ahl al-Jazīra*, Volume 7. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya.
- Payne, J. trans. (1901). *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*. Volume 4. London: n.p.
- William of Tyre, trans. Atwater Babcock, E., and Krey, A. C. (1943). *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*. New York: Columbia University Press.

### Studies

- Abdel-Haleem, M. (1990). The Face in the Quran: Divine and Human. *Islamic Quarterly* 34 (2), pp. 164–79.
- Abdulfattah, I. R. (2020). A Forgotten Man: Maurice Nahman, an Antiquarian-Tastemaker. In: J. Kamrin, M. Bárta, S. Ikram, M. Lehner, and M. Megahed, eds., *Guardian of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Zahi Hawass*, Prague: Charles University, pp. 105–23.
- Al-Azmeh, A. (1997). *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Politics*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Al-Azmeh, A. (2014). *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and his People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ali-de-Unzaga, M. (2012). Embroidered Politics: A Case Study between al-Andalus and Castilla. *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* 655, pp. 1–10.
- Ali-de-Unzaga, M. (2017). Revisiting Andalusī-Umayyad Caliphā Material Culture: The Multiple Biographies of the Embroidery Housed in Oña, Burgos. In: A. Shalem, ed., *The Chasuble of Thomas Becket*, München: Hirmer Verlag, pp. 110–25.
- Alonso Benito, J. L. (2009). *Catálogo de obras restauradas, 2003–2007: Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales de Castilla y León*. Valladolid: Consejería de Cultura y Turismo.
- Anderson, B. (2017). *Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Armengol, P., Déléry, C., and Guichard, P. (2013). *El ataífor de Sant Jaume de Fadrell*. Castelló: Diputació de Castelló.
- Babaie, S., and Grigor, T. eds. (2015). *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Baer, E. (1967). Le Suaire de Saint-Lazare, An Early Datable Hispano-Islamic Embroidery. *Oriental Art* 13, pp. 36–48.
- Baiz Khan, M. (2013). Chirāgh-i Rōshan: Prophetic Light in the Ismāʿīlī Tradition. *Islamic Studies* 52, (3/4), pp. 327–56.
- Baker, P. L. (1995). *Islamic Textiles*. London: British Museum Publishing.
- Barry Flood, F. (2001). *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Berlekamp, P. (2011). *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bernstein, P. L. (2012). *The Power of Gold: The History of an Obsession*. Danvers: John Wiley and Sons.

- Blessing, P. (2018). Draping, Wrapping, Hanging: Transposing Textile Materiality in the Middle Ages. *The Textile Museum Journal* 45, pp. 1–21.
- Blessing, P. (2019). Weaving on the Wall: Architecture and Textiles in the Monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos. *Studies in Iconography* 40, pp. 137–82.
- Bloom, J., and Blair, S., eds. (2013). *God is Beautiful and Loves Beauty: The Object in Islamic Art and Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Bloom, J., and Blair, S. eds. (2015). *God Is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth: Light in Islamic Art and Culture*. The Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Borrego Díaz, P. (2005). Análisis técnico del ligamento en los tejidos hispanoárabes. *Bienes Culturales: revista del Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español* 5, pp. 75–122.
- Bush, O. (2018). *Reframing the Alhambra: Architecture, Poetry, Textiles and Court Ceremonial*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (1995). “Telas hispanomusulmanas: siglos x–xiii.” In: J. I. De La Iglesia Duarte, and J. A. García de Cortázar, eds., *v Semana de Estudios Medievales*, Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, pp. 199–207.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (2005). Los tejidos como patrimonio: investigación y exposición. *Bienes Culturales: Revista del Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español* 5, pp. 5–19.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (2014). Materias preciosas textiles: el caso del bordado con posible escena de Pentecostés del Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas. *Anales de Historia del Arte* 24 (1), pp. 27–37.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (2019). Textiles from the Museum of San Isidoro (León): New Evidence for Re-evaluating their Chronology and Provenance. *Medieval Encounters* 25, pp. 59–95.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (forthcoming). “Reconsidering ‘Andalusi’ textiles in two Christian contexts: The San Isidoro and Bayonne silks between art historical myth and reality.” In: S. L. De Giosa and N. Vryzidis, eds., *The Medieval Mediterranean between Islam and Christianity: Religious Cross-pollinations in Art, Architecture and Material Culture* (tentative title), Cairo: AUC Press.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, A., Feliciano, M. J., and Parra, E. (2018). Medieval Iberian Relics and their Woven Vessels: The Case of San Ramón del Monte (1126) Roda de Isabena Cathedral (Huesca, Aragon). In: M. Van Strydonck, J. Reyniers, and F. Van Cleven, eds., *Relics @ the Lab. An Analytical Approach to the Study of Relics*, Leuven: Peeters, pp. 43–76.
- Canepa, M. P. (2009). *Two Eyes of The Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship Between Rome and Sasanian Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Casamar, M. and Zozaya, J. (1991). Apuntes sobre la yurba funeraria de la Colegiata de Oña (Burgos). *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval* 5, pp. 39–60.
- Compareti, M. (2011). The State of Research on Sasanian Painting. *e-Sasanika* 8, pp. 1–50.
- Compareti, M. (2015) Ancient Iranian Decorative Textiles: New Evidence from Archaeological Investigations and Private Collections. *The Silk Road* 13, pp. 36–44.
- Contadini, A. (1998). *Fatimid art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications.
- Contadini, A. (2015). Facets of Light: The Case of Rock Crystals. In: J. Bloom and S. Blair, eds., *God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. Light in Islamic Art and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 121–55.
- Contadini, A. ed. (2018). *The Pisa Griffin and the Mari-Cha Lion: Metalwork, Art, and Technology in the Medieval Islamicate Mediterranean*. Pisa: Pacini Editore.
- Crone, P., and Hinds, M. (2003). *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dor, A. (2017). The Suaire de Saint Lazare at Autun: The Story of the Shroud; or, How a Hispano-Moresque Silk Became a Relic. In: A. Shalem, ed., *The Chasuble of Thomas Becket*, Genoa and New York: University of Chicago Press, pp. 124–37.

- Dospěl Williams, E. (2019). A Taste for Textiles: Designing Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd Interiors. In: G. Bühl and E. Dospěl Williams, eds., *Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection*. Online collection available at: <https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles> (Accessed on 10 October 2020).
- El-Cheikh, N. M. (2014). The Institutionalization of 'Abbāsīd Ceremonial. In: J. Hudson and A. Rodríguez Lopez, eds., *Diverging Paths? The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam*, London: Brill, pp. 351–70.
- El Rashidi, S. and Bowker, S. (2018). *The Tentmakers of Cairo: Egypt's Medieval and Modern Appliqué*. Cairo: AUC Press.
- Ettinghausen, R. (1972). *Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence*. Leiden: Brill.
- Farmer, H. G. (1994). *A History of Arabian Music to the XIth Century*. London: Luzac Oriental.
- Feltham, H. B. (2010). Lions, Silks and Silver: The Influence of Sasanian Persia. *Sino-Platonic Papers* 206, pp. 1–51.
- Fernandes Cardoso, E. R. (2015). *Diplomacy and Oriental Influence in the Court of Cordoba (9th–10th centuries)*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Lisbon.
- Fernández-Puertas, A. (1977). Lápida del siglo XI e inscripción del tejido del siglo X del monasterio de Oña. *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 26, pp. 117–27.
- Floriano, A. C. (2006). *El bordado: artes decorativas españolas*. Valladolid: MAXTOR.
- Gayo García, M. D. and Arteaga, A. (2005). Análisis de colorantes de un grupo de tejidos hispanomusulmanes. *Bienes culturales: revista del Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español* 5, pp. 123–46.
- Girault-Kurtzemann, B. (2018). Le voile de sainte Anne d'Apt, histoire d'une relique. In: M. Heijmans and A. Ozoline, eds., *Autour des reliques de saint Césaire d'Arles: Actes du colloque d'Arles des 11, 12 et 13 octobre 2013*. Arles: Les amis de saint-Trophime, pp. 141–5.
- Heck, G. W. (1999). Gold Mining in Arabia and the Rise of the Islamic State. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (3), pp. 364–95.
- Herzfeld, E. (1920). Der Thron der Khosrô. Quellenkritische und Ikonographische Studien über Grenzgebiete der Kunstgeschichte des Morgen- und Abendlandes. *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 41, pp. 1–24.
- Hoffman, E. (2008). Between East and West: The Wall Paintings of Samarra and the Construction of Abbasid Princely Culture. *Muqarnas* 25, pp. 107–32.
- Houtsma, M. (1913). *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume 3, part 2. Leiden: Brill.
- Hunzai, F. M., and Kassam, K. (1997). *The Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismā'īlī Poems*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Jacoby, D. (2017). The Production and Diffusion of Andalusī Silk and Silk Textiles, Mid-Eighth to Mid-Thirteenth Century. In: A. Shalem, ed., *The Chasuble of Thomas Becket*, Genoa and New York: University of Chicago Press, pp. 142–51.
- Jairazbhoy, R. A. (1996). *Art and Cities of Islam*. Lahore: Ferozsons.
- Karatzani, A. (2012). Metal Threads: The Historical Development. In: I. Tzachili and E. Zimi, eds., *Textiles and Dress in Greece and the Roman East: A Technological and Social Approach*, Athens: Ta Apragmata, pp. 55–65.
- Kendrick, A. F., and Guest, R. (1926). A Silk Fabric Woven at Baghdad. *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 49, (285), pp. 261–7.
- Klaniczay, G. (2002). *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lafrate, A. (2016). *The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Lamm, C. J. (1937). *Cotton in Mediaeval Textiles of the Near East*. Paris: Paul Geuthner.

- Lane-Poole, S. (1901). *A History of Egypt: In the Middle Ages*, Volume 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lange, C. (2021). Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind: Light and luminous being in Islamic theology. *Critical Research on Religion* 9 (2), pp. 142–56.
- Lázaro López, A. (1969). Las ricas telas halladas en la Iglesia Parroquial de Oña. *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 2º sem, 4 (8), 173, pp. 394–6.
- Le Strange, G. (1897). A Greek Embassy to Baghdād in 917 A.D. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 29 (1), pp. 35–45.
- Le Strange, G. (1905). *Caliphate, The Lands of the Eastern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lévi-Provençal, E. (1938). *La Péninsule ibérique au Moyen Âge: d'après le Kitāb ar-Rawḍ al-mi‘tār fi ḥabar al-aḳṭār d’Ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Ḥimyarī*. Leiden: Brill.
- Mackie, L. W. (2015). *Symbols of Power: Luxury textiles from Islamic lands, 7th to 20th century*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.
- Maguire, H. (2004). *1204, Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks.
- Mahal, T. S. (2015). *The Manners, Norms, and Customs (Rusoom) of the House of Governance In the First Age (Era) of the Abbasid Caliphate 750–865 AD*. New York: Xlibris.
- Makariou, S. (2001). Quelques réflexions sur les objets au nom de ‘Abd al-Malik ibn al-Mansūr. *Archéologie Islamique* 11, pp. 47–60.
- Marcos-Marín, F. (1986). Tejidos árabes e independencia de Castilla. *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 63, pp. 355–61.
- Marin, M. (1998). *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part 1: History and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Martin, T., ed. (2019). *The Medieval Iberian Treasury in the Context of Cultural Interchange*. Leiden: Brill.
- Mitchell, T. (2000). *Questions of Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Motoyoshi Sumi, A. (2004). *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Waṣf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory*. Leiden: Brill.
- Muthesius, A. M. (1993). Silk, Power and Diplomacy in Byzantium. In: *Textiles in Daily Life: Proceedings of the Third Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America, September 24–26*, Earleville: Textile Society of America, Inc., pp. 99–110.
- Nahman, M. (1918). *Nahman’s Visitor Book*. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives. Available at: [https://archive.org/details/bml-SCR\\_N362\\_N14/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bml-SCR_N362_N14/mode/2up) (Accessed on 20 October 2021).
- Necipoğlu, G. (1991). *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. New York and Cambridge: Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press.
- Necipoğlu, G. (1993). An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World. *Ars Orientalis* 23, pp. 3–26.
- Niño Mas, F. (1941). Las mitras de Roda. *Archivo Español de Arte* 14, pp. 138–47.
- Partearroyo Lacaba, C. (2017). Franja del Pirineo. In: M. A. Gómez Ródenas, J. E. Eiroa Rodríguez and L. Montero, eds., *Seda. Historias pendientes de un hilo. Murcia, siglos X al XXI*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, pp. 70–1.
- Partearroyo Lacaba, C. (1992). Almoravid and Almohad Textiles. In: J. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, pp. 105–13.
- Payne, A. (2014). *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*. Leiden: Brill.
- Pence Britton, N. (1938). *A Study of Some Early Islamic Textiles in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts.
- Pennell, S. (2015). *The Art of Gold Embroidery from Uzbekistan*. Brisbane: StoryBridge Press.

- Pentcheva, B. V. (2015). The Power of Glittering Materiality: Mirror Reflections Between Poetry and Architecture in Greek and Arabic Medieval Culture. *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 47, pp. 223–68.
- Rabasco García, V. (2014). El papel del comercio en el contexto artístico del reino taifa de Toledo. *Estudios Medievales Hispánicos* 3, pp. 129–50.
- Rabbat, N. (1995). *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture*. Leiden: Brill.
- Rabbat, N. (2006). 'Ajīb and Gharīb: Artistic Perception in Medieval Arabic Sources. *Medieval History Journal* 9 (1), pp. 99–113.
- Ringgren, H. (1959). Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate. In: C-M. Edsman, ed., *The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 737–48.
- Robinson, C. (1997) Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in Taifa Palace Architecture. *Gesta* 36 (2), pp. 145–55.
- Robinson, C. (2002). *In Praise of Songs: The Making of Courtly Culture in Al-Andalus and Provence, 1005–1134 A.D.* Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Rodríguez Peinado, L., and Cabrera-Lafuente, A. (2020) New approaches in Mediterranean textile studies: Andalusí textiles as case study. In: N. Vryzidis, ed., *The Hidden Life of Textiles in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 17–44.
- Rogers, J. M. (2004). God's Shadow on Earth. In: Piotrovskii, M, and Rogers, J. M. eds., *Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands: Works from the State Hermitage Museum and the Khalili Collection*. Munich: Prestel, pp. 31–41.
- Rosser-Owen, M. (2022). *Articulating the Ḥijāba: Cultural Patronage and Political Legitimacy in al-Andalus*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ruggles, D. F. (2000). *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Ruggles, D. F. (2007). Making Vision Manifest: The Frame, View, and Screen in Islamic Culture. In: D. Harris and D. F. Ruggles, eds., *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 131–56.
- Salet, F. L. (1967). Suaire de saint Lazare d'Autun. *Bulletin Monumental* 125 (3), pp. 316–17.
- Sanders, P. A. (1984) *The court ceremonial of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt*, Ph.D. Thesis. Princeton University.
- Sanders, P. A. (1994) *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Santangelo, A. (1960). Il restauro della casula di Fermo. *Bollettino d'Arte* 45, pp. 273–7.
- Scibe, C., Solazzo, C., Tosini, I., Lam, T., Vicenzi, E., and González López, M. J. (2020). Gilt leather threads in 11th–15th century textiles: In: *Proceedings of the nth Interim Meeting of The Leather & Related Materials Working Group, 6–7 June 2019, Paris (France)*, pp. 162–9.
- Serjeant, R. B. (1972). *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban.
- Shalem, A. (2006). Manipulations of Seeing and Visual Strategies in the Audience Halls of the Early Islamic Period. Preliminary Notes. *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft, Byzas* 5, pp. 213–32.
- Shalem, A. (2014a). The Architecture for the Body: Some Reflections on the Mobility of Textiles and the Fate of the So-Called Chasuble of Saint Thomas Becket in the Cathedral of Fermo in Italy. In: A. Payne, ed., *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 246–67.
- Shalem, A. (2014b). A Receptacle for the Absent Body: The Chasuble of Thomas Becket in Fermo. New York City: The Institute of Fine Arts at NYU.
- Shalem, A. ed. (2017). *The Chasuble of Thomas Becket*, München: Hirmer Verlag.

- Shepherd, D. G. (1953). Two Islamic Embroideries in Gold on “Mulham”. *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 40 (8), pp. 188–91.
- Simon-Cahn, A. (1993). The Fermo Chasuble of St. Thomas Becket and Hispano-Mauresque Cosmological Silks: Some Speculations on the Adaptive Reuse of Textiles. *Muqarnas* 10, pp. 1–5.
- Swelim, T. (2015). *Ibn Ṭūlūn: His Lost City and Great Mosque*. Cairo: AUC Press.
- Tamari, S. (1996). *Iconotextual Studies in the Muslim Ideology of Umayyad Architecture and Urbanism*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Taragan, H. (2020). Textiles in Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Case of the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar. *Al-Masāq* 32 (2), pp. 140–55.
- Tronzo, W. (1997). *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Underhill, G. (1939). An Eleventh-Century Mesopotamian Embroidery. *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 26 (1), pp. 4–5.
- Widengren, G. (1959). The Sacral Kingship of Iran. In: C-M. Edsman, ed., *The Sacral Kingship/La Regalità Sacra: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 242–57.
- Wiet, G. (1935). Tissus et tapisseries du Musée Arabe du Caire. *Syria* 16 (3), pp. 278–90.
- Wiet, G. (1937). Tissus Brodes Mesopotamiens. *Ars Islamica* 4, pp. 54–63.
- Wiet, G. (1964). *Cairo, City of Art and Commerce*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Wiet, G. and Marçais, G. (1934). Le Voile de Sainte Anne d’Apt. *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* 34 (1), pp. 177–94.
- Woodfin, W. (2008). Presents Given and Presence Subverted: The Cunegunda Chormantel in Bamberg and the Ideology of Byzantine Textiles. *Gesta* 47 (1), pp. 33–50.
- Young, T. C. (1966). *Near Eastern Culture and Society*. Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Prof Anna Contadini, whose dedicated advice, guidance, and ingenious comments were pivotal for this article and together with the soAS Ralph Pinder-Wilson Award, enabled the research to be possible. This paper also would have been inconceivable without the help, knowledge, and friendship of Ana Cabrera-Lafuente, who had the patience and courage to educate me on the nuances of the textile world. Finally, I thank and dedicate this article to Seif El Rashidi, for his intoxicating passion for textiles and life.
- 2 For an expanded discussion, see Rosser-Owen (2022: p. 302).
- 3 The use of wall hangings in the Umayyad court ceremonial is well documented, but no emphasis is ever made on gold, and extant fragments rarely contain metallic thread (Blessing, 2018; Dospěl Williams, 2019; Taragan, 2020).
- 4 It is important to note that a Marwanid (i.e., Syrian) inscription should not be the ultimate proof of provenance because textiles of this type were falsified in Andalusian workshops.
- 5 According to Shalem (2017: p. 86, no. 27), Ahmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī, an ‘Abbasid poet born in Kufa in 302/915, wrote a text describing this practice. The poem may have been written during 334/946 in the court of the Aleppian emir Sayf al-Dawla. However, the poem description of the tent bears little resemblance to the iconography of the chasuble when compared to the presented texts. See also El Rashidi and Bowker (2018).
- 6 Berlekamp (2011: p. 8); this is supported by the term *gharibah* (any phenomenon from uncanny to extraordinary that escapes comprehension, often related to ‘*ajabah*’/‘*ajab*’ and used to describe furnishing textiles in the c.173 texts from the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*). Contadini (2018) has further explored such phenomena in the Mediterranean. See also Mitchell (2000: p. 125) and Rabbat (2006: p. 107) and Robinson (1997: p. 147).
- 7 ‘Umāra al-Yamanī (d. 569/1174), quoted in al-Maqrīzī (trans. al-‘Adawi, 1853: pp. 495–6; cited in Sanders, 1994: p. 136).

- 8 Cited in Sanders (1994: p. 41).
- 9 The association of Heaven with gold is attested in the Quran (Q 17:93, 24:35, 43:71; see also *Kitāb waṣf al-firdaws*, cited by Barry Flood, 2001: p. 36), where it is written that those worthy of Paradise will be rewarded with gold ornaments (Q 18:31, 22:23, 43:73). Within a frame of sacral kingship, already seen in early Byzantium (Muthesius, 1993: p. 99; Canepa, 2009: pp. 144–5), these luminous visions of gleaming gold rooms can be interpreted as terrestrial representation of the realm of light, Heaven.
- 10 “Cosmological rooms,” covered with gold-threaded embroideries, are already mentioned by Flavius Philostratus (trans. Berwick, 1809: p. 45) in Babylon.
- 11 Cheaper gold textiles, mostly in silk, continued to be produced over the next centuries. For example, see the furnished apartments of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muhammad’s wife, whose walls were covered in *zarkash*, likely a gold brocade (Al-Shujā’i, ed. Schäfer, 1977: p. 78). I thank Doris Behrens-Abouseif for this reference.