DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLES ON EARLY
(11TH-12TH C.) MEDIEVAL TEXTILES: ASPECTS
OF THEIR ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM

Our paper examines certain aspects of the iconography and symbolism of the double-headed eagles which are displayed on eleventh-twelfth centuries medieval luxury silk textiles (fig. 1). Many specialists of oriental (mainly Persian) and Islamic textiles of Spain, as well as other eminent scholars, including O. von Falke,1 P. Ackerman,2 R.B. Serjeant,3 A.U. Pope,4 G. Wiet,5 F.E. Day,6 M.-T. Picard-Schmitter,7 F. May,8 A.C. Weibel,9 F. Kühnel10, E. Grube11, H. Corbin,12

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5 G. Wiet, Soieries persanes, Cairo 1948; Idem, “Miss Day’s Reply”, Ars Islamica 15-16 (1951), 244-250.
M. Lemberg,13 G. Vial,14 D.G. Shepherd,15 N. Kajitani,16 M. Lombard,17 M. Campos,18 D. King,19 S.S. Blair, J.M. Bloom and A.E. Wardwell,20 C. Partearroyo Lacaba,21 P. Baker,22 F.V. Fernandez,23 A. Cutler,24 dealt with the diverse provenances, the historical contextualisation and the possible allocation of these fabrics to the different workshops which created them. These textiles survive in relatively good condition, mostly because they were included in medieval church treasures.

It is admitted by all scholars that the double-headed eagle emblem (like the usual single-headed eagle) functioned as a major symbol of power. Originated in the East, it was used in Mesopotamian art, during the Sumerian and especially in Hittite eras.25 Later on, we find some of its rarest representations, as the

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17 M. Lombard, Les textiles dans le monde musulman. VVe-XIIe siècle, Paris, 1978,
25 See C. Lebrun, “L’aigle bicéphale sur les sceaux inscrits de scribes dans le monde
one from Sassanian Iran, on a bronze dish, now preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Teheran (fig 2). An unusual representation of a double-headed eagle can be found in a fresco from a grotto of Qyzil in Chinese Turkestan (fig. 3) and this heraldic type of representation is, as R. Wittkower noted an offspring “... of the same Western Asiatic prototypes, colored by Persian influences...”.

In Byzantium, apart from some very rare representations of this imagined (not realistic) bird, datable to eleventh century (a stone slab from Beroe [Stara Zagora] and a marble slab from Martyropolis [Miafarqin or Mayyafariqin] in Asia Minor) and certainly due to oriental influences, double-headed eagles appear only by the time of the reign of the Paleologan dynasty, that is to say after the end of thirteenth century. Imperial byzantine silks with single-headed eagles survive in relatively small number in Western Europe (in Brixen/Bressanone, Cathedral Treasury, in St. Knud, Odense, Denmark, in hittite”, Res Antiquae 1, Bruxelles, 2004, 133-148; J.D. Chariton, “The Mesopotamian Origins of the Double-Headed Eagle”, UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research XIV (2011), 1-13.

26 Photograph by A. Davey.


28 R. Wittkower, Eagle and Serpent, 21.


31 See P. Androudis, “Chapiteau de la crypte de la basilique de Saint-Démétrios à Thessalonique avec emblèmes de la famille des Paléologues”, Αξιόν στην Χριστιανική Αρχαιολογίας Eπιμέλειας της Ελλάδος; period Δ’. t. Δ’ (2012), 131-140, with all the bibliography on the subject.

32 Said to be the chasuble of Bishop Albuin (975-1006). See A. Cutler, Eagle Silks in Byzantium, 69.

33 In this silk the eagles are enclosed in roundels. The fabric was probably sent to Odense from Apulia by Ethele, St. Knud’s first wife, as a shroud for his body in 1101. See Byzantium. Late Antique and Byzantine Art in Scandinavian Collections, exhibition catalogue, ed. J. Fleischer, Ø. Hjort and M.B. Rasmussen, Copenhagen 1996, no 91 (J. Veller).
the Musée Saint-Germain, the former Abbaye de Saint-Germain in Auxerre, France\textsuperscript{34}). Unpublished pieces from Byzantine eagle silks are preserved in cathedral treasures and museums\textsuperscript{35}.

On the other hand, this fabulous being is attested in Islamic art in various periods. In twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was given particular importance by the Seljuk Turks and the Turcoman atabegs (princes) of Rum or Anatolia (Asia Minor) and the Turcoman Zangid princes of Iraq, who made the double-headed eagle their standard.\textsuperscript{36}

It is generally accepted that Muslim culture in the East and West, has greatly benefited from Iran’s influence in the domain of decorative arts. Persia acquired symbolic and decorative motifs from the most ancient civilizations (such as the emblem of double-headed eagle), filtered and analyzed them, and then propagated them across the entire Mediterranean basin. Rules and standards of the iconography and the decorative motifs developed on the Iranian plateau reached many times Islamic Sicily and Spain. According to R. Ghirshman, «...these passed through the same course which leads through Sumer and Babylon and Nineve to Achaemenian and Samanid Persia, and there from reaches the Byzantine Empire, Islam and Roman Europe ...».\textsuperscript{37} The Muslim conquests, the Crusades, the present of the Latin states in the Levant, the increase of the flow of pilgrimage in the 12th and 13th century, the diplomatic relations with precious gifts (including Near Eastern silk fabrics)\textsuperscript{38} and all trade exchanges won


\textsuperscript{35} A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, 55-56, n. 36.


\textsuperscript{37} R. Ghirshman, Iran. From the earliest times to the Islamic conquest (translated from French), Harmondsworth, 1954.

a dense network from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, with many cross-cultural interactions. All these mobilities resulted to a “shared culture of precious objects and artifacts”, especially for the courts and princes.39 In this context, we find many luxurious silks with single and double-headed eagles (Alone or together with other emblems of power) in Byzantium, in Andalusia, the Latin West, as well as the Near East.40

From Buyid (or Buwahid, in Persian: Āl-e Būya) Iran of mid tenth-mid eleventh century (932-1055), where the ruling family claimed a Sassanian descent and identified with pre-Islamic Persia and ancient Persian and Sassanian traditions and where popular myths were rediscovered and reemployed in culture, poetry and art41, up to Andalusian Muslim Spain, the precious masterpieces of silks with heraldic representations of double-headed eagles (fig. 4) present a variety in compositions and symbolical meanings.

In these silks the eagles, the most eminent of predatory birds, are shown frontal, “frozen”, into static stiffness and often grasping their small prey, usually hare-like creatures (or quadrupeds) in their talons. This imagery, although slightly unnatural, can be regarded as an independent subvariant of the heraldically posed birds.

Silk textiles were luxury goods, which often involved polychromy and gold brocade. As a result, they were well known and respected in their time.


40 A. Cutler, Eagle Silks in Byzantium, the Latin West and ’Abbāsid Baghdad, 67-72.

Finds of 10th-12th c. Islamic silks in European churches testify to a highly organized trade and to kindly gifts, until European silk-weaving flourished in the 14th c. It is worth noting that by the end of 12th century arabic terms entered the western silk terminology. Silk textiles from Baghdad (the “panni de Bagadello”) reached through Genoa the Spanish cities of Valencia and Ceuta. Evidence on western imports of silks from the Near East is rich in 12th century and even more abundant in 13th century.\(^{42}\)

Unfortunately, there is a length limit on this paper and, going into any detail at all on 11th-12th c. eastern and western silks with double-headed eagles, would exceed it.

**The Textiles**

*A. Textiles from Buyid Iran and Iraq*

We will start our presentation of the surviving medieval textiles displaying double-headed eagles with the most ancient ones, those from the pre-Seljuk Iran of the dynasty of the Buyids (or Buwahids). In these textiles the fabulous bird figure alone or carrying a man in front of their breast. Eagles appear in a highly stylized manner and are accompanied by Kufic inscriptions.\(^{43}\) These silk textiles with eagles, were found together with other silks in tombs of an ancient necropolis in Iran (see below). These textiles were principally garments, shrouds, large cloths with funerary inscriptions. The latter were used as covers for coffins, according to a local Daylamite Shi’i practice.\(^{44}\) Although we ignore the identity of the people in the tombs, inscriptions on one of them which bore the name of the Buyid ruler Baha’ al-Daula (989-1012), led scholars to classify some silks as Buyid. The other silks were dated from the the late ‘Abbasid to late Seljuk period and include Egyptian and Syrian pieces. Although it was believed that these pieces were modern forgeries, it seems that: “... the invention of a new, complex iconography, epigraphically correct, the emulation of medieval fibres, dyes and weaves, for which modern technology could help little, and the simulation of fabric fatigue would demand skills and organization of no mean order ...”\(^{45}\)

The first textile that we present here (fig. 5, 6), a silk cloth with three pairs of double-headed eagles with human figures standing in front of them,

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\(^{42}\) See D. Jacoby, *Silk crosses the Mediterranean*, 55-79.


\(^{45}\) *Ibidem*, 157.
is now preserved in the Cleveland Museum of Art. This cloth, almost complete in length and breadth (extant section: 1, 70 and 0, 65 m respectively), is believed to have been found in the “commercial” excavation of a tomb tower at Naqqārakāna, Iran, in 1924-1925. This ancient necropolis is adjoining the sanctuary of Shahr Banu near Rayy (a few kilometres south of Teheran). This piece, attributed to late 10th or early 11th c. Persia was, without any doubt, a precious material destined to envelop the body of an important deceased person of royal origin. The motif of the double-headed eagle goes back to Summerian and Hittite times, whereas the theme of a human figure carried off by an eagle, is familiar in the West through the Ganymedes myth. E. Kühnel interpreted the image as an Iranian variant of the myth of Ganymedes, suggesting that depictions with human figures on which the eagles grasp quadrupeds in their talons were based on a misconstruction of the myth.

The elaborate and ornamental treatment of details in this silk is characteristic of a number of pieces thought to have come from this site.

The inscription at the top of the textile is a verse from a Dīwān dedicated by the poet Buhturi to the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), in order to congratulate him on an escape from drowning. It reads: ‘You remain the Amir of the Faithful and your preservation is for the epoch an event of excellent quality’.

From the point of iconography it is important to see the presence of a motif in the Sassanid Style on a fabric from late 10th or early 11th c. Buyid Iran. Although known from ancient times and in use during the medieval period, the design of the eagle with a human being in this textile seems to represent the theme of the “Ascent to Heaven”. We see a young man, with a royal head of hair as a halo, which is carried off into space by a great fantastic bird (in our case a double-headed eagle) that encloses him. According to some stylized details, this bird could be identified as the anqa (phoenix) or simurgh, which already in

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47 The weave is a lampas with warp-faced tabby ground and weft-faced tabby pattern. Warp and weft are of silk.

48 Hundreds of smaller silk fragments in the same burial ground were unearthed in the 1930’s, by the Ray Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston but they remain unpublished. An also unpublished report on some of these silks by Florence E. Day is on file in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

49 See above, n. 46.


51 G. Wiet, Soieries persanes, 55-63.

the Avesta (the primary collection of sacred texts of Zoroastrianism), as in the later Persian mystical epics, assumes so many symbolic functions, even becoming the emblem of the Holy Spirit. It is important to remember an episode in the Persian heroic epic *Shahnama*, (around 1020), namely, the abduction of Zāl, son of Sam, who was nurtured and reared by the great bird Simurgh. The spiritual meaning of this episode, as it was developed by the mystic poet Suhrawardi, is in full accord with the *hadith* (a saying or an act or tacit approval or disapproval ascribed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad), which could lead us to meditation on the symbolism of the image. In our case the *hadith* alludes to the green Bird whose breast offers a shelter in the other world to the martyrs, the spirits of the “witnesses of truth”. According to Simnani, one of the Iranian Sufi masters, this is an allusion to the formation of the “resurrection body”. Thus, the represented hieratic movement of being taken up to the Heaven, reveals the meaning of what G. Wiet called its “triumphant gravity”.

Each upper part of the eagles’s wings is occupied by a small bird, possibly a cock. The eagle has a spread tail and clutches quadrupeds in his claws. On the wing of each small bird (cock?) there is an inscription: “al-rahmah” [= mercy, pity]. On the upper part of the arms of the small standing figure the inscription reads: “al-barakah” [= blessing]. At top of textile, there is Kūfic inscription: “Thou hast remained Commander of the Believers, and indeed, Thy remaining is (a) handsome and good (thing) for the age”.

No doubt that this silk was wrapping the body of a deceased person, of royal origin.

Two other fragments of silk textiles, also from Buyid Iran, represent exactly the same theme of the Ascension.

The first fabric (fig. 7, 8), from the Cleveland Museum of Art (inv. no 53434) displays double-headed eagles with human figures, but this time without the presence of animals. Another smaller fragment of the same silk cloth, with four double-headed eagles in a row, is kept in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Collection. The biggest fragment displays eight brown double-headed eagles in ivory background, separated by “trees of life” in form of a candelabrum, united by horizontal bands with inscriptions. Each fabulous bird is represented frontally, carrying a winged creature. Its wings are almost square and ornamented with arabic inscriptions.

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57 Acquired by the F.H. Wade Fund.

58 D.G. Shepherd, *Three Textiles from Raiy*, 68, fig. 3.

Despite the general stylized design, the attention is focused on details, in particular the treatment of the heads with curved beaks, flowered ears and ornamented necks. No doubt that we have here a “transitional” style, where the motifs depend on the past, but their execution is new. For instance, the double-headed eagle carrying a human creature is a common theme in the ancient Art of the Middle-East.\(^{60}\) Moreover, the repeated compartments reflect the connection with the ancient Islamic textiles and the predominant “Sassanid” style, with a large repertory of fantastic motifs of birds and beasts figured in pairs or in medallions.

The Islamic contribution in the form of this fragment is the use of the arabic inscription as decorative element. The presence of the arabic calligraphy proves the fabrication of the textile in the islamic era. In the superior tablets we read: “Those of noble origin will behave properly” and on the wings: “Those who increase their energy will see their value increasing”.\(^{61}\)

The double-headed eagles of our silk remind us of the eagles of the Andalusian and Sicilian textiles of the epoch. No doubt that this silk was wrapping, as the previous one, also from Iran, the body of a deceased person of royal origin.

The fragment of the second silk (fig. 9), was found at Naqqāraḵāna, also in the province of Raiy (Iran). It is a compound cloth in two textures of white, alternating with a stripe with a green and white Kūfic inscription, displays the pattern of a prince carried by a large double-headed eagle.\(^{62}\) Three pieces of the same silk, are conserved in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Washington D.C.)\(^{63}\) and another one in Paris.\(^{64}\) The bigger fragment of the textile, once in a Private Collection,\(^{65}\) was published by M.-T. Picard-Schmitter.\(^{66}\)

The main pattern figures a double-headed eagle carrying, from a ring about its neck, a crowned personage, no doubt a prince, which is flanked by two winged lions. The great eagle is no doubt an imperial bird, in a heraldic position and in regal dignity. The eagle has a tail spread into a pedestal terminating in half-acanthus schrolls. The prince depends from the eagle’s neck by a circlet, which he grasps with his hands. Below there is a Kufic inscription. In a green stripe on the upper right part of the conserved piece is a white Naskhī inscription which reads: “And complete prosperity”.\(^{67}\) P. Ackerman suggested that “... the textile is supreme as an example of weaving ...”. She also attributed the silk

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\(^{60}\) D.G. Shepherd, *Three Textiles from Raiy*, 67.

\(^{61}\) *Idem*, 67.


\(^{63}\) In the Collection of Hon. And Mrs. Robert Woods.

\(^{64}\) Musée de Cluny, inv. no 21.872.

\(^{65}\) According to F. Day (Review of G. Wiet, *Soieries persanes*, 234), it “... was in 1947 in the possession of Rowland S. Read ...”.

\(^{66}\) M.-T. Picard-Schmitter, *Scènes d’Apothéose sur des Soieries*, 309- 312, fig. 2.

\(^{67}\) P. Ackerman, *Textiles of the Islamic Periods*, 2014, 2034.
– without any solid arguments – to the workshops of Kashan (Iran), but neither the design of the fragment, nor the double-woven part, characteristic for this sīlah, points to this attribution. The textile was generally attributed to 10th-11th c.

M.-T. Picard-Schmitter recognized in these three Buyid textiles with double-headed eagles and human figures the Theme of the Apotheosis.

We should not omit to point out that exactly the same motif, with all the features justifying reference to the hadith interpreted by Simnani, figures among the paintings adorning the “muslim” wooden ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily (1130-1140). Here the eagle is displayed, with a single head and not two. Whether or not the Palermo ceiling painters came from Fatimid Egypt or Syria, it is known that they were inspired by themes originating from Iran, and often, as in the present case, did no more than reproduce them. We should assume that representations of this royal emblem in Norman art of Sicily (as in the Norman Stanza in King Roger II’s palace in Palermo) about the second half of the 12th century were inspired by Islamic textiles.

As for Byzantium, a parallel to the theme of the Ascension in textiles can be found in the byzantine silk of around 1000, now in the Mainfränkisches Museum, Würzburg. It depicts the Celestial Journey of Alexander the Great, accompanied by two single-headed eagles. On the other hand and as we saw above, the eagle silk textile from the Cathedral of Auxerre (France), is the only one attributed to byzantine imperial workshops. Here we have single-headed eagles of rather “heraldic type”, without carrying any prey or human figures in their breast.

68 M.-T. Picard-Schmitter, Scènes d’Apothéose sur des Soieries, 309, n. 16.
Textiles with double-headed eagles attributed to Muslim Spain

Muslim Spain developed as a major center of production and manufacture of luxurious textiles, especially silks. The manufacture was strongly influenced by the Near East techniques and many of its fabrics imitated with certainty eastern types.74

Textiles with double-headed eagles attributed to Andalusí workshops were found in tombs, or wrapping the relics of Christian saints. The practice of wrapping the bodily remains of Christian saints in precious textiles, often imported from the eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, Spain, or Sicily, is well attested from at least the eleventh century onward.75 Textiles were found in royal tombs as mortuary vestments. Other scholars rejected the narrow interpretation of the exclusive use of these textiles as mortuary vestments and proposed that they were probably chosen “from amongst the wardrobe of the living”.76 Silk textiles were also used as ecclesiastical vestments or as church hangings and furnishings.77

It is worth noting that precious silks with double-headed eagles, which were believed to be Byzantine (fig. 4), should be finally attributed to the famous textile workshops of Muslim Spain. These andalusí workshops were placed under the direction and the control of the prince who claimed the paternity of the production. As a result, these textiles became the mark of prince’s prestige. The frequent presence on these objects of the name of the sultan, or the governor owner of the workshops, underline this idea of apperance or valorization of


75 See A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, 119-120.


77 A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, 120-126.
the ruler. Other workshops, which were private and of considerable size, were working (but not exclusively) for the governor, but they were situated outside the palace. The textiles of high quality were in majority destined for the commerce and for export. They were also private workshops of minor importance, individuals or organized in small corporations.

Most of Andalusí textiles are now preserved in Western Europe, in Christian contexts (ecclesiastical collections, treasuries and museums), as ecclesiastical vestments, in royal burials and as reliquary linings. They display double-headed eagles clutching lions or gazelles as prey in their claws. In the beaks of the eagles figure crescent-shaped objects with pendants (there is no satisfactory explanation for their meaning) and on their bodies are plant forms, which could be stylized trees of life (axis mundi), within pearled lozenges. No doubt that the union of the sacred symbols of the eagle and the lion would have had ambiguous but clearly powerful significance. Both symbols were associated with spiritual and earthly power. The the placement of the two images in a heraldic context would have denoted importance generally.

It is more than obvious that the type of symbolism of the Buyid Persian textiles with the abduction of Zāl (or the ascension of the soul, or the apotheosis as it was interpreted) is not found at all in the Islamic textiles of andalusian fabric. It seems that for a short time in the 12th century the emblem of the two-headed eagle was used in Spain, after the capital Toledo was incorporated in the Kingdom of Castile in 1085. It is worth noting that cloth pieces with two-headed eagles can be found also in the time of Alphonso VII of Castile (1126-1157), who unified the Spanish Kingdoms and was crowned “Emperor of All Spains” in 1135. These clothes are probably of Islamic origin and fabric and we can not exclude that they may have belonged to Almohad commandents (1060-1147) from which Toledo was captured.

For the Muslim artists of Spain, the iconography of the double-headed eagle as bird of prey has heraldic origins. According to D.G. Shepherd, the motif of the double-headed eagle with its prey: « ... can be traced in an unbroken line in Persian art back through Sassanian, Parthian and Achaemenean art to prehistoric times, where this motive is found in a painted pottery from Susa III ... ». King of birds and solar symbol, the eagle with its prey represents the victory of the eternal over the temporary. Thus the eagle represented also the divine aspect of the King who used these symbols and consequently it became an evident symbol of superiority with divine connotations.

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80 D.G. Shepherd, The Hispano-Islamic textiles in the Cooper Union Collection, 363.

One of the most important fragments of Andalusian eagle silks of eleventh-twelfth centuries is the one from the tomb of San (Saint) Bernardo Calbó (1233–1243), in the Cathedral of Vich, Cataluña, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, N. York, with heraldic double-headed eagles, with half-ex tended wings, clutching lions as prey (fig. 4).\(^{82}\) The presence of fragments of the same textile in other museums and collections,\(^{83}\) suggests that the original textile was very large. This “Cloth of the Eagles”, which belongs to the type of “pallia cum aquilis et bestiolis”, is a silk textile decorated with double-headed eagles. The colour of the ground resembles carmine, and on it the design is wrought in greenish black - probably green in original - relieved with yellow at intervals. Certain scholars in the past suggested that this textile was byzantine, while others attributed it to a hispano-moorish workshop and recognized byzantine influences.\(^{84}\) In any case, the ordnance of the motifs in rows and not any more within the perle-bordered roundels, indicates a new treatment of the ancient models, which places the production of this textile in the reign of Almoravids.\(^{85}\) The fragments of this textile are believed to be a part of the booty from the Christian reconquest campaigns against the Muslims of Spain that Bernardo Calbó led as bishop of Vich when he was accompanying the Spanish King Don Jayme the Conqueror in the conquest of Valencia (1238). The iconography of this textile consists of the motif of the double-headed eagle clutching lions as prey in its claws, within roundels in rows. The becs of the eagles have crescent-shaped objects with pendants. The bodies of the eagles have plant forms, like stylized Trees of Life, inscribed in lozenges made of pearls. In fact the iconography of the eagle clutching smaller animals represents the triumph of the spiritual over the temporal. According to D.G. Shepherd, the representation of eagles clutching lions in their claws is an indigenous variant of an old myth.\(^{86}\) It seems that the artist used the two solar symbols of the eagle and the lions to illustrate the spiritual nature of the struggle, with the king of birds vanquishing the king of Beasts.\(^{87}\) On the other hand A. Gonosová, suggested that this “…

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\(^{82}\) Weft-faced compound twill, Warp: undyed silk. Weft: red, dark green and yellow silk. Dimensions: 63 x 46 cm, no 41.92 (Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1941).

\(^{83}\) In: Vich, Cataluña, Museu Arqueològic-Artístic Episcopal (F. May, Silk Textiles of Spain, 46, fig. 31); Cleveland Museum of Art (D.G. Shepherd, The Third Silk from the Tomb of Saint Bernard Calvó, 13, 14); N. York (Cooper-Hewitt Museum, see Early Christian and Byzantine Art: An Exhibition Held at the Baltimore Museum of Art, Exhibition Catalogue, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore 1947, 153, no 774, pl. 114); Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung, see K. Otavsky-M. A.M. Salm, Mittelalterliche Textilien, 163-166, no 90.


\(^{85}\) D.G. Shepherd, The Third Silk from the Tomb of Saint Bernard Calvó, 14; M. Campos Kent, Figurative Hispano-Arabic Textiles, 115-123.

\(^{86}\) D.G. Shepherd, The Third Silk from the Tomb of Saint Bernard Calvó, 14.

\(^{87}\) M. Campos Kent, Figurative Hispano-Arabic Textiles, 116.
double-headed eagle silk is best understood as an eleventh-or-twelfth-century Hispano-Islamic adaptation of a Byzantine textile, which could have reached Spain in the late tenth or early eleventh century ...

Other Andalusian silks contain heraldic eagles with spread tails which are bordered by a row of small rosettes. A fragment of these 12th century silks with double-headed eagle, from the Cleveland Museum of Arts, comes from the reliquary of the early Christian martyr Santa Librada at the Spanish Cathedral of Sigüenza (fig. 10). In this fragment, a medallion contains a heraldic eagle with spread tail bordered by a row of eight small rosettes. The eagle wings are divided by a horizontal band bearing a short pseudo-Latin inscription. Each eagle’s shoulder is occupied by a small medallion which contains a single quadruped, similar to those in the frame of the large medallions. The eagle’s body is decorated with a pattern of hearts. The fabulous bird wears a necklace of pearls; a similar band of pearls appears at the juncture of body and tail. In his outstretched claws the fabulous bird holds two tablets on the right one of which is written usually the Arabic word Baraka (“blessing”), which appears in mirror image on the left. We should point out here that the eagle has two and not one heads (the left one is partly destroyed). Another fragment of the same textile is conserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 11). According to M. Campos Kent: “… The iconographic configuration of this textile would have had the clear spiritual significance of transcendence …”. It is obvious here that the power of the eagle and its spiritual value are a vehicle of afterlife. The eagle itself is the guide to paradise and its reinforced by the presence of gazelles, symbols of transcendence.

A fragment of an almost identical fragment of textile is found in Museu Arqueològic-Artístic Episcopal, Vich (fig. 12). The principal iconography consists of one double-headed eagle in heraldic pose, placed within interlaced medallions and richly decorated by polychrome bands. In this textile the arms of the eagle and its body are not decorated. The fabulous bird carries two tablets with Kufic inscriptions. The two textiles have certain stylistic elements in common: the design is an allover pattern and hardly any space is left undecorated. Moreover, a strange contradiction between the static, heraldic quality of the main pattern and the rather “grotesque” activity of the small prancing animals is particularly noteworthy.

88 A. Gonosová, Textile fragment with double-headed eagles, 414.
89 No 52.15, Lampas weave, silk and gold thread (dimensions: 36, 50 x 39, 55 cm), purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund 1952.15. See F. May, Silk Textiles of Spain, 39, 40 (pl. 25); M. Campos Kent, Figurative Hispano-Arabic Textiles, 110-114; A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving. AD 400 to AD 1200, Vienna 1997, 88 and 233.
90 See The Cleveland Museum of Art Handbook, Cleveland 1958, no 120.
91 D.G. Shepherd, The Third Silk from the Tomb of Saint Bernard Calvó, 9; E. J. Grube, Two Hispano-Islamic Silks, 78, 79.
92 Accession no 58.85, Height: 36, 50, width: 39, 55 cm.
93 M. Campos Kent, Figurative Hispano-Arabic Textiles, 111.
94 Ibidem, 111.
95 F. May, Silk Textiles of Spain, 46, fig. 31; E. J. Grube, Two Hispano-Islamic Silks, 78, 79.
Double-headed eagles appear also in a silk from the shrine of St. Anno (†1075), whose relics were transferred at the 12th century shrine at St. Servatius, Siegburg (fig. 13). The Islamic inscription on the silk is translated: “Praise to the birth of Allah”. P. Schmölz suggested a Spanish provenance for the textile, while S.M. Plötzek, proposed a Sicilian origin. A silk today lost, from a reliquary now at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin was ornamented with double-headed eagles. It was previously kept in Quedlinburg Cathedral, Berlin (fig. 14).

Another magnificent Andalusian silk of 12th century, now preserved in the Historical Textile Museum of Lyon, France (fig. 1) originates from a mantle covering a statue of Notre-Dame de la Victoire, in the Church of Thuir (the Department of Pyrénées orientales, France). It represents a double-headed eagle clasping captive gazelles in his talons. The breast has distinctive ogee foliate motifs occurring between rows of the design. Up until the sixteenth century there was a custom, which consisted of removing small pieces from the textile to give to women who were about to give birth. The remaining fragments show that the eagles were placed in horizontal rows and separated from each other by a vertical band of trees of life. Despite the absence of an inscription, there is every reason to believe that this silk piece was produced in the Palatine workshops of Muslim Spain around 12th century. In the Reyes de Taifas era, the same powerful stylization of the figures can be seen and the textiles all have the same colors: examples are on the altar of Vich (in Catalonia) and the silk interior of the reliquary of St. Emilianus in the monastery of Yuso (Logroño), also in Spain. However, the arrangement of motifs in rows, and not within beaded borders, indicates a break with old traditions, and suggests this textile was produced during the period of the reign of the Almoravid dynasty (1056-1147). A. Muthesius identified the two headed bird as a peacock.

In recent times, new textiles ornamented with double-headed eagles were discovered. No doubt that the most brilliant is the “big blue textile”, which was found in the tomb of St. Zoilo in Cataluña (fig. 15). This extraordinary silk


97 P. Schmölz, Der Siegburger Servatius Schatz, 28; S.M. Plötzek, Textilfragmente aus Siegburger Schreinen, 180-181 and fig. 22d.

98 O. von Falke, Kunstgeschichte, vol. 1, 116, Abb 185; F. May, Silk Textiles of Spain, 39-40, fig. 26; A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, 88-89, 231 and fig. 90B.


of blue color figures thirty-six heraldic white double-headed eagles alone, without clutching any prey. However, the position of the claws of each «hybrid» double-headed eagle reminds us the great eagles of the 11th century Buyid textiles carrying human figures in front of their breast.

The silk found in the tomb of Alfonso VII, King of Castile (1126-1157) in the Cathedral of Toledo (Espagne) represents another double-headed eagle.103 The Tunica (tunic) of Infante Don Garcia (†1145/46), son of the Spanish king Alfonso VII, was found in 1968 in his tomb in the Panteón Real of the Parochial Church of Oña in Burgos, Spain (fig. 16, 17).104 This cloth, which was worn for riding, is decorated with double-headed eagles clutching peacocks as prey in their claws.

Apart from these silks, they are other specimens with double-headed eagles with no inscriptions, but generally attributed either to “The East” or to Muslim Spain. A fragment of a silk textile (transformed into a seal pouch) with double-headed eagle, nearly similar to the one from the 12th c. silk fragments from Vich (fig. 12), is conserved in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Canterbury (inv. no N15, fig. 18).105 A. Muthesius ascribed the fragment to Muslim Spain, but she dated it – in our opinion erroneously - to the 13th century.106

A fragment of a silk with double-headed eagles was recorded as early as 1931, but is still little-known (fig. 19).107 Woven in green on a crimson ground, it bears the pattern of double-headed eagle holding rings in its beaks, set in a frame of interlaced circles from which the interlaced portions have been deleted. A fragment of the same textile is now at Dumbarton Oaks Collection (fig. 20).108

In Kunstmuseum, Berlin is preserved a fragment of a green silk textile with double-headed eagle (fig. 23).109 Once it belonged to the same silk that was found in the Church of Saint-Front in Perigord (France, fig. 22). The figures are golden and each eagle is clutching two lions in its claws. A bigger fragment of the textile is preserved in Lyon, Musée des Tissus Historiques.110

102 This term was used by Mrs M. Ali de Unzaga.
103 M. Gomez-Moreno, Ars Hispaniae: Historia universal des arts Hispanico, Madrid 1951, 350-351, fig. 408b.
106 Ibidem, 102.
108 Inv. no BZ1933.46.
109 Inv. no. 99, 103 (dimensions: 22 x 33 cm). See O. von Falke, Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei, fig. 141; M.-T. Picard-Schmitter, Scènes d’Apothéose sur des Soieries, 314 (fig. 4), 315.
110 Inv. no 25080 (acquired in 1889), dimensions: around 30 x 50 cm. See: R. Cox,
The piece, identical to one more textile found in France (fig. 21), was dated to the second half of the 12th c. and was attributed to a workshop of Muslim Spain or Sicily.

A fragment of a brocaded silk with a double-headed eagle (fig. 24, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art) was found in 1606 in the altar of the Benedictine abbey church of St. Peter in Salzburg. This silk and gold reddish textile was among other precious textiles discovered in the tomb of St. Amandus in the same church. The tomb was rebuilt in the time of Abbot Balderich (1125-1147), so we must assume that the silk wrapped the relics of St. Amandus at that time. The fragment, dated to the 11th-12th c., presents a double-headed eagle (its heads are missing), which attacks two panthers with dragon-head tails enclosed within two half-circles that terminate in dragon-heads. The style and iconography of the textile could point toward an origin to the Islamic East. A second fragment of the same silk, this time with a complete double-headed eagle (fig. 25, 26), is reconstructed and kept in Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung, Berne.

There are also 12th c. vestments or textiles which were attributed to Norman Sicily. A figure of double-headed eagle, among other animal and bird motifs is decorating the Chasuble of St. Bernulphus, now in the Utrecht Museum Catharijneconvent (fig. 27). This ecclesiastical vestment is considered of Sicilian fabric. A double-headed eagle clutching quadrupeds (probably lions) in its claws is painted in the wooden ceiling of Cappela Palatina in Palermo (fig. 29, 12th c.). No doubt that this synthesis copied the decoration of a contemporary textile.


111 The fragment (compound twill, brocaded, dimensions: 46. 4 x 54. 6 cm) was in the hands of Mrs Paul Mallon (Paris).


115 U. Monneret de Villard, Le pitture musulmane, fig. 5. See also P. Androudis, Les premières apparitions attestées, 214 (fig. 7), 216.
Double-headed eagles are also found in frescoes imitating textiles painted in 12th century Romanesque churches of France. An exemple is to be found in the Church of Saint-Hilaire d’Asnières-sur-Vègre (fig. 28). In the same period the motif of the double-headed eagle is to be found in other creations of Western Art. Thus we find it in the Initial Q to Psalm 51, f. 23r Auct Bible. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. E. The eagle is represented with spread tail and, holding leaves by its beaks (fig. 30). Later on, double-headed eagles appear in textiles attributed to Seljuk Anatolia (13th century), as well as in Mamluk Egypt and Mongol rulers.

Conclusion

A comparison of the different changes which the motif of double-headed eagle underwent while traveling along the Mediterranean shores before being painted or sculpted in Romanesque churches of XII-XIII centuries in France is very important. All the above-mentioned syntheses with double-headed eagles in medieval textiles of “islamic” fabric have special symbolic meanings, which differ totally from Buyid Iran to Muslim Spain and show the enormous success of the motif in medieval art.

As a powerful and assertive bird with solar implications, the eagle was an obvious symbol of superiority with divine connotations. Buyid textiles with double-headed eagles seem to represent Scenes of Apotheosis or a variant of the ancient myth of Ganymedes. Despite the fact that they were found in royal tombs, it is not known whether they were woven expressly as funerary trappings, or they were selected from the belongings of the deceased.

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117 P. Androudis, Les premières apparitions attestées, 220 (fig. 16) and 222. The main phase of the church was built in 11th century.


119 Like the silk cloth from the shrine of Saint Apollinarius, in the church of Saint Gervatius in Siegburg, now preserved in Staatlichen Museen, Berlin (no.81.475). It is worth noting that the double-headed eagle has heraldic significance for the Seljuks of Rum and appears on their buildings at Konya and elsewhere. See P. Androudis, “Origines et symbolique de l’aigle bicéphale des Turcs Seldjoukides et Artuqides de l’Asie Mineure (Anatolie)”, Βυζαντιακά 19 (1999), 311-345.

120 See for instance the stunning brown and ivory striped silk with double-headed eagles from Egypt which bears the elegant naskh inscription “Glory to our master the sultan al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad”. This piece is attributed to the Rasulid sultan Mu’ayyad Dāvād (1297-1321). See L. W. Mackie, “Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations”, Muqarnas 2 (1984), 131 (pl. 6) and 138-139.

As for Spain, the Christians who placed the Muslim textiles with double-headed eagles in heraldic postures, accompanied by gazelles, harpies, lions and plants in form of Tree of Life, the multifaceted Islamic program of Salvation of the Soul would have many common elements with the Christian traditions of representation. It is important to remind that Saint John is represented by the eagle transporting the soul to Heaven. Gazelles were symbols of the soul for Christians and the harpies were identified with matters of the afterlife. Moreover, this iconography was not “hostile”, but “comprehensible” and “admitted” for both religions. Whether these precious silks came north originally by purchase, as diplomatic gift, as tribute, or as loot is often difficult to determine.

Fig. 1 Musée historique des tissus de Lyon.
Fragment of Andalusian silk with double-headed eagle, 12th century
Сл. 1 Историјски музеј текстила у Лиону, фрагмент андалузијске свиле са двоглавим орлом, 12. век

Fig. 2 Archaeological Museum of Teheran (Iran). Dish from Sassanian Iran with double-headed eagle (Photograph by A. Davey)
Сл. 2 Археолошки музеј у Техерану (Иран). Посуда из периода сасанидског Ирана са представом двоглавог орла (фото: А. Дејви)

Fig. 3 Detail of a fresco with double-headed eagle. Qyzil, Chinese Turkestan (7th-9th century A.D)
Сл. 3 Детаљ фреске са представом двоглавог орла. Кизил, Кинески Туркистан (7-9 век н. е.)
Fig. 4 Silk textile with double-headed eagle from the tomb of San Bernardo de Calbó (†1243), Cathedral of Vich, Cataluña

Сл. 4 Свила са мотивом двоглавог орла из гробнице у Сан Бернардо де Калбо Calbó (†1243), Вих катедрала, Каталонија

Fig. 5 Silk textile with three pairs of double-headed eagles carrying human figures (Cleveland Museum of Art, no.62.264)

Сл. 5 Свила са три пара двоглавих орлова који носе људске фигуре (Музеј уметности у Кливленду, бр.62.264)

Fig. 6 Detail of fig. 5 (P. Androudis)

Сл. 6 Детаљ слике 5 (Цртеж: П. Андрудис)
Fig. 7 Silk cloth with double-headed eagles (Cleveland Museum of Art, no 53434)

Сл. 7 Свилена тканина са двоглавим орловима (Музеј уметности у Кливленду, бр. 53434)

Fig. 8 Detail of fig. 7 (P. Androudis)

Сл. 8 Детаљ слике 7 (цртеж: П. Андрудис)

Fig. 9 Fragment of textile. “Ascension” with double-headed eagle and prince. (Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no 30.1)

Сл. 9 Фрагмент текстила “Вазнесење” са двоглавим орловима и принцем (Колекција Дамбертон Оакс, бр. 30.1)

Fig. 10 Fragment of Andalusian textile with double-headed eagle from the reliquary of Santa Librada at the Cathedral of Sigüenza, Cleveland Museum of Art

Сл. 10 Фрагмент андалузијског текстила са мотивом двоглавог орла из реликвијара Санта Либрада у катедрали Сигуенза, Музеј уметности у Кливленду
Fig. 11: Fragment of the same Andalusian textile with double-headed eagle. Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 12: Fragment of a similar textile with double-headed eagles. Museu Episcopal, Vich

Fig. 13: A silk textile with double-headed eagles from the shrine of St. Anno, now in Siegburg

Fig. 14: Now lost silk fragment with double-headed eagle, formerly kept in Quedlinburg Cathedral, Berlin (O. von Falke)
Fig. 15 The “big blue textile” with double-headed eagles found in the tomb of St. Zoilo in Cataluña

Fig. 16 Tunica (tunic) with double-headed eagles of Infante Don Garcia (†1145/46), son of the Spanish emperor Alfonso VII, found in his tomb in the Parochial Church of Oña in Burgos (Spain)

Fig. 17 Detail of the tunica of Infante Don Garcia with double-headed eagles

Fig. 18 Fragment of a silk textile (in form of a pouch) with double-headed eagle (Canterbury Cathedral Treasure).
Fig. 19 Fragment of a silk textile with double-headed eagle (Indjoudjian)

Сл. 19 Фрагмент свиле са двоглавим орлом (Инђуђијан колекција)

Fig. 20 A fragment of the same textile. Dumbarton Oaks Collection.

Сл. 20 Фрагмент истог текстила. Колекција Дамбартон Оакс.

Fig. 21 Textile with double-headed eagles from the grand-suaire of Saint-Front Perigord

Сл. 21 Текстил са двоглавим орловима из покрова Св. Перигоа

Fig. 22 Spain, 12th cent. Silk with double-headed eagles. Lyon, Musée des Tissus

Сл. 22 Шпанија, 12в.век. Свила са двоглавим орловима, Лион, Музеј текстила

Fig. 23 The same textile. Reconstruction (O. von Falke)

Сл. 23 Исти текстил, реконструкција (О. вон Фалке)
Fig. 24 Fragment of textile with double-headed eagle found in the tomb of St. Amandus (Cleveland Museum of Art)

Сл. 24. Фрагмент текстила са двоглавим орлом пронађеним у гробници Св. Амандија (Музеј уметности у Кливленду)

Fig. 25 Fragment of the same textile (Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg)

Сл. 25. Фрагмент истог текстила (Абег Стифтунг, Ригисберг)

Fig. 26 Detail of fig. 25: Double-Headed eagle

Сл. 26. Детаљ сл 25: мотив двоглавог орла

Fig. 27 Utrecht Museum Catharijneconvent. Double-Headed eagle (12th c.) from the decoration of the chasuble of St. Bernulphus

Сл. 27. Утрехтски музей, опатија Катаријн, двоглави орао (12. век) из декорације одежде Св. Бернулфија
Fig. 28 Church of Saint-Hilaire d’Asnières-sur-Vègre (France). Detail of a mural painting of 12th century with double-headed eagle.

Fig. 29 Wooden ceiling of Capella Palatina in Palermo. Double-headed eagle (12th c.) with later repaints

Fig. 30 Initial Q with double-headed eagle. From a manuscript (Bodleian Library)