

THE PAINTINGS IN THE HALL OF THE KINGS OF THE ALHAMBRA: VEGETAL-ASTRAL PARADISE, PORTRAIT AU VIF AND CHIVALRIC VIRTUE¹

LAS PINTURAS DE LA SALA DE LOS REYES DE LA
ALHAMBRA: PARAÍSO VEGETAL-ASTRAL, RETRATO AU
VIF Y VIRTUD CABALLERESCA

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ABSTRACT This work delves into the paintings in the Hall of Kings at the Palace of the Lions in the Alhambra to try to address a global analysis of them in their palatine context. Regarding its symbolism, a reading related to the building is proposed as Garden of Joy that alludes to the Muslim Paradise in its vegetal-hedonistic and astral-mystical connotations, presided over by the resplendent astral bodies of Muhammad V and his ancestors. We propose that this symbolism links the Nasrid poetic tradition with the classical *topos* on the conversion of the virtuous person into *sidus*. This conjunction is also traced in the panorama of artistic hybridization between Granada and Castile, based on several examples in Toledo and Burgos.

On the other hand, the painting of the Nasrid kings is analyzed from the typological and semantic point of view. To this end, its relationship with the medieval series of royal portraits in the Hispanic kingdoms –of which it constitutes its oldest preserved example– and its relationship with the concept of *au vif* portrait (alive-like portrait) –according to Lalaing’s description of 1502– are addressed. Parallels between the visual images in the Hall of Kings and the literary images present in the medieval Hispanic chivalric tradition –synthesized in the *Amadís de Gaula* and the *Tirant lo Blanc*– are pointed out and discussed. Finally, this paper reflects on the function of the series of portraits of Nasrid kings and the chivalric themes of the paintings and their perception by the audiences of the time.

KEY WORDS Iconography, cultural hybridity, portrait series, chivalric romance, Nasrid art.

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RESUMEN Por otro lado, se analiza la pintura de los reyes nazaríes desde el punto de vista tipológico y semántico. Para ello se aborda su relación con las series medievales de retratos regios en los reinos hispanos –de las cuales constituye su ejemplo más antiguo conservado– y su vinculación con el concepto de retrato *au vif* o al natural según la descripción de Lalaing de 1502. Asimismo, se señalan y comentan paralelismos entre las imágenes visuales de la Sala de los Reyes y las imágenes literarias presentes en la tradición caballerescas medieval hispana sintetizada en el *Amadís de Gaula* y en el *Tirant lo Blanc*. Finalmente, se reflexiona sobre la función de la serie de retratos de reyes nazaríes y los temas caballerescos de las pinturas, así como su percepción por las audiencias de la época.

PALABRAS CLAVE Iconografía, hibridación cultural, serie de retratos, libros de caballerías, arte nazarí.

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INTRODUCTION: THE PALACE AND ITS ENIGMAS

Although there is still no consensus on the overall symbolic interpretation of the Palace of the Lions at the Alhambra in Granada, the hypotheses put forward to date revolve around two major conventions of Islamic culture in general and Nasrid architecture and epigraphy in particular. Firstly, the palace's relationship with the garden as a paradise has been explored, starting with the name used by Yūsuf III in the presentation of Ibn Zamrak's poem in the Hall of Two Sisters, in the poet's *diwān*, where it is called the "Garden of Delights (al-Riyāḍ al-Sa'īd). The monument's epigraphy, fountains and streams of water and the plant motifs in its plasterwork thus create this architectural and literary metaphor, which is characterised by its sacred and meaningful semantics².

The second major convention analysed when looking at the symbolism of the Palace of the Lions is its astral component. In this respect, a cosmic, sidereal or astral interpretation of the *muqarnas* vaults and the treatment of light throughout the building is generally adopted, which is also in line with Ibn Zamrak's inscriptions. Through the conjoining of these elements, the palace offered an astral image of the sovereign, who projects light and eternal happiness to his people³. Other authors have gone further, linking *muqarnas* in general with the atomisation and accidentality of al-Baqillani, emphasising their cosmic symbolism, while linking it more specifically to commemoration and the funerary sphere⁴. The Palace of Lions has thus been seen as a madrasa, *zawiya*, and tomb of Muhammad V⁵, or at least a place dedicated to the prince's knowledge and virtue⁶. Some authors

have accepted this theory in part, in particular the hypothesis surrounding the use of the Hall of Kings as a library⁷ or at the very least as a "place of rest and social gatherings"⁸.

Regardless of the various hypotheses as to the original function of the Palace of the Lions, it is clear that it was intended to exalt Muhammad V and his dynasty through the conventions of the paradisiac garden and astral or cosmic components. Our work aims to answer the question of how the Palace of the Lions coherently brought together the plant and astral components that historiographers have noted to date. In particular, we will seek to understand how the paintings on leather in the Hall of Kings contributed to its cohesion and levels of meaning.

PAINTINGS OF CHIVALRIC THEMES AROUND COURTLY LOVE

The two paintings on leather with chivalric content in the side bedchambers of the Hall of Kings have been interpreted through various levels of reading that have to do with mirrors for princes and the space's possible use as a library⁹ (Il. 1 and 2). It has also been proposed that its themes, linked to the chivalric conventions of courtly love, are related to Sufism as a path of love leading to Allah, practised at the court of Muhammad V and commented upon by Ibn al-Khatib¹⁰. Vallejo Naranjo has studied the Nasrid literary tradition with which these chivalric scenes are in dialogue, from the treatise on chivalry by Muhammad ibn Ridwan ibn Arqam of Guadix (d. 1259)

2 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. La Alhambra como lugar paradisiaco en el imaginario árabe. In: *Boletín de Arte-UMA*, 2017, nº 38, pp. 45-60, at pp. 52-55. PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *Los códigos de utopía de la Alhambra de Granada*. Granada: Diputación Provincial, 1990, pp. 182-199.

3 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. Estéticas de la luz, el tiempo y la apariencia en la arquitectura áulica andalusí. In: BORRÁS GUALIS, Gonzalo Máximo; CABAÑERO SUBIZA, Bernabé (coord.). *La aljafería y el arte del islam occidental en el siglo XI*. Actas del seminario internacional (Zaragoza, 1-3 December 2004). Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2012, pp. 135-176, en pp. 154-160. PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *The codes of utopia...* op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 112-117.

4 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. La cúpula de mocárabes y el Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra. In: *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 2000, nº 12, pp. 9-24.

5 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: ¿Madrasa zawiya y tumba de Muhammad V? Estudio para un debate. In: *Al-Qantara*, 2001, nº 22.1, pp. 77-120.

6 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El Palacio de los Leones: "Al-Riyāḍ Al-Sa'īd", el Jardín Feliz del Conocimiento: arte y visión islámica de la Creación. In: PARADA LÓPEZ DE CORSELAS, Manuel (ed.). *Domus Hispanica. El Real Colegio de España y el cardenal Gil de Albornoz en la Historia del Arte*. Bologna:

Bononia University Press, 2014, pp. 195-210. RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: espacio de virtud del príncipe. In: GIESE, Francine; VARELA BRAGA, Ariane (ed.). *The Power of Symbols: The Alhambra in a Global Perspective*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 71-82. RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. Ciencia y virtud en el palacio bajomedieval: el Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra. In: USCATESCU, Alexandra; GONZÁLEZ HERNANDO, Irene (ed.). *En busca del saber: arte y ciencia en el Mediterráneo medieval*. Madrid: Ediciones Complutense, 2018, pp. 33-47.

7 ROBINSON, Cynthia. Arthur in the Alhambra? Narrative and Nasrid Courtly Self-Fashioning in the Hall of Justice Ceiling Paintings. In: ROBINSON Cynthia; PINET, Simone (ed.). *Courting the Alhambra: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to the Hall of Justice Ceilings*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 12-46. ECHEVARRÍA, Ana. Painting Politics in the Alhambra. In: ROBINSON, Cynthia; PINET, Simone (ed.). *Courting the Alhambra: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to the Hall of Justice Ceilings*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 47-66.

8 Alhambra y Generalife. Edificios y lugares. Sala de los Reyes. <https://www.alhambra-patronato.es/edificios-lugares/sala-de-los-reyes> [accessed 27/10/2021].

9 ECHEVARRÍA, Ana. Painting Politics... op. cit. (no. 6), pp. 49, 52, 53, 55, 56.

10 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El Palacio de los Leones: "Al-Riyāḍ Al-Sa'īd"... op. cit. (no. 5), pp. 198-199. RALLO GRUSS, Carmen. El jardín pintado: las pinturas de la Sala de los Reyes del Cuarto de los Leones. In: *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*. 2020, nº 49, pp. 131-147, p. 147.



II. 1. Painting from the left bedchamber of the Hall of Kings in the Alhambra. Board of Trustees of the Alhambra and the Generalife.



II. 2. Painting from the right bedchamber of the Hall of Kings in the Alhambra. Board of Trustees of the Alhambra and the Generalife.

entitled *El concierto para exhaustivamente tratar de lo que con los caballos se puede relacionar*, dedicated to Muhammad I (1237-1273) and recast in the second reign of Muhammad V between 1369 and 1390, in *El Culmen beneficioso y provisor de lo que no contiene el "Concierto" [of Ibn Arqm] y reparación de los temas que no trae a colación*, dedicated to the monarch by Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn Yuzayy. He also cites other works dedicated to Muhammad V, such as Ibn Hudayl's *Regalo de los espíritus y blasón de los andalusíes*, recast in the *Gala de caballeros, blasón de paladines*, dedicated to Muhammad VII. Finally, the author connects these interests with the themes of courtly love present in the frontier roman-

ce, chivalric treatises, and mirrors for princes, which sought to guide the perfect knight to a "virtuous way of life in the quest for spiritual perfection", in accordance with the "cultured and cosmopolitan tastes and modes of political representation of Muhammad V", expressed through "chivalric pageant as courtly apotheosis" and as a means of expression of the Nasrid monarchy in the diplomatic sphere".

11 VALLEJO NARANJO, Carmen. Consideraciones iconográficas sobre las pinturas de la Sala de los Reyes de la Alhambra de Granada. In: *Eikón / Imago*, 2014, nº 5.1, pp. 29-74, at pp. 36-40.

The military, courtly love, and hunting scenes in these paintings, which are set in a sort of eternal spring, were again related to the Garden of Delights and represented Paradise, an idea that extends to the water flowing through the channels and fountains of the Palace of the Lions, which find their parallel in the Fountain of Life or Love depicted in the paintings¹². Ruiz Souza emphasises the water symbolism of the zigzags that run down from the *muqarnas* vaults and decorate the capitals and the Fountain of the Lions¹³. Rallo stresses the relationship with the *Rauda* or royal cemetery, the tombstones of which bore epitaphs linked to the same concepts of a paradisiac garden populated with plants and flowers and through which water flowed¹⁴.

In short, according to the latest studies on these paintings, they are thought to be connected to the Palace of the Lions through the symbolism of the paradisiac garden and its streams of water. The ensemble, which is virtuous and sapiential in nature, linked the model of both pious and amatory behaviour reflected in matters of courtly love, which is present in the literature of the Christian kingdoms and in the Nasrid *adab*. What connection might these models of behaviour and the paradise-like orchard setting have with the painting in the central bedchamber of the Hall of Kings?

THE PAINTING OF THE NASRID KINGS

The painting on leather in the central bedchamber of the Hall of Kings has generally been analysed as a separate entity and not in relation to the Palace of the Lions as a whole (Il. 3). The identification of its ten seated figures is supported by three important 16th-century accounts. In Antoine de Lalaing's account of Philip the Handsome's visit to the Alhambra on 20 September 1502, the painting is described as the saga of Nasrid kings since ancient times: "*Au planchier d'icelle salle sont peintes au vif tous les roys de Grenade depuis long tempz*"¹⁵. Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (1503/4-1575) speaks of the "ten kings [...]" whose portraits can be seen in a room; some of them known in our time by the elders of the land¹⁶. Finally, Gonzalo Argote de Molina (1549-1596) ci-

tes the coats of arms of the band "as they are seen today in the royal palace of the Alhambra, in the room of the portraits of the Moorish kings"¹⁷. The first two accounts relating to the painting are especially relevant, as the oral tradition of the Nasrid period was still alive when they were written. Similarly, although the area to which they refer began to be known as the Hall of Justice from the 17th century onwards, which led to the kings being identified with wise men, it was still known as the Hall of Kings during the 18th and 19th centuries¹⁸.

Scholars such as Eguilaz, Gómez-Moreno and Tormo reiterated that the figures depicted in the central painting are kings¹⁹. Contrary to Rafael Contreras' identification of these characters as sages, Pavón Maldonado stated that they are either kings or Nasrid warrior nobles, real or fictitious²⁰. Bermúdez Pareja stated that the painting does indeed depict a "meeting" of Nasrid kings – a view held by Dodds²¹ – and left open the possibility that they were "dignitaries of the court of Granada and doctors of the Law"²². Pursuing this idea, Ruiz Souza has proposed on several occasions that they were nine wise men in conversation with Muhammad V, in the manner of *maylis*, a useful interpretation that supports his theory as to the Palace of the Lions' function as a madrasa, *zawiya* and tomb of Muhammad V²³. It has also been suggested that the figures were all Nasrid kings who were knights of the Order of the Band²⁴, or that the kings were talking about the "chivalric

12 RALLO GRUSS, Carmen. El jardín pintado... op. cit. (no. 9), pp. 138-140.

13 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: espacio de virtud... op. cit. (no. 5), pp. 74-79.

14 RALLO GRUSS, Carmen. El jardín pintado... op. cit. (no. 9), pp. 146-147.

15 GACHARD, Louis Prosper. *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*. Brussels: F. Hayez, 1876, vol. 1. p. 206.

16 HURTADO DE MENDOZA, Diego. *Guerra de Granada hecha por el rey de España don Felipe II contra los moriscos de aquel reino, sus rebeldes*. Lisbon: Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, 1627, fol. 4r

17 ARGOTE DE MOLINA, Gonzalo. *Nobleza de Andalucía*. Jaén: Francisco López Vizcaíno, 1866, p. 202.

18 LAFUENTE ALCÁNTARA, Miguel. *Historia de Granada, comprendiendo la de sus cuatro provincias Almería, Jaén, Granada y Málaga desde remotos tiempos hasta nuestros días*. Granada: Imprenta y librería de Sanz, vol. III, 1845, p. 153.

19 GÓMEZ-MORENO GONZÁLEZ, Manuel. *Guía de Granada*. Granada: Indalecio Ventura, 1892, p. 74. EGUILAZ YANGUAS, Leopoldo de. *Étude sur les peintures de l'Alhambra*. Granada: Imp. y Lib. de la Vda. E Hijo de P.V. Sabatel, 1896, pp. 14-45; TORMO MONZÓ, Elías. *Las viejas series icónicas de los reyes de España*. Madrid: Blass y Cía, 1916, p. 44.

20 PAVÓN MALDONADO, Basilio. Escudos y reyes en el Cuarto de los Leones de la Alhambra. In: *Al-Andalus*, 1970, n° 35.1, pp. 179-197, in p. 193.

21 DODDS, Jerrilynn D. The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia of the Alhambra: Iconography and Iconology. In: *Art Bulletin*, 1979, n° 61.2, pp. 186-197, in p. 195.

22 BERMÚDEZ PAREJA, Jesús. *Pinturas sobre piel en la Alhambra de Granada*. Granada: Board of Trustees of the Alhambra and the Generalife, 1987 (1ª ed. 1974), p. 29.

23 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. El Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: espacio de virtud... op. cit. (no. 5), pp. 79-80.

24 ALBARRACÍN NAVARRO, Joaquina. Las pinturas de la cúpula elipsoide central de la Sala de los Reyes en la Alhambra. In: *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*, 2005, n° 41, pp. 109-117, in p. 111.



Il. 3. Painting from the central bedchamber of the Hall of Kings in the Alhambra. Paul Van Der Werf, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pavdw/49673894858>

exercises" depicted in the paintings in the outer rooms, which "were the subject par excellence of courtly debate and erudition, much as football is today"²⁵. Finally, Echevarría offers three alternative possibilities. Given that the ten characters are depicted on an equal footing, it could be a meeting of the viziers (*al-muwāzāt/al-muwāzarāt*), the royal council (*maḥwara*), or the *arraíces* (other members of the Nasrid family who had military powers)²⁶. However, due to the formal and symbolic characteristics of this artwork, its relationship with the rest of the Palace of the Lions – including the epigraphy, which alludes to Muhammad V, his ancestors and the dynasty, but not to other members of the court – and its reception by 16th-century viewers familiar with the Nasrid oral tradition, we believe it more likely that it is a series of kings.

The one king facing the viewer, seated in a central position and dressed in green, has repeatedly been identified with Muhammad V, the man who built the Palace of the Lions. However, doubts have arisen as to the chronology of the band's two large coats of arms, which feature dragons but not the Nasrid motto. We find Pavón Maldonado's theory that the coats of arms belong to the reign of Muhammad V convincing²⁷. With

regard to the dating of the paintings, Bernis Madrazo's analysis of the clothing is the strongest argument put forward to date. This author identifies aspects of Nasrid and Castilian fashion – which changed rapidly in the visual culture of the time – from around 1380²⁸.

The problem lies in who the other nine characters are, a question addressed by Rallo²⁹. Rallo argues that they are Nasrid kings for several reasons: they wear swords and turbans – the sword would not make sense if the figures were sages or jurists; their number corresponds to the legitimate rulers and usurpers of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada up to Muhammad V's time – as they were all counted in order of succession; the presence of the founder of the dynasty – Alhamar the Red, dressed in the same colour, a characteristic of his; the presence below them of Nasrid coats of arms – red, without the sash; and, finally, the lost inscription above the entrance arch and alluding to the Nasrid saga: "Eterno poder e imperecedera gloria sea para la dinastía del dueño de este palacio" ("Eternal power and everlasting glory to the dynasty of the owner of this palace")³⁰. We believe that these arguments, together with the oral tradition echoed in 16th-century sources, amount to a solid interpretative paradigm.

25 VALLEJO NARANJO, Carmen. Consideraciones iconográficas... op. cit. (n. 10), p. 70.

26 ECHEVARRÍA, Ana. Painting Politics... op. cit. (no. 6), p. 55.

27 This could be an alternative to the traditional gules Nasrid coat of arms – which is repeated in the lower part of the painting – and the inclusion of the Castilian gold band by Muhammad V and featuring the Arabic motto "Allah alone is victorious". PAVÓN MALDONADO, Basilio. Escudos y reyes... op. cit. (no. 19), pp. 183-192. PAVÓN MALDONADO, Basilio. Notas sobre el escudo de la Orden de la Banda en los palacios de don Pedro y de Muhammad V. En: *Al-Andalus*, 1972, n.º 37.1, pp. 229-232.

28 BERNIS MADRAZO, Carmen. Las pinturas de los Reyes de La Alhambra. In: *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*, 1982, n.º 18, pp. 21-49.

29 RALLO GRUSS, Carmen. 'En el mundo nosotros debemos nuestra fortuna a nuestras espadas', Muhammad V promotor de las pinturas de la Sala de los Reyes en la Alhambra. In: GIESE, Francine; VARELA BRAGA, Ariane (ed.). *The Power of Symbols: The Alhambra in a Global Perspective*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 23-36, at pp. 28-33.

30 CALVERT, Albert F. *The Alhambra*. London: Georges Philip & Son, 1904, p. 38.

Rallo also relates the painting of the kings to surah 64:9 of the Koran:

“The day He will gather you all for the Day of Gathering. And whoever has faith in Allah and acts righteously, He shall absolve them of their sins and admit them into gardens in which streams flow, where they shall stay forever. That is the ultimate triumph!”

According to Rallo, this message would be complemented by that of surah 9:100, which refers specifically to the *ansār* or *Nasr*, from whom the Nasrids were descended³¹:

“... The first of the emigrants and the helpers (*ansār*) and those who followed them in goodness. Allah will be pleased with them and they will be pleased with Him and He has prepared for them gardens with streams of water. There they will stay forever. That is their great triumph.”

The painting of the kings thus linked the image of the Nasrid dynasty – much in the same way of a portrait gallery – with the ultimate destiny of its members in Paradise, from which they would be offered to us as an everlasting model of virtue. Their images would therefore act as a reminder and as an example for future generations, who would be responsible for perpetuating the legacy of the Nasrid dynasty, as the desire was for “eternal power and everlasting glory [...] for the dynasty of the owner of this palace”.

LINKING THE PLANT PARADISE WITH THE ASTRAL PARADISE IN THE PALACE OF THE LIONS

We shall now bring together the vegetal, astral, dynastic and eschatological concepts already discussed in this paper in an effort to determine the meaning of the paintings in the Hall of Kings in the palace complex. The context here is the same as in which the astral and orchard tropes are used – along with the nuptial theme – to exalt the Nasrid monarchs³², particularly the astral metaphor encapsulated in the Hall of the Two Sisters and the image of Paradise in the Courtyard of the Lions itself³³. The paintings in the Hall of Kings embody these two

ways of understanding Paradise in Islam: “one more sensory and earthly, Koranic; and the other more spiritual, in which supreme joy results from beatific contemplation of divine light³⁴.” We believe that the scenes of maidens in towers, encounters by the fountain in the garden of love, tournaments and other chivalric themes would be part of this vegetal/hedonistic idea and play their part in complementing the nuptial metaphor so evident in the Alhambra, which culminates in the mystical union of the triumphant soul of the knight with the lady at the centre point of the cosmos, the most marvellous palace, which is also a starry sky.

In delving deeper into this astral/mystical connotation, we would like to point out several key elements in the painting of the kings that have received less attention. The first of these is the gold background, which recalls the same resource used in Christian painting as a setting for supernatural scenes, be they miraculous events, other-worldly scenarios, or environments linked to divinity³⁵. This resource gives rise to a dazzling composition based on the use of highly idealised light, which transmutes physical space into supernatural space. This treatment contrasts sharply with the landscape or orchard backgrounds used in the chivalry-themed paintings in the side rooms. On the other hand, the characterisation of the rulers, dressed in bright colours and in white, with clear, shining faces, corresponds to the idealised image offered by the Koran when it refers to the “white, luminous faces of the blessed ones for whom the eternal happiness of Paradise awaits”³⁶.

The third element of interest to us is the line of stars that runs through the centre of the composition, which we believe can be identified with the Milky Way, and which joins the two large Nasrid shields with band and supported by lions. This way of linking the beginning and end of the constellation – as a metonymy of the cosmos or the astral world – with the two great Nasrid dynastic coats of arms in the time of Muhammad V could be linked to the desire for eternal glory expressed in the inscription at the entrance to this room. The presence of stars in the three paintings in the Hall of Kings emphasises the paradisiacal connotation of them all, although their different treatment allows a differentiation to be made between the vegetal/hedonistic connotation of the chivalric scenes,

31 RALLO GRUSS, Carmen. El jardín pintado... op. cit. (no. 9), pp. 145-146.

32 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. La construcción poética de la Alhambra. In: *Revista de Poética Medieval*, 2013, no. 27, pp. 263-285, at pp. 273-280. PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *Los códigos de utopía...* op. cit. (no. 1), pp. 148-154, 158-166.

33 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. La utopía arquitectónica de la Alhambra de Granada. In: *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*, 1988, n° 24, pp. 55-76, at pp. 58-60, 64-66. PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *Los códigos de utopía...* op. cit. (no. 1), pp. 182-187.

34 Ibid, p. 66.

35 See in general NIETO ALCAIDE, Víctor Manuel. *La luz, símbolo y sistema visual (el espacio y la luz en el arte gótico y del Renacimiento)*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1978.

36 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *Estéticas de la luz...* op. cit. (no. 2), p. 154.

topped by a narrow band of eight-pointed golden stars on a red background, and the astral/mystical connotation of the group of kings, underlined by the prominence of the Milky Way – with eight-pointed blue stars – and by the other-worldly golden background that surrounds the whole composition³⁷. In other words, in the painting of the kings the supernatural cosmic space is truly the central character, bringing the kings together and imposing itself theophanically on the viewer; a realm where there will never be darkness. In the paintings of chivalric themes, on the other hand, the starry sky complements the landscape and separates the two larger sides of the composition, although there is something suggestive about the relationship between these stars and the gleam of the beloved's jewels – present in a text by Ibn al-Khatib – in creating the allegory of the lady, which Robinson believes would explain the symbolism of these two paintings³⁸. In any case, both paintings complemented the nuptial metaphor of the palace.

The relationship between the Milky Way and aulic architecture is revealed in one of the poems in which Ibn al-Milh (d. 1107) described the palace of Seville³⁹:

“Bright torches are often associated with the water that the hydraulic machine tries to exhaust. They appear to my eyes like two stars between which the line of the Milky Way has been stretched to join one with the other.”

These verses are part of the poetry competitions promoted by Al-Mu'tamid in Seville. One of the favourite subjects in such competitions was the description of palaces (*al-qusūr*), belonging to the *qusūriyyāt*⁴⁰ genre. Noteworthy in this regard is the following verse by Ibn Hamdis, which connects the image of the ruler and his virtues with the brightness of the palace and the constellations⁴¹:

“The builders have conveyed the prince's qualities in their construction. Thus, from his breast they have taken its breadth; from his light the brightness; from his fame its broad scope;

and from his wisdom the foundations. By taking his high royal rank as a model, his hall has been raised so high that it is on a par with the constellations.”

The poetry of the Taifa era, which enriched the fruitful literary tradition of reference for the Nasrid period, includes the elegy of Ibn Idrīs (1164/1166–1202) on the city of Murcia⁴², which provides us with a metaphorical landscape similar to that of the Palace of the Lions, with its vegetal, aquatic and astral motifs:

“There is no green garden that can compare to it,/ its Milky Way is the river, and its stars the flowers;/ most beautiful of all is the bend of the river/ where the dazzling flowers of the courtyards emerge.”

The wisdom of the ruler and his other virtues are linked to the presence of astral representations in his palaces. *Sendebār*, an Arabic book translated into Spanish by the Infante Don Fadrique in 1253, states⁴³:

“And he erected there a beautiful big palace and he wrote on the walls all the wisdom that he had to show and to learn: all the stars and all the figures and all the things.”

The central painting in the Alhambra's Hall of Kings depicts the Nasrid kings in an astral realm linked to conventions of their sovereignty – related to power and wisdom – and their destiny in Paradise. We also believe that this aulic image brings us face to face with the embodiment of the ancient *topos* that links human virtue with the act of reaching the stars – *ad astra per aspera* and other similar phrases – with the very conversion of the human being into a *sidus* or shining astral body, with posthumous memory and, ultimately, with the desire to transcend through good deeds⁴⁴.

The painting of the kings of the Alhambra thus alludes to the contemplation of Allah's light, but also to the identification or fusion of the monarchs with it, as glorified astral bodies. The Nasrid tradition was no stranger to this literary and philosophical convention of the ancient world. Inscriptions from the time of Muhammad V in the Alhambra bear witness to this. For example, the inscription that he added to the entrance of the Hall of the Boat reads “May Ibn Nasar, bright and

37 Gold and red are the dynastic colours of Muhammad V, while gold and blue are the colours of choice in palatine astral images.

38 ROBINSON, Cynthia. La Alhambra, un palacio islámico. In: *Anales de Historia del Arte*, 2013, nº 23 (Especial II), p. 298.

39 RUBIERA MATA, María Jesús. *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe. Datos para una estética del placer*. Madrid: Hipérion, 1988, p. 94.

40 RUBIERA MATA, María Jesús. La descripción poética de los palacios árabes: datos para la definición del género ‘*qusūriyyāt*’. In: *Actas del IV Coloquio Hispano-Tunecino* (Palma de Mallorca, October/November 1979). Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1983, pp. 213–215.

41 RUBIERA MATA, María Jesús. *La arquitectura...* op. cit. (no. 38), pp. 136–137.

42 RUBIERA MATA, María Jesús. *Literatura hispanoárabe*. Madrid: Mapfre, 1992, p. 121.

43 *Sendebār*. Edited by LACARRA, María Jesús. Madrid: Cátedra, 2007, pp. 72–73.

44 PARADA LÓPEZ DE CORSELAS, Manuel; CHAPINAL HERAS, Diego. *Observar las estrellas, llegar hasta las estrellas, ser una estrella. Introducción a un topos astral en la religión, el arte y el poder*. Pending publication.

beautiful sun of the kingdom/ in such a high position remain safe from the hour of sunset⁴⁵. At the entrance to the Hall of the Two Sisters: “In the firmament of the radiant caliphate let it remain/ Lighting up the darkness with its dazzling justice⁴⁶.” The northern portico in the Court of the Myrtles commemorates the taking of Algeciras by Muhammad V in 1369, and also includes these astral references⁴⁷:

“Lights of majesty shine in your court/ Allowing generosity to shine, smiling and joyful/ [...] O the exalted, patient, courageous and magnanimous/ Ascending higher than the stars! On the horizon of the kingdom you appear, a sign of mercy / Bringing light to that made dark by injustice Even the branch of the east wind you protect / And even the stars at their zenith you frighten.”

The inscription inside the Mirador de Lindaraja, which Puerta Vilchez deems the poetic axis of the entire Palace of the Lions, enhances the astral metaphor and links it to the dynastic responsibility of Muhammad V⁴⁸:

“[...] He shall prosper this day who overcomes [Koran 20.64] Such a limit I reach in every kind of beauty/ That the stars take it, in their high sky/ [...] Muhammad V] in the sky of the kingdom manifests himself as a full moon of religion/ His works endure, his lights shine/ He is but the sun in a mansion/ in which, with him, all good gives him shade/ [...] The crystal sky shows wonders here/ [...] In the eternal paradise [of these mansions] our lord has found enjoyment/ in reward for the good [his dynastic legacy] that was entrusted to him and which he knew how to continue.”

This message is explicitly reiterated in Ibn Zamrak's poetry in the Hall of the Two Sisters, which was recited at the circumcision of Amir 'Abd Allāh, son of Muhammad V, a key moment in underlining the continuity of the lineage. The poem, after alluding to Orion, the Pleiades, the Moon and the stars that are placed or are in dialogue with the *muqarnas* dome in this space and placed at the service of Muhammad V, declares⁴⁹:

“We have never seen a palace so supreme in appearance/ With clearer horizons, nor with more ample meeting space/ We have

never seen a garden of more pleasant greenery/ Of more aromatic spaces, nor of sweeter fruits/ [...] Between me [the garden] and victory there is the noblest lineage/ lineage which, being what it is, is enough for you [the sultan].”

According to Puerta Vilchez, the five Pleiades mentioned in this poem could allude to the five sons of Sultan Muhammad V⁵⁰. Ibn Zamrak also used an eloquent astral hyperbole in the Alijares – a palace that no longer stands – reminiscent of the painting of the kings of the Alhambra: “Look at this garden dressed up like a magnificent bride/ The hall of monarchy a place/ has been earned beyond the stars⁵¹.”

Ibn al-Khatib (1313-1374) used astral metaphor linked to hedonistic and mystical or moral connotations. He thus defines the Alhambra as a solemn and joyful place, “head of the capital of the kingdom, seat of Islam, refuge of power [...] and] a bride sweetened by the rain that adorns the hill and courts the stars⁵²”. While in his book entitled *The Full Moon Splendour of the Nasrid Dynasty or The History of the Kings of the Alhambra*, he questions his readers and Muhammad V by resorting to the sidereal convention in relation to virtue and memory⁵³:

“Wretched is he who abandons good work that can be of use to him, or the beautiful prayer that can elevate him, because he lives like a ravenous beast, lets the most delicate and valuable pearls of his life be lost away from the good path, and squanders in vile and sterile places the deposit that Allah, exalted be He, has entrusted to him. Blessed, however, is he who knows where he is going and uses the short time of this life to perform meritorious deeds, which will remain behind him like shining stars, and to make virtues eternal, which will bring him praise and reward; for steadfast prayer attracts and claims divine mercy and grace, and brings and obtains forgiveness. Let the industrious work at this, and let those who long for it strive for this.”

Virtue (nobility, courage, magnanimity, patience, excellence, piety, good deeds, prayers), power (victory, dynastic legitimacy) and eternity (by divine grace and mercy), united

45 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. *Leer la Alhambra. Guía visual del monumento a través de sus inscripciones*. Granada: Board of Trustees of the Alhambra and the Generalife, 2011, p. 107.

46 Ibid, p. 207.

47 Ibid, p. 101.

48 Ibid, p. 230-231.

49 Ibid, p. 213-214.

50 PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. Caligramas arquitectónicos e imágenes poéticas de la Alhambra. In: MALPICA CUELLO, Antonio; SARR, Bilal (ed.). *Epigrafía árabe y arqueología medieval*. Granada: Alhulia, 2015, pp. 97-133, at p. 27.

51 Ibid, p. 129.

52 Ibid, p. 124.

53 IBN AL-KHATIB, Lisan al-Din. *Historia de los reyes de la Alhambra (al-Lamha al-badriyya)*. Translation and study by CASCIARO, José María; MOLINA, Emilio. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1998, p. 4.

in the sovereign as a shining astral body that perpetuates the kingdom from the top of his palace/Paradise: literary images used by the Nasrid elite that help us to contextualise and understand the visual images of the Hall of Kings.

The virtuous remain in Paradise eternally, as a reference and guide, like stars in the firmament. In truth, this convention has existed in Arab and Islamic culture since at least the 10th century, if we take into account laudatory poetic formulae such as that conveyed right through to the 16th century and which is found in the chest of the patriarch Juan de Ribera⁵⁴:

“May glory and enduring existence be yours/ as long as day follows night/ and in endless grace may you live on/ as long as nights continue to exist/ All men are equal / but you are the heaven of all men.”

HYBRID PARADISE

The possible connections between the paintings in the Hall of Kings and various workshops in Avignon, Siena, Florence and Castile have already been pointed out by historiographers and are the subject of a paper in this volume. Ibn Khaldun had already referred – not without some suspicion – to the Nasrid fashion of assimilating distinctive signs or emblems of the Castilians, as well as painted images for decorating walls⁵⁵:

“[...] is what is happening in al-Andalus today with regard to the Castilians (*al-Yalāliqa*), for you find them imitating them in their clothes and emblems (*šarāt*), while they copy their customs and habits, even painting images on walls, monuments and houses (*ḥattā fi rasm al-tamaṭīl fi l-ʿyudrān wa-l-maṣānīʿ wa-l-buyūt*); the discerning observer will notice signs of domination in this.”

The problem posed by these paintings may be similar to that of the multiple international influences (from Avignon, the kingdom of Naples under Anjou rule, and northern Italy) present in the chivalric cycle of the *Camera Pinta* at Rocca Albornoziana in Spoleto, whose wall paintings date to around 1395-1410⁵⁶ (Il. 4). In the case of Granada, we are not so much interested in pointing out technical or stylistic

affinities as iconographic approaches shared with Christian territories. To this end, we aim to reflect on the paradisiacal ensemble in which astral and orchard elements are combined as described above.

Like the themes of courtly love that decorate the paintings in the side bedchambers, the depiction of the ten Nasrid kings is an entirely hybrid work and reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Muhammad V's court. Asín Palacios produced some pioneering work in pointing to the use of conventions from *The Scale of Muhammad* in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1265-1321), such as light metaphors to reflect the beatific life of the blessed in Paradise or the heaven of fixed stars⁵⁷. In his book, Dante falls asleep at the foot of the tree of Paradise. He is woken by being immersed in the Eunoe, from which he emerges “revived like new plants renewed with new leaves, purified and ready to mount to the stars”⁵⁸. Long before Dante, the Murcian Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) recorded in his *Fotuhāt* the words of Muhammad on the *ṣirat* (the path to Allah), and said that:

“It will rise from the earth in a straight line to the surface of the sphere of the stars, and that its boundary will be a meadow, extending beyond the walls of heavenly paradise, into which meadow, called the paradise of delights, men will enter first of all”⁵⁹.

In the Hall of Kings of the Alhambra, such meadows or a paradise of delights (vegetal/hedonistic connotation) provide the setting for the chivalric scenes that flank and precede the golden level of the sphere of stars where the kings are represented (an astral-mystical connotation).

The relationship between the paintings in the Hall of Kings and the Gothic-Mudejar tradition of Toledo and the plasterwork at the palace of Tordesillas, the palace of Ruy López Dávalos, and the Alcázar of Seville⁶⁰ was first pointed out several years ago. The phenomenon was part of the hybrid or eclectic artistic *koiné* that fused Toledan, Almohad and Nasrid elements in a dialogue between Castile and Granada,

54 PARADA LÓPEZ DE CORSELAS, Manuel; PUERTA VÍLCHEZ, José Miguel. La arqueta del Patriarca Juan de Ribera: origen, usos y estudio de su inscripción árabe. In: *Cuadernos de Arte de la Universidad de Granada*, 2019, nº 50, pp. 39-57, at pp. 49-54.

55 I am grateful to José Miguel Puerta Vilchez for providing me with this faithful translation of Ibn Khaldun's well-known passage.

56 DE LUCA, Silvia. *Gli affreschi della Camera Pinta a Spoleto: fonti letterarie e filologia artistica*. Perugia: Fabbri, 2013.

57 ASÍN PALACIOS, Miguel. *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1919, pp. 68-69.

58 ALIGHIERI, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, XXVIII-XXXIII.

59 *Fotuhāt*, III, 573, seen in ASÍN PALACIOS, Miguel. *La escatología...* op. cit. (no. 56), p. 151.

60 PAVÓN MALDONADO, Basilio. *Arte toledano: islámico y mudéjar*. Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1973, pp. 261-266. DODDS, Jerrilyn D. The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia... op. cit. (no. 20), pp. 190-191. VALLEJO NARANJO, Carmen. Consideraciones iconográficas... op. cit. (no. 10), p. 31.



Il. 4. Detail from the *Camera Pinta*, Rocca Albornoziana, Spoleto. Manuel Parada López de Corselas.



Il. 5. Tympanum of the Portal of Paradise, western façade of Toledo Cathedral. Manuel Parada López de Corselas.

into which mutual influences seeped⁶¹. In our opinion, this multi-faceted orbit includes the tympanum of the left door of the western façade (also known as the Puerta del Perdón) of Toledo Cathedral (1410-1424)⁶² (Il. 5).

This tympanum is framed by a double band with the arms of Castile and León and is divided into three scenes decorated with fleurons in the form of eight-pointed stars, surrounded by smaller flowers of five and eight petals. The star-shaped fleurons contain heads or small figures, which include those of a king and queen, and the figure of Samson fighting a lion or Hercules having achieved atonement. Historiography has not shown a great deal of interest in this tympanum, although it has recognised its paradisiacal connotation: “The so-called Door of Hell, on the left, is of no artistic interest. The tympanum is adorned with vegetal decoration, from which hang human heads related to paradise⁶³.” We believe that this relief is of great artistic and iconographic interest, as it synthesises the two connotations of Paradise (vegetal and astral) that we have explained through the paintings in the Alhambra’s Hall of Kings, as well as the classical *topos* of the sovereign’s body glorified as an astral body in Paradise through the Christian tradition represented by the Carthusian, as we shall see later.

Once again, this convention is in dialogue with the Castilian and Andalusian spheres. Above we have seen how Ibn Idris equated the stars with flowers. Similarly, Ibn Šuhayd refers to the stars as flowers with faces planted by the river that flows towards the Milky Way⁶⁴:

“The night was spent in vigil/ grazing the stars of the sky, and also others/ that had a sunrise, but no sunset;/ these were flowers with their mouths open/ before the udders of the laden clouds/ [...] Stars planted like daffodils/ by the river that leads to the Milky Way.”

The Toledo tympanum may have a funerary interpretation and dynastic legitimisation due to its connection with the Royal Chapel of Henry II of Castile, the first two bays of the north nave of which were built from 1374 onwards, next to the door that this tympanum decorates and adjacent to the existing Capilla del Tesoro. A chapel of the House of Trastámara, it was not completed until the beginning of the 15th century, when work began on the western doorway⁶⁵. The current Capilla del Tesoro, the sacristy of the Royal Chapel of Henry II, boasts a *muqarnas* vault decorated with gold, in keeping with the cosmic decoration of the ensemble, probably similar to the spaces of the Palace of the Lions⁶⁶.

Away from Granada and Toledo, the astral image of the sovereign was used in the tomb of John II and Isabella of Portugal, made by order of Isabella I under the direction of Gil de Siloe between 1489 and 1493 in the Carthusian monastery of Miraflores in Burgos (Il. 6). Pereda has shown how its un-

61 The extensive bibliography on the subject includes – in addition to Peter Burke’s general works on artistic hybridisation – the following works: GÓMEZ-MORENO GONZÁLEZ, Manuel. *Arte cristiano entre los moros de Granada*. In: *Homenaje a D. Francisco Codera en su jubilación del profesorado. Estudios de erudición oriental*. Zaragoza: Mariano Escar, 1904, pp. 259-270. MOMPLET, Antonio Eloy. *Mudéjar Art or Vice Versa? In*: RIDYARD, Susan J.; BENSON, Robert G. (ed.). *Minorities and Barbarians in Medieval Life and Thought*. Sewanee: University of the South Press, 1996, pp. 73-87.

62 AZCÁRATE RISTORI, José María. Alvar Martínez: Maestro de la Catedral de Toledo. In: *Archivo Español de Arte*, 1950, nº 23.89, pp. 1-12, at p. 2.

63 FRANCO MATA, Ángela. Aspectos de la escultura gótica toledana del siglo XIV. In: HERNANDO GARRIDO, José Luis; GARCÍA GUINEA, Miguel Ángel (ed.). *Repoblación y reconquista: Seminar*. Actas del III Curso de Cultura Medieval (Aguilar de Campoo, September 1991). Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación Santa María la Real, 1993, pp. 47-56, at p. 49.

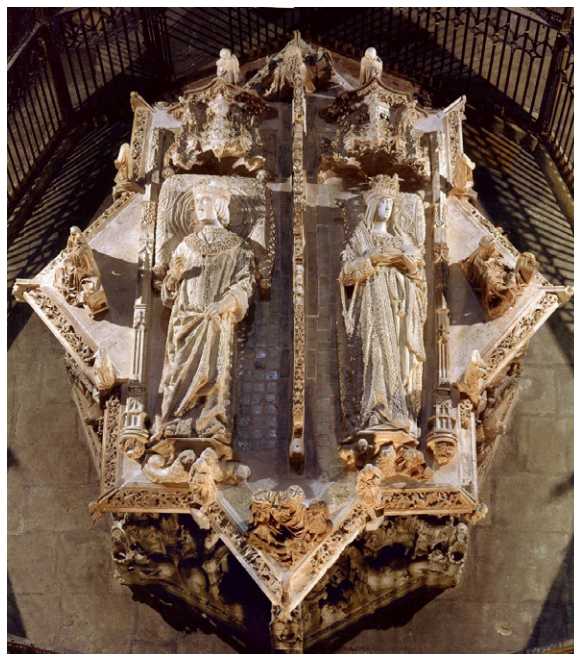
64 SAMSÓ, Julio. Literatura y astronomía en al-Andalus en el siglo XI. In: RIUS, Mònica; ROMO, Èlia; BEJARANO, Ana María; CONSOLI, Erica (ed.). *Traducir el mundo árabe. Homenaje a Leonor Martínez Martín*. Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 2015, pp. 247-264, at pp. 254-255.

65 AZCÁRATE RISTORI, José María. Alvar Martínez... op. cit. (no. 61), pp. 1-3.

66 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. Capillas Reales funerarias catedrales de Castilla y León: Nuevas hipótesis interpretativas de las catedrales de Sevilla, Córdoba y Toledo. In: *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 2006, nº 18, pp. 9-29, at pp. 14-15.

usual star-shaped typology constitutes a visual metaphor for the heavenly bodies of the resurrected in relation to the words of Daniel (12:3), St Paul (1 Corinthians 15:39-49) and the *Vita Christi* of the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony (ca.1300-1377/78), a work that Isabella the Catholic knew through the manuscript given to her by Fray Hernando de Talavera, the first archbishop of Granada⁶⁷. In the words of the Carthusian: "The glorified body will be clear and refulgent in these two ways. It will be clear and transparent like crystal and it will be bright and dazzling like the brightest gold or the most brilliant star or the sun in an excessively refulgent way"⁶⁸. The tomb of John II and Isabella of Portugal is no stranger to the vegetal connotation of Paradise either. It is profusely decorated with thistles all around its perimeter. In our opinion, this work fits in with the tradition described by Pereda and also with the body of knowledge of the Toledan and Andalusian precedents described above.

In placing an emphasis on astral paradisiacal symbolism, another Toledan work from the time of the Catholic Monarchs may be linked both to the aforementioned tympanum in Toledo Cathedral and to the tomb in Burgos. We refer to the top of the main pillars of San Juan de los Reyes (Il. 7), which are populated by a series of busts looking downwards, surrounded by intertwining branches, situated beneath a large crown – perhaps the Boreal Crown – and resting on a moulding adorned with a pearled border and flowers, which in turn rests on a band of *muqarnas*, all of which are carved in stone. In our opinion, we are once again faced with the image of the blessed in the astral-vegetal Paradise. The presence of the *muqarnas* and the funerary function of this chapel – originally intended to house the tombs of Isabella I and Ferdinand the Catholic – are elements that connect with the eschatological and cosmic conventions that we have recorded in the Nasrid tradition. These elements represent yet another episode in the phenomenon that Ruiz Souza called "*Aljamiada*" architectures and other degrees of assimilation"⁶⁹.



Il. 6. Tomb of John II and Isabella of Portugal, Carthusian monastery of Miraflores, Burgos.. Cartuja de Burgos, <https://twitter.com/cartujadeburgos/status/762623288896065538>

THE PAINTING OF THE KINGS OF THE ALHAMBRA: THE OLDEST SURVIVING SERIES OF ROYAL PORTRAITS IN SPANISH ART

The painting of the kings of the Alhambra fits in with the 14th century concept of the portrait as a typological image of representation, preceding the shaping of the "modern portrait" after the 15th century, if we follow Martindale's premise⁷⁰. It would thus form part of the series of sculptural and pictorial royal images in which the legitimacy and exaltation of the group takes precedence over the physiognomic description of the individual, that is to say, the sense of an iconic series or genealogy, with an enlightening and moralising function⁷¹. This is so much the case that in some series of paintings, instead of portraits being included, it was sufficient to depict the heraldic coat of arms, which was evidently much more representative of the individual than a typological portrait. This was the case in the pictorial decoration of the backrests of the choir stalls created in Barcelona Cathedral for the meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1519 and on the ceiling of the Hall of Coats of Arms in the Palace of Sintra (ca. 1520).

67 PEREDA ESPESO, Felipe. El cuerpo muerto del rey Juan II, Gil de Siloé, y la imaginación escatológica (observaciones sobre el lenguaje de la escultura en la alta Edad Moderna). *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 2001, nº 13, pp. 53-85, at pp. 69-73.

68 Ibid, p. 70.

69 RUIZ SOUZA, Juan Carlos. "Castilla y Al-Andalus. Arquitecturas aljamiadas y otros grados de asimilación". *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 2004, nº 16, pp. 17-44.

70 MARTINDALE, Andrew. *Heroes, Ancestors, Relatives and the Birth of the Portrait*. Maarssen: Schwartz, 1988, pp. 8-9.

71 TORMO MONZÓ, Elías. *Las viejas series...* op. cit. (no. 18), pp. 9-15, 43. NOGALES RINCÓN, David. Las series iconográficas de la realeza castellano-leonesa (siglos XII-XV). In: *En la España Medieval*, 2006, nº extra 1, pp. 81-112, en pp. 88-89.



Il. 7. Upper part of one of the main pillars of San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo.. Manuel Parada López de Corselas.

The first known documented series of royal portraits in the Hispanic kingdoms are those commissioned by Alfonso X of Castile at the Alcázar of Segovia in 1258 and consisting of 38 seated polychrome sculptures of rulers of Asturias, León and Castile (Il. 8); the series commissioned by Peter IV of Aragon (1336-1387) from the master Aloy and consisting of 12 alabaster sculptures of his predecessors; and the series assembled between 1382 and 1392 by Charles II and Charles III of Navarre in the palace of Tudela, which consisted of paintings of Christian monarchs and emperors⁷². None of these series have survived and the next series known in Spain date from the 15th century, such as the 15 portraits of the kings of Aragon painted by Jaume Mateu and Gonçal Peris Sarrià in 1427-1428 and which decorated the *arrocabe* of the council chamber of Valencia City Hall. Of these only four have survived. They belong to the Museo Nacional de Arte de Cataluña (National Art Museum of Catalonia). Work on the pictorial gallery of kings and ladies in the Hall of Ambassadors of the Reales Alcázares de Sevilla may have begun in 1427, although its current appearance is due to alterations carried out in the 16th and 17th centuries⁷³ (Il. 9). This example could be related to its precedent in the Alhambra, as in both cases the portrait gallery is linked to the hall's rich gilded ceiling, with its astral connotations. In short, the

72 FALOMIR FAUS, Miguel. Los orígenes del retrato en España: de la falta de especialistas al gran taller. In: PORTÚS PÉREZ, Javier (coord.). *El retrato español del Greco a Picasso*. Catálogo de la exposición (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 20 October 2004 - 6 February 2005). Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2004, pp. 72-95, at pp. 68-69.

73 CASTILLO OREJA, Miguel Ángel; MORALES, Alfredo José. *Galería de reyes y damas del Salón de Embajadores, Alcázar de Sevilla*. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2002. CASTILLO OREJA, Miguel Ángel. La conservación de un valioso legado: la rehabilitación de los alcázares reales en la política constructiva de los Reyes Católicos. In: BORRÁS GUALIS, Gonzalo; CASTILLO OREJA, Miguel Ángel (ed.). *Los alcázares reales. Vigencia de los modelos tradicionales en la arquitectura aulica cristiana*. Madrid: Antonio Machado Libros, 2001, pp. 99-127, at pp. 117-118.

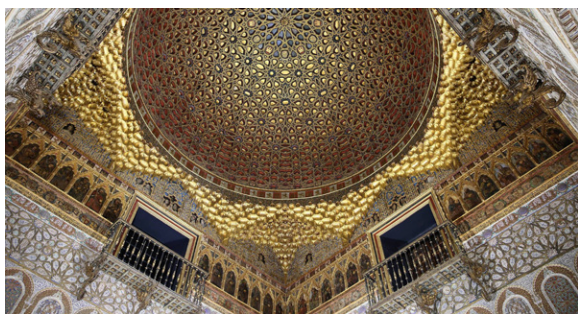


Il. 8. José María Avrial y Flores, elevation and section of part of the frieze of the Hall of Kings in the Alcázar of Segovia, 1844. Madrid, RABASF, inv. MA-0814. RABASF, <https://www.academiacolecciones.com/dibujos/inventario.php?id=MA-0814>

painting of the kings in the Alhambra (Il. 10), executed around 1380, is the oldest surviving royal pictorial series in Spanish art and deserves a prominent place in the history of European portraiture. On the subject of galleries of portraits depicting the nobility, it is worth mentioning the series of sculptures of the ancestors of the Mendoza family, who were visible from the *arrocabe* of the Salón de Linajes at the Palacio del Infantado in Guadalajara (Il. 11). This late 15th-century example crosses late-Gothic forms with Nasrid elements such as the muqarnas on the roof and the faux *qamariyya* windows in the *arrocabe*. The portraits, grouped into pairs, are positioned in small niches topped by false ribbed vaults decorated with a starry sky.

In all the series of medieval Hispanic royal and noble portraits that we know of and know more or less what they look like, the *titulus* (cartouche) or heraldic coat of arms is always present and is more important than the physical characterisation of the people depicted. As in early Christianity, the prevalence of the self was channelled through the word or sign of rank or lineage⁷⁴. This is why the two large shields of the band at the ends of the composition, the small red shields

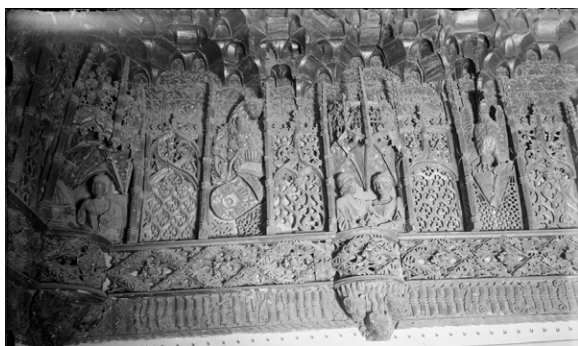
74 BOCK, Nicolas. Making a Silent Painting Speak: Paulinus of Nola, Poetic Competition, and Early Christian Portraiture. In: FOLETTI, Ivan; FILIPOVÁ, Alžbeta (ed.). *The Face of the Dead and the Early Christian World*. Rome: Viella, 2013, pp. 11-28.



II. 9. Detail of the gallery of portraits of kings, Hall of Ambassadors, Reales Alcázares, Seville.. Ben The Man, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vis-beek/48488757967/in/album-72157708374653285/>



II. 10. View of the central bedchamber of the Hall of Kings in the Alhambra.. Board of Trustees of the Alhambra and the Generalife.



II. 11. Detail of the ceiling of the Salón de Linajes, Palacio del Infanta-do, Guadalajara (photo: António Passaporte, between 1927 and 1936). Madrid: Ministry of Culture. Sub-Directorate for Library Coordination, 2011. Licence "Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)"

below each figure, and the inscription that led into this space and alluded to the Nasrid dynasty, as mentioned above, are of great importance when it comes to identifying the figures depicted in the central painting of the Alhambra's Hall of Kings.

PORTRAITS *AU VIF*, CHIVALRIC LITERATURE, PALACES, AND AUDIENCES

We must stress the importance of the fact that the paintings in the Alhambra's Hall of Kings have been preserved *in situ* and without suffering *damnatio memoriae*. Together they constitute a group that, in Spain, can only be compared to examples found in literature, and not just any genre but Castilian and Aragonese books on chivalry, which further emphasis the hybridisation and the Hispanic cultural *koiné* of which the Palace of the Lions plays a part.

In *Tirant lo Blanc*, a work begun by Joanot Martorell and completed by Martí Joan de Galba at the end of the 15th century, two halls at the imperial palace in Constantinople are described⁷⁵. The first of these had

"depictions of the following love stories all around it: Floris and Blancheflour, Thisbe and Pyramus, Aeneas and Dido, Tristan and Isolde, and Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot, and many more, whose love was represented with very subtle and artistic painting."

In the second hall

"the images on the walls depicted various stories involving Bors, Perceval and Galahad, when he is led to the Siege Perilous, and showed the entire Holy Grail quest. The hall's superb ceiling was all gold and blue, and around it were images, all of gold, of all the Christian kings, with their beautiful crowns on their heads and with sceptres in their hands. And at the foot of each king was a stone ledge, on which rested a shield bearing the king's coat of arms".

Despite the distance between them, this literary setting at the Constantinople palace is similar in concept to the decoration of the Alhambra's Hall of Kings. Both buildings combine gold and blue, conventional scenes of courtly love, and a gallery of sovereigns positioned around the ceiling with the trappings of their power – such as *jinetas*, turbans and full-length robes in the case of the Nasrid kings – and below them their heraldic shields. The similarity would appear to be literal in some of the chivalric themes chosen, as there are scenes in the paintings of the Alhambra that seem to have been taken from the stories of Flores and

75 MARTORELL, Joanot; GALBA, Martí Joan de. *Tirant lo Blanc*. Edited by VIDAL JOVÉ, Joan Francesc. Madrid: Alianza, 2005, pp. 265, 268.

Blanchefleur, and Tristan and Isolde⁷⁶. In the culture of the 14th and 15th centuries, therefore, the Alhambra could be understood as a palace as complex, morally inspiring and magnificent as that of the Byzantine emperor himself, as it possessed to the greatest degree everything that could be expected of a palace of the highest rank. It is not surprising, therefore, that Antoine de Lalaing, in the same account in which he described the paintings in the Hall of Kings, should say of the Alhambra that “c'est l'ung des lieux bien ouvré qui soit sur terre, comme, je croy, il n'y a roy crestien”⁷⁷ (There is no Christian king who owns such a palace).

Furthermore, in order to understand the early reception of the series of portraits in the Hall of Kings, it is worth recalling once again the words of Lalaing in 1502: “Au planchier d'icelle salle sont peintes au vif tous les roys de Grenade depuis long tempz”. In 1501, Lalaing described some silver figures of Louis XI (r. 1461-1483) at Notre-Dame de Cléry-Saint-André in the following terms: “Deux tables d'autel en fagon de tabernacles d'argent, faictes au commandement du roy Loys avec sa portraiture au vif, sont illec en une chapelle, tant bien faictes que la fagon met les regardans en admiration”⁷⁸. In both cases we are talking about typological portraits, but with some individualised features. Painting *au vif*, *al naturale* or “from life” alluded to an idealised representation of the model⁷⁹. A painting *au vif* was a conventional or negotiated image, as can also be deduced from the first treatise on painting *au naturel*: Francisco de Holanda's *Do tirar polo natural* (1549)⁸⁰. Painting *au vif* was also possible even when the subject had died or was absent. It was a term applied to works in which the image was brought to life thanks to the use of information relating to the person being depicted, so that their “true portrait” could be created⁸¹. But

that truth was achieved mainly through text, heraldry and/or conventional attributes or characterisation. It was not until the process of that followed the Council of Trent that the quest for a portrait that was both true and physiognomic or mimetic began. The creation of just such a portrait would be one of the challenges of the Baroque period⁸².

In *au vif* portraits we are faced with a negotiated or conventional image, in which certain distinctive physical details of the sitter were included – such as the colour of their hair, beard and eyes, as we see in some Nasrid rulers – and other elements that add vitality to the image, such as the gaze and gestures, as is also the case in the Alhambra. Thus we could translate Lalaing's expression as follows: “On the ceiling of that hall are painted *au naturel* [or ‘as if they were alive’]⁸³ the kings of Granada from long ago.”

As we have seen, in *au vif* portraits the typological characterisation of the sitter was most important of all, based on stereotypes relating to their status and, in particular, to the virtues attributed to their soul, which were expressed through the idealised beauty and the luminosity and clearness of their face, especially if the sitter was – or was expected to be – among the blessed in Paradise. This is why, in our opinion, Saint Teresa of Avila reproached Fray Juan de la Misericordia when he portrayed her in Seville in 1576: “God forgive you, Fray Juan, you have painted me as old, ugly and bleary.” Rather than having a fit of pride and narcissism, it is more likely that the saint had a traditional concept of what a portrait should be, i.e. a mirror of the soul. Centuries later, Oscar Wilde made this tradition his own when he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The painting of the kings at the Alhambra answers to the exemplary function of the representational portrait, linked to the concept of the portrait *au vif*. This ties in with a fruitful European tradition that links up with the other great work synthesising Hispanic chivalric literature: the *Amadís de Gaula*, a book begun in the 14th century and written in its definitive version at the end of the 15th century by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo and printed in 1508. The work tells of how Apollidon and his beloved Grimalda build the Arch of True Lovers which, in a magical way, reveals how sincere and exalted is the love professed by the knights and ladies who put themselves

76 ROBINSON, Cynthia. Arthur in the Alhambra... op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 16-18, 23-24.

77 GACHARD, Louis Prosper. *Collection des voyages...* op. cit. (no. 14), p. 206.
78 Ibid, p. 134.

79 TUREL, Noa. Paintworks “*au vif*” to Paintings from Life: Early Netherlandish Paintings in the Round and the Invention of Indexicality. In: BALFE, Thomas; WOODALL, Joanna; ZITTEL, Claus (ed.). *Ad vivum?* Leiden: Brill, 2019, pp. 122-150. TUREL, Noa. Living pictures: rereading “*au vif*”, 1350-1550. In: *Gesta*, 2011, no. 50.2, pp. 163-182. WOODS-MARTEN, Joanna. Ritratto al naturale: Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits. In: *The Art Journal*, 1987, no. 46, pp. 209-216.

80 FONSECA, Raphael do Sacramento. *Francisco de Holanda: “Do tirar pelo natural” e a retratística*. Doctoral thesis. Campinas: Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2010, pp. 44, 77.

81 BAKKER, Boudewijn. *Au vif - naar't leven - ad vivum: The Medieval Origin of a Humanist Concept*. In: *Aemulatio: Imitation, Emulation and Invention in Netherlandish Art from 1500 to 1800. Essays in honor of Eric Sluiter*. Zwolle: Waanderts Publishers, 2011, pp. 37-52, at pp. 40-44, 47-48.

82 PEREDA ESPESO, Felipe. *Crime and Illusion. The Art of Truth in the Golden Age*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017.

83 For use of the adjective *vivos* in reference to medieval portraits in Spain, please see the extracts from *Amadís de Gaula* included in the following pages of this paper.

to the test by passing beneath it. Only those who pass the test have the honour of seeing the sculptural portraits of Apolidon and Grímanesa on the other side of the arch, “in the likeness of himself and his Lady, the countenances and the stature like unto them, so true that they seemed alive”, who seem “truly to be alive”, “as fair and as fresh as life”, for “Grímanesa [was represented] with such perfection that she seemed alive, having been rendered through great art with her husband Apolidon”⁸⁴. Both statues correspond to the parameters discussed in relation to the portrait *au vif*: they share some physical characteristics with the people depicted, but more importantly, they appear to be alive and are the paragon against which viewers measure their own qualities, which reflect their virtues, mainly courage and beauty, which are equated with goodness. The text also tells us that the sculptural portraits of Apolidon and Grímanesa are identified by their inscriptions (their *titulus* or cartouche) and are shown, by way of an exemplum, as a paradigm of true love. The Arch of True Lovers is illustrated for the first time in the *Amadís* published in Seville in 1531, where the portraits of Apolidon and Grímanesa occupy the upper part of the arch and, in accordance with the aforementioned customs, are also accompanied by heraldic coats of arms (II. 12).

The winners of this first test – and, as the text emphasises, none others – have the privilege of finding their name, main virtue and their ancestry magically inscribed alongside those of Apolidon and Grímanesa. Amadís’ inscription read as follows: “This is Amadís of Gaul, the true lover, son to King Perion”⁸⁵. But if they also wish to inherit his land – the Firm Island – they have to prove themselves to be more virtuous or brave (in the case of the knights) and more beautiful (in the case of the ladies) than he and she in the test that lies beyond the arch, the entrance to the Forbidden Chamber, where they have to fight unwaveringly against unseen forces. In other words, both tests examine the candidate’s virtue through the chivalric ideals of true love, combined with the exercising of his or her effort or courage, with the “living” figures of Apolidon and Grímanesa providing a point of reference throughout. When Amadís emerges triumphant from the ordeal, a hand takes his and a mysterious voice exclaims: “Welcome is the Knight who shall be Lord here, because he passeth in prowess him who made the enchantment, and who had no peer in his time”⁸⁶. As his

beloved Oriana undergoes the test, the same voice exclaims: “Welcome is the noble Lady, who hath excelled the beauty of Grímanesa the worthy companion of the Knight who, because he surpasses Apolidon in valour, hath now the lordship of this Island, which shall be held by his posterity for long ages.”⁸⁷

In our opinion, a nod to this type of chivalric challenge can be seen in the Latin inscriptions located in the empty bays on the east side, next to the funerary groups of Charles V and Philip II in the basilica of El Escorial: “If any of the descendants of Charles V should surpass the glories of his deeds, let him occupy this place first; all others should reverently abstain,” and “This place left empty here was kept by him, who left it out of his kindness [Philip II] for he who among his descendants were higher in virtue; otherwise, let none occupy it”⁸⁸.

Once he has overcome a thousand adventures, passed through the Arch of True Lovers, placed his name next to the portraits of Apolidon and Grímanesa, and conquered the Forbidden Chamber, Amadís will become sovereign of the kingdom and there – in that axis mundi – he will be able to consummate his love and beget the descendants of his lineage: in a lavish, rare and beautiful crystal room, from which one can see outside but whose interior remains invisible from outside, as if it were surrounded by latticework⁸⁹. It is an other-worldly space filled with references to the conventions of Nasrid architecture.

In the Hall of Kings of the Alhambra, as in *Tirant* and *Amadís*, we find images that refer to chivalric pursuits (fighting, hunting, courtship as part of the nuptial metaphor) and portraits *au vif* of Nasrid sovereigns, in a highly idealised and other-worldly context that alludes to Paradise in its vegetal-hedonistic and astral-mystical forms. The Garden of Delights is a Paradise presided over by the celestial and shining bodies of Muhammad V and his ancestors, which are offered up as an example to the palace’s visitors and future owners. Clearly, however, the literary and visual images of this ensemble are meant to be explained and commented upon, just as the characters of chivalric tales reflect on the virtues and fame of their heroes. In these tales, the oral tradition of

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 1626.

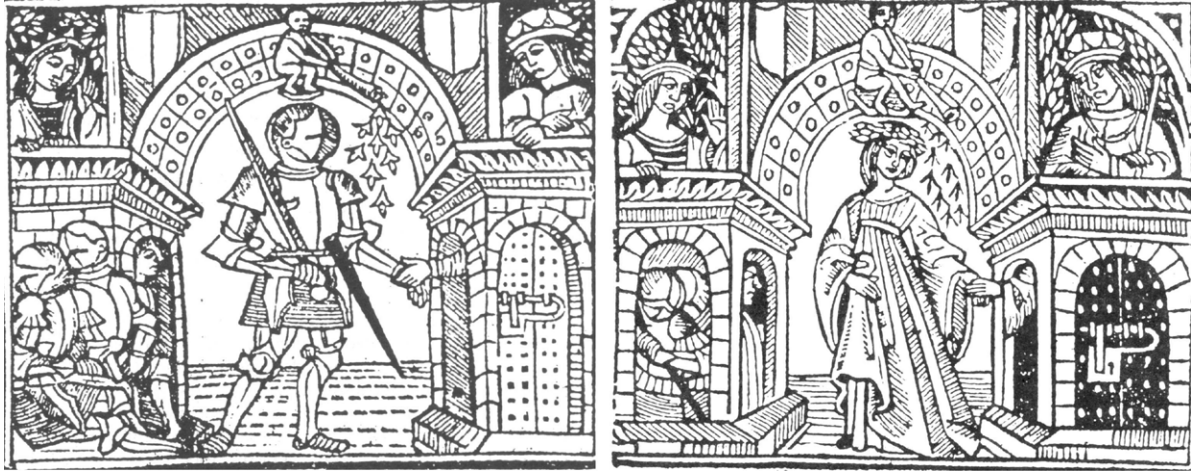
⁸⁸ RODRÍGUEZ VELASCO, María. Los donantes de El Escorial: estado de la cuestión. In: CAMPOS Y FERNÁNDEZ DE SEVILLA, Francisco Javier (coord.). *La escultura en el Monasterio del Escorial*. Actas del Simposium (1-4 September 1994). San Lorenzo de El Escorial: Real Centro Universitario Escorial-María Cristina, 1994, pp. 343-355, at p. 347.

⁸⁹ RODRÍGUEZ DE MONTALVO, Garcí. *Amadís...* op. cit. (no. 83), pp. 674, 1627.

⁸⁴ RODRÍGUEZ DE MONTALVO, Garcí. *Amadís de Gaula*. Edited by CACHO BLECUA, Juan Manuel. Madrid: Cátedra, 1987, pp. 660-661, 668, 670, 1619.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 672.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 673.



II. 12. Amadís and Oriana triumphant in the trials of the Arch of True Lovers and the Forbidden Chamber, according to the illustrations in the Seville edition of Amadís, 1531. Dominio público.

the heroes that the characters wish to emulate is present at all times, an oral tradition that also has an artistic point of reference in the shape of images such as the portraits of Apolidon and Grimanese. These same elements resonated with the very orality of the readers and listeners of chivalric literature, who in turn replicated the discursive, emotional and visual landscapes recreated in the books. We therefore agree with Robinson when she asserts that the Palace of the Lions is a place for talking about and discussing the actions of literary and, we would like to add, historical characters, and fundamentally for contemplation, reflection, and edification⁹⁰. It was also there that Muhammad V, in all probability, received the news of his long-awaited victories, before commenting on and celebrating them, distributing gifts to his “lions of war”, as the poem of the Fountain of the Lions says. And it was there that he celebrated such important dynastic events as the circumcision of his first-born son.

In short, the paintings in the Hall of Kings in the Palace of the Lions provide a synthesis of the chivalric, sapiential and mystical culture that grew around the ideals of love and chivalric conduct in the peninsular kingdoms at this time, and of the function of painting as an example of virtue and as a paradigm of royal representation and memory. Faced with these images, the viewers of the time contemplated their responsibility to history and how they should respond to the model of majesty and virtue exemplified by Nasrid sovereigns, who are depicted as living in an astral and vegetal Paradise, seated in

the sphere of the stars, where they will remain for eternity as shining celestial bodies or as the beautiful and dazzling sun of Granada, the kingdom without sunset. Ultimately, who is worthy of crossing the threshold and inhabiting the Palace of the Lions?

90 ROBINSON, Cynthia. *Ar thur in the Alhambra...* op. cit. (no. 6), pp. 44-46.