



c. 1429–73

Wool

19 feet 3/4 inches x 8 feet 9 1/8 inches  
(586.7 x 475 cm)

Spanish, Possibly Muslim craftsmen

The Joseph Lees Williams Memorial  
Collection, 1955, 1955-65-21

### DIRECTED LOOKING

What are the largest shapes  
in the carpet?

What designs are inside  
each square?

Each golden square is the coat of arms of Fadrique Enríquez, the man for whom this carpet was made. He was the admiral (commander of the navy) of a Spanish kingdom called Castile. How is his high position represented by the symbols in his coat of arms?

Find some of the areas of geometric pattern in the carpet.

What shapes make up  
the patterns?

How are the outer borders on the  
sides of the carpet different from  
the rest of the carpet?

Can you find white, angular lines  
that separate the scenes in the  
outer border?

## “ADMIRAL” HERALDIC CARPET

This carpet belongs to a group of medieval Spanish rugs that are called “admiral” carpets because they bear the coat of arms of Fadrique Enríquez de Mendoza (1390–1473), admiral of Castile. Fadrique (pronounced fahd-REE-kay) was the grandfather of Ferdinand the Catholic, the first king of all Spain. It was Ferdinand and his wife Isabella who commissioned the voyage on which Christopher Columbus first reached the Americas.

The Museum’s carpet is one of six that the Enríquez family donated to the convent of Santa Clara in Palencia, Spain, their burial place. The carpet’s exceptionally fine condition and considerable length (over nineteen feet) indicate that it was rarely used and was probably designed for important processions. With its geometric pattern and glossy sheen, the carpet’s background resembles a tile floor. When the carpet was rolled out for special ceremonies the three shields would have stood out, visually proclaiming Fadrique Enríquez’s name and importance.

## INTERPRETING THE DESIGNS

This carpet was made in the mid-fifteenth century, probably between 1429, when Fadrique Enríquez inherited the admiralty, and 1473, when he died. With its intermingling of European and Islamic motifs, the carpet reflects the cultural diversity of medieval Spain, which contained Christian and Muslim states until the Catholic rulers Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada in 1492.

Repeated three times in the center of the carpet is Fadrique Enríquez’s coat of arms: a lion rampant (standing on its hind legs) beneath two triple-towered castles on a shield bordered by anchors and ropes. The lion rampant is a common symbol of royalty in European heraldry (a system of emblems identifying individuals and

families). The castles declare the name of the Enríquez family's homeland, the kingdom of Castile, which means "castle" in Spanish. The anchors and ropes refer to Fadrique's position as admiral of the kingdom's navy.

The overall pattern of the carpet consists of geometric shapes and Arabic calligraphy (decorative writing)—standard elements of traditional Islamic art—and animal and human figures. Surrounding the coats of arms, the carpet's central field is a honeycomb of octagons within which appear eight-pointed stars and stylized animal and human figures. In the outermost border, angular Arabic script frames a variety of lively scenes, including bears hunting various prey, flocks of small birds perching in trees, men fighting bears, and women wearing fifteenth-century European hoopskirts.

## CARPET MAKING IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

Originating in central and western Asia as coverings for beaten-earth floors, carpets have functioned practically and aesthetically throughout the ages in houses, tents, mosques, and palaces. Migration and conquest spread the craft and intermingled designs and styles. Rug manufacturing was brought to Spain by Muslims from North Africa early in the eighth century, and had become an important Spanish industry by the twelfth century.

The Museum's admiral carpet was woven by hand on a loom, most likely by Muslim weavers (virtually all of whom were women). Achieving such intricate detail and fine texture required tying more than one hundred knots per square inch; it could take years to complete a carpet of this size and quality.

## THE ISLAMIC PERIOD IN SPAIN

Early in the eighth century, Muslim armies made up of Arabs from the East and Berbers from Morocco crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and took control of most of the Iberian Peninsula (present-day Spain and Portugal) from the Visigoths (Germanic Christians). In the course of its nearly eight-hundred-year existence, al-Andalus, as the Muslims named the new Islamic frontier, would become a cultural capital for both East and West. Lavish royal patronage fostered great artistic achievements, the most widely known of which are truly monumental—the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra palace-citadel in Granada.

Attempts by Christians to reconquer the territory continued throughout the centuries and encroached on al-Andalus from the North. In 1469 the marriage of Ferdinand of Castile and Isabella of Aragon

united the two most powerful Christian kingdoms on the peninsula. In 1492 Granada, the last remaining Muslim state, fell to these Catholic monarchs, who became the first to rule a united Spain. Non-Christians were forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled: all Jews were driven out in 1492; Muslims were officially expelled in 1609–10. The full extent of the influence of Islamic Spain on European culture, science, industry, and technology—during and long after the Muslim presence—has only recently begun to be widely recognized.

## HOW THIS CARPET CAME TO THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Until the 1890s the admiral carpet remained a possession of the Spanish convent to which it had been donated by the Enríquez family. Later acquired by the Reverend and Mrs. Charles F. Williams of Norristown, Pennsylvania, who gathered one of the first collections of antique Asian and Middle Eastern carpets in the United States, the rug became Museum property in 1955.

## LOOKING AND DISCUSSING

### INITIAL OBSERVATION

Have students work together to create a list of everything they see in the admiral carpet: colors, lines, patterns, textures, shapes, animals, people, etc.

### OPEN DISCUSSION

Begin an open discussion of the carpet by asking students to share their impressions of the work and find visual evidence for their statements.

### DIRECTED LOOKING (WITH ANSWERS IN ITALICS)

What are the largest shapes in the carpet?

*The three golden squares in the center are the largest shapes in the carpet.*

What designs are inside each square?

*Each golden square contains a shield, two anchors, and two ropes. Inside each shield are a lion and two castles.*

Each golden square is the coat of arms of Fadrique Enríquez, the man for whom this carpet was made. He was the admiral (commander of the navy) of a Spanish kingdom called Castile. How is his

high position represented by the symbols in his coat of arms?

*Regarded as the king of beasts and commonly used as a symbol of royalty, the lion represents Enríquez's status as an officer of the king. The castles represent the kingdom of Castile; "castile" means castle in Spanish. The anchors and ropes refer to the navy that Enríquez commanded.*

Find some of the areas of geometric pattern in the carpet. What shapes make up the patterns?

*The center of the carpet is composed of octagon and diamond shapes. Surrounding this area is a border of diamond shapes made of crisscrossing, zigzagging, yellow lines.*

How are the outer borders on the sides of the carpet different from the rest of the carpet?

*They are full of scenes of animals and people. Explore these scenes by having students come up close to the poster and find where the details come from in the border of the rug.*

Can you find white, angular lines that separate the scenes in the outer border?

*Explain that these lines are based on Arabic calligraphy (decorative writing).*

## TIMELINE

- 1238** Mohammed I establishes the dynasty that will rule Islamic Spain—by the mid-1240s reduced to the small southern province of Granada—until its demise in 1492
- c. 1400** Chinese traders join Arab and Indian merchants trading in East Africa
- 1402** Mongol conqueror Timur (Tamerlane) defeats the Ottoman Turks near Ankara, threatening their empire
- c. 1412** Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi sets down rules of linear perspective
- 1415** Henry V defeats the French army at Agincourt, enabling England to conquer much of France
- 1429** Joan of Arc leads French forces against the English at Orléans; two years later she is burned at the stake in Rouen
- Mid-1400s** "Admiral" Heraldic Carpet is woven
- 1453** Ottoman Turks conquer Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire

- 1455** The Gutenberg Bible is the first large book printed with movable type in Europe
- 1469** Spain's Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon are united through the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella
- 1477** Japan's ten-year civil war ends indecisively; a century of internal conflict ensues
- 1478** Ferdinand and Isabella persuade Pope Sixtus IV to authorize the Spanish Inquisition
- 1480** The Inca Empire reaches its zenith; fifty-two years later it is vanquished by Spanish conquistadors
- 1492** Ferdinand and Isabella conquer Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain; Christopher Columbus reaches the Americas; the beginnings of Spain's colonial empire are established in the New World
- 1498** Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama establishes a sea route around Africa to India
- 1609–10** Philip II expels all Muslims from Spain

*This carpet is included in Images of the Middle Ages, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by a generous grant from the Lila Wallace—Reader's Digest Fund.*