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Oriental Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Hispanic Lands – a Methodological and Historiographical Reflection

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In this position paper, we present case studies that range from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century to highlight the long history of engagement between the Iberian Peninsula and the eastern Mediterranean, Transoxiana, the Far East, and the lands of the American continent. Sartorial display and theatricality lie at the heart of our proposal. We hope to show that in medieval and early modern Iberian contexts the use of the blanket terms "Oriental" and "Orient" is not only anachronistic and imprecise, but also simplistic. Indeed, Iberian merchants and consumers were fully cognizant of the specific origins of fashionable items of cloth and clothing. Luxurious fabrics were transformed to suit cultural demands over the centuries and their social value was reassigned accordingly. Likewise, we contend that gathered knowledge of the Islamic world (and beyond) was distinct from its representation and the promotion of stereotypes. Our hope is to stimulate a healthy debate: to what extent do we employ imprecise terminology to explore cultural phenomena and how does its use affect our approach to art historical interpretation?

Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, an inherent association with majesty lay at the heart of the feverish consumption of Central Asian textiles, especially cloths of gold and silk (*nasij al-dhahab al-harir*), in the Iberian Peninsula. Admiration and wonderment were a deliberate result of their performance across the far reaches of cross-continental trade. Central Asian textiles reached the westernmost confines of a vast transcontinental commercial route largely through Genoese merchant activity as well as through diplomatic channels. Nevertheless, the taste for and utility of these objects was deliberate: Iberian consumers were able to discern their quality and associate it with their provenance. Central Asian textiles were not "Oriental" but "Tartar", a vital distinction to understand their commercial success. The extraordinary material and technical qualities of the *panni tartarici*, or Tartar cloth, often described in contemporary sources, were intimately associated with courtly splendor.[1]

For instance, in 1486, Queen Isabel of Castile (r. 1474-1504) visited the burial of her father, Juan II (r. 1406-1454), at the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores (Burgos) to pray

[1] Anne E. Wardell, *Panni Tartarici: Eastern Islamic Silks Woven in Gold and Silver: 13th-14th Centuries*, Florence, Bruschettini Foundation, 1989; David Jacoby, "Oriental Silks Go West: A Declining Trade in the Later Middle Ages", in *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf (eds), Florence, Marsilio, 2010, p. 71-88; Maria Ludovica Rosati, "Panni Tartarici: Fortune, Use, and the Cultural Reception of Oriental Silks in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century European Mindset", in *Seri-Technics: Historical Silk Technologies,* Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello, and Luca Molà (eds.), Berlin Max Plank Institute, 2020, p. 73-88; Sila Oreja Andrés, "El obsequio de tejidos como gesto de munificencia en el tardomedievo castellano: testimonios literarios," in *Anales de Historia de Arte*, 24, 2014, 389-400.

directly over his body.[2] A rich *nasij*, shrouded the corpse and covered most of what the queen likely saw and touched.[3] Throughout Juan II's long reign, the promotion of his image aimed to create a nexus between royal power and incontestable sovereignty.[4] Yet, the display of Central Asian textiles was tied to traditional royal displays and the preservation of royal memory since the thirteenth century. It is worth noting that his father, Enrique III (r. 1390-1406) sent two successful embassies to Tamerlane's court in Samarkand in 1396-1403 and 1403-1406, which returned to the Iberian Peninsula laden with diplomatic gifts and envoys.[5] His son's burial shroud, therefore, also might have been an (inherited) imperial gift.

Medieval Central Asian textiles achieved an unprecedented universality by successfully communicating in the language of splendor. The recognized Central Asian provenance of the *panni tartarici*, was intimately tied to the materiality and, thus, performance of the objects.

[2] Francisco Tarín y Juaneda, *La Real Cartuja de Miraflores, Burgos* (1896), Valladolid, Editorial MAXTOR, 2011.

[3] Napoleonic troops entered the Cartuja de Miraflores and destroyed the royal burials in 1809. The memory of Juan II's shroud survives in this representation found in Macari Golferich's (1866-1938) undated and unpublished album of textile reproductions, *Reproduccions policromades originals de teixits perses, bizantins, aràbics, italians, espanyols, etc.*, Centre de Documentació, Museu del Disseny de Barcelona (E-XIX-5)

[4] José Manuel Nieto Soria. "Del rey oculto al rey exhibido. Un síntoma de las transformaciones políticas en la Castilla bajomedieval", in *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales*, 2, 1992, 5-28.

[5] Carlos Montojo Jiménez, *La diplomacia castellana bajo Enrique III: estudio especial de la embajada de Ruy González de Clavijo a la corte de Tamerlán*, Madrid, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. Centro de Publicaciones 2004.

More than two centuries and an ocean apart, the eighteenth-century wood carving depicting Saint James "the Moorslayer" from the Jesuit Church of San Javier de Moxos (present-day Bolivia) tells a similar tale of historiographic oversimplification. The Bohemian-born Adalberto Marterer (1690–1753), a Jesuit priest who lived and worked throughout the region of Llanos de Mojos, is usually credited with its creation. The Moxos panel has been published multiple times and exhibited twice. In all instances, it has been identified as Saint James "the Moor Killer," no doubt because Jacobean iconography is commonly understood to be static.[6] Yet, this interesting image belongs to a genre of paintings of Turks destroying sacred images, which seems to have originated in the anti-Protestant visual polemics of the Low Lands and which drew heavily on established anti-Semitic tropes.[7]

The conventional depiction of a large-scale Santiago on an enormous white horse whose front hooves trample over infidels while his rear protects the Christian armies is offset by the fact that the Apostle's victims do not seem to be either Muslims or Amerindians. Their shaved and tufted hair style, as well as their facial hair and features, suggest that the soldiers are a contemporary representation of Qing men, a fact that has routinely escaped analysis. This panel is one of five relief sculptures depicting scenes of the life of Saint Francis Xavier, including one of Saint Francis Preaching in India. Saint Francis Xavier, a founding member of the Society of Jesus and a companion of St. Ignatius of Loyola,

[6] Thomas BF Cummins and María J Feliciano, "Mudéjar Americano: Iberian Aesthetic Transmission in the New World" in A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture. Edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gulru Necipoglu. London: Wiley and Sons, 2017, p. 20; Francisco Marquez Villanueva, *Santiago: La Trayectoria de un mito*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2004.

[7] Cecile Dupeux et al., *Bildersturm: Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille? Begleitbuch zu den Ausstellungen in Bern und Straßburg*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000; María J Feliciano, "Picturing the Ottoman Threat in Sixteenth-Century New Spain" in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye*. Edited by James Harper. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, 243-266.

landed in Goa in 1541, where he evangelized until 1549, when he traveled to Japan. He returned to Goa two years later and in 1552 traveled to China. He died in the Chinese island of Sancian, where he fell ill before he could reach the mainland.

In the context of the narrative content of the altarpiece, where this relief sculpture belonged, and the Moxos Jesuit mission region where this work of art was likely created, the presence of Saint James championing the cause of Christianity in the Far East is not surprising. In this triumphant representation, the Apostle is depicted achieving the spiritual victory that Saint Francis Xavier's untimely death prevented. It also reaffirms the preeminence of martyrdom as triumph in Jesuit thought, both fitting subject matter for this seemingly unusual example of the "art of the missions." Here, anti-Islamic visual tropes provide the model for a viceregal transformation of an otherwise canonical subject matter within the greater Iberian devotional repertoire. Yet the specificity of the narrative and its use of Chinese men as representations of heterodoxy was only reduced to a blanket statement of "Moorish" in modern scholarship.

Public celebrations offer more evidence to help us rethink the idea of 'the East' and its interpretation in medieval and early modern Iberian societies. Besides the work of Carrasco Urgoiti and Irigoyen — which are mainly concerned with the use of 'Morisco style' dress in *juegos de cañas* as part of chivalric events—little has been written on the topic of public performances.[8] Yet, contemporary event chronicles, written by members of the participating public as well as local and royal chroniclers, offer detailed documentary evidence of the festivities. Despite their institutional nature, these accounts highlight the ways in which aspects of visual culture were described and how the images of the Islamic and Oriental world were constructed.

We should aim to identify the terms employed by contemporary chroniclers that refer to the visual elements associated with the Islamic world distinctly from those that refer to Asia. Discerning lexical or semantic specificity is crucial. "Morisco" and "Turkish" clothing were quite different, and the use one or the other term was the result of careful consideration rather than random choice — as some studies have suggested.

To highlight distinctions, we can consider two case studies: allegories of the Continents, a very frequent feature of royal political iconography, and the iconographic representations of celebrations in which the Jesuits played a major part. The Jesuits had a crucial role in the conversion of both East and West Indian populations, and hence were influential in the transfer of their vision of those 'others' to the Iberian Peninsula.

Images of the four continents allow us to analyse the peculiarities of the Iberian case. In the Low Countries and Italy, a stereotyped representation developed in which sartorial representations carried little semantic weight. The Iberian tradition was unique in portraying the continents dressed in either "Morisco style" or "Turkish style" clothing to make them easily recognizable. Thus, Africa and Asia were usually represented wearing

[8] María Soledad Carrasco Urgoíti, *El moro retador y el moro amigo. Estudios sobre fiestas y comedias de moros y cristianos.* Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1996; Javier Irigoyen-García, *Moors Dressed as Moors. Clothing, Social Distinction, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Iberia*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017.

similar outfits, since their inhabitants were — or were assumed to be — Muslim. The only visible differences were the Turkish weapons, which traditionally surrounded the female figure representing Asia, and the amount of detail in the descriptions of the precious jewels that she wore. Since East and West were depicted wearing identical dress, the differences between them relied on known external cultural elements.

Although the intellectual elites had first-hand knowledge of the difference between the various African and Asian peoples — in as much as objects had been imported from those lands and chronicles had circulated since the early days of the Iberian kingdoms' territorial expansion — they sought an easily understandable and identifiable image for consumption by a largely illiterate population. The main concern was to link them to Islam, rather than to make a detailed ethno-anthropological description.

In the case of festivities associated with the Society of Jesus, on the other hand, a composite of "domestic" and "Oriental" Islam emerges. Although Jesuit chronicles described Asian populations in detail, but such ethnographic descriptions did not guide the visual propaganda that the order generated. Instead, they created images that reaffirmed the ways in which spectators understood the Asian "other". This can be seen, for instance, in the plays performed to mark Philip III's arrival in Lisbon (1619). The entertainment organised for this royal entry celebrated the expulsion of the Moriscos (1619) and praised the monarch for his action, while simultaneously reminding him of Portugal's, and especially the Jesuits', key contribution to the kingdom's eastward expansion. In these plays Asia was represented as a richly dressed woman riding an animal that symbolised the idolatry attributed to Asian people in an image reminiscent of the Whore of Babylon. Next to her stood a,

"Brahmin wearing a Morisco shirt with long and wide sleeves embroidered in multicoloured silk and over this a rich Indian coat with gold embroidery. Underneath he wore a long white silk robe with three threads hanging over his chest, one red and two white, which is a mark and ensign of these superstitious Brahmins. His head was covered by a round Morisco headdress with many folds which enveloped his beard as is the custom among them. He appeared to be old and aged, as befits his trade, [he carried] an unusual Indian staff and wore slippers or white shoes".[9]

This account mentions a "Morisco style" that the population could easily identify both with Islam and wealth and ostentation to evoke the richness of Asian territories that did not use garments in the Iberian tradition.[10] This particularity escapes the iconographic types found in costume books and shows how the image of the East began to take shape in order to make it understandable and visible to local Iberian populations. In festive contexts, the Orient was very much a construct. Images of the East resorted to very specific items that had little or nothing to do with Spanish material culture—such as Turkish armament,

[9] Joao Sardinha Mimoso, *Relacion de la Real Tragicomedia con que los Padres de la Compañía de Jesus en su Colegio de S. Anton de Lisboa recibieron a la Magestad Catolica de Felipe II de Portugal*...Lisboa: Jorge Rodriguez, 1620, pp. 10-14.

[10] It is evident that the use of the term "Morisco" refers indiscriminately to Islamic sartorial practices, rather than to Iberian Islamic dress.

headgear, and staffs—but more specifically to Muslim culture in general. What resulted is a kind of specific otherness more related to objects than people.

This leads us to question the alleged "orientalism" of medieval and early modern sartorial display in Iberia. As discussed above, we must contend with the disassociation between the way in which Asia was perceived and described by travellers/conquerors and how it was represented in public celebrations. Visual propaganda attempted to create a comprehensible image of the Muslim (Asian) "other" which was not rooted in reality.

Furthermore, the concepts "Oriental" and "Orientalism" in costume studies have at its core an important and problematic source: sixteenth-century costume books or *trachtenbuch*. Between 1520-1600, several widely-circulated volumes aimed to illustrate the ways in which people around the known world dressed. [11] They were illustrated with engravings and enjoyed enormous success (even today). Their origins can be traced to several drawings by Albrecht Dürer (ca. 1520-1521) and Christoph Weiditz' (1498-1559) illustrated manuscript (ca. 1529) completed after his visit to the Imperial Court of Charles V (1528-1529). His work, now at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (Nuremberg), is comprised of 154 drawings depicting the sartorial habits of people from the Spanish kingdoms (from the Basque County to Granada) to India and the Americas. Weiditz' drawings provided the model that was reproduced, copied, and reinterpreted in subsequent costume books. For instance, the sixteenth century *Códice de Trajes* (or *Costume Codex*, BNE RES-265) follows Weiditz' model and includes drawings of clothing from Europe, the Americas, and Asia[12].

The first collections of engravings and printed books on costume were published in the second half of the sixteenth century. Among them, two are of particular interest: the first, François Deprez' (1525-1580) *Recueil de la diversité des Habits qui sont des present en usaige tant es Pays D'Europe, Asie, Afrique, et isles sauvages, Le tout fait apres le natural* (1562) incudes 120 engravings by the Italian Enea Vico (1523-1567). The second, Cesare Vecellio's (ca. 1521-1601) *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (1590 and 1598), incorporates more than 500 engravings in the second edition.

The illustrations are detailed and sometimes are presented from vantage points. They include male and female attire of different social classes— from royalty to commoners as well as varying social ranks and professions—alongside a text detailing the textiles, garments and, in some cases, were to source them. The books are organised by geographical areas including kingdoms, regions, and cities. Vecellio's work offers the most exhaustive visual representations in the exposition of European material. From other regions of the world, Vecellio distinguishes between Cairo and North Africa, but labels them "moros" (Moors), indistinctively. Similarly, Americans are separated into Peruvians and Mexicans and Asians between Turkish, Syrian, Persian, Tartars, Indian, Chinese.

[11] Giorgio Riello, "The World in a Book: The Creation of the Global in the Sixteenth Century European Costume Books" in *Past and Present* 14 (2019), pp. 282.

[12] RES/285, http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/biblioteca/C%C3%B3dice%20de%20trajes%20%20%20/qls/3302017

For our purpose, the main value of early costume books (Weiditz, Desprez and Vico, Bertelli, Vecellio) is their wide dissemination and their success in providing models that became archetypes, according to L. Carvalho.[13] Simply put, they fix the identity of people through cloth and clothing. An example of the diffusion of their models is the similarities that Carvalho noted between Weiditz' drawings and the engravings in costume books published subsequently.

Christoph Weiditz
Tracht der Frauen in Sevilla; Wie die Frauen in Santander zur Kirche gehen, 1530-40. In: *Trachtenbuch*... Acervo do Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

Enea Vico
Woman of the Nobility; Woman of Aghilar with Hooded Cape, 1558. Gravura em cobre, formato In-4°. In: VICO apud SPIKE, John (ed.). *The Illustrated Bartsch. Italian masters of the sixteenth century. Enea Vico*. (Vol.30). New York: Abaris Books, 1985.

The same pattern emerges between the representation of Granadan women, labelled *moriscas*, and other non-European sartorial traditions, such as Persian, Turkish, and Tartar, possibly due to the lack of direct access to accurate sources.

Weiditz vs. J.-J Boissard, 1581

We must ask whether the dresses that illustrate those regions are real or imaginary. We presume that European models are accurate representations or products of first-hand observation, but what about the others? It is essential to differentiate between depictions of traditions from the authors' regions of origin (which generally are complemented with a

[13] Larissa Carvalho, "Vico e Vecellio: indagaçôes sobre a circulaçao de modelos nos libros de tarjes do século XVI" in *Figuras, Studies on the Classical Tradition*, 8:1 (2020), pp. 184-210.

higher number of illustrations) and those from far away places. For "exotic" locations, we must take into account the sources that provided the authors' models. In Vecellio's case, as a Venetian, he had direct access to Italian cloth, clothing, and their sources as well as ample direct access to other traditions in Europe and the Mediterranean. After all, Venice had been a commercial entrepôt since the Middle Ages and saw people from different kingdoms and distant regions walk through its streets in their traditional garments. But Vecellio's knowledge of sartorial practices from regions further afield and cultures uknown must be put into question.

Early costume books offer insight into the depths of sixteenth-century cross-cultural knowledge *from a European perspective*. They copied and repeated models that aided in the construction of identities and the circulation of stereotypes of non-Europeans. As Giorgio Riello points out, "the overlap between individual figures (dress) and the locality (place) that costume books present is confirmed through repetition. The topographical specificity becomes a recurrent theme or convention of representation that through repetition emerges as a stereotype". We must question, therefore, the place of the "oriental/orientalism" in their sartorial representations. Early costume books use the word "oriental" infrequently and only as a general descriptor. In fact, their taxonomic organisation avoided the use of non-geographical terms. The costume books of the second half of the sixteenth century show broad representations of cloth and clothing from the Near East and fewer depictions from Asia (India, China and Japan). On the other hand, the concept of Oriental/Orientalism, according to Adam Geczy, "begins with a deliberate, qualitative and self-conscious separation between cultures"[14], a mentality that the costume books disseminated through the repetition of images.

The case studies briefly presented above evince a variety of perceptions of Islamic material culture and sartorial practices that were characteristic of Iberian consumers of the late medieval and early modern periods. We hope to have demonstrated that anachronistic and generic uses of the terms "Orient" and "Oriental" are not helpful to the study of Iberian material culture. Instead, we advocate for context-specific methodologies and critical readings of documentary and visual evidence.

[14] Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism. Dress, Textiles and Culture from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century*, p. 15