

Card Weaving in Islamic Spain

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Most of the evidence for card weaving in Islamic Spain is circumstantial at best. No surviving pictures show a Moorish man or maiden sitting at a card weaving loom; no text references clearly indicate card woven bands; no actual bands survive except for those which come to us by way of the Christians. But we *do* have those Christian bands, evidence that card weaving was practiced elsewhere in Spain in the Middle Ages. In addition, miniatures and paintings (all drawn by Christian artists) show bands which may well have been card woven.

The first place to look for card woven bands is in the surviving tiraz from al-Andalus. Fortunately, a lot of textile fragments do survive from the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries, including some which are clearly tiraz strips (Dodds, nos. 21 & 22; May, figs 8 - 10). However, these bands are entirely tapestry woven.

The earliest clear evidence for card weaving in Spain are pieces surviving from the end of the 12th century, woven by a queen, Eleanor of England (May, 98). May does not indicate whether or not the inscription bearing Eleanor's name and the date was brocaded into the band.

An increasing number of card woven bands survive from the thirteenth century, although tapestry weaving continued to be practiced as well (May 67 – 75). Most of the card woven bands have brocaded decoration; executed in silk and gold, they adorn the coffins and vestments of the royal families of Castile and Leon. At least one example survives of a plain weave, in the form of straps to hold on a prince's spurs (Gomez Moreno, CXL; Herrero Carretero, p. 37).

Given the number of card woven bands which have come to us via Christian sources, it seems reasonable that card weaving would have been practiced among the Moors as well. Indeed, miniatures from the Alfonsine corpus show a variety of narrow wares which could have been created through card weaving, including filets holding veils in place (Fig. 1), drawstrings (*tikka*) for ladies' pants (Fig. 1), and tiraz. The question of card woven tiraz is especially interesting given the earlier tapestry woven examples. A tunic from the tomb of Archbishop Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada (Fig. 2) – which Dodds claims is “of totally Muslim manufacture” (331) – includes brocaded card woven strips at the shoulder seams. Given the enormous width of this tunic (approximately 80” around at the chest), these seams, and hence the bands, would fall to the upper arm – where tiraz strips normally appear on a garment. At least one Moroccan sultan appears in the Cantigas de Santa Maria wearing a tiraz-adorned garment which appears to have much in common with the Ximenez de Rada tunic (Fig. 3).

The 14th and subsequent centuries have yielded many fewer extant card woven bands. Miniatures and paintings of Moors, however, continue to depict potentially card woven

narrow wares. One striking example is in the ceiling paintings of the Alhambra, where twelve richly dressed Granadan men sit gathered together. A number of these men wear their swords hung from baldrics covered with geometric designs reminiscent of the 13th century pieces (Fig. 4). Similarly, at the end of the 15th century, we find another example of card woven spur laces – highly decorated this time – on the boots of an extremely Moorish magi (Fig. 5).

Over all, the evidence for card weaving in Islamic Spain remains scattered and sparse, as for many other questions surrounding Moorish textile arts and costume.

Figures



Figure 1: Thirteenth Century Moorish Ladies.

The lady on the left wears a potentially card woven filet to hold her veil in place. The lady on the right has a highly decorated band for her drawstring, the ends of which are visible between her legs. (Libros de Ajedrez, by way of Smith, pp. 60-1)



Figure 2: The Ximenez de Rada Tunic.

The entire tunic is shown to give perspective on the placement of the decorative bands at the shoulder seams. (Dodds, no. 94)



Figure 3: Moroccan Sultan with Tiraz.

The placement, geometric design, and gold details of the tiraz are very similar to the brocaded card woven bands in the Ximenez de Rada Tunic. (Cantigas de Santa Maria, by way of Smith, p. 59)



Figure 4: Fourteenth Century Alhambra Painting.

The geometric designs on the baldric are reminiscent of thirteenth century card woven bands. (By way of Smith, p. 98)

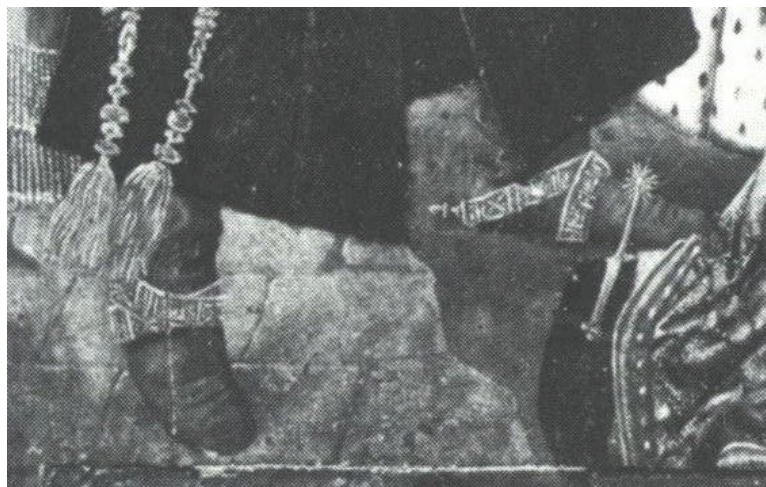


Figure 5: Fifteenth Century Spur Straps.

The decoration on these spur straps appears to be Arabic lettering. (Anderson, no. 257)

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