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[Turkotek Discussion Forums](#) > [Rugs and Old Masters: An Essay Series](#) > [2. Animals in Paintings](#)

Welcome, [Filiberto Boncompagni](#).  
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March 14th, 2011, 04:03 PM

#1

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

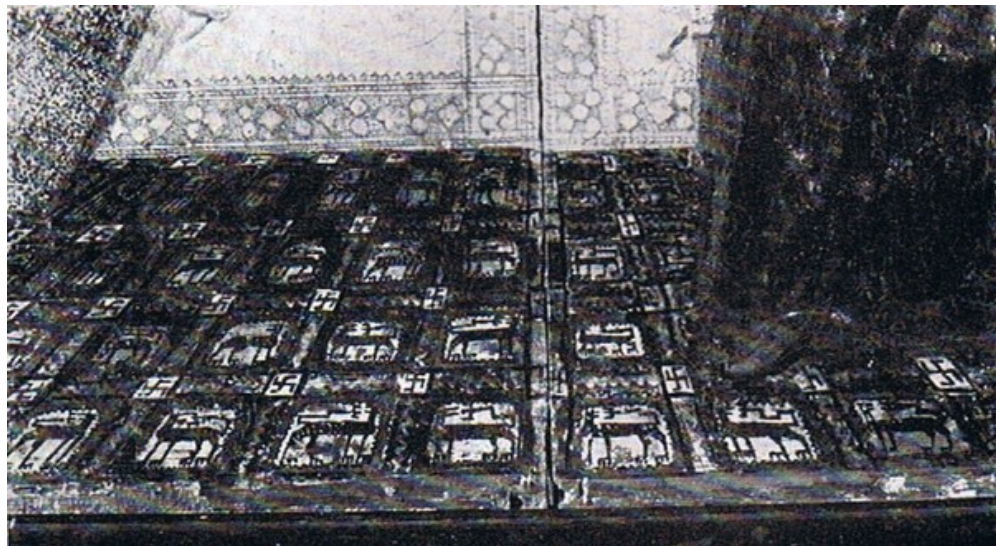
Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5

[The tile hypothesis](#)

Putting aside some of the floor covering depicted which look really like seldjuks rugs (design, borders, era) or rugs from a different origin, and others examples looking like textiles, I have another hypothesis one can apply to the remaining ones.

When looking at the following picture, one can remark details of the depicted floor covering:



Annunciation, Siena, ca. 1345, formerly in Schlossmuseum, Berlin

Here the slit of the wall is prolonged on the ground

### **The tile hypothesis:**

The inlaid tile was one of the great inventions of medieval craftsmen. Production of such tiles involved stamping the surface of an unfired slab of clay with a carved wooden block, impressing the design into the surface. The hollows were then filled with white clay.

The technique produced tiles that were both striking and durable, and had the

particular advantage of being suited to mass production. Inlaid tiles, primarily used for floors, were made in quantity in England from the 13th to the 16th century.

Inlaid floor tiles (with decoration inlaid into their surface using contrasting coloured clay) were produced in England from at least 1237. During the 13th century they were used to decorate palaces and religious houses.



Ca.1280. This tile is a typical product of what is known as the Wessex School. This group of tilemakers was active in the later part of the 13th century, and produced tiles for a large number of sites throughout the region. Among these were the cathedrals of Salisbury and Winchester.



Ca.1270-1300. This 13th-century inlaid tile bears a double-headed eagle, the emblem of Henry III's brother, Richard of Cornwall. It was apparently found at a site in Lyme Regis. Tiles of the same design were used at Cleeve Abbey in Somerset, where a medieval tiled floor has survived almost intact at the site of the refectory. This heraldic design was among several first produced to commemorate the marriage in 1271 of Richard's son Edmund to Margaret de Clare.



Ca.1250-1300. The griffin combines the wings and head of an eagle with the body of a lion. The main source of inspiration for the portrayal of creatures was the Bestiary, a collection of descriptions of beasts to which Christian and allegorical interpretations were added. Similar tiles depicting griffins were used to decorate the floors of royal apartments at Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire. At Clarendon tiles featuring lions and griffins were used in pavement dated between 1250-1252. Designs established at Clarendon were repeated at sites throughout the south-west of England and South Wales



Ca;1250-1300. Red earthenware with an impressed design of a lion and infilled with white slip and covered with a clear lead glaze.

Regards,  
Y😊

Source: V&A Museum

*Last edited by Yohann Gissing; March 15th, 2011 at 12:24 PM. Reason: wrong images insertion*



March 14th, 2011, 07:04 PM

#2

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)  
Administrator



Interesting theory, Yohann.

Join Date: May 2008

Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 22

You are probably right on the Bestiary as source for these animals! I mean, not on the tiles only, but also on the carpets.

To my knowledge, though, there was no use of inlaid floor tiles in Italy in this period. Well, at least not in Tuscany, and most of these painters were Tuscans.

I may be wrong - I'm not knowledgeable about tiles... but I am Tuscan 😊 and I don't recall having seen such floor tiling or any records of them in different media.

Regards,

Filiberto



March 14th, 2011, 09:07 PM

#3

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5



Filiberto,

The idea of this thesis is, what is on the ground and which is neither a carpet, nor a textile must be the ground itself.

However, as you pointed out, it has been impossible for me to find pictures of tiled grounds in Italian churches, I only found some in England. Whatever the technique of pavement, tiled, mosaic, inlaid marble, there's absolutely no Italian picture. If it was wood marquetry that could explain their disappearance, or, like in the initial theories it could also have been carpets or textiles.

At least the tile technique was employed in England, and there remain testimonies "in good condition for their age" in certain churches.

Otherwise there's no doubt about the medieval bestiary theory, I could post more related examples.

Regards,  
Yohann

*Last edited by Yohann Gissinger; March 15th, 2011 at 12:21 PM.*



March 15th, 2011, 12:38 PM

#4

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 22



Hi Yohann and Filiberto,

You are pointing, Yohann, at a truly interesting detail in this Berlin Annunciation. This line on the ground is indeed puzzling. The fact that there are only two alternating patterns, also speaks in favor of tiles in this case. I haven't found yet any better picture of that painting.

Best  
Pierre



March 15th, 2011, 02:01 PM

#5

[Filiberto](#)  
[Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 22



Hi guys,

Quote:

Here the slit of the wall is prolonged on the ground

Quote:

This line on the ground is indeed puzzling

Don't bother with that line: it's a painting "su tavola" (on wood). That line is simply the separation between two planks. With time, change of temperature and humidity, the planks move. This breaks the - I don't remember how it's called in English, in Italian is the "preparazione": the layer with canvas, glue and gypsum underneath the color and, of course, the color itself. Notice that the color and the preparazione are gone for few millimeters on the sides of the line in the supposed "carpet" field. A very common phenomenon (did I mention that, besides being Tuscan and Florentine, I am also - or rather I was - a restorer of paintings?) 🍷  
Regards,

Filiberto



March 15th, 2011, 09:53 PM

#6

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5



Hello Filiberto,

I thought about that, but I believed the separation belongs to the drawing itself because the slit stops before the edge. When looking one more time, I've seen the slit stops before...the frame! You're right.

Anyway, I don't think we can so easily eliminate the tile hypothesis, when looking at the composition of this example:



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints, ca. 1349

and this other one:



Lippo Memmi, Maria lactans, 1340s, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

In such examples, the floor covering is apparently (if the pictures are not samples) distributed all over the ground in a squaring arrangement, and without any main border...

Regards,  
Y



March 15th,  
2011, 10:46 PM

#7

[Pierre Galafassi](#)  
Members



Hi Yohann,

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 22

Two other examples of Renaissance floors with motifs, which in my (humble) opinion

are indeed decorated tiles, perhaps of the type described in your post (no beasts though):

FIG a. *Anonymous Spanish artist. 1380-1400 ? St Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Madrid*



FIG b. *P. del Pollaiolo, allegory of Faith, 1469-1470  
Uffizi, Florence*





In both cases one could still have a tiny doubt, for example due to the pseudo-kufic script in Pollaiolo's painting. (But pseudo-arabic or -hebrew script was quite in fashion in early Renaissance painting)

However, in most cases tiles are much more easy to identify than that.

Regards

Pierre



March 16th, 2011, 12:38 AM

#8

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5



Hello Pierre and Filiberto,

Pierre, the pedestal of your last picture makes me think about this one:



St. Louis of Toulouse Crowning Robert of Anjou 1317

I have a doubt about the opportunity to put such a pedestal on a rug or a textile in the real life, even in the XIVth c. when it was so rare and so expensive, tiles are more durable.

There's another hypothesis besides the tiles one: It's also possible that certain floor decorations in paintings are imaginary and in tight relation with the scene, only created for its symbolic system value.

Please, have another look at the "Lippo Memmi, Maria lactans, 1340s, Staatliche Museen, Berlin" for example. Is there anything else than symbols in this scene?

Here an interesting bestiary in english for you: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/bestiary.hti> ( in Maria lactans birds could be herons).

Amicalement,  
Y😊



March 16th, 2011, 01:17 PM

#9

## [Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 22

### "well-fed animal" rug

Hi Yohann,

Simone Martini's painting (St. Louis of Toulouse crowning Robert of Anjou, Capodimonte, Naples) is indeed an interesting case: here the platform may be posed either on a rug, as suggested by R.E. Mack (1) or on decorated tiles, but there is hardly any doubt that such rugs with parrots in an octagonal cartouche did exist.

Another example of this type of rug is shown in G. di Paolo's painting «St Catherine before the Pope in Avignon» FIG a) and b).





Fig a) and  
 Fig b) Detail , rotated 180°  
 Giovanni di Paolo, *St Catherine of Siena before the Pope Gregory XI in Avignon*, 1460, Thyssen-Bornemisza. Madrid. (Date of painting questionable, but it was perhaps one of the many commissioned for the Saint's canonization in 1461)

According again to Mack (2) «..the painter probably makes reference to the carpet with parrots... that chroniclers mention as constantly before the throne of Benedict XII in Avignon..to authenticate the setting of his painting...». Benedict, another Avignon Pope, was a notorious ruggie. Note that the parrot motif faces the enthroned Pope and not the visitors. One can see a portion of a narrow and simple border.

I agree with you that painters must have (very often) introduced invented elements of decoration in their paintings, it is what we call «licence artistique»; Elements fully invented or closely inspired by objects in their possession or in possession of the people who ordered the painting (the latter being more likely in the case of the awfully expensive rugs of the Renaissance period).

(1). Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza, Islamic trade and italian art, 1300-1600*, page 75.  
 (2). *ibid.* page 199, footnote #15



March 16th, 2011,  
 07:39 PM

#10

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)  
 Administrator



Hi Yohann,  
 Quote:

There's another hypothesis besides the tiles one: It's also possible that certain floor decorations in paintings are imaginary and in tight relation with the scene, only created for its symbolic system value.

Please, have another look at the "Lippo Memmi, Maria lactans, 1340s, Staatliche Museen, Berlin" for example. Is there anything else than symbols in this scene?

Fact is that there are more examples of this kind of "carpets".



*Lippo Memmi, Maria lactans, 1340s, Staatliche Museen, Berlin*

Like this one



*Giovanni di Paolo, Virgin with Child 1445, Detail MET New York*

Or this



*Sano di Pietro, Marriage of the Virgin, 1448 Vatican*

And there's no doubt here: it's a representation of a carpet.

In Pierre's database there are two other paintings of Sano di Pietro with the same carpet.

It is possible that Lippo Lemmi had invented it and the other two artists copied him but it seems improbable to me.

Pierre, the Spanish painting could be very well a tiled floor example. And the specimen in the Pollaiuolo's work is very un-probable as a carpet, being made only by kufesque borders. I tend more to interpret it as an artist's license though, like in this Vincenzo Foppa's Virgin and Child, ca 1480



Where the horizontal border looks definitely wrong. Wronged by the painter or by the weaver? Or it was badly repaired? Who knows?  
Regards,

Filiberto



March 16th, 2011, 08:35 PM

#11

[Yohann Gissinger](#)  
Members



Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5

Hello Filiberto,

"In Pierre's database there are two other paintings of Sano di Pietro with the same carpet."

Are the two examples of Pierre database also related to a virgin/Maria?

Regards,  
Yohann



March 16th, 2011, 09:14 PM

#12

[Filiberto](#)  
[Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 22



March 16th, 2011, 09:30 PM

#13

[Filiberto](#)  
[Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 22



March 16th, 2011, 09:49 PM

#14

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5



March 17th, 2011, 11:14 AM

#15

[Filiberto](#)  
[Boncompagni](#)

Administrator



Yes, they are!



I don't want to count them now, but so they are at least 65% of the other paintings in the database up to the 16th century.

With the Virgin Mary, I mean... 😊

Regards,

Filiberto



No need to count you probably have 100% of christians scenes before 1500 and 65% or more with the virgin Mary after 1500, of course!

I noticed that when you have a throne/enthronement/coronation/king there are eagles or lions decorating the floor (whatever the support) and if the scene relates a virgin/Mary and her son/marriage the long legged birds appear.. How do you explain this other phenomenon 😊?

Regards,  
Y.

*Last edited by Yohann Gissinger; March 17th, 2011 at 02:28 AM. Reason: post difficult to understand*



Bonjour Yohann,



Yeah, my estimate of 65% was VERY conservative.  
Like rugs, paintings contained a lot of symbols. Eagles, lions and thrones are normally associated with power. Long-legged birds, I don't know.  
Let's have a look at your Bestiary which is very interesting, by the way, thanks for the link.  
Here is what I (quickly) found:

**Herons** - *The white feathers signify purity*

**Lion** - *Thus our Saviour, a spiritual lion, of the tribe of Judah, the root of Jesse, the son of David, concealed the traces of his love in heaven until, sent by his father, he descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary and redeemed mankind, which was lost.*

**Eagle** - *The word 'eagle' in the Holy Scriptures signifies sometimes evil spirits, ravishers of souls; sometimes the rulers of this world. Sometimes, in contrast, it signifies either the acute understanding of the saints, or the Lord incarnate flying swiftly over the depths then seeking once more the heights.*

*The word 'eagle' represents those who lie in ambush for the spirit. This is confirmed by Jeremiah, who says: 'Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven' (Lamentations, 4:19). For our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of heaven when wicked men do such things against us that they seem to exceed the very rulers of the air in their evil machinations.*

*The word 'eagle' also symbolises earthly power. Ezekiel says with reference to this: 'A great eagle with broad wings and long limbs, in full plumage, richly patterned, came to Lebanon. It took away the marrow of a cedar-tree, it plucked the highest foliage' (see Ezekiel, 17:3-4).*

The usual problem with symbols – especially with the ones in rugs 🐼 - is that they have so numerous meanings that is difficult to establish which one is the right one.  
Regards,

Filiberto



March 17th, 2011, 05:05 PM

#16

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 22



"The usual problem with symbols – **especially with the ones in rugs** - is that they have so numerous meanings that is difficult to establish which one is the right one".

This, Filiberto, is of course very unusual in a fact-obsessed Rugdom were capillo-tracted theories and feuding experts are virtually unknown 😊

Pierre



March 18th, 2011, 01:43 AM

#17

[Yohann Gissinger](#)

Members

hide and seek, show and tell

Join Date: Jul 2008  
Location: France  
Posts: 5

Hello guys,

It looks like this thread is extinguishing, let me say few words...

In one hand, acknowledge that one would feel very uncomfortable in trying to establish from a reliable source, at least one meaning of the simplest symbol from a rug or a kilim. The symbolic system has been transmitted in a restrictive way.

In the other hand, and at the opposite, concerning the symbolic medieval (+/--occidental) system there are numerous reliable informations, the interpretation of meanings can differs from a person to another of course, but the guidelines are there.

Just try to imagine the difference between the XIII-XIVth century and nowadays technique and knowledge, vertiginous!  
Most of the people in this time didn't know how to read, but they were used to access some knowledge and understanding through symbols, there was a transmission utility for that system (in an extensive way, but with many levels).

Regards,  
Y😊

Last edited by Yohann Gissingier; March 18th, 2011 at 01:53 AM.



July 4th, 2011, 03:57 PM

#18

[Chris Aquilo](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2011  
Location: Somerville, MA  
Posts: 0

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Filiberto Boncompagni**   
*Bonjour Yohann,*

*Yeah, my estimate of 65% was VERY conservative.  
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**Eagle** - *The word 'eagle' in the Holy Scriptures signifies sometimes evil spirits, ravishers of souls; sometimes the rulers of this world. Sometimes, in contrast, it signifies either the acute understanding of the saints, or the Lord incarnate flying swiftly over the depths then seeking once more the heights.*

*The word 'eagle' represents those who lie in ambush for the spirit. This is confirmed by Jeremiah, who says: 'Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven' (Lamentations, 4:19). For our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of heaven when wicked men do such things*

against us that they seem to exceed the very rulers of the air in their evil machinations.

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The usual problem with symbols – especially with the ones in rugs 🐞 - is that they have so numerous meanings that is difficult to establish which one is the right one.

Regards,

Filiberto

Greetings and forgive my lack of understanding to textiles, i was unaware of this a few days back until I found one of the most beautiful works of art I have ever seen. I was curious if you knew of any more meanings. My textile kilim ? or holbien rug ? (all I could find similar terms for this piece) Mine has some sort of weird representations of fish birds and such really awesome colors and crazy geometric patterns going on..

here are some pics:

[http://s1081.photobucket.com/albums/j351/chr\\_stopher/](http://s1081.photobucket.com/albums/j351/chr_stopher/)

thanks in advance..

chris-



January 27th, 2012, 08:18 PM

#19

[Patricia Jansma](#)

Members

Join Date: Apr 2011  
Location: amsterdam (the netherlands, EU)  
Posts: 1



Dear All,

Just wanted to add the following text about tiles and rugs by Mr. Jan Pluis (a prominent scholar on tiles in the Netherlands) from the book "The Dutch tile, designs and names, 1570-1930" (Nederlands Tegelmuseum / Primavera Press, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1998, second edition). Page 31-35:

### **"Ornamental tiles 1560-1700**

*In Western Europe during the late middle ages, many buildings were erected in Gothic style. Monasteries, churches and the houses of the well-to-do often had floors of fired earthenware tiles. Red-firing floor tiles were either unglazed or were covered with a monochrome leadglaze or they had a decoration in relief or a white inlaid design. In Flanders, France, England, in the Northern Netherlands and Germany, these tiles were much used and were laid to form large 'tapestries' or 'carpets' of ornamental and/or figurative design.*

*In the third quarter of the 16th century, there was some cross-fertilisation of inlaid and tin-glazed (previously called 'maiolica') tile designs. Inlaid and relief patterns found their way onto maiolica tiles - or possibly vice versa?- during the second half of the 16th century (Van Dam, Tegel 12, 1984). Ornamental tiles from the second half of the 16th century nearly always have a design painted in reserve against a dark background, producing an effect similar to that of inlaid floor tiles. Van Dam surmises that a number of floor tile makers switched over to the maiolica technique around 1550.*

*Although no examples remain of these early ornamental tiles installed on walls, it is likely that this was the case from about 1570 on. [...]*

*The traditional Italian system of surrounding a square, figurative tile with four elongated hexagonal tiles was abandoned in the middle of the 16th century. [...] The designs of this (pj: 1560-1600) period are purely ornamental and show a mixture of renaissance and islamic styles, undoubtedly influenced by the ornament books of the second quarter of the 16th century. One of the earliest of these was published by Francisque Pellegrin in 1530. His book had 62 pages illustrated solely with moresques and motifs derived from Moorish traceries printed in black on a white ground. Pellegrin, a native of Florence, worked at the court of the French king Francis I. At the time, there were numerous Islamic artists active in Italian cities and there was also direct trade contact between Venetian merchants and those of the Levant (notably Damascus). Because of this, Islamic designs and garland motifs became widely known. [...]*

*The star and cross shape goes back to the 13th and 14th century Persian tiles. At that time it was composed of individual star- and cross shaped tiles. In the 16th century this pattern was transferred to square tiles in Spain and later in Persia itself. Several tiles need to be placed together to obtain the star and cross design. [...] At the end of the 16th century the interest in figural designs increased again, and geometrical patterns gave way more and more to designs with, for example, animals and persons. By the middle of the 17th century ornamental designs only played a modest role in the total tile production. [...]*

### **Carpets, tapestries and wallpapers**

*In common with tiles, carpets, tapestries and wallpaper are used to decorate walls and floors. Medieval tiled floors with a design in relief or inlay technique from the 12th and 13th centuries are often reminiscent of carpets. Rectangular areas of different patterns were laid adjacent to one another, separated by rows of plain tiles. These may have been inspired by Roman mosaics or by textile patterns. [...].*

Best regards, Patricia Jansma



January 28th, 2012, 06:29 PM

#20

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 22

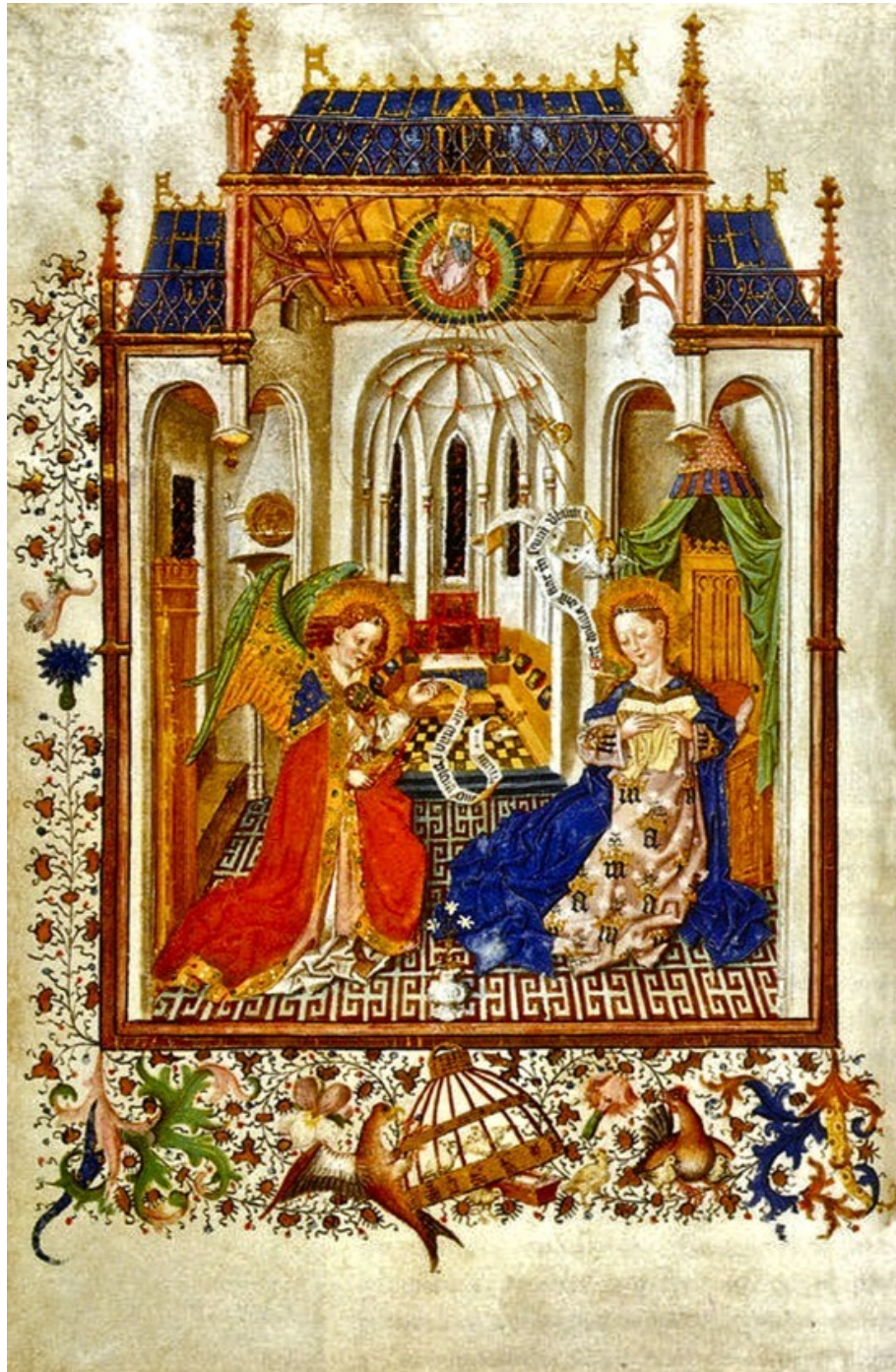


Hi Patricia,

Thanks a lot for this interesting contribution! I shall try to find an on-line scan of Francisque Pelegrin's (Or Francisco Pelegrino's) book, if possible. The illustrations should be of great interest, not only for scholars interested in tiles, like Mr Puis, but perhaps as well for ruggies.

Tile floors were ubiquitous in Renaissance painting, being much more frequent «studio props» than carpets or even than velvets and other precious textiles. The following paintings feature tile floors with probable islamic influence, as those mentioned by Mr Puis, but painted as early as the second half of the fifteenth century:

The first example illustrates the «Livre d'heures de Catherine de Cleves » (Anonymous, ca. 1450, Munster) and shows what might be the sainak motif (Most frequent on Turkmen ensi, and also found on some much older Anatolian rugs).



The later tile floor, with its pseudo kufic «borders», appears in several allegories painted by P. del Pollaiolo (Here, the Allegory of Faith, ca. 1470, Uffizi, Florence).



Best regards.  
Pierre



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2. Animals in Paintings

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