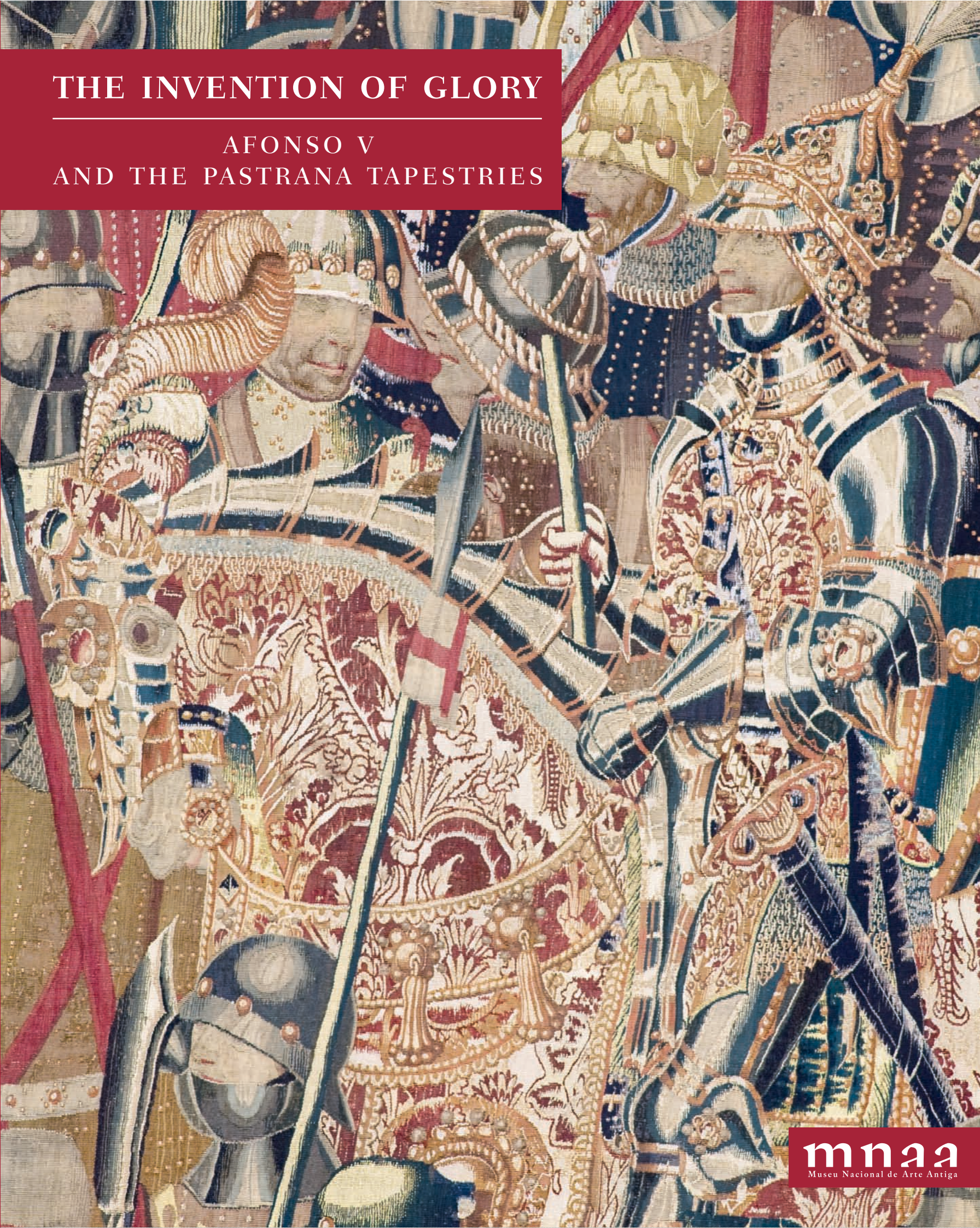


THE INVENTION OF GLORY

AFONSO V
AND THE PASTRANA TAPESTRIES



THE INVENTION OF GLORY

AFONSO V
AND THE PASTRANA TAPESTRIES

AFONSO V AND THE INVENTION OF GLORY.
THE PASTRANA TAPESTRIES
AT THE MUSEU NACIONAL DE ARTE ANTIGA

It is said (despite the crusade waged by the *Annales* School against *histoire événementielle*) that History is like a mural painting: an immense composition, in which characters and events evolve, in an operation that always implies *perspective* and the values of light and shade, evoking the glories and failures of its protagonists. It might similarly also be said that it is like a tapestry, to the extent that the final picture results from the slow interweaving of the threads that shape it, and, in no small measure, from the hand that guides the warp. History has, in fact, always denounced the historian, just as today it finds itself plunged into the crisis that currently questions the old paradigm of History as a science.

As far as the History of Art is concerned, it does not seem that this is simply a question of producing *more History* – as if it were merely a matter of broadening its scope to include a new (and more peripheral) set of facts or systems. Instead, it is *Another History*, which makes use of the same methodology (immediately employing the notion of *Time* as an operative category) and becomes objectively interwoven with it, but only in order to centre itself or concentrate upon the very particular ballast that is included in the (albeit somewhat diffuse) concept of a *work of art*: a multimodal set of creations, in diverse fields, that, because they are designed, at their very first level, for people's sensory enjoyment, cannot, however, avoid being projected into discourses and narratives (either implicitly or explicitly). And, even when this does not happen, they cannot avoid amounting to *facts*, which are always susceptible to readings and interpretations and always have documentary value. It is also for this same reason that the work of art, in whose production we find a combination of fact and conjuncture, political, economic and cultural conditions and individual or collective wills, constitutes the most perfect prism for observing Time: that central mission of History – so that it is highly imprudent to neglect it.

This is in fact what happens, and in a particularly intense fashion, with the extraordinary works of art that together form the

so-called *Pastrana Tapestries*: the four monumental wall hangings produced at the Tournai workshops in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, narrating the North African conquests of Dom Afonso V, the king of Portugal, and which, at least since the seventeenth century, have been conserved at the respective Collegiate Church. In truth, rather than embodying the mere concept of *tapestries of History* or historiated tapestries, like most of their counterparts of that time, illustrated with episodes of a biblical or mythological nature, or being considered, at the very least, as *tapestries of Ancient History*, these particular tapestries should be viewed more concretely as *tapestries for History*, as part of an operative relationship that is deliberately established with contemporaneity.

In fact, in these tapestries and in the context of a commission that can be described as exceptional in every respect, what was projected, thread after thread, was the recreated (and therefore *invented* or mental) image of a monarch proving that he had an acute awareness of the rhetorical goodness of the *monument* and its importance for constructing a posthumous view of his actions as King and Leader. Hence that highly detailed account of the *Conquest of Arzila* (in an epic trilogy of *Landing*, *Siege* and *Assault*) and the *Fall of Tangier* (conquered through surrender, with the attack perhaps justifying one single tapestry, without the presence of the king), an almost unprecedented commission from the prestigious Flemish workshops, produced only a few years after the great events that they evoked (1471).

And this was certainly also the reason for its rapid reinforcement through the placement of a new commission, one that was no less fantastic and, once again, was made only a few years after the events, leading to the production of a new series (of which there remain or were woven only two tapestries, of identical and extraordinary dimensions), significantly given the name of *Crusade Tapestries* and on this occasion dedicated to the episodes related with the conquest of Ksar es-Seghir, in 1458, almost fifteen years earlier: but designed to complete the evocation of the king's Moroccan exploits, now illustrating the *Mass and Kissing of Hands in Lagos*, before the departure and *Embarkation* as he headed for the Algarve over the seas, thenceforth reflected in the monarch's own nomenclature. These tapestries, it must be admitted, have

enjoyed much less exposure and it was considered very important to be able to bring them to Portugal as well.

In all of them, in fact, the same concern is expressed with creating an image for History: with the invention of a record of glory about the exploits of the warrior king, who in these tapestries demonstrates (in an unprecedented act, in view of the retrospectively projected mediaeval cliché of the knight-king that historiography has labelled him with from afar) an acute and modern knowledge of the operative importance of the scenic and visual media, revealing an intellectual background that was already impregnated with a mythical yearning for heroism, certainly imbibed through the teachings of the pedagogues Estêvão de Nápoles and Mateus Pisano, which his regent uncle provided him with. And this called for a record to be made, because of the rarity that it represented at the level of a contemporary (and in fact repeated) commission and because of the singular anticipation that it represented in comparison, for example, with the one that was produced in 1535, at the orders of Charles V, in order to celebrate the conquest of Tunis (which had a similar significance both in political terms and at the level of the crusade).

A culturally humanised prince, certainly, like all those of the Avis Dynasty, and – without wishing by this to be stating an apparent contradiction – a mystical prince (like all those of the Avis Dynasty). His personality was also further refined by crusading ideals (in fact very current at that time in-between times and which were projected in the African enterprise) and by an ethical vision founded upon the concepts of chivalry, which would cause him to mint *espadins* (an old Portuguese coin that derives its name from the principal device, which was a hand grasping an upright sword), to found an *Order of the Sword* and to line up in heraldic garments alongside his peers from the Golden Fleece. This was an *ethos* (and also a political aim of creating a circle of reinforcement and prestige) which would also represent an anticipation in relation to the equally symbolic decorative programme that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Manuel I was to commission for the Sala dos Brasões at the National Palace of Sintra. A mediaeval-modern king, naturally. Or, quite the opposite, if considered retrospectively on the basis of the Gothic radicalism that would later shape the imperial aesthetics of the king known as *the Fortunate*.

For this reason (if he had been able to know it in advance), he would certainly not have objected to the nickname that History

was to give him, that of *the “African” king* – in the way that it highlights an ancient system of reference, evocative of Ciprianus, the conqueror of Hispania. But also for this same reason, mention should be made of the note made by the knight Georg von Ehingen, next to the portrait that he drew of him (around 1457–58) and which represents an extremely rare and valuable iconographic element for establishing the appearance of Afonso V, at the youthful age of 25, while also giving us an idea of his mental profile: “The king was a handsome and well-formed prince, and the most Christian, most bellicose and fairest king that I have ever met”.

Fair, bellicose and Christian (as is perhaps reflected in the insignia of the *rodízio*, found in great abundance on the tapestries, with an extremely rare example to be found with his effigy superimposed upon it at the Church of São Francisco in Beja), imbued with a spirit of mission and *crusade*. He wished to bequeath this image to History, thus demonstrating his awareness of the need to build a hagiographic and glorified image. And it is that attitude (overlooking any more complex authorial questioning) that, together with the two series of the Pastrana tapestries, is equally surprising in the mythical (and mystical) polyptych of the collective veneration of St. Vincent, similarly ordered and idealised by him in what amounted to an evident symbolic and ideological complementarity: and which, for that very reason it became necessary to draw closer to.

A prince who was aware of the image that he should project onto the great mural painting upon which our memory is cemented (in an always underlying morality). It is, however, precisely there – in that final *tapestry* – that the cloth (or paper) clearly ran out: even though in such a process no small part was played by the premature disappearance from the Portuguese territory of the prodigious cycle of the evocations of his military glory, further complemented by the long period of forgetfulness to which the now famous panels were subjected. Taking all things together, however, he would essentially be afforded a position in the shadows, in the background of History, slowly interwoven for him by the commentators – from the pens of the chroniclers to the pages of the historians. Such a withdrawn position was after all necessary for the (shining and glowing) drawing that was made of the other figures that were to appear before and after him: his uncle Dom Pedro, the one of the *Seven Departures* (he himself was to travel, from Castile to France, without ever being given any credit for this); and his son, the *Perfect Prince*.

He himself, however, was to go down in the future memory, as the *imperfect prince*: his hands forever stained with the blood of his tutor, equivocally shed at the Battle of Alfarrobeira (without taking into account the equivocal action of Dom Pedro himself, in delaying the handover of power; the removal of authority that, in his childlike eyes, was represented by the fact that his mother was denied the legitimate right to act as his regent; or, for the nobility trained in the school of the still chivalrous legitimacies and loyalties, by the educational sequestration of the prince, who was brought up and schooled under the auspices of his uncle and regent and was married while still a child to his uncle's own daughter); the lukewarm assumption of royalty (rapidly overtaken by the frightful ambitions of nobles and potentates) and the very desertion of the Crown (with its later recovery and *usurpation*) and the consequent and melancholic defeat on French territory; in short, the erratic and ruinous pursuit of Iberian ambitions that were to end in the disaster of Toro in 1476, the last chapter of his political activity, whereby he would definitively forfeit the sceptre, fleeing to a monastery and inevitably producing one final icon: the ceremonial armchair of Varatojo (and no longer a throne) [cat. 5], whose possession is traditionally attributed to him. Before he was finally overtaken by death in 1481.

And it is this date, after all (that of the loss of Toro), that it is worth comparing with that of the commission (at the beginning of the last quarter of the fifteenth century) of this extraordinary group of Pastrana tapestries: which was to relegate the series of the *Crusade Tapestries* to a later project (already in the reign of João II, in this way reinforcing the (re)invention of his father's glory – with the necessary epistemological consequences). A whole host of questions, therefore, that open up the contemplation of these *tapestries for History*, in which there is a fatal crossover between the very question about the final destination of those incredible pieces and the naturally monumental setting (at the Paço dos Estaus?) that was reserved for them.

Now that they have at last reached here, however, it is a memory that is exhumed and reconstructed – and, in this sense, is *invented* – in the mere possibility of finally enjoying, in devolved splendour, the monumental series of the four Pastrana tapestries: in a subtle interaction with a handful of pieces of special significance, which make it possible to contextualise and understand their production, in what amounts to a mutual and plural enrichment. In this sense, they are not only tapestries of History (of the History of

Afonso V and the Portugal of that time) that thus become fully intelligible through the effects of their correct contextualisation. In fact, it is the actual *Panel of the King* itself that, within the peculiar framework of that other magnificent monument that he himself undertook to bequeath to posterity (the mystical ex-voto from the Nation to the miraculous saint who, at the beginning of its own History, had lent it his assistance in the expansion of the Faith), now emerges from under the *Panel of the Infante*, the mythical fixation of the History-moral that has long been impregnated within it.

In this exemplary partnership made possible by the commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the two Iberian countries' treaty of accession to the European Union (EEC), the fact that the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon currently houses the four monumental Flemish tapestries commissioned by Afonso V and kept in Spain, at the end of a painstaking and courageous process of restoration undertaken by the Fundación Carlos de Amberes, is certainly a singular moment in the history of the first Portuguese museum, which is in fact close to completing its first hundred years in its current configuration. Even more so, if we bear in mind that this opportunity to once again be able to promote the mythical (but opportune) confrontation with the so-called *Panels of St. Vincent*, attributed to Nuno Gonçalves, is a circumstance that only the Lisbon museum is currently in a position to provide.

But this unprecedented joint presentation of these tapestries (since their departure from Portugal, under circumstances that have never been completely clarified) would in itself be enough to fully justify the opportune nature of the present exhibition. The further association, around them, of a significant group of pieces directly associated with the *image* of the king who commissioned them (whether the image that he was personally committed to creating or the one that posterity has mythically associated with him), unquestionably allows us to make the singular rediscovery (and, in that sense, the *invention*) of the pursuit of glory that motivated the man and the monarch in his path through life: and it is, consequently, an opportunity for an eloquent demonstration of the operative value of the artistic heritage in the construction of History, which it would similarly be unwise to neglect. It is, however, in the very history itself of the fifteenth-century Flemish production of tapestries – and in the context of a History of Art in Portugal – that the series of Pastrana tapestries thus cements its central place: the dignity that naturally surrounds the Portuguese commissioner of these works.

EXHIBITION

CURATORS

António Filipe Pimentel
Catherine Geens

COORDINATION

José Alberto Seabra Carvalho
Teresa Pacheco Pereira

INSTALLATION STAFF

J. C. Sampaio, Lda.
URBANOS – Division of Fine Arts
Press Officer
Anísio Franco

TECHNICAL SECRETARY

Sabine Volkmann
Support
Graça Abreu
Ana Sousa
Madalena Thomaz

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

Rita Azevedo
Ana Rita Gonçalves
Adelaide Lopes
Maria de Lourdes Riobom

SPECIAL COLLABORATION

Ana Madureira

COMMUNICATION DESIGN

FBA. Ferrand, Bicker & Associados

VIDEO

Laranja Azul

INSURANCE

AON GIL y CARVAJAL
AON France
LUSITÂNIA, Companhia de Seguros, S. A.

TRANSPORT

EDICT S.L.
URBANOS – Division of Fine Arts

CATALOGUE

EDITION

Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga
Fundación Carlos de Amberes

EDITORIAL COORDINATION (PORTUGAL)

Ana de Castro Henriques

TEXTS

Miguel Ángel Aguilar
Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra (MAB)
Yvan Maes De Wit
António Filipe Pimentel
Dalila Rodrigues

NOTES ON WORKS OF ART

Celina Bastos (CB)
Joaquim Caetano (JC)
José Alberto Seabra Carvalho (JASC)
Saul António Gomes (SAG)
Conceição Borges de Sousa (CBS)

TRANSLATION

John Elliott (Texts: Prime Minister of Portugal, Management of the Institute of Museums and Conservation, António Filipe Pimentel. Entries: cat. 1–5)
Philip Sutton (Texts: Prime Minister of Spain, Bishop of the Diocese of Sigüenza-Guadalajara, Miguel Ángel Aguilar, Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra, Dalila Rodrigues, Yvan Maes De Wit. Entries: cat. 6–9).

PHOTOGRAPHY

All the photographs of the tapestries were taken in Brussels by Pol Mayer.
Brussels, Yvan Maes De Wit: figs. 13–27
Laura Castro Caldas/ Paulo Cintra: cat. 4
Évora, Biblioteca Pública de Évora: fig. 11
Lisbon, IMC/Divisão de Documentação Fotográfica: figs. 9 and 10 (José Pessoa); cat. 5 (Carlos Monteiro)
Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga: fig. 8
Madrid, Oronoz: figs. 2 and 5
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France: cat. 3
Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek [Cod.hist.qt.141, S. 89]: cat. 2
Toledo, © Cabildo Primado: fig. 6

PRODUCTION

Ediciones El Viso

DESIGN

Subiela

PREPRESS

Lucam

PRINTING

Brizzolis

BINDING

Ramos

© of the edition: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga and
Fundación Carlos de Amberes

© of the texts: the authors

ISBN [MUSEU NACIONAL DE ARTE ANTIGA] 978-972-776-406-8

ISBN [FUNDACIÓN CARLOS DE AMBERES] 978-84-87369-62-9

LEGAL DEPOSIT [PORTUGAL] 311541/10

LEGAL DEPOSIT [SPAIN] M-25471-2010

Print Run: 500 copies