

National Gallery of Art

Office of Press and Public Information
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Gothic Tapestries from Spain, Recently Restored, On View Together for First Time in the United States at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 18, 2011 to January 8, 2012



Attributed to the workshop of Pasquier Grenier, *Assault on Asilah*, 1475-1500, wool and silk, 369 x 1099 cm (145 1/4 x 432 11/16 in.), Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Pastrana (Guadalajara). ©Fundación Carlos de Amberes. Photographs by Paul M.R. Maeyaert

Washington, DC—The Pastrana Tapestries—among the finest Gothic tapestries in the world—will be on view together for the first time in the United States at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from September 18, 2011 through January 8, 2012. *The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries* will feature the recently restored set of four monumental tapestries that commemorate the conquest of two strategically located cities in Morocco by the king of Portugal, Afonso V (1432–1481).

Since the 17th century the tapestries have been the property of the Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Pastrana, Spain, just 50 miles east of Madrid. Because of their outstanding quality and historical significance, the Spanish

government listed them as cultural patrimony to be safeguarded during the Spanish Civil War. The only one of the four that has traveled previously to the U.S., *The Conquest of Tangier*, was included in the landmark National Gallery of Art exhibition ***Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*** in 1991–1992.

"We are honored to be the first U.S. museum to offer this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the Pastrana Tapestries together," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "Exquisite and monumental, these tapestries depict one of the many events that would lead to the European voyages of exploration across the Atlantic."

Exhibition Organization, Tour, and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Fundación Carlos de Amberes, Madrid, in association with the Embassy of Spain, the Spain-USA Foundation, and the Embassy of Portugal and with the cooperation of the Embassy of Belgium and the Embassy of Morocco in Washington, DC, as well as the Diocese of Sigüenza-Guadalajara and Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Pastrana, Spain.

After Washington, ***The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries*** will be on view at the Meadows Museum, Dallas, Texas, from February 5 to May 13, 2012, in addition to several other U.S. cities, to be announced.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the government of Spain; the government of Portugal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Instituto Camões; and the government of Belgium, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The conservation of the tapestries was undertaken at the initiative of the Fundación Carlos de Amberes, with support from the Belgian InBev-Baillet Latour Fund, and the following Spanish institutions: Fundación Caja Madrid, Region of Castilla—La Mancha, Provincial Council of Guadalajara, and Diocese of Sigüenza-Guadalajara and Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Pastrana.

The Pastrana Tapestries

Woven in the late 1400s, these monumental tapestries, each measuring 12 by 36 feet, depict Afonso V's conquest in 1471 of the Moroccan cities of Asilah and Tangier, located near the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar. They are among the rarest and earliest examples of tapestries created to celebrate what were then contemporary events, instead of allegorical or religious subjects. The designer minimized the misery of warfare, reinventing the event with the heroic image of Afonso and the ideals of chivalry in mind.

Exquisitely rendered in wool and silk threads by Flemish weavers in Tournai, Belgium, the tapestries teem with vivid and colorful images of knights, ships, and military paraphernalia set against a backdrop of maritime and urban landscapes.

Three tapestries depict episodes in the Portuguese conquest of Asilah:

Landing at Asilah: Large sailing ships called "carracks" fly banners with the emblem of Afonso V and Portugal's patron Saint George. Two monkeys have boarded the ships, indicating that the army has reached the Moroccan coast, while Muslim residents of Asilah wield swords, shields, and spears behind the city walls. The Belgian weavers of the tapestry, unfamiliar with North African architecture, depicted a city that resembles one in Northern Europe with high-pitched roofs and pointed spires.

Siege of Asilah: Afonso and his son Prince João are in the Portuguese camp, while the army bombards the city with cannons, muskets, crossbows, and long pikes. Afonso is also depicted on horseback with a pennant flying overhead, bearing his emblem—a golden paddle wheel spewing life-giving drops of water.

Assault on Asilah: Portuguese soldiers scale the city walls while Afonso raises his sword, ready to enter the battle. The king is preceded by his standard-bearer, Duarte de Almeida, dressed in full armor and carrying Afonso's emblem. The victory at Asilah paved the way for the conquest of Tangier.

The fourth tapestry—*The Conquest of Tangier*—depicts the Portuguese cavalry and infantry marching in formation from the city in the background, probably Asilah, to the walls of Tangier. The people of Tangier expected the governor of Asilah, Muhammad al-Shaikh, to send reinforcements to help them repel the Portuguese army. Involved in his own war against the governor of Fez, he instead signed a treaty granting the Portuguese dominion over Tangier. Of the many inhabitants depicted walking into exile, a lone Moroccan wears a red tunic with an inscription that imitates Arabic script and may have been intended to indicate the beginning of the Muslim declaration of faith.

The capture of Tangier on August 24, 1471, secured Portuguese control over the entrance to the Straits of Gibraltar and the maritime traffic between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Tangier remained a Portuguese enclave until 1661, when it was given to Charles II of England as part of the dowry of his bride, the Portuguese princess Catherine of Bragança. The Sultan of Morocco, Moulay Ismaïl, reclaimed the city in 1684 when he blockaded the port and forced the British to withdraw.

It is likely that Pasquier Grenier, the outstanding tapestry merchant of the day, carried out the commission in Belgium. His illustrious clients included crowned heads of Europe and the dukes of Burgundy for whom Grenier's workshops in Tournai produced tapestries in the same style and technique as those made for Afonso V.

Catalogue

Published by Ediciones el Viso, the exhibition catalogue includes texts by Miguel Ángel Aguilar, president, Fundación Carlos de Amberes; Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra, Instituto de Historia, Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Yvan Maes De Wit, conservator, De Wit Manufacturers; António Filipe Pimentel, director, Museu Nacional de Arte Antigua, Lisbon; Dalila Rodrigues, art historian; and Donald J. La Rocca, curator, department of arms and armor, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The 102-page catalogue includes color illustrations and is

available for purchase in the Gallery Shops in hardcover. To order, please visit our website at shop.nga.gov; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

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General Information

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Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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Related Activities

The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries Celebrated with a Variety of Related Programs at the National Gallery of Art



Film still from *Mysteries of Lisbon (Mistérios de Lisboa)* (Raúl Ruiz, 2010, High Definition DCP, 270 minutes with intermission) to be shown at the National Gallery of Art on Sunday December 18, 4:00 p.m. and Wednesday, December 21, 12:30 p.m. Image courtesy of Music Box and Raúl Ruiz

The National Gallery of Art plans a dynamic array of programs to celebrate ***The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries***, an exhibition of a set of four monumental 15th-century tapestries on view for the first time in the United States from September 18, 2011, through January 8, 2012. A lecture, film, Gallery Talks, a Conversations with Conservators and Educators series, and an in-depth online resource all consider the themes explored in the exhibition.

All programs are free of charge in the East Building Auditorium unless otherwise noted. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Lecture Program

Introduction to the Exhibition—The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries

Sunday, December 18, 2:00 p.m.

Barbara von Barghahn, professor of art history, The George Washington University
East Building Auditorium

Film Program

Mysteries of Lisbon (Mistérios de Lisboa)

Sunday, December 18, 4:00 p.m.

Wednesday, December 21, 12:30 p.m.

Raúl Ruiz's majestic adaption of Portuguese novelist Camilo Castelo Branco's 1854 romantic epic *Mistérios de Lisboa*—a brilliantly twisting tapestry of interlocking fates and identities—is reputed to be this master filmmaker's final work. Ruiz has crafted a beautiful, visually complex monument to the narrative cinema, telling a story of machinations and maneuvers that are never exactly as they seem. (Raúl Ruiz, 2010, High Definition DCP, 270 minutes with intermission)

Conversations with Conservators and Educators

The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries

November 14, 15, 29, 12:00 p.m.

December 6, 8, 12:00 p.m.

Julia Burke, senior conservator, National Gallery of Art, and Diane Arkin, lecturer,
National Gallery of Art

East Building Information Desk

Online Resource

A downloadable brochure will include special graphics to help visitors identify the principal actors and actions depicted in the Pastrana Tapestries and will use maps and translations of the tapestries' inscriptions to elucidate the story they depict. An illustrated timeline will also help visitors situate these events in the context of 15th-century Portuguese history.

About the Exhibition

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Conservation of the Pastrana Tapestries



Images taken before and after the conservation work was completed by the De Wit Manufacturers on *Assault on Asilah*, attributed to the workshop of Pasquier Grenier, 1475-1500, wool and silk, 369 x 1099 cm (145 1/4 x 432 11/16 in.), Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Pastrana (Guadalajara). ©Fundación Carlos de Amberes. Photographs by Paul M.R. Maeyaert

In the 17th century, the tapestries were donated, possibly by Fray Pedro González de Mendoza y Silva, the prince of Eboli's son, to the Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Pastrana, where they have been cared for by the parish priests and parochial community and shared with the public ever since. Despite earlier conservation efforts, the condition of the tapestries had declined over the years, and in 2008, at the initiative of the Fundación Carlos de Amberes, a project to restore these magnificent works was undertaken. The tapestries were sent back to Belgium for complete conservation and restoration by the Royal Manufacturers De Wit in Mechlin. The tapestries had suffered various forms of damage: moths ate away many of the wool threads; iron mordants used in the dyeing process corroded some of the dark-colored wool; dirt and stains obscured the original bright colors; and prolonged exposure to light caused fading and severely weakened the silk threads.

The first step in the conservation treatment was to place the tapestries in a hermetically-sealed receptacle to eliminate the insects by depriving them of oxygen. Conservators then cleaned the tapestries, using a gentle vacuum suction system to remove dust, followed by aerosol suction, a technique that uses a mixture of compressed air, water, and a neutral detergent. The mixture creates a cloud of vapor

that was repeatedly suctioned through the tapestry, detaching remaining dirt. Afterward, the tapestries were rinsed with decalcified and demineralized water, and dried. The conservators stabilized fragile areas by stitching new fabric to the reverse of the tapestry, applying backing material dyed to match the original color, and finally, relining the tapestries to strengthen them for the future. The result highlights the brilliant coloring and minute detail that characterize each of these splendid tapestries.

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