

# Miradas

Revista de Historia del Arte y la Cultura de las Américas y la Península Ibérica

MIRADAS 09 (2025)

**Special Issue:** Experience and reception of images, objects and spaces in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas

**Special Issue editors:** Alicia Miguélez, Sara Carreño

**Editorial Deadline:** November 2025

**eISSN:** 2363-8087

<https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/miradas>

**Edited by:** Miriam Oesterreich; Franziska Neff;  
Institut für Europäische Kunstgeschichte, Heidelberg University

**Hosted by:** University Library Heidelberg

**SUMMARY Reception of Oriental Fabrics in Iberian Christian Contexts**

**Receipt date:** 22/07/2024

**Acceptance date:** 07/01/2025

**DOI:** [doi.org/10.11588/mira.2025.2.114824](https://doi.org/10.11588/mira.2025.2.114824)

**Licence:** CC BY NC ND

**Author:** Rodríguez Peinado, Laura

(Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Professor in the Department of Art History)

**Mail:** [lrpeinado@ghis.ucm.es](mailto:lrpeinado@ghis.ucm.es)

**Citation:**

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "SUMMARY Reception of Oriental Fabrics in Iberian Christian Contexts." Special issue *Experience and reception of images, objects and spaces in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas*, edited by Alicia Miguélez and Sara Carreño. *MIRADAS – Journal for the Arts and Culture of the Américas and the Iberian Peninsula* 9 (2025): 39-51, [doi.org/10.11588/mira.2025.2.114824](https://doi.org/10.11588/mira.2025.2.114824).

# SUMMARY Reception of Oriental Fabrics in Iberian Christian Contexts

*Laura Rodríguez Peinado\**

## **Abstract**

In the Middle Ages, rich fabrics of Eastern origin were prized by elites in the Iberian Peninsula as a symbol of collective identity and personal status and were preserved for generations. Luxury textiles arrived in Christian territories through several ways. Their transcultural nature favoured the knowledge of decorative codes adopted in the ornamentation of other materials and techniques. They were not perceived as exotic objects but rather were appropriated by elites who appreciated their material and aesthetic qualities, free of religious connotations by valuing them primarily as a sign of luxury and magnificence. Only in some cases did their appropriation represent an act of authority, domination and submission, when they were plundered and taken as spoils of war.

**Keywords:** silks • intercultural assimilation • functionality • reinterpretation • sensoriality

---

\* Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Professor in the Department of Art History

In the Middle Ages, luxury textiles were symbols of collective identity and personal status, valued for their materiality and aesthetics. They were acquired for their value, regardless of their origin, but they conveyed messages in the contexts in which they operated. Their function was multiple, and they were not perceived so much as exotic objects, but rather were appropriated, freeing them from foreign meanings, valuing them as a sign of luxury and magnificence, as well as conveying spiritual nobility.

Preserved for generations, they enjoyed a chameleon-like quality in medieval society, with reuse and changes in function, which meant adapting their meaning according to needs. They were valued for their materials, technique, colour, and decoration, factors that contributed to transculturation, influencing Western art and stimulating artisans from different media, and they served as inspiration. As luxury products that crossed borders and shared a common aesthetic, they were fundamental mediators in cultural exchange due to their transportability. Textiles became alternative models of transfer, with a vocabulary shared with other materials that allow us to understand the internationalization of taste. As transcultural objects, they were receptacles of memory, propaganda, power, and legitimization. The decorative codes of luxury textiles were part of a collective imagination highly sensitive to the essentially material, to the values of texture, chromatic richness, and ornamentation, although their users were not unaware of the messages and meanings they conveyed.

Trade was the main source of acquisition for these luxury goods, in markets where products of different manufactures were traded. They were considered “guide goods,” so the circulation of textile products favoured large-scale trade, linking very distant places. Furthermore, due to their value and exclusivity, they constituted one of the most valued gifts among diplomatic representatives and were also used as a form of tribute payment. The least common form of acquisition was the appropriation of pieces through spoliation, an action that was associated with an act of authority, dominance and submission, transmitted by the value given to the pieces obtained as war booty.

Al-Andalus was the first European territory to generate a powerful textile industry following the introduction of sericulture around 740. Textile production in al-Andalus was carried out on a large scale, and many Andalusian fabrics reached the Christian Iberian territories by various routes, being used as symbols of prestige. There is no solid evidence of the opening of luxury factories in the Christian Iberian territories, although information provided by a document mentioning “tiraceros mozárabes” protected by King Alfonso V draws attention to the monarch’s interest in having workshops where luxury fabrics could be made to cover some of his needs. But the main route of penetration of these luxury pieces was trade. The textiles that arrived in Christian peninsular territories were used for various purposes, and their functions changed over time, either through reuse or through changes in status. Textiles of various kinds are used to decorate spaces of power as a sign of authority and magnificence.

Rich fabrics were used for clothing as sociopolitical markers. The style of dress and the richness of the textiles were a clear sign of ostentation, a symbol of collective identity and personal status. Silk fabrics with metallic threads were the most appreciated for the clothing of monarchs, nobles and ecclesiastics. The collection of dress exhumed from the Royal Pantheon of the Monastery of Santa María la Real in Huelgas (Burgos) constitutes an example of the value of the dress as a symbol of identity. Interest in Andalusian fabrics for clothing continued in subsequent centuries. In the 15th and 16th centuries, when velvets were the most prized fabrics for clothing, Moorish dress was still fashionable in the Iberian Peninsula. Examples include the dress worn by Saint Catherine of Alexandria, painted by Yáñez de la Almedina, or the fabric that covers the torso of the Virgin of Pajares in Peñafiel (Valladolid), decorated with the motto “Glory to our Lord the Sultan”. The fabric would have been used for its material value, without the inscription having any religious implications.

Ecclesiastical textiles are the most numerous. They were part of treasures, changing functions over time. Often arriving through donations and gifts as a sign of ostentation and prestige, increasing their value with their sacred use.

Textiles used to wrap relics are of great significance due to their origin. Many fabrics used to wrap relics are of Islamic origin, such as the tiraz of Abd al-Rahman III, from the reliquary of Saint Librada in Sigüenza Cathedral; the almaizar of Hisham II, found in 1853 in a reliquary in the Church of Santa María de Rivero in San Esteban de Gormaz (Soria); and the Colls fabric—possibly a banner—found in 1978 under a stone altar in the Church of Puente de Montañana (Huesca). We do not know how they were acquired or when they were donated to wrap relics, changing their meaning and function. Banners and flags taken as war trophies were donated to religious institutions for their symbolic value. Their function was to commemorate the triumph of Christianity over Islam.

Rich fabrics were also reused in the liturgy. The value of textiles favoured their use and reuse, and restorations were essential. Liturgical vestments became an instrument of ecclesiastical reform. Since the 11th to the 12th centuries, robes were a sign of dignity. They were made of rich silks with brilliant colours and gold threads, which fascinated the faithful and the clergy. Their use brought magnificence to the performance of divine services. The rich ornaments radiated a visual richness with great resonance in medieval society, because the sensorial strengthened spirituality. The pontifical robes of Bishop Ramón of Roda de Isábena, and the funerary trousseau of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Archbishop of Toledo, are significant. In both cases, their clothing contains Arabic inscriptions with verses about the greatness of God and blessings of prosperity that were intelligible to polyglots, and they were able to make these texts a symbolic re-inscription in a Christian key, considering the process of transculturation to which oriental fabrics were subjected in Christian contexts.

The use of textiles with epigraphic decoration was an indication of refinement and was part of the consumption patterns of a minimally Arabized society capable of interpreting simple formulas containing words of good wishes. It is possible that the epigraphy on textiles sold was intentionally selected. Textiles with inscriptions could have been used with a sense of appropriation and vindication. The Nasrid silk motto, “Glory to our Lord the Sultan”, may have been used by the Nasrids with a dynastic meaning and with the intention of sending legitimizing messages. However, in very specific cases, such as the pluvial cape of the Constables of Castile donated to the Constables’ Chapel in Burgos cathedral by its founders, Pedro Fernández de Velasco and Mencía de Mendoza, the choice of this textile may have been intentional on the part of the promoters and a symbol of supremacy over Islam, quite the opposite of what the Nasrids had intended.

The diverse origins of rich textiles facilitated the development of an aesthetic vocabulary free from religious meanings. They were part of their collective imagination. Their use was a sign of respectability, status, and identity, because materiality was valued, and decorative elements were complementary and adapted to new meanings, eliminating any ethnic or religious associations. Their aesthetic language was linked to luxury rather than a desire for dominance. These textiles were integrated, redefining their aesthetic and symbolic value, as an expression of status.

Textiles participate in a polysemic language. They are used in everyday activities such as clothing, but they also acquire representative positions as a discriminator of social roles in a hierarchical society such as the medieval one.



Fig. 1: Fernando Yáñez de la Almedina. *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Fig. 2: Fabric from the Virgin of Pajares in Peñafiel (Valladolid).



Fig. 3: Fabric from the reliquary chest of Saint Isidore. Museum of the Royal Collegiate Church of Saint Isidore, León.



Fig. 4: Witches' canopu. Episcopal Museum of Vic, Barcelona.



Fig. 5: Chasuble of Saint Ramon. Cathedral of Roda de Isábena, Huesca.



Fig. 6: Pluvial cape of the Constables of Castille. Chapel of the Constables, Burgos Cathedral.



Fig. 7: Moorish fabric with facing lions. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

## Bibliography:

- Alfaro Giner, Carmen. *Tejido y cestería en la península ibérica. Historia de su técnica e industrias desde la Prehistoria hasta la romanización*. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984.
- Barrigón Montañés, María. “Vestirse para la muerte en el panteón de las Huelgas de Burgos: cultura textil en la Castilla plenomedieval. Un estudio del ajuar de Alfonso VIII y Leonor Plantagenet († 1214).” PhD Dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2022. <https://produccioncientifica.ucm.es/documentos/6381691818a84b178feaa054>.
- Batlle i Gallart, Carme. *Els orígens medievals de la Seu d’Urgell*. Rafael Dalmau, 1979.
- Böse, Kristin. “Beyond foreign: textiles from the castilian royal tombs in Santa María de las Huelgas in Burgos.” In *Oriental silks in medieval Europe*, edited by Julianne von Fircks and Regula Schorta. Abegg-Stiftung, 2016.
- Cabrera Lafuente, Ana. “Textiles from the Museum of San Isidoro (León): new evidence for re-evaluating their chronology and provenance.” *Medieval Encounters* 25, no. 1-2 (2019): 59-95. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340039>.
- Cabrera Lafuente, Ana. “Tejidos y reliquias: de contenedores y forros a reliquias textiles.” In *Románico y reliquias. Arte, devoción y fetichismo*, coordinated by Pedro Luis Huerta Huerta, 101-128. Fundación Santa María la Real del Patrimonio Histórico, 2022.
- Cabrera-Lafuente, Ana, María Judith Feliciano and Enrique Parra. “Medieval iberian relics and their woven vessels: the case of san Ramón del Monte († 1126) Roda de Isábena cathedral (Huesca, Aragón).” In *Relics @ the lab: an analytical approach to the study of relics*, edited by Mark Van Strydonck, Jeroen Reyniers and Fanny Van Clevén, 43-76. Peeters Publishers, 2018.
- Calvo Capilla, Susana. “Viajes por el Mediterráneo entre los siglos VIII y XII, tras los pasos de los viajeros andalusíes, fatimíes y bizantinos.” In *Caminos de Bizancio*, coordinated by Miguel Cortés Arrese. Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2007.
- Casado Alonso, Hilario. “Comercio textil, crédito al consumo y ventas al fiado en las ferias de Medina del Campo en la primera mitad del siglo XVI.” In *Historia de la propiedad. Crédito y garantía: V Encuentro Interdisciplinar. Salamanca, 31 de mayo-2 de junio*, coordinated by Salustiano de Dios de Dios, Javier Infante Miguel-Motta, Roberto Robledo Hernández and Eugenia Torijano Pérez. Colegio de Registradores de Madrid, 2007.

- Castiñeiras, Manuel. "Catalan romanesque painting revisited: the altar frontal workshops." In *Spanish medieval art: recent studies*, edited by Colum Hourihane. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; and The Index of Christian Art at Princeton University, 2007.
- Catalán, Diego, ed. *Gran crónica de Alfonso XI*. 2 vols. Madrid: Gredos, 1977.
- Collin, Georges and Évariste Lévi-Provençal, eds. Ibn 'Idari. *Kitab al-bayan al-mugrib fi ajbar al-Andalus wa-l-Magrib*. Dar al-Taqaqa, 1951.
- Constable, Olivia Remie. *Trade & traders in Muslim Spain. The commercial realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cortes, Susana and Juan Pedro Sánchez Gamero. *Los textiles de la catedral de Toledo. Tapices, reposteros, estandartes y paños*. Cabildo Catedral Primada – Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deporte de Castilla-La Mancha, 2014.
- Dodds, Jerrilynn D, ed. *Al-Andalus. Las artes islámicas en España*. El Viso, 1992.
- Eiroa Rodríguez, Jorge A. *Real Academia de la Historia. Catálogo del Gabinete de Antigüedades. Antigüedades Medievales*. Real Academia de la Historia, 2006.
- Eiroa Rodríguez, Jorge A. and Mariángeles Gómez Ródenas. (coordinators). *Seda. Historias pendientes de un hilo. Murcia, siglos X al XVI*. Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 2017.
- Feliciano, María Judith. "Muslim Shrouds for Christian Kings? A Reassessment of Andalusí Textiles in Thirteenth-Century Castilian Life and Ritual." In *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, edited by Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi. Brill, 2005.
- Feliciano, María Judith. "El corpus epigráfico de los tejidos medievales en Iberia: nuevas aportaciones." In *Arte y producción textil en el Mediterráneo medieval*, edited by Laura Rodríguez Peinado and Francisco de Asís García García. Polifemo, 2019a.
- Feliciano, María Judith. "Sovereign, saint and city: honor and reuse of textiles in the treasure of San Isidoro (Leon)." *Medieval Encounters* 25, no. 1-2 (2019b): 96-123. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340040>.
- Fernández, Damián, Lester, Mollie and Wood, Jamie, eds. *Rome and Byzantium in the Visigothic Kingdom: Beyond Imitatio Imperii*. Amsterdam University Press, 2023.

- Fernández Valverde, Juan, ed. *Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada. Historia de los hechos de España*. Alianza Editorial, 1989.
- García Gómez, Emilio and Évariste Lévi-Provençal (literary edition). *El siglo XI en primera persona: las "memorias" de Abd Allah último rey zirí de Granada destronado por los almorávides: (1090)*. Alianza, 1995.
- García Guatas, Manuel and Juan F. Esteban Lorente. "Noticias sobre el hallazgo de un tejido musulmán." *Artigrama* 3 (1986): 29-34.
- García Villada, Zacarías. *Catálogo de los códices y documentos de la catedral de León*. Imprenta Clásica Española, 1919.
- Gómez Moreno, Manuel. *Iglesias mozárabes. Arte español de los siglos IX al XI*. Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1919.
- Herrero Carretero, Concepción. "Marques d'importation au XIVE siècle sur les tissus orientaux de Las Huelgas." *Bulletin du CIETA* 81 (2004): 41-47.
- Lagardère, Vincent. "Mûrier et culture de la soie en Andalus au Moyen Age (Xe-XIVE siècles)." *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 26, no. 1 (1990): 97-111. Antiquité et Moyen-Age. <https://doi.org/10.3406/casa.1990.2561>.
- Lavesa Martín-Serrano, Asunción. "Aproximación arqueológica a los tejidos andalusíes." PhD Dissertation, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2018. <https://repositorio.uam.es/handle/10486/687847>.
- Lombard, Maurice. *Études d'économie médiévale: 3. Les Textiles dans le monde musulmán: du VIIe au XIIIe siècle*. Mouton, 1978.
- López Martínez de Marigorta, Eneko. "El tiraz omeya de al-Andalus. De la jerarquización social, la centralización y la hegemonía estatal a la diversificación, la especialización regional y el dominio del mercado." In *Artesanía e industria en al-Andalus. Actividades, espacios y organización*, edited by Adela Fábregas and Alberto García Porras. Editorial Comares, 2023.
- Mackie, Louise W. *Symbols of power. Luxury textiles from Islamic lands. 7th-21th century*. Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015.
- Marinnetto Sánchez, Purificación. "Un tejido nazari bajo las enaguas de la Virgen de Pajares de Peñafiel." *Ars Magazine*, 7 de septiembre, 2021, <https://arsmagazine.com/un-tejido-nazari-bajo-las-enaguas-de-la-virgen-de-pajares/>.

Martín i Ros, Rosa: “Les vêtements liturgiques de Saint-Valère: étude historique.” *Bulletin du CIETA* 71 (1995-1996): 63-78.

Martínez Meléndez, María del Carmen. *Los nombres de tejidos en castellano medieval*. Editorial Universidad de Granada, 1989.

Martínez Núñez, María Antonia. *Recientes hallazgos epigráficos en Madinat al-Zahra' y nueva onomástica relacionada con el dar al-sina'a califal*. Editorial Universidad de Jaén, 2015.

Monge Simeón, Laila. “Els teixits produïts i comercialitzats al Mediterrani. Els casos de teixits bizantins a la Seu d’Urgell.” *Síntesi. Quadens dels Seminaris de Besalú* 2 (2014): 55-74.

Moreno Coll, Araceli. “Pervivencia de motivos islámicos en el Renacimiento: el lema ,*izz li-mawlana al-sultan* en las puertas del retablo mayor de la catedral de Valencia.” *Espacio, tiempo y forma*, 6 (2018): 237-258. Serie VII, Historia del Arte. <https://doi.org/10.5944/etfvii.6.2018.20711>.

Navarro Espinach, Germán. “El comercio de telas entre Oriente y Occidente (1190-1340).” In *Vestiduras ricas. El monasterio de Las Huelgas y su época, 1170-1340*, edited by Joaquín Yarza Luaces. Patrimonio Nacional, 2005.

Partearroyo Lacaba, Cristina. “Las telas de los santos, de los reyes y de los califas: los tejidos en al-Andalus (ss. X-XIII).” In *Santiago, al-Andalus. Diálogos artísticos para un milenio: conmemoración del milenario de la ciudad de Santiago tras la razzia de Almanzor (997-1997)*. Xunta de Galicia, 1997.

Partearroyo Lacaba, Cristina. “Tejidos andalusíes.” *Artigrama* 22 (2007): 6-30.

Paulino Montero, Elena. *Arquitectura y nobleza en la Castilla bajomedieval. El patrocinio de los Velasco entre al-Andalus y Europa*. La Ergástula, 2020.

Pérez Pena, Laia. “El drap de les bruixes: un teixit excepcional a Sant Joan de les Abadeses.” *Datatèxtil* 37 (2017): 1-5.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. “El arte textil en el siglo XIII. Cubrir, adornar y representar: una expresión de lujo y color.” In *Alfonso X el Sabio. Las Cantigas de Santa María. Códice Rico, Ms. T-I-1. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial*, coordinated by Laura Fernández Fernández and Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza. Vol. II. Testimonio, 2011.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "El toque de lo sagrado: los tejidos como reliquias." In *Imago & Mirabilia. Les formes del prodigi a la Mediterrània medieval*, edited by Anna Orriols, Jordi Cerdà and Joan Duran-Porta. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2020.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "Origen y difusión de tejidos ricos en los territorios cristianos ibéricos en la Edad Media." *Anuario De Estudios Medievales* 51, no. 2 (2021): 851-880. <https://doi.org/10.3989/aem.2021.51.1.13>.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "Materialidad de los tejidos medievales de San Isidoro de León: tinte y color." *Archivo Español de Arte* XCV, no. 380 (2022a): 359-378. <https://doi.org/10.3989/aearte.2022.19>.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "Arquitectura y textil, epidermis figuradas de origen islámico en contextos cristianos." In *Al-Andalus y el arte español: ejercicios de inclusión y olvido. Homenaje a Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza*, edited by Víctor Rabasco García, Susana Calvo Capilla, and Azucena Hernández Pérez. La Ergástula, 2022b.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "Textiles históricos. Economía de medios, usos y reusos." *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Diseño y Comunicación* 208 (2023a): 139-150. <https://doi.org/10.18682/cdc.vi208.10740>.

Rodríguez Peinado, Laura. "Tinte y color. Entre la materia y su valor en los tejidos medievales". In *(In)materialidad en el arte medieval*, edited by Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz, Francisco de Asís García García, Laura Rodríguez Peinado and Raúl Romero Medina. Trea, 2023b.

Rosser-Owen, Mariam. *Arte islámico en España*. Turner, 2010.

Ruiz Souza, Juan Carlos. "Botín de guerra y tesoro sagrado." In *Maravillas de la España medieval. Tesoro sagrado y monarquía*, edited by Isidro Bango, vol. I. Junta de Castilla y León - Caja España, 2001.

Ruiz Souza, Juan Carlos. "De las lorigas de cuero a la Tienda del Encuentro. Arquitecturas de propaganda y victoria en el particularismo medieval hispano". In *Arte y producción textil en el Mediterráneo medieval*, edited by Laura Rodríguez Peinado and Francisco de Asís García García. Polifemo, 2019.

Sánchez-Albornoz, Claudio. *Estampas de la vida de León hace mil años*. Tipografía de la Revista de Archivos, 1926.

Senra Gabriel y Galán, José Luis and Laura Rodríguez Peinado. "Hilos, agujas y telares en el mundo monástico medieval." In *Homo Viator. Expresiones artísticas e itinerarios de ida y vuelta*, edited by José Luis Senra Gabriel y Galán and Laura Rodríguez Peinado. Trea, 2024.

Sequeira, Joana. *O pano da terra. Produção textil em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*. Universidade do Porto, 2014.

Serjeant, Robert B. *Islamic textiles, material for a history up to the mongol conquest*. Librairie du Liban, 1972.

Vallejo Givés, Margarita and Jaime Vizcaíno Sánchez. “Bizancio en el umbral del Imperio. Una panorámica de la investigación sobre la ocupación bizantina de Hispania”. In *El umbral del Imperio, nuevas miradas a la Hispania bizantina*, edited by Margarita Vallejo Givés and Jaime Vizcaíno Sánchez. Editorial Universidad de Alcalá, 2023.

Yarza Luaces, Joaquín, ed. *Vestiduras ricas. El monasterio de Las Huelgas y su época, 1170-1340*. Patrimonio Nacional, 2005.