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**As contribution to the discussion of animal rugs:**

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March 10th,  
2011, 08:56  
PM

#1

[Yohann Gissinger](#)  
Members

Join Date: Jul  
2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 0

**As contribution to the discussion of animal rugs:**

### **Translated and summarized from a text by Isabelle Bardi-Fronty and Christine Descatoire. Museum of Cluny. France.**

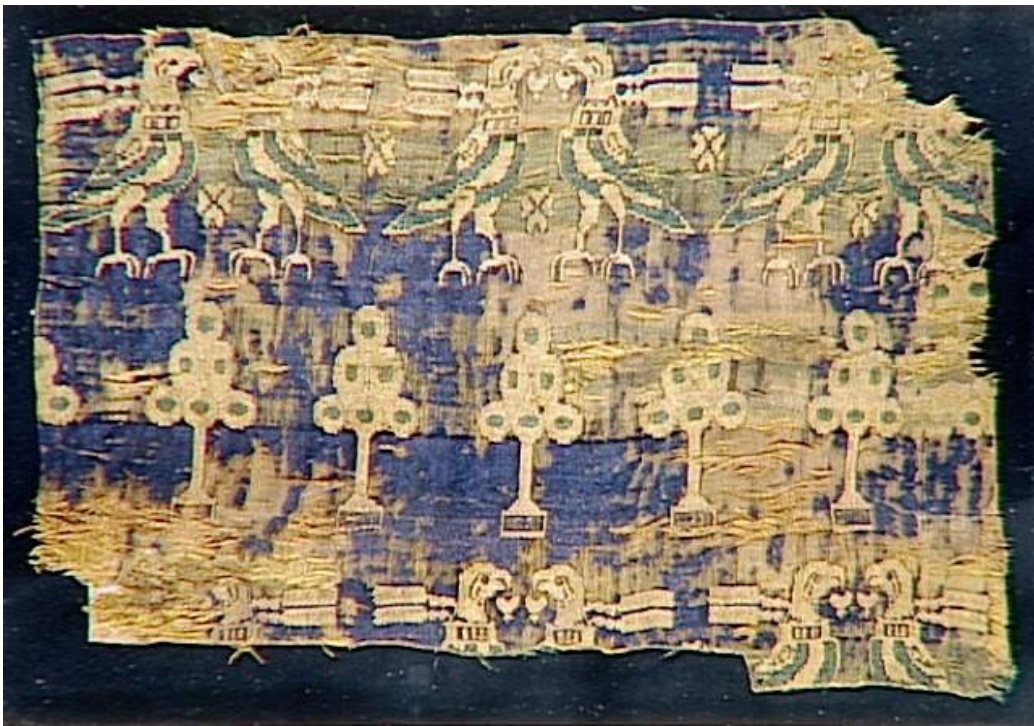
The origin of the Middle East bestiary is deeply rooted in Asian art. Three thousand years before our era, the civilizations installed between Tigris and Euphrates adapted a zoomorphic repertory on several forms of mediums, painted or carved. If the fragility of fabrics explains why most old specimens were lost, the numerous importance and the artistic quality of woven zoomorphic works from the Middle Ages in Persia, Syria, Iraq or Iran illustrate the survival of these decorations born in the Mesopotamian world.

At the beginning of the first millennium before ??? our era, an «orientalizing» phenomenon, also influenced by Greek art, favored the diffusion of certain animal designs in the whole Mediterranean basin. The syncretism implemented by the Greek artists thus was the main medium for the influences of the East on Occident. The Eastern bestiary consists of a multitude of species, domestic and wild animals as well as fantastic creatures, sometimes coexisting on works characterized by a filling of all available space. This "horror vacui", can be seen for example on archaic orientalist jugs featuring rows of successive horizontal animal motifs. The scenes of hunting on the alexandrine «taqueté» wool fragment below (Cl. 21844) are representative of this style.



*Figured fabric, weaving, wool (textiles) 5th century, 4th century Near-East CL.21844*

The motifs with animals facing each others is another very old creation of the Eastern art which was largely diffused in Occident, in particular thanks to the circulation of seals featuring animals on both sides of a tree of life. Dated from the 6th-7th century, the silk «samit» with faced birds represents an old prototype which was mainly developed in the north of the Egyptian delta. This topic of the birds around a tree of life was declined in multiple forms during the whole medieval period, as testified by Persian (Cl. 2156), Iranian (Cl. 21858) and Iraqi (Cl. 22048) specimen of the museum of Cluny.



*Piece of the shroud of St. Benignus of Dijon, samit shaped dobby, silk (textile) 6 th-7th century, Persia Cl.2156*



*Damask decorated with phoenixes amid vines, gold thread, silk (textile), 2nd half of 14th century lampas, Middle-East CL21858A,B,C*

Since the 4th century, the art of silk weaving (coming from the Far East via Persia) was controlled by the Greeks. In the 6th century, the Justinian dynasty of Constantinople developed silk cultivation in the Byzantine Empire and encouraged the creation of workshops of silk fabric within the court. The position of Constantinople at the doors of the East, its Roman origin and its contacts in the West, conferred it a key role in the relationship between Orient and Occident, this fact is confirmed by artworks.

The Byzantine textiles thus carry the memory of many ancient designs, painted or woven, now lost. A fragment of silk samit (Cl. 22818) , shows a decoration of medallions populated with fantastic or exotic animals such as the winged horse of the museum of Cluny but also the griffins and the elephants on other parts of the same fabric.



*Samit, silk (textile) 11th or 12th century, probably from a Byzantine workshop Cl.22818*

Through their privileged links with the Byzantine Empire and the Middle East, Italian centers like Palermo, Venice and Lucca, were the principal center of propagation of eastern influence in Europe. After having adopted the samit, manufactured in the East since Antiquity, these Italian cities copied eastern lampas around the turning of the 11th to the 12th century, creating many alternatives (like diapers).

In the 15th century, velvets, mainly manufactured in Florence, Genoa and Venice, supplanted lampas. Meanwhile, the technique of the embroidery knew a large development especially in northern Europe. The Western fabrics were largely inspired by the repertory of the Eastern bestiary and mixed real animals, familiar or exotic, with fantastic ones. They often used again the motifs of faced or leaned pairs of animals (gazelles, parrots, eagles, lions, hares, phoenix, griffins), around a separating element (fountain, tree of life, ogival palmettes). These couples of animals were often organized in alternate lines or placed in the middle of medallions, often surrounded by vegetal arabesques .

In the 14th century, motifs of Chinese origin also influenced Western fabrics, via silk fabric imported from Yuan (Mongol) China: the Italian fabric with parrots below (Cl.12103) is also decorated with couples of khilin (« lion-dog, mystical animal of Chinese origin).



*Damask black background decorated with embroidery and maroon parrot 2nd half 14th century gold thread, silk (textile), lampas, Italia CL12103*

Beyond these loans of Eastern bestiary, a double evolution occurred in the Middle Age. The bestiary grows with several newcomers (the siren-fish, the unicorn). The medieval animal is initially perceived with its symbolic and allegorical dimension. This symbolic system can be profane: the Middle Age sees a growing importance of the heraldic animal, (like the three passing leopards on the coat of arms of English kings), for example embroidered on a horse cover.

But the medieval bestiary is mainly a Christian bestiary, where the animal, real or mythical, symbolizes of Good or the Evil, representing Christ (the Lamb of the embroidered cover, Cl. 20367d???) or the devil, symbolizing Virtue or Vice (the siren as emblem of lust), not without a certain ambivalence (the lion can represent either Christ or the devil, the good or the evil). A belt purse of the Cluny museum, pendant of the one with the griffin (Cl. 11788), is decorated with hybrid beings, half-man and half-animal, symbolizing Vice.



*Embroidery with leopards Pearl (material), velvet, silk (textile), embroidery (textiles), cabochon, 1330-1340 England Cl.20367d*

Nevertheless, the function of animals as symbols of moral standards is rarely obvious on fabrics, where animals have a function especially decorative. The modes of representation are various. The designs can saturate space (lampas with phoenixes, Cl. 21858) or being strewn on the bottom (lampas with dogs and cat-like, Cl. 21861a).



*Damask brocade gold gold thread, silk (textile) 18th century, 14th century, 19th century Italia CL21861a,b,c,d,e,f*

The preoccupation for naturalism (lampas with lions and eagles, Cl. 22537) contrasts with the search of stylization and of geometric patterns (belt purse with swans, Cl. 11992, near to a purse with heraldic decoration from the treasure of Tongres). The fabric with hunting scenes (16th century, Cl. 22064) which closes the presentation, quite far from being a symbol of the fight against the evil, expresses a purely decorative intention which points out to older Eastern scenes of hunting.



Lampassette decorated with panthers, dogs, rabbits and wild boar Silk (Textile), embroidery (textiles) 2nd half 16th century Nederland CL22064

Thanks to Pierre Galafassi for his help in this translation.

Y😊

Last edited by Yohann Gissingier; March 10th, 2011 at 10:32 PM.



March 26th, 2011,  
01:01 PM

#2

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)  
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 9



I received by John Howe a further contribution on animals in rugs and textiles. The text and image are from a book on Hispano-Moresque Fabrics by Cyril G. E. Bunt, 1966.

Quote:

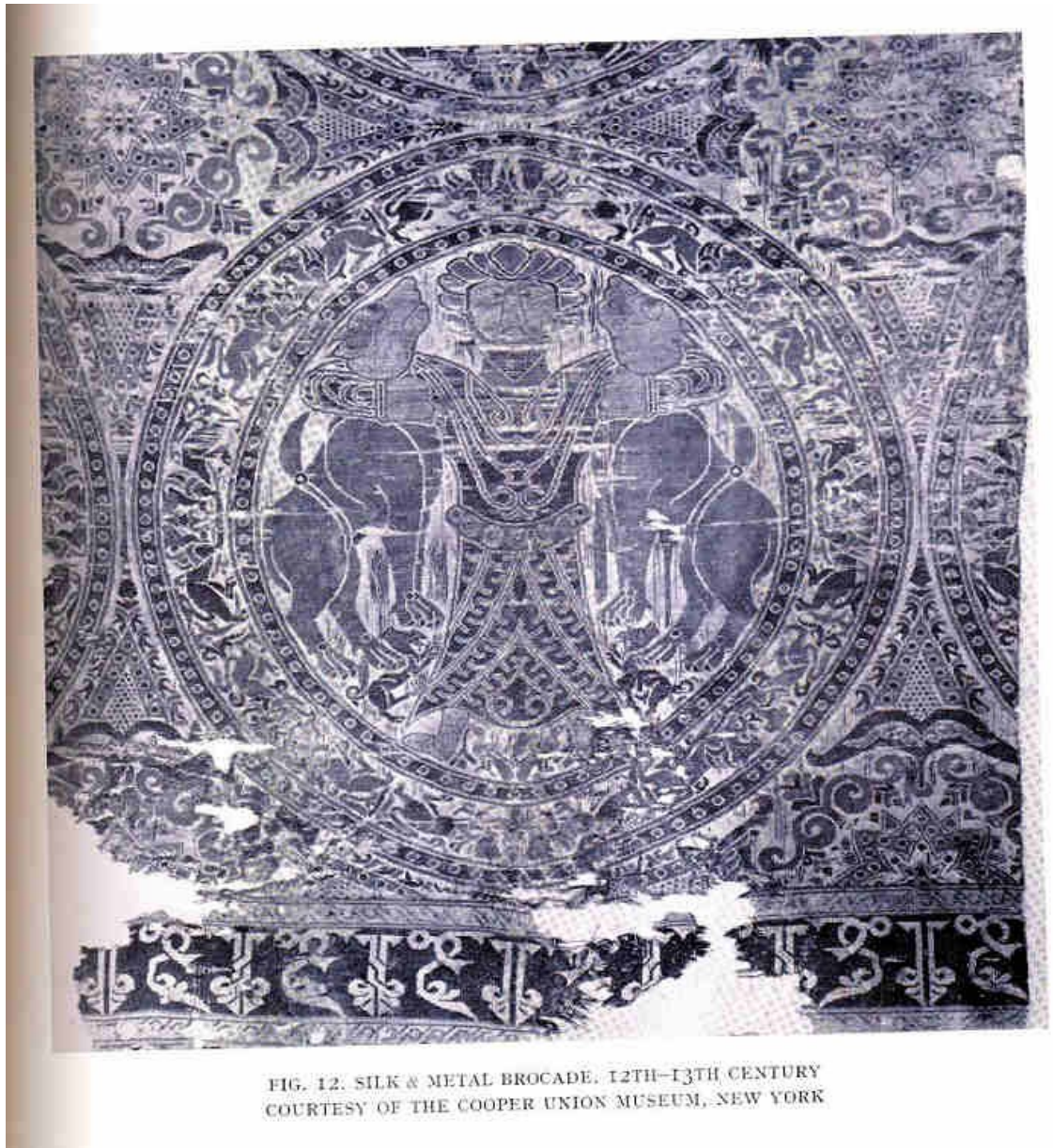
Hispano-Moresque Fabrics

*In the all-too brief survey of Persian textiles which accompanied the volume devoted to that subject in the present series we mentioned in passing that, in the seventh century, the conquest of Iran by the semitic Arabs, resulted in the creation of an inter-national style which appealed to all Islamic peoples.*



*In this volume we present a compendium of Hispano-Moresque woven fabrics the inspiration of which was derived from this Near Eastern source. Its widespread vogue in the Spanish Peninsula, radically different from the range of tissues developed under western influence demands separate treatment.*

*As early as the fifth century textiles of a style allied to the Sassanian were to be found in the markets of Western Europe, notably at Arles and Toulouse. And the merchants of Spain were by no means ignorant of the sartorial appeal of these imports. There is literary evidence that, as the seventh century, rich silks were among the precious imports reaching Merida and Seville. Silk culture was not introduced into Spain until after the Islamic invasion in the early eighth century. The conquest of Cadiz, Merida, Toledo and other centres of Andalusia resulted in them being soon settled by groups of skilled craftsmen, including weavers, and the silks of Cordoba were famous under the Western Caliphate, which was established in the year 756. Sericulture is recorded in the Peninsula early in the eighth century and Spanish silks are recorded among the vestments at the Vatican under the Pontificate of Gregory IV and Leo IV. Miss Florence Lewis May (to whose Hispanic Society monograph I am much indebted for much valuable information), records many instances of the prevalence in Spain of the Iranian factory system called "Tiraz" throughout the succeeding centuries. The first establishment on this Near Eastern pattern was in Cordoba in the ninth century. By the time of Abd el-Rahman I (821-852) the weaving craft had been adopted into the administrative system and their products were actually being exported to Iran during the reign of the third Abd el-Rahman [912-961). By this time groups of silk weavers were established in Leon as well as Cordoba and small factories were springing up throughout Spain in important centres of population. Tiraz (the word is applied to a silk material as well) was a valuable commodity in the West Caliphate, included among diplomatic gifts to foreign courts and embassies and also received by the Treasury as part payment of tribute.*



Notice the border..

Thanks John,

Filiberto



March 26th, 2011, 02:50 PM

#3

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 0



Ola!

¿Quiere usted conocer a las alfombras hispano-musulmanas también?

[http://www.dipualba.es/iea/digitalizacion/ilus\\_alfom.htm](http://www.dipualba.es/iea/digitalizacion/ilus_alfom.htm)

Hasta luego,  
Juan.

Last edited by Yohann Gissinger; March 26th, 2011 at 02:56 PM.



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