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1 Persian carpet,  
17th century.  
Florence, Museo  
Bardini, inv. 555

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# ‘HITLER’S CARPET’ A TALE OF ONE CITY

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In an article titled “Louvre’s Dragonfly-Wing-Like Islamic Art Building Is Ready to Fly” and published in the *Los Angeles Times* on 1 September 2012, Mario Bellini, the Italian architect in charge of construction of the new wing in the Louvre’s 19th-century Visconti Courtyard explains the specific aesthetic of the ‘dragonfly’ wing as follows: “If you look up, you understand you’re in a courtyard, [...] but on the other hand, you feel you are in a special world, and this magic filter – we can say a flying carpet – it transports your fantasy and your attention elsewhere, while you can still glimpse out and position yourself. That peculiar aspect of being there and not being there is what I think makes our proposal a success.”<sup>1</sup>

The engagement of modern architects and designers in projects involving the erection and re-building of

museums today is quite evident. Museums in today’s so-called modern secular society are a major focus of public interest. They are the magnets of our mobile travelling society and the agoras where a sophisticated discourse on social and political issues as well as ethical values unfolds. The objects that are on permanent or temporary display in them invite visitors to engage in an aesthetic or, more precisely, visual interaction with history that is seemingly unaffected by a religious gaze. Moreover, artefacts and masterpieces on display tend to be transformed from objects of cult to objects of culture in a usually rigid manner, whereby their function is obscured or, indeed, replaced by aesthetics – they are a visual pleasure to the eye. The universal, broad-based values associated with the aesthetic merits of artefacts sometimes cause us to forget that, despite

<sup>1</sup> Devorah Lauter, “Louvre’s Dragonfly-Wing-Like Islamic Art Building Is Ready to Fly”, in: *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 2012, URL: [http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-ca-louvre-](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-ca-louvre-islam-20120902,0,6657050.story)

[islam-20120902,0,6657050.story](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-ca-louvre-islam-20120902,0,6657050.story) (accessed on 16 Sept. 2012). Cf. Rudy Ricciotti/Mario Bellini/Renaud Piérard, “A New Space for the Islamic Arts”, in: *Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre*, ed. by Sophie Makariou, Paris 2012, pp. 20–25.

this aesthetic gaze – a way of approaching the object that purports to be on equal terms and impartial –, there is still a particular narrative that is being told. Artefacts are not merely visual illustrations of written sources and oral traditions. They are independent, self-sufficient sources for telling stories and histories that can actually contradict and challenge literary sources. It would be interesting to contemplate on Bellini's description of the ceiling of the Louvre's new wing for Islamic art as a "flying carpet". His suggestion that visitors when confronted with the sculptured ceiling will experience spiritual transport, while the display of Islamic objects in the space will cause their thoughts and fancy to take flight, is very intriguing. In fact, the newly designed space clearly interacts with the glass pyramid designed by I. M. Pei that was erected at the entrance courtyard to the Louvre in 1989. But whereas Pei's pyramid is an unmistakably steady and solid structure fixed at one particular spot, the idea of the flying carpet suggests transition and change. And yet, the flying carpet allegory as related to the world of Islam is perhaps one of the most obvious clichés – a thousand-and-one-nights marvel – that has considerable bearing on the popular mind and, indeed, on the jargon of academic 'Orientalism'.<sup>2</sup>

Why the carpet came to be the unmistakable emissary of Islam in the West is a topic that goes beyond

the scope of this study. It is likely that the richness of its colours, its usual pattern of flowers and scrolls, often referred to as arabesques, as well as its common spatial organisation, which tends to reject any sense of depth, turned the carpet into the Islamic art object par excellence, which epitomises Western stereotypical views of Islamic art. Moreover, these stereotypical views focusing on iconoclasm in Islamic art or, more precisely, its rejection of imitation of nature, likewise appear to be confirmed by the carpet's decoration. It seems then that the carpet could be regarded as the grand Other of Western art, especially as compared to, say, Renaissance painting in Florence with its one-point perspective. It is this antithesis that obviously prompted Oscar Wilde to say that "the whole history of [the] arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation [...], and our own imitative spirit".<sup>3</sup>

Of course, there were several other reasons involved in reinforcing the carpet's central role as an envoy of Islamic art in the West, first among them its perceived status as a luxury object, a fact that contributed, in the High Middle Ages, to its immediate acceptance in royal and wealthy aristocratic households in Europe, and, in modern times, to its impact on artists interested in the new possibilities offered by abstract art.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Our understanding and use of the term 'Orientalism' is related to the long Western history that narrates the image of Islam from the birth of this religion in the 7th century until our 'modern' era and draws on the influential study of Edward W. Said. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London 1978; *idem*, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in: *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976–1984*, ed. by Francis Barker *et al.*, London/New York 1986, pp. 210–229; Asaf Hussain *et al.*, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, Brattleboro, Vt., 1984; see also Armando Salvatore, "Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacement of 'Essentialism' in the Study of Islam", in: *Arabica*, 43 (1996), pp. 457–485; *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. by Alexander L. Macfie, New York 2000; Touraj Atabaki, *Beyond Essentialism: Who Writes Whose Past in the Middle East and Central Asia*, Amsterdam 2003; Birgit Schäßler, "Riding the Turns: Edward Said's Buch 'Orientalism' als Erfolgsgeschichte", in: *Orient – Orientalistik – Orientalismus: Geschichte und Aktualität einer Debatte*, ed. by Burkhard Schnepel/Gunnar Brands/Hanne Schönig, Bielefeld 2011, pp. 279–302.

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", in: *Complete Works*, ed. by Vyvyan Holland, London/Glasgow 1967, p. 979. For Oscar Wilde's view on the aesthetic of the Persian carpet, see *ibidem*, p. 45: "I should like to write a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal." For the history of the role of the Oriental carpet in the West see mainly Kurt Erdmann, *Europa und der Orientteppich*, Berlin/Mainz 1962; John Mills, *Carpets in Pictures: Themes and Painters in the National Gallery*, London 1975; *idem*, *Carpets in Paintings*, London 1983; Hans-Günther Schwarz, *Orient-Okzident: Der orientalische Teppich in der westlichen Literatur, Ästhetik und Kunst*, Munich 1990; Rosamund Mack, "Lotto a Carpet Connoisseur", in: *Lotto: Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance*, ed. by David A. Brown/Peter Humfrey/Mauro Lucco, Washington 1997, pp. 59–67; Marco Spallanzani, *Oriental Rugs in Renaissance Florence*, Florence 2007; see also Annette Beselin, "Bode auf den zweiten Blick", in: *Islamische Kunst in Berliner Sammlungen: 100 Jahre Museum für islamische Kunst*, ed. by Jens Kröger/Désirée Heiden, Berlin 2004, pp. 66–71.

Our aim in this short study is to focus on a specific aspect concerning carpets and politics. At the centre of this investigation is a particular Persian carpet in the Museo Bardini in Florence (Inv. 555, Fig. I) that came to be known in oral tradition as ‘Hitler’s carpet’; it was reputedly used to welcome Hitler on the platform of Florence’s main train station on 9 May 1938, where it was allegedly stepped on by Hitler and cut by his spurs, an account that will be examined in this study and put into its specific historical context, thus allowing us to speculate on the particular reasons that contributed to its dissemination and the credence that was lent to it in Florence.

In the first part of this article, we will introduce the carpet in the Bardini collection in Florence and provide an historical overview on the political role of carpets. In addition, we will look in detail at the specific uses and rituals of audience hall carpets in the medieval Islamic world. This emphasis on the carpet’s role in the various regions of the Islamic world is important mainly to establish its political function in the Middle Ages and early modern era in both the Muslim and Christian spheres; it may also, to a certain degree, shed light on the history of the common present-day diplomatic practice of using carpets in official arrival ceremonies for political figures and on the particular story involving the use of the Bardini

carpet in Florence in 1938. The second part of this article focuses on the tradition and the Florentine urban narratives associated with this carpet and aims at explaining the complex relationship between fiction and reality in its modern biography.

## I.

Before travelling back in time in order to trace the long history of carpets and politics, let us first introduce Bardini’s carpet.<sup>5</sup> This monumental piece measuring 280 × 750 cm is one of the best-preserved carpets in the Museo Bardini. It is also the largest, though not the most significant or valuable carpet in the collection. It was probably made in the mid-17th century in one of the main workshops of central Iran, most likely in Isfahan. The carpet is a cotton-made piece featuring about eight different colours, including ivory-white, Bordeaux, red, yellow, green, turquoise, blue, and dark brown. It is densely knotted, with some 2000 knots per dm<sup>2</sup>, and decorated with a floral pattern that has commonly been referred to in the West as arabesque decor. Its main field consists of large palmette-shaped flowers and large cloud bands on a warm red background. The borders are decorated with varied palmette flowers of different sizes in various positions. These borders are defined by a rather darker blue background.

Vera-Simone Schulz is working on a Ph.D. thesis on “Eindringliche Dinge: ‘Orientalisierungen’ und textile Ästhetik in der Toskana, 1200–1500”; see also *eadem*, “Portraits, Photographs and Politics in the Carpet Medium: Persia, the Soviet Union and Beyond”, in: *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* (in press).

<sup>4</sup> See esp. Fredrik R. Martin, *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*, Vienna 1908; John Mills, “The Coming of the Carpet to the West”, in: *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 17th Century*, London 1983, pp. 11–23; Brian Spooner, “Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet”, in: *The Social Life of Things*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai, Cambridge 1986, pp. 195–237; Kurt Erdmann, *Der orientalische Knüpfteppich*, Tübingen 1960; see also Wilhelm von Bode/Ernst Kühnel, *Vorderasiatische Knüpfteppiche aus alter Zeit*, Munich 1985 (reprint of the ed. Leipzig 1902). Regarding the role of carpets in abstract painting see esp. Schwarz (note 3), *passim*; *Die Macht des Ornaments*, exh. cat., ed. by Agnes Husslein-Arco/Sabine

Vogel, Vienna 2009; and *Ornament und Abstraktion*, exh. cat. Riechen 2001, ed. by Markus Brüderlin, Cologne 2001.

<sup>5</sup> On this carpet see mainly: Alfredo Lenzi, “Il Museo Bardini – V. Dipinti, cornici, cose varie”, in: *Dedalo*, X (1929/30), pp. 69–98: 97f., fig. p. 97; Ferdinando Mazzini, *Tappeti orientali*, Livorno 1954 (1940), p. 72, pl. 38; Vittorio Viale, “I tappeti”, in: *Arazzi e tappeti antichi*, exh. cat. Turin 1948, ed. by Vittorio Viale/Mercedes Viale Ferrero, Turin 1952, pp. 161–247: 190–192, no. 9, pl. 131; Michele Campana, *Tappeti d’Oriente*, Milan 1966, pp. 46f., no. 18; Mercedes Viale Ferrero, *Impariamo a conoscere i tappeti*, Novara 1969, p. 22, no. 8; Alberto Boralevi, “I tappeti orientali del Museo Bardini”, in: *Hali*, ital. suppl., I (1981), pp. 2–15: 8, no. 8; Giovanni Curatola, *Tappeti*, Milan 1981, no. 112; Enza Milanese, *Tappeti: guida completa al riconoscimento dei tappeti d’antiquariato*, Milan 1992, p. 105; *eadem*, *Il tappeto: i luoghi, l’arte, la storia*, Milan 1997, p. 35; Alberto Boralevi, *Geometrie d’Oriente: Stefano Bardini e il tappeto antico = Oriental Geometries: Stefano Bardini and the Antique Carpet*, Livorno 1999, pp. 110f., no. 38.



2 The carpet of Fig. 1 as exhibited in the Museo Bardini today

The carpet is prominently mounted on the front wall of the main stairwell of the Museo Bardini (Fig. 2), a museum housing the collection of the Florentine antiques and art dealer Stefano Bardini (1836–1922). Completed in 1883, the palazzo near the Lungarno, on the Piazza dei Mozzi, was initially used by Bardini to accommodate his office and exhibition spaces and then, after business operations were terminated in 1914, his private art exhibition. His collection consisted not just of the leftovers of his commercial activities, but was, indeed, of museum quality. Upon his death, Bardini bequeathed his collection and palazzo to the City of Florence.<sup>6</sup> It is unknown when the carpet entered the collection and where it was displayed during Bardini’s lifetime.

<sup>6</sup> *Il Museo Bardini a Firenze*, ed. by Fiorenza Scalia/Cristina De Benedictis, I, Florence 1984. On Bardini see esp. Valerie Niemeyer Chini, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode: mercanti e connaisseur fra Ottocento e Novecento*, Florence 2009; Antonella Nesi, “Stefano Bardini: da pittore a restauratore, da antiquario a conservatore”, in: *La croce di Bernardo Daddi: vicissitudini di un’opera d’arte*, ed. by Antonella Nesi, Florence 2011, pp. 14–21.

<sup>7</sup> Bardini’s photographic collection is kept in the Fototeca dei Musei Civici Fiorentini, Florence.

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to reconstruct exactly when Bardini’s photographs were taken; the views of the various room installations probably date from the

Extensive photographic documentation shows the layout of the palazzo with its eclectically furnished rooms, which traces back to Stefano Bardini: an artfully staged wealth of artworks, architectural fragments and fine objects of various provenance, with the Oriental carpets sometimes decorating the blue painted walls, sometimes covering the floors. The carpet with the inventory number 555, however, cannot be reliably identified in any of the surviving photographs, although one does show a very similar carpet, albeit just a corner of it (Fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> Some of the objects from the collection, including carpets, were also individually documented in photographs, but not our carpet, which may indicate that Bardini did not count it among his most important pieces. One photograph (Fig. 4) shows a dense array of carpets mounted in the stairwell, a form of display possibly linked to Bardini’s commercial activities, when a selection of pieces was offered to potential buyers.<sup>8</sup> The 1914 *Inventario generale* of the Galleria Bardini lists several carpets in the stairwell area, including a “Grande tappeto persiano, lungo oltre 8 metri” mounted “scendendo; parete di fronte” (i.e. on the lower front wall of the stairwell) that was deleted from the inventory in 1916 as sold.<sup>9</sup> Our carpet may subsequently have been mounted on the front wall, while before 1916 it was likely mounted on the right-hand wall of the stairwell, where the inventory lists, among other pieces, a “Grande tappeto persiano con disegni su fondo rosso e su fondo bleu”.<sup>10</sup> The revised and notarised inventory that was drawn up right after Bardini’s death in 1922 lists the

period 1883–1890. On this and generally on the photographic documentation of Bardini’s commercial activity and collection see Cristina Poggi, “Le fotografie di Stefano Bardini”, in: *L’archivio storico fotografico di Stefano Bardini: dipinti – disegni – miniature – stampe*, ed. by Everett Fahy, Florence 2000, pp. 417–424. According to Lynn Catterson, who is preparing a larger study on the Bardini archive and generously shared her material with us, older inventory books confirm the display of carpets in the stairwell.

<sup>9</sup> Archivio dei Musei Civici Fiorentini, *Galleria Bardini: inventario generale*, 1914, p. 53, no. 330.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 333.



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3 Palazzo and  
Galleria Bardini in  
Florence, ca. 1890



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4 Palazzo and  
Galleria Bardini in  
Florence, ca. 1890,  
carpets hanging in  
the main stairwell

5 Museo Bardini, view of the main stairwell from the ground floor, ca. 1923, from Lensi 1923/24 (note 15)



FIRENZE, PALAZZO BARDINI: LA SCALA.

carpet (now identified by its dimensions and the inventory number 555, which it still has today) in the stairwell, without specifying its exact position.<sup>11</sup>

Only since the establishment of the Museo Bardini as one of Florence's municipal museums in 1923–1925<sup>12</sup> has the mounting of the carpet on the front wall of the stairwell been documented: a photograph shows it displayed like a solitaire in this prominent location, accompanied only by a painting, Luca Giordano's *Apollo and Marsyas* (Fig. 5).<sup>13</sup> The picture is part of a photographic campaign of the 'purified' museum installation by Mario Pelagatti, Assessore alle Belle Arti

of the Comune di Firenze, and Alfredo Lensi, curator of the Florentine municipal museums and, consequently, of the Museo Bardini. The series seems to trace back to the photographer Ferdinando Barsotti<sup>14</sup> and was obviously made in connection with the new installation, though prior to the official opening in 1925, since Lensi already published the photograph showing the stairwell with the carpet in the 1923/24 issue of the journal *Dedalo*, when the rearrangement was still a work in progress.<sup>15</sup> The restrained installation with ivory-coloured walls and just a selection of Bardini's objects was retained in the post-war period.

<sup>11</sup> Archivio dei Musei Civici Fiorentini, *Inventario delle opere conservate nel Palazzo*, 1922, p. 95, no. 555.

<sup>12</sup> Bruna Maria Tomasello, "Il Museo di Stefano Bardini", in: *Museografia italiana negli anni Venti: il museo di ambientazione*, conference proceedings Feltre 2001, Feltre 2003, pp. 19–41.

<sup>13</sup> On this painting see *Museo Stefano Bardini: guida alla visita del museo*, ed. by Antonella Nesi, Florence 2011, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> A set of roughly 150 photographs is kept in the form of cyanotypes at the Fototeca dei Musei Civici Fiorentini, Florence, "Miscellaneo Storico". Some photographs are also accessible in the Photothek of the Kunsthisto-

risches Institut in Florenz where they were inventoried as photographs by Ferdinando Barsotti. Barsotti regularly worked for Lensi; cf. Alfredo Lensi, *Quaderni di ricordi*, Florence 1985, e.g. pp. 209, 211. See also Cosimo Chiarelli, "Ferdinando e Gino Barsotti, fotografi di architettura nella Firenze del Novecento", in: *Architettura & Arte*, XI/XII (2000), pp. 24–31.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Alfredo Lensi, "Il Museo Bardini: stucchi e terrecotte", in: *Dedalo*, IV (1923/24), pp. 486–511, here the illustration on p. 487. Lensi published a total of five accounts of the new museum's collections; see also *idem*, "Il Museo Bardini – II. Le armi", in: *Dedalo*, VI (1925/26), pp. 164–183; *idem*, "Il Museo Bardini – III. Marmi e pietre", in: *Dedalo*, VI (1925/26),



6 Museo Bardini, view of the main stairwell from the ground floor, ca. 1953



7 Museo Bardini, view of the main stairwell, ca. 1978

Whereas our carpet remained in its place,<sup>16</sup> it was now accompanied by two other carpets, one on each side (Figs. 6, 7). Only when the museum was reopened in 2009 after the original installation had been partially reconstructed, additional carpets went on display in the stairwell (Fig. 2), yet without restoring the extreme density of Bardini's installation.

When visiting the Museo Bardini today an information board reports about the famous episode in the history of the carpet that earned him his nickname:

D'altronde ancora negli anni Trenta del Novecento la considerazione artistica riservata ai tappeti era piuttosto scarsa se si pensa alla scelta di disporre alla Stazione Centrale di Firenze il tappeto persiano che oggi riveste la parete maggiore dello scalone, per accogliere Hitler. Sull'opera rimase un vistoso taglio causato dagli speroni degli stivali militari del Führer.

Hitler's 1938 visit to Italy reciprocating Mussolini's tour of Germany in 1937 was a significant

pp. 753–772; *idem*, "Il Museo Bardini – IV. Mobili e sculture in legno", in: *Dedalo*, VIII (1927/28), pp. 461–485; and Lensi (note 5).

<sup>16</sup> See also Archivio dei Musei Civici Fiorentini, so-called *Inventario Serafini*, 1971–1975, pp. 144f.



event in the political rapprochement between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. As part of the magnificent displays that the regime put up in Rome, Naples and Florence, an oriental carpet from a municipal museum was allegedly used to welcome the head of state and friend – in order to decorate and delineate the area where Hitler was to come into contact, with his foot, with the Florentine ground. Before enlarging upon the history of ‘Hitler’s carpet’ in the second part of this article, we first want to turn our focus to the origins of the politically connoted use of carpets.

The use of lavish carpets in a political context, for example to furnish audience halls or to welcome a political figure in a public space, has a long tradition. The contemporary diplomatic ritual of spreading a red carpet as a welcoming gesture in honour of a political persona is, in fact, a vestige of the medieval tradition of choosing specific and expensive carpets to decorate audience halls for visiting diplomatic delegations. It is likely that there are royal connotations to the present-day use of the colour red, which recalls purple, the famed and most expensive colour in ancient and medieval times, which was reserved for royal attires and other specific private belongings of the king.

It was likely the character of the carpet as an object, specifically its primary quality as a flat-woven or knotted pile surface that is clearly isolated and defined by its marked borders, that made it an ideal artefact for any diplomatic and/or royal audience. The carpet indeed creates a special space within space, separated from the general public territory. It is a space marker. Thus it is not surprising that today’s long and narrow red carpet – the runner type – also serves to indicate the particular path that a person or a group of persons should follow during a welcome ceremony. Mario Monti’s first diplomatic visit to Berlin in Janu-

ary 2012 offers a textbook contemporary example illustrating this function of the carpet (Fig. 8): the long and narrow red carpet runs diagonally before turning back in a straight line, thus guiding Monti and Merkel along the path they were meant to follow.

Medieval Arabic sources are quite rich in accounts of the ritual of spreading carpets for specific events in the audience halls of the caliphs’ palaces. In fact, early audience hall carpets belonged to the larger category of objects related to the caliph’s public image, notably the throne, the crown, the royal ceremonial robe, the signpost flags, the sceptre, the ring, as well as the curtain that was to be drawn aside by the *hajib* in order to reveal to the audience the caliph in full regalia.<sup>17</sup> The carpet was either to be spread out in front of the caliph’s throne or underneath it, thus creating a well-defined area around the monarch and separating him from his audience.

Literary sources tell us about the habit of spreading carpets in the reception halls of the Umayyad caliphs. For instance, when ‘Abd Allah, the son of Marwan II, fled to Nubia, he was asked to appear before the Nubian king. ‘Abd Allah expected the king to appear before him on a carpet, but to his astonishment the king sat on the ground and even refused to sit on the valuable carpet (*bisat*) that ‘Abd Allah apparently spread out for him. When ‘Abd Allah asked why he refused to do so, the Nubian king replied: “Because I am a king and the duty of a king is to humble himself before the power of God, who has made him great.”<sup>18</sup> The fact that ‘Abd Allah chose to tell this story to the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur suggests that both considered it odd behaviour for a king.

It is possible that the Umayyads used precious carpets in their reception halls that were looted during the Arab conquests of the seventh century. These could have been made in workshops supported by

<sup>17</sup> Oleg Grabar, *Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court*, Ann Arbor 1955, esp. pp. 52–58.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta’rikh al-rusul wa l-muluk*, transl. by Gaugier H. A. Juynboll, New York 1989, XIII, pp. 34f.



8 Mario Monti on his first diplomatic visit to Berlin on 12 January 2012

either the Sasanian or Byzantine royals. Unfortunately, the famous Sasanian Spring Carpet was destroyed; in fact, it is related that ‘Umar cut the carpet into pieces and distributed them among the soldiers who took part in the battle for Ctesiphon. It is not known, however, if any pieces of this gigantic carpet made their way into the Umayyad treasuries.<sup>19</sup>

Some literary sources tell us about a precious carpet (*bisat*) of “floss silk (*ibrisam*) woven [or stitched] (*gharaz*) with gold [threads] (*mudbabbab*) with [fringed] borders (*mufarwaz*) and a lining (*mubattan*)” that belonged to the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn ‘Abd

al-Malik (d. 743). According to Arab sources, it was an enormous carpet, measuring 100 *dbira’* (about 60 m) in length and 50 *dbira’* (about 30 m) in width. Subsequently part of the treasury of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861), this carpet was spread out in his throne room for a ceremonial banquet on the occasion of the circumcision of his son.<sup>20</sup>

Another account, which appears in the *Kitab al-Aghani* of Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani (ca. 1219), mentions two carpets (*bisit*) that were laid for Caliph al-Walid ibn Yazid and for Ma‘bad (a well-known singer) in the reception hall, probably in the bathhouse, of

<sup>19</sup> This famous Sasanian carpet was called Qitf and is mentioned by many medieval Persian and Arab authors; see its discussion in Avinoam Shalem, “Forbidden Territory: Early Islamic Audience Hall Carpets”, in: *Hali*, 99 (1998), pp. 70–77: 70; *idem*, “The Fall of al-Mada’in: Some Literary References Concerning Sasanian Spoils of War in Mediaeval Islamic Treasuries”, in: *Iran*, XXXII (1994), pp. 77–81.

<sup>20</sup> For the term *dbira’* see Walther Hinz, s. v. *dhirā’*, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, ed. by Bernard Lewis et al., II, Leiden 1965, pp. 231f.; this account is given by the eleventh-century treasurer Al-Qadi Abu’l-Husayn bin al-Zubayr, in his *Kitab al-dbakka’ir wa’l-tubaf*, para. 139; for the English translation cited here see Ghada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. 136.

the former.<sup>21</sup> Also, carpets that were once used in a Byzantine royal context were reused by the Umayyad caliphs. According to the historiographer al-Mas'udi, Caliph al-Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan was very proud to have in his reception hall an imperial Byzantine carpet. He told a Byzantine patrician who was abducted and brought to Damascus by a Tyrian merchant: "Go back to your king [...] and say to him: I have left the king of the Arabs on the carpet [of the great Byzantium – 'ala bisat mu'azzam al-Rum] where you once sat, dispensing justice and revenging the injuries done to his subjects in the palace that was once yours and the seat of your former authority."<sup>22</sup>

Literary sources from the early Abbasid period frequently mention the use of a particular carpet in the audience hall of the caliph and suggest that audience hall carpets had a specific function, at least during the first three hundred years of Abbasid rule. In another passage of his work, al-Mas'udi reports how, during the caliphate of al-Mansur (754–775), a certain man from Rusafa was brought before the caliph. The man, who was probably known for his excellent knowledge of the exploits of the Umayyad caliph Hisham (724–743), was to answer for al-Mansur some questions about Hisham's military tactics. The man replied, but after each piece of information he divulged he would say words of blessing for Hisham. This angered the Abbasid caliph who clearly considered the Umayyads his enemies, and he shouted at the man: "Get out! [...] and may God's wrath fall upon you! You tread my carpets [*bisati*] with your feet and yet you dare call down blessings on the memory of my enemy!"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani*, Cairo 1927, I, p. 53. Cited by Grabar (note 17), pp. 76f.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, V, para. 3209; cit. from Masudi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, transl. and ed. by Paul Lunde/Caroline Stone, London/New York 1989, p. 323.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, IV, para. 2379; cit. from Masudi 1989 (note 22), pp. 26f.

<sup>24</sup> See A. Dietrich, s. v. al-Hadjdjädj b. Yusuf, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (note 20), pp. 39–43.

Another account illustrating the strict code of behaviour or, indeed, the rules for speaking, while treading on the caliph's carpet, is mentioned by al-Tabari. He recounts how some dignitaries were invited to appear in the presence of al-Mansur in order to talk about al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi (d. 714), a famous Umayyad governor.<sup>24</sup> The opinions expressed in this talk varied. One of the persons, Hasan bin Zayd, who was clearly critical of al-Hajjaj, said to al-Mansur: "Commander of the Faithful! I never reckoned that I should live so long that al-Hajjaj would be mentioned in your palace, and on your carpet [*bisatuka*], with praise!"<sup>25</sup>

To approach the caliph, and above all to sit on his carpet, was obviously regarded as a great honour. As an example, during the caliphate of al-Mahdi (775–785) a man whose estate had been confiscated asked to see the caliph. Afterwards he proudly recounted how he had been asked to approach al-Mahdi and step on his carpet (*firash*).<sup>26</sup> Another anecdote relates that, when the caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833) was holding a regular meeting with judges and some scholars, a man, probably a sufi, entered the room:

He stood at the edge of the carpet [*'ala tarf al-bisat*] and said: Greetings! May the mercy of God and His blessings be upon you! Ma'mun returned his salutation and the stranger asked: Would you permit me to draw near [i.e., on the carpet]? Do so, said Ma'mun, and be seated.<sup>27</sup>

That allowing a person to sit on the caliph's carpet meant bestowing honour upon that person is clearly illustrated by the following account given both by al-

<sup>25</sup> Al-Tabari, *The Early 'Abbasid Empire, II: The Sons and Grandsons of al-Mansur: The Reigns of al-Mahdi, al-Hadi, and Harun al-Rashid*, transl. by John Alden Williams, Cambridge 1989, p. 9; for the Arabic text see al-Tabari, *Annales*, ed. by Michael J. De Goeje, Leiden 1879/80, III, part I, pp. 401–440.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Tabari 1989 (note 25), p. 123; for the Arabic text see al-Tabari 1879/80 (note 25), p. 529.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, IV, para. 2727; cit. from Masudi 1989 (note 22), p. 195.

Tabari and al-Mas'udi: Al-Hadi (785–786), in one of his better moods, asked his brother Harun al-Rashid to sit nowhere but by him, “in the place of honour”.<sup>28</sup> When Harun al-Rashid later asks his brother for permission to withdraw, his mount is led right up to the edge of the carpet (*bisat*), suggesting that Harun had been sitting on the caliph's carpet.<sup>29</sup>

Literary sources on the history of the Persian Buyid dynasty (ca. 930–1055) emphasise the political importance of the ruler's carpet. Ibn Miskawayh (ca. 932–1030), who held office in the courts of the Buyid sultans Mu'izz al-Dawla (945–967), Rukn al-Dawla (935–976) and 'Adud al-Dawla (978–983), tells us that Ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq, a commander in Khurasan, was given many presents by Rukn al-Dawla. He adds that “this was after Ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq had presented himself and trodden Rukn al-Daulah's carpet”.<sup>30</sup> According to the same author, Ibn al-'Amid, who acted as a mediator between 'Adud al-Dawla and Bakhtiyar (the successor of Mu'izz al-Dawla in Iraq), “came out of 'Adud al-Daulah's house after a robe of honour had been bestowed upon him; he had kissed 'Adud al-Daulah's carpet and accepted the stipulation that he should rank as 'Adud al-Daulah's deputy in this province and have the latter's name mentioned in the *Khutbah*”.<sup>31</sup> Ibn Miskawayh also tells us the story of Abu 'Abdallah, who “was courteously received by 'Adud al-Daulah, who accepted his excuses and offered him a fief and honourable treatment on condition of his treading 'Adud al-Daulah's carpet and accepting his protection”.<sup>32</sup>

An interesting account is given by Abu Shuja' Rudhrawari and Hilal b. Muhassin; the former was a

vizier in the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Muhtadi (869/70) and the latter a vizier's secretary in Baghdad. They recount that commander general Abu'l-Fadl Ibn Sudmand was asked to appear before the caliph in Baghdad and to tread his carpet, yet refused to do so, because he believed that the caliph would soon be succeeded by al-Muwaffaq, the son of caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861).<sup>33</sup>

These literary accounts suggest that, at least during the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, carpets were spread out in the caliph's reception halls. Moreover, it appears that the caliph's carpet defined a particular space in front of or around the throne. Treading on this carpet was allowed only with the caliph's permission and was regarded as an act symbolising mutual trust, obedience or the subject's unconditional support of his ruler; in some cases it recalls the act of the caliph bestowing a robe of honour upon his loyalists.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, literary sources rarely describe the decoration of these carpets. Yet the following account by Abu al 'Abbas Muhammad ibn Sahl, who held office in the palace of the Abbasid caliph al-Muntasir (861/62), may shed some light on the main message these carpets seemed to convey. It is a description of the carpet on which al-Muntasir's father and predecessor al-Mutawakkil had been murdered by a Turkish officer, who probably was in conspiracy with his own son:

I went up to one of the loggias on the upper storey and found it furnished with a floor carpet made at Susangird [*bisat susanjird*], a dais which served as a throne, a *musalla*, or small prayer rug, and red and blue cushions.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, IV, para. 2487–2489; cit. from Masudi 1989 (note 22), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, IV, para. 2487; cit. from Masudi 1989 (note 22), pp. 64f. See also al-Tabari 1989 (note 25), p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> Cit. from *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate: Original Chronicles of the Fourth Islamic Century*, transl. and ed. by Henry F. Amedroz/David S. Margoliouth, Oxford/London 1920–1921, V, p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 383.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 430.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, VI, p. 462.

<sup>34</sup> It is worth mentioning that during the Mongol period kissing the ruler's carpet was regarded as a sign of submission. On this aspect see Henry H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th Century*, London 1888, III, p. 746.

The large carpet was edged with medallions enclosing pictures of men and an inscription in Persian – a language I read fluently. Now, to the right of the small prayer rug, I saw the portrait of a king with a crown on his head, shown in the posture of one who speaks. I read the inscription, which was as follows: “This is the likeness of Shirawaih, murderer of his father, King Parwiz. He reigned six months.” I then noticed a number of other portraits of kings and to the left of the small prayer rug, in the last place, was a figure with the following words above it: “Portrait of Yazid ibn al-Walid ibn abd al-Malik, murderer of his cousin Walid ibn Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik. He reigned six months.” I was astonished by all this and also by the chance which had set these figures to the left and right of the place where Muntasir sat. I said to myself: I do not think this reign will last more than six months.<sup>35</sup>

In the following passage, ibn Sahl comes to know that al-Muntasir himself had chosen this particular carpet to be laid out in the audience hall. On his initiative, right after the audience of the caliph the ill-omened textile is removed from the hall and destroyed; nevertheless, after a reign of only six months, al-Muntasir too was assassinated.

Drawing upon this account, it appears that the caliph’s carpet was, indeed, an object of interest and concern in the Abbasid palace. Ibn Sahl also mentions that a Christian named Ayyub ibn Sulaiman was appointed as the Keeper of the Carpets (*kbazin al-furush*) in al-Muntasir’s palace. This man was probably responsible for the preservation and cleaning of the carpets as well as for choosing the appropriate carpet

that was to be spread under the caliph’s throne for each public event.

According to ibn Sahl, the portraits of the Sasanian king Shirawaih, i.e. Kavadh II (628), and the Umayyad caliph Yazid III ibn al-Walid (744) appeared to the right and to the left of the caliph’s throne. This implies that the throne was placed in the centre of the carpet and was surrounded by the portraits of the different kings, an arrangement that, in turn, suggests that the caliph was granted a place of honour within the royal domain and, accordingly, accepted into the ‘Family of Kings’ who ruled the earth.<sup>36</sup> Whereas al-Muntasir used this carpet only once, his father, al-Mutawakkil, literally used it until his last day. Thus it is possible that al-Muntasir’s carpet was from the Umayyad period, begun perhaps in 744, at the order of the ambitious Yazid III ibn al-Walid during his short reign, and finished after his death.<sup>37</sup>

A textile (*mulkbhan*) with similar iconography is described by the famous Persian poet Firdawsi (ca. 940–1020). It was made of superb gold embroidery, on which 48 Iranian as well as Rumi (i.e. Byzantine) kings were depicted, and was hung over the legendary throne of Khusraw.<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning that, according to al-Qadi al-Rashid ibn al-Zubayr, several hundred silk curtains (*sutur*) of various types and lengths with depictions of kings and their states were found in the treasury of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir (1036–1096). Ibn al-Zubayr adds that the king’s name, the span of his reign and some additional information about him were to be found above each of the portraits.<sup>39</sup>

Another common iconography for caliphal carpets consisted of vegetal motifs. These were huge carpets

<sup>35</sup> The account is reported by Al-Mas’udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, V, para. 2980–2982; cit. from Masudi 1989 (note 22), pp. 268f. See also Ernst Herzfeld, *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra*, Hamburg 1948, p. 221 (Herzfeld also cites the account of Ibn al-Tiqtaqa).

<sup>36</sup> For the notion of the ‘Family of Kings’ in the Umayyad period see Oleg Grabar, “The painting of the Six Kings at Qusayr ‘Amrah”, in: *Ars Orientalis*, I (1954), pp. 185–187.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur U. Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art*, VI: *Islamic Period Carpets, Metalwork, Minor Arts, Ornament, Music*, London/New York 1967, p. 2277, suggested that the carpet had been a Sasanian work taken over and completed by the Umayyads; however, this speculation is not sustained by any documentary evidence.

<sup>38</sup> Cited by Ernst Herzfeld (note 35), p. 222.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-Zubayr (note 20), p. 254 (chap. 381).



9 Zahhak Enthroned, illustration from the Great Mongol Shahnama, ca. 1335/36. Washington DC, Freer Gallery of Art, inv. 23.5

that depicted floral gardens with water canals. They were spread in the reception halls and the resting rooms specially furnished for delegates and emissaries visiting the royal court. During the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir bi-Allah (908–932), in the year 917, two Byzantine envoys were welcomed in Baghdad. The palace was lavishly decorated for this event. According to the account of ibn al-Zubayr “twenty-two thousand pieces of floor furnishings – carpets (*busut*) and runners (*nikhakk*) from Juhrum, Armenia, and Dawaq – were spread, all of them in the passageways and courtyards [leading] from the New Public Gate to al-Muqtadir bi-Allah’s residence, and on these the army generals and the despot’s [i.e. the Byzantine emperor’s] envoys walked [...]. A hundred resting places (*marqad*) were furnished with sofa-like mattresses (*maratib*) of heavily embroidered brocade, and carpets (*busut*) all bearing [images of] flowing rivers.”<sup>40</sup>

Visual evidence suggests that carpets with depictions of powerful quadrupeds or birds were used in the reception halls of the Muslim caliphs as well.<sup>41</sup> A prime example, discussed by Ettinghausen, can be found in the famous illustration of King Zakhak on his throne (Fig. 9) in the 14th-century manuscript of the Great Mongol Shahnama, formerly known as the Demotte Shahnama.<sup>42</sup> In the miniature Zakhak is shown seated on his throne and surrounded by his courtiers. A small carpet is placed under the throne and, though some of the dignitaries appear to be stepping on the edges of the carpet, the small field before

Zakhak’s throne is kept clear, as if it were an inaccessible area. This field consists of two large octagons, each of which bears a depiction of a mythical quadruped; the one to the left is dark brown, while only the raised tail is visible of the other. The animals might be seen as guarding the royal territory of the king, in which case the field with the two octagons would represent Zakhak’s security zone.<sup>43</sup>

All these literary and visual sources underscore the significant political role that the caliph’s carpet had during the late Umayyad and the Abbasid periods. The carpet marked the private royal territory in front of or around the caliph’s throne. Its decoration with specific motifs and symbols was, in fact, intended to emphasize the idea of the carpet as a guarded royal domain, and the compositional layout of both geometric and floral carpets may have dictated ceremonial space allocations in the audience halls. At any case, treading on it was allowed only with the caliph’s permission and regarded as symbolising mutual trust between the ruler and his subject.

Later on, in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, Mamluk rugs, which usually include a prominent octagon within a central square and borders filled with medallions, cartouches or stylised floral scrolls, may have dictated the ceremonial setting or the arrangement of the caliph’s deputies during a formal procedure or reception.<sup>44</sup>

Oriental carpets became very desirable luxury objects in the Latin West already in the late Middle

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134 (chap. 162); for the English translation cited here see al-Qaddumi (note 20), p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> See esp. Richard Ettinghausen, “New Light on Early Animal Carpets”, in: *Aus der Welt der islamischen Kunst. Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. by Richard Ettinghausen, Berlin 1959, pp. 93–116; Kurt Erdmann, “Zur Frage der ältesten orientalischen Teppiche”, in: *Der Cicerone*, XXII (1930), pp. 152–156; Carl J. Lamm, “The Marby Rug and Some Fragments of Carpets Found in Egypt”, in: *Svenska Orientsällskapets årsbok* (1937), pp. 52–130. It is worth mentioning that ibn al-Zubayr says that, according to al-Suli, the throne iwan in the palace of al-Mu’tasim (833–842) was decorated with mosaics and bore a depiction of the mighty bird (*‘anaqa maghrib*). See ibn al-Zubayr (note 20), p. 129 (ch. 160).

<sup>42</sup> Ettinghausen (note 41), p. 99, figs. 4 and 5. For this miniature see Oleg Grabar/Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History*, Chicago 1980, pp. 58f., fig. 1. On the Great Mongol Shahnama see also Sheila Blair, “Rewriting the History of the Great Mongol Shahnama”, in: *Shahnama. The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, ed. by Robert Hillenbrand, Aldershot/Burlington, Vt., 2004, pp. 35–50.

<sup>43</sup> For the reconstruction of this carpet see Ettinghausen (note 41), fig. 6.

<sup>44</sup> On the role of floor decorations as related to ceremonies see Jonathan Bloom, “Almoravid Geometric Designs in the Pavement of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo”, in: *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. by Bernard O’Kane, Edinburgh 2005, pp. 61–80.

Ages. Although according to their representation in Western painting they were used mainly in order to bestow prestige and high rank to their European owners, it is possible that also accounts of their political role were transferred. It is no wonder, therefore, that we find that same lingering symbolism in a gesture made by the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967): on 21 September 1949, when Adenauer introduced his cabinet to the Allied High Commissioners, he was asked to remain at the edge of the ‘red’ carpet on which the latter were standing during the official ceremony, in order to create a sense of distance. Adenauer, however, violated formal procedure and stepped onto the carpet, thus symbolising Germany’s will to enter the Western alliance and reclaim an active role for itself in the post-World War II era (Fig. 10).<sup>45</sup>

## II.

The account of the Bardini carpet serving as part of the magnificent urban *mise-en-scène* Italy’s Fascist regime put up to welcome Hitler in 1938 seems to belong to this long history of the use of carpets in diplomatic ceremonies. Moreover, we may speculate that the anecdote of Hitler stepping on it is rooted in the tradition of the symbolic act of treading on the ruler’s carpet. The first who brought this story to public attention was Alberto Boralevi in a 1981 article and, again, in his 1999 catalogue of the Bardini carpet collection.<sup>46</sup> Boralevi based his account on an oral tradition,<sup>47</sup> a belief circulating to this day in Florence, particularly among people linked to the museums of the city. Boralevi’s important 1999 publication is also the source, quoted rather literally, for the aforementioned information board in the museum.



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10 Konrad Adenauer symbolically stepping on the edge of the carpet on 21 September 1949, the day of the official introduction of his cabinet to the Allied High Commissioners

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of Adenauer’s ‘carpet diplomacy’ see Deborah Kisatsky, *The United States and the European Right, 1945–1955*, Columbus, Oh., 2005, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Boralevi 1981 (note 5), p. 8; Boralevi 1999 (note 5), p. 110.

<sup>47</sup> As generously confirmed by him in oral communication.



However, today no sources exist that offer proof of the carpet being used at the railway station for Hitler's arrival in Florence. There is no trace of the Bardini carpet in the documentation kept at the Archivio del Comune di Firenze, which comprehensively records the activities of the specially established Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti.<sup>48</sup> Nor is there any sign of it in the extensive photographic and cinematographic documentation of Hitler's stay in Florence.<sup>49</sup> Instead, the images clearly show that an ordinary red-carpet-like runner was lying on the platform at Santa Maria Novella when Hitler disembarked (Fig. II).

Films and photographs that were disseminated in the newsreels as well as in albums, printed picture books and magazines are, however, not mere sources, but rather an inherent part of this media event that, along with Mussolini's visit to Germany in 1937, marked the culmination of the propagandistic machinery of the two dictatorial regimes.<sup>50</sup> In fact, as eyewitness reports have it, there was less concrete talk about politics in May 1938 and more viewing of fireworks and parades, which gave rise to the common historiography of the visit as empty propaganda and a diplomatic failure. Still, recent studies have shown that the meeting did constitute an important stage on the way from the Berlin-Rome Axis (1936) to the

signing of the Pact of Steel on 22 May 1939:<sup>51</sup> "The fascist regime let the spectacle of the visit speak for itself",<sup>52</sup> and the event successfully demonstrated, for both local and international audiences, how close Italy and Germany were.

On his trip to Italy from 3 to 9 May 1938 Hitler visited Rome, Naples and Florence, and these three cities were therefore transformed into authentic stages for the demonstration of Fascist power: lavish decors and ephemeral structures highlighted selected monuments, while at the same time concealing messy corners; colourful flags, standards and banners created new urban perspectives; military and paramilitary parades alternated with games and fireworks; and, above all, crowds of celebrating and exalted, yet at the same time controlled and channelled people filled the squares and streets.<sup>53</sup> When the two dictators appeared, the crowd became both actors in and spectators of the grand event, whose orchestration was conceived not just for those attending, but also with its cinematic impact in mind. This was true in particular for Florence, where Hitler spent a total of only ten hours, from 2 pm to midnight on 9 May. Centerpiece of the visit was a car ride through carefully selected parts of the city. The route and backdrops were designed to be seen from a driving automobile,<sup>54</sup> a per-

<sup>48</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, files CF 7480–7488.

<sup>49</sup> The most important contemporary illustrated accounts of Hitler's visit to Italy are the following: *Il Führer in Italia*, ed. by Agenzia Stefani, Milan 1938; *Italia e Germania – maggio XVI*, Rome 1938; Heinrich Hansen, *Der Schlüssel zum Frieden: Führertage in Italien*, Berlin 1938; Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler in Italien*, Munich 1938. On the visit to Florence in particular see *Adolf Hitler a Firenze: maggio 1938*, Florence 1938; *Le strade di Firenze parate a festa il 9 maggio 1938-16 per la venuta di Adolf Hitler*, [Florence] 1938. The filmic documentation by the Istituto Luce consists of ten films, the last episode being "Il commiato di Roma e la giornata fiorentina". On this argument see Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism*, Ann Arbor 1985, pp. 150f.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland*, Göttingen 2008, esp. the chapter "Duce und Führer. Fotografische Inszenierungen", pp. 417–463. For two of the most important discussions of the

medialisation of the representation of power in Italian Fascism, see Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Rome/Bari 1993, and Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Baxa, "Capturing the Fascist Moment: Hitler's Visit to Italy in 1938 and the Radicalization of Fascist Italy", in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, XLII (2007), 2, pp. 227–242; Roberto Mancini, *Liturgie totalitarie: apparati e feste per la visita di Hitler e Mussolini a Firenze (1938)*, Florence 2011. A new study with a chapter on the visit of 1938 has just appeared: Pierre Milza, *Conversations Hitler-Mussolini: 1934–1944*, Paris 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Baxa (note 51), p. 235.

<sup>53</sup> On the visit to Florence see in particular Mancini (note 51). See also the well-documented catalogue *Firenze 9 maggio 1938: il ritorno all'ordine. 1938, l'immagine di Firenze per la visita del Führer*, exh. cat., Florence 2012, esp. the article by Michele Rossi, "Il maggio radio del Führer" (no pag.).

<sup>54</sup> Mancini (note 51), esp. pp. III–119.

spective that was duplicated in the film of the Istituto Luce, which for longer stretches does not show Hitler and Mussolini, but rather their view of the decorated city from the driving vehicle. Even newspaper reports were written in the present tense, mimicking voice-over narration. We should not forget that, unlike in Rome, this visit was not just about Hitler coming to Italy, but also about Mussolini coming to Florence; indeed, the grand – though even then perceived by some as rather dark – urban *mise-en-scène* was intended mainly for the latter.

After celebrating imperialist claims in Rome and demonstrating Italy's (staged rather than real) mil-

itary power in Naples, the function of Florence as the third station was to point out the commonalities shared by the Latin and Germanic cultures. Accordingly, art played an important role, not least because the Italians wanted to appeal to Hitler's well-known interest in this field. The staging that the city was subjected to followed a strict and stereotypical perception of its medieval and Renaissance-shaped character; at the same time it was flooded with swastikas and fasces.<sup>55</sup> The official journal of the Comune di Firenze published a special bilingual issue, in which German and Italian authors offered what amounted to a cultural manual for mutual under-



11 Hitler welcomed by Mussolini on the platform at Santa Maria Novella station at his arrival in Florence on 9 May 1938

<sup>55</sup> See the pictures of the *bozzetti* in Mancini (note 51), figs. 18–49. See also, from a different point of view, Diana Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected:*

*Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, University Park, Pa., 2004, esp. the chapter “Dictators as Tourists: Hitler’s Visit to Florence”, pp. 83–98.

standing:<sup>56</sup> comparative discussions of culture, literature and the visual arts as well as reports about the German agents who were active in the city on the Arno – among them the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, whose director Friedrich Kriegbaum had been assigned, together with Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, to serve as Hitler’s and Mussolini’s guide during the museum visits.<sup>57</sup> The program also included a visit to the exhibition *Mostra delle armi antiche* at the Palazzo Vecchio, as well as a meeting with Florentine artists. The flag-waving presentation by flag-bearers from the Palio and other Tuscan games in the Boboli Gardens also served to point to the venerable medieval tradition.

Within this gigantic machine arraying the entire city for the National Socialist visitor the Bardini carpet is missing. It seems to have left no traces at all. And yet, both written and visual sources reveal the important role that carpets and textiles played in the event.

Since February 1938, the Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti produced countless cost calculations with lists of planned expenses that from the outset included the acquisition of carpets and runners. An early list actually budgets for the “Acquisto di un grande tappeto per la Sala dei Dugento = circa M 24 × 16 = e guide per Palazzo Vecchio” the substan-

tial amount of 100,000 lire; added to that are 12,000 lire for “Tappeti per gradinate ecc”.<sup>58</sup> Soon a carpet from a Florentine municipal museum was identified that seemed to be suited for representative purposes, obviously obviating the need for a purchase. In a resolution on 22 February 1938 the Podestà of Florence approved an expense of 1650 lire for the “restauro del tappeto d’Aubusson in dotazione al Museo Stibbert”<sup>59</sup> and the item related to the restoration of this carpet reappears on all subsequent lists of the Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti. The textile in question is the large Aubusson carpet that today adorns the ceremonial hall of the Museo Stibbert (Inv. Stoffe 1069, 11.70 × 6.30 m; Fig. 12).<sup>60</sup> We do not know if the carpet was actually used to furnish the Sala dei Dugento in the Palazzo Vecchio, where Hitler’s and Mussolini’s meeting with the artists took place. Interestingly, it had already been at the Palazzo Vecchio for some time, and because it was worn in places, the “Soprintendente del Museo Stibbert, in data 26 Maggio 1937” had submitted a request for its restoration, as suggested by the aforementioned resolution.<sup>61</sup> The actual request by Alfredo Lensi, the curator of the Florentine municipal museums who was also responsible for the Museo Bardini, is kept in the archives of the Museo Stibbert. Lensi disposed rather unscrupulously of the museum pieces under his control, which were

<sup>56</sup> *Firenze: rassegna mensile del Comune*, VII (1938), 5. After the event had been celebrated in the local press (see, among others, *La Nazione*, 10 May 1938, pp. 1–4; *Il Bargello*, X [8 May 1938], 28, pp. 1f.), the journal of the Comune published an extensive report: “Nel segno dell’Asse Roma-Berlino: il soggiorno in Italia di Adolfo Hitler si è concluso tra grandiose manifestazioni a Firenze”, in: *Firenze: rassegna mensile del Comune*, VII (1938), 6, pp. 241–259.

<sup>57</sup> The head of the photo library and the institute’s assistant each published related articles: Robert Oertel, “Gemälde deutscher Meister in florentinischen Sammlungen. Quadri di maestri tedeschi nelle gallerie fiorentine”, in: *Firenze: rassegna mensile del comune*, VII (1938), 5, pp. 172–176; Werner Haftmann, “Das Kunsthistorische Institut in Florenz”, *ibidem*, pp. 235–240. See Anne Spagnolo-Stiff, “L’Istituto Germanico di Storia dell’Arte di Firenze tra due dittature. Il caso del saggio di Werner Haftmann per la visita del Führer nel 1938”, in: *9 maggio 1938: la primavera violentata*, Florence 2013 (in press). Cf. the famous account by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Dal diario*

*di un borghese e altri scritti*, Rome 1976, pp. 170–192 (a German annotated edition by Elmar Kossel is currently being prepared).

<sup>58</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, archive file CF 7484, “Preventivo di spese per lavori, addobbi e illuminazioni”, n. d., but probably February 1938, since the list is still incomplete.

<sup>59</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, CF 7487, file “Comune di Firenze – Ufficio Belle Arti”, resolution of 22 February 1938.

<sup>60</sup> Dominique Charles Fuchs, “Acquisti dalle collezioni Demidoff e Farnard nelle raccolte del Museo Stibbert”, in: *L’idea di Firenze: temi e interpretazioni nell’arte straniera dell’Ottocento*, conference proceedings Florence 1986, ed. by Alessandro Vezzosi/Luigi Zangheri, Florence 1989, pp. 147–151; *Museo Stibbert: guida alla visita del museo*, ed. by Cristina Piacenti Aschengreen, Florence 2011, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> See note 59.



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12 Aubusson carpet in the Salone delle Feste of the Museo Stibbert, Florence

moved back and forth without any record. As a result, such relocations can be reconstructed only indirectly, as in our case. The Aubusson carpet was returned from the Palazzo Vecchio to the Museo Stibbert only a few years ago.<sup>62</sup> The documents of the Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti also record an expense of 18,050 lire for the general item “Provviste guide e tappeti”.<sup>63</sup> In particular, red carpets were placed on the platform at the railway station as well as at the entrance of the

Palazzo Pitti.<sup>64</sup> Carpets were also considered a necessary feature of representative interiors, such as those at the Palazzo Pitti, where the “Posa in opera dei tappeti in tutte le sale dell’appartamento Reale e conseguente montatura, ribattitura e immagazzinamento” as part of preparations and along with other renovation measures was approved by the Podestà in a resolution dated 1 March 1938.<sup>65</sup> A sumptuously embroidered table carpet that decorated one of the tables at the

<sup>62</sup> We are grateful to Simona Di Marco of the Museo Stibbert who provided us with this information and who is currently preparing a study of her own on this topic.

<sup>63</sup> Cf., for example, Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, CF 7484, “Lavori e provviste straordinari da eseguire in occasione dei prossimi festeggiamenti”, n. d. Initially, this item was described somewhat more precisely as “Acquisto di un grande tappeto di velluto”; cf. *ibidem*, CF 7484, file stapled together, untitled, n. d., p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Mancini (note 51), pp. 123, 142.

<sup>65</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, CF 7487, file “Comune di Firenze – Ufficio Belle Arti”, resolution of 1 March 1938. The Appartamento Reale in the Palazzo Pitti was made available for Hitler to take in it a brief rest. Photographs in *Gli Appartamenti Reali di Palazzo Pitti*, ed. by Marco Chiarini/Serena Padovani, Florence 1993, pp. 154f., show that specifically for this occasion carpets were used that otherwise were not part of the decoration of the various rooms.

Palazzo Pitti on this occasion was rediscovered in the Pitti's depot by Marco Spallanzani in 2009.<sup>66</sup>

Besides carpets, cloths and textiles in general played an important role, and not just as flags and standards made of modest materials (on which several millions of lire were spent): the not insignificant amount of 189,000 lire was budgeted for the “Acquisto velluti, damaschi, galleni [*sic*] ecc. e fattura di tappeti daffinestre [*sic*]”.<sup>67</sup> Especially balconies and windows of the major Florentine palaces were decked out with sumptuous cloths and tapestries from the palace's own holdings, including the balcony of the Palazzo Vecchio, which provided the backdrop for the event's highlight, the epiphany of the two dictators before the cheering crowd (Fig. 13).<sup>68</sup> Seemingly following ancient tradition, gigantic tapestries probably taken from the depot of the Uffizi were hung on the façade of the Palazzo Vecchio and underneath the Loggia dei Lanzi.<sup>69</sup> On the way between the Palazzo Pitti and the Uffizi via the Corridoio Vasariano the dictators appeared at a window, as briefly seen in the film of the Istituto Luce: this window, too, was decorated with a valuable tapestry from the state collections, most likely a 17th-century *portiera* with the coat of arms of the Medici and a royal crown.<sup>70</sup>

The case of the carpets and tapestries from the Palazzo Pitti is telling: since the Pitti, unlike the Palazzo Vecchio and the Bardini and Stibbert collections, is

not owned by the City of Florence, but by the state, the body responsible for carrying out the necessary measures was the state Soprintendenza headed by Giovanni Poggi, which, in its cost report, painstakingly registered each and any placement of the carpets normally stored in the depot.<sup>71</sup> As far as the objects from collections and palaces of the City of Florence are concerned, the picture was different. This was the realm of Alfredo Lensi, who was director of the Ufficio Belle Arti e Antichità from 1908 until 1934 and hence also, as we know, curator of the Florentine collections; after 1934, he remained at the helm of the Museo Stibbert and was still a highly influential figure, not least in the organisation of Hitler's visit.<sup>72</sup> He was responsible for the organisation of the aforementioned *Mostra delle armi antiche* at the Palazzo Vecchio and for the catalogue accompanying it.<sup>73</sup> In addition, after having installed in 1934–1937 in the crypt of Santa Croce the war memorial for the dead of the Fascist revolution and World War I, he oversaw its extension to include those who had fallen in Spain and Africa.<sup>74</sup> This expansion was initiated especially with the 1938 visit in mind, since the enshrinement of these categories of fallen was of particular relevance with regard to the guests from Berlin: Spain had been a joint undertaking and Africa stood for Italy's imperial claims, especially since the 9th of May marked the

<sup>66</sup> Marco Spallanzani, “Two needlework carpets at Palazzo Pitti”, in: *Carpet Studies*, ed. by Marco Spallanzani (in preparation).

<sup>67</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, CF 7484, file stapled together, untitled, n. d., p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Clearly visible in all photo reports as well as in the Istituto Luce film.

<sup>69</sup> Visible in the Istituto Luce film as well as in various photographs by Hoffmann (note 49), Locchi (our Fig. 13) and Istituto Luce. See on this practice Lucia Meoni, *Gli arazzi nei musei fiorentini: la collezione medicea. Catalogo completo, I: La manifattura medicea da Cosimo I a Cosimo II (1545–1621)*, Livorno 1998, p. 46 and fig. 18 on p. 42.

<sup>70</sup> Lucia Meoni identified the *portiera* as made after a model by Alessandro Rosi that can be dated after 1691, when the Granduke Cosimo III obtained from Vienna the right to the “royal treatment”. Among the four *portiere* of this kind still existing in the Medici Collection, the closest one is *Inventario Arazzi 1912-25 no. 362*. We are grateful to Lucia Meoni for this communication.

<sup>71</sup> Archivio del Comune di Firenze, Ufficio Speciale Festeggiamenti, CF 7484, file “Soprintendenza”, “Elenco dei lavori eseguiti per conto dell'onorevole Comune di Firenze”, 22 June 1938. See also note 65 above.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Lensi (note 14); Gabriella Carapelli, “Gli operatori”, in: *Edilizia in Toscana fra le due guerre*, ed. by Gianni Isola *et al.*, Florence 1994, pp. 207–240: 227. For an extensive discussion of Lensi's work practices see Carlo Francini, “Palazzo Vecchio: l'invenzione del museo”, in: *Bollettino della Società di Studi Fiorentini*, VII/VIII (2000/2001), pp. 89–147.

<sup>73</sup> *Mostra delle armi antiche*, exh. cat., introd. by Alfredo Lensi, Florence 1938. Cf. Francini (note 72), p. 142.

<sup>74</sup> Ludovica Sebgondi, *Santa Croce sotterranea: trasformazioni e restauri*, Florence 1997, pp. 9–39. Lensi himself published a short article on this in the aforementioned special issue of the journal of the Comune di Firenze: Alfredo Lensi, “Il Sacrario dei Caduti”, in: *Firenze: rassegna mensile del comune*, VII (1938), 5, pp. 310f.



13 The decorated façade of the Palazzo Vecchio at the moment before Hitler's and Mussolini's appearance on the balcony, 9 May 1938

second anniversary of the proclamation of the *Impero*. And Santa Croce was indeed the first official station of Hitler's and Mussolini's tour of Florence, where they paid a very short visit only to the crypt and ignored the upper church – the pantheon of the Italians.

In his various functions Lenzi was also co-organiser of the grand event of 9 May 1938. Considering his work habits, it is not surprising that the relocation of various art objects for the decoration of this or that Florentine palazzo left no traces. One cannot rule out that our carpet was, indeed, treated in a similar manner: it may even have been used at the railway station, most likely in the Palazzina Reale (the royal reception building), where Hitler was first welcomed

by Florentine notables upon his arrival rather than on the platform.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, photographs and films do not show any details of this.

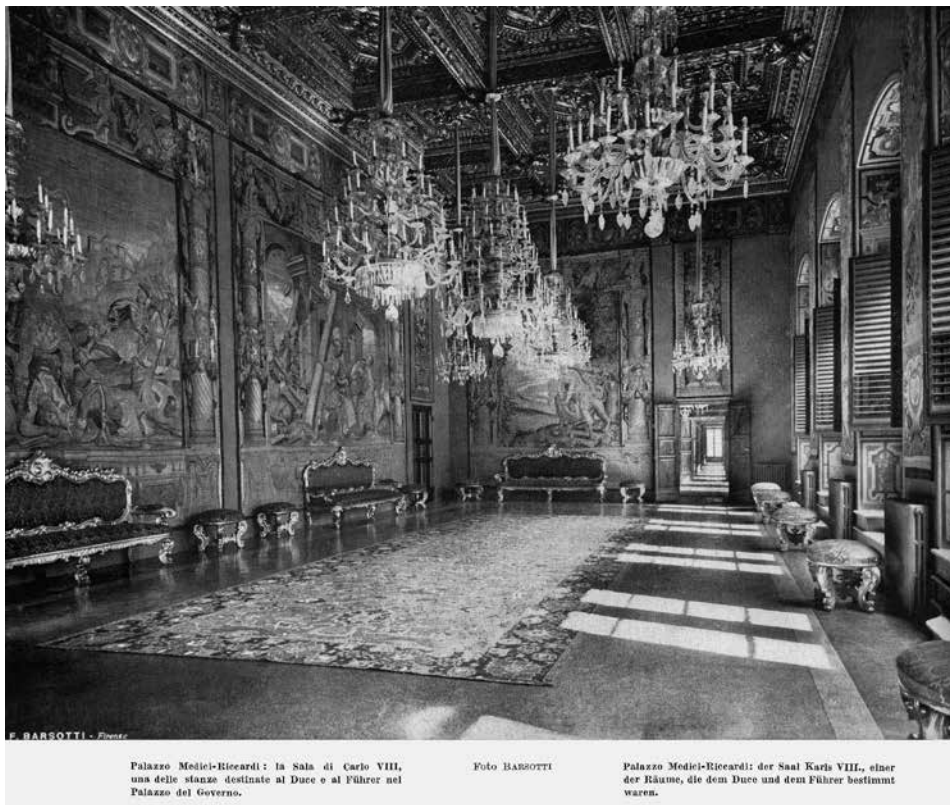
It is also conceivable, though, that the Bardini carpet was used for Hitler's and Mussolini's meeting in Florence on 28 October 1940. In the case of this second joint visit to Florence the situation was, of course, altogether different than it had been at the time of the diplomatic-representative visit of 1938, when Florence, moreover, had been only one of the stations: on 10 June 1940, Italy had entered the war, siding with Germany. At the meeting the two discussed very specific topics and “problemi relativi alla guerra ed alla creazione del nuovo ordine europeo”;<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> In this respect we concur with Elmar Kossel who is also assuming a display of the carpet in the Palazzina Reale (oral communication).

<sup>76</sup> *Firenze: rassegna mensile del comune*, IX (1940), 10–12, bilingual special issue, see esp. “La cronaca della grande giornata”, pp. 7–30: 19.

the visit was arranged at the last minute and except for a few flags it was mainly the cheering crowd that served as a design feature in giving the city a festive appearance. The work meeting took place at the Palazzo Vecchio in the Sala di Clemente VII, whose decoration was probably once again overseen by Lensi.<sup>77</sup> The magazine *Firenze: rassegna mensile del comune* again covered

the event, especially the reception for the entire delegation at the Palazzo Medici Riccardi: it contains a picture of the Salone di Carlo VIII in the Piano Nobile (also called Sala Grande) showing a large oriental carpet on the otherwise bare floor (Fig. 14).<sup>78</sup> A detailed analysis of the formal features of this carpet (especially the sequence of the elements in the border that



Palazzo Medici-Riccardi: la Sala di Carlo VIII, una delle stanze destinate al Duce o al Führer nel Palazzo del Governo.

Foto BARSOTTI

Palazzo Medici-Riccardi: der Saal Karls VIII, einer der Räume, die dem Duce und dem Führer bestimmt waren.

14 The Salone di Carlo VIII in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi at Hitler's visit of 1940, from "La cronaca della grande giornata" (note 76)

<sup>77</sup> Francini (note 72), pp. 142f. and fig. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. "La cronaca" (note 76), p. 19, fig. on p. 22 (photo by Barsotti). By way of comparison, see the photograph inv. 56213 in the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, which was taken before 6 July 1929

(the date the inventory entry was created) and on which the carpet does not appear. The banquet took place in the Galleria di Luca Giordano, while a private work dinner was arranged for Hitler and Mussolini in the Sala Rossa or Sala de' Quadri.

can be more easily discerned) suggests that it may be the Bardini carpet, even if the problematic quality of the picture thwarts a conclusive identification.<sup>79</sup> Aside from this, the photograph confirms the role of textiles in political-diplomatic events of this kind.

As pointed out in the first part of this article, carpets are, however, very special textiles, because they not only decorate, but also mark the area where the ruler sets foot. Another detail from the story of ‘Hitler’s carpet’ reminds us of this quality, namely the cut that Hitler allegedly made with his spurs when getting off the train. To visitors of the Museo Bardini the cut is indeed clearly visible, even to the naked eye, although it has been stitched up. However, so far no documents related to this restoration have surfaced. A 1959 account from the archives of the Museo Bardini notes the “conservazione: ottima” of our carpet;<sup>80</sup> its generally good state of preservation was also confirmed at the time of the reopening of the Museo Bardini in 2009.<sup>81</sup> Without a thorough examination it is impossible to determine if the rather long cut running across the carpet’s width could indeed have been caused by spurs – even when assuming that spurs can be that sharp. Be this as it may, the incident with the

spurs calls for a complete deconstruction. First of all, we know by now that the carpet was not lying on the platform. Secondly, Hitler never wore spurs and all photographs and films show that he did not wear them on the day of his arrival in Florence either (Fig. 11). If anybody damaged the carpet with his spurs on 9 May 1938, it would more likely have been Mussolini who, in fact, did wear suitable riding boots – assuming the carpet was actually used during the event and the Duce stepped on it.

But this detail of the story of ‘Hitler’s carpet’ re-frames damage as an injury – an injury, indeed, that was not self-inflicted but rather inflicted by an ‘outsider’: not Mussolini (or an anonymous officer) was identified as the agent in this “invented tradition”,<sup>82</sup> but rather the National Socialist dictator – who was, in fact, occasionally characterised as “il diavolo sull’Arno” in the literature on the 1938 visit.<sup>83</sup> It is a symbolic injury directed at the entire city of Florence. The cut in the carpet turned into a scar. Thus, rather than suggesting that the treading of Hitler on the carpet symbolizes his treading on Italian territory and his signing a pact with Mussolini, it is the story of the scar that is in focus, a story that alludes to the damage

<sup>79</sup> In the *Rassegna* picture the outer guard border of the carpet side in the foreground is not visible. The restoration history of the carpet inv. 555 is, if at all, scantily documented, making it difficult to decide whether this is due to the picture’s extreme foreshortening or whether the carpet was restored at some later point in time or whether it is, after all, a different carpet. The dimensions of our carpet (7.50 × 2.80 m) may be compatible with the proportions of the space (ca. 20 × 10 m). Alberto Boralevi kindly drew our attention on a carpet now in the Sala degli Arazzi di Lille of the Quirinale Palace in Rome, which in his opinion presents even more similarities to the carpet displayed in Palazzo Medici Riccardi in 1940 (see especially the form of the cloud bands). It should be pointed out that ownership of the Palazzo Medici Riccardi transferred to the Provincia di Firenze in 1874 and that, from 1911 on, it was gradually turned into a museum, while at the same time being used as Palazzo del Governo. See *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze*, ed. by Giovanni Cherubini/Giovanni Fanelli, Florence 1990.

<sup>80</sup> Ufficio Catalogo of the Servizio dei musei civici fiorentini, Florence, CF 190, scheda I1i/7 [1959].

<sup>81</sup> The carpet was, however, already relined on the reverse, precluding a closer examination of the cut. The restoration of a cut on a carpet such as

this usually would have left no visible traces on the front. We are grateful to the textile conservator Guia Rossignoli for providing us with this information. Loretta Dolcini kindly informed us about a conversation she has had with Alfredo Clignon, the well-known carpet restorer who was active until the Seventies also for the Florentine Soprintendenza: Clignon told her the story of Hitler’s spurs and that he had been responsible for the restoration of our carpet. The Opificio delle Pietre Dure under the coordination of Anna Mieli is preparing a volume on Clignon based on his extensive archive, but no information seems to have survived on the Bardini carpet. Our deep gratitude goes to Loretta Dolcini and Anna Mieli for their oral communications.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger, Cambridge/New York 1983; interestingly, in this book spurs in the absence of horses are referred to as being among the typical ingredients of “invented traditions”: “The spurs of cavalry officers’ dress uniforms are more important for ‘tradition’ when there are no horses” (p. 4).

<sup>83</sup> Michele Rossi, “‘Primavera hitleriana’: il diavolo sull’Arno – 9 maggio 1938”, in: *La Casa dei Doganieri: rivista di libri, lettere, arti*, II (2009), 2/3, pp. 47–76.



brought to Italy in general and to Florence in particular after this visit of 1938.

The question whether the Bardini carpet inv. 555 was used on the occasion of Hitler's and Mussolini's visit to Florence on 9 May 1938 (or, for that matter, on any later visits) must remain open. If we are to accept that the carpet was indeed part of the decoration in 1938 in the Palazzina Reale at the railway station or even later in 1940 at the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, this might be the origin of the whole story of 'Hitler's carpet': on the basis of this small historical detail, the anecdote of the symbolic violation of the carpet by Hitler's spurs could have been construed and passed down through generations of museum professionals. However, even the factuality of this historical footnote is not certain, and we should therefore consider the entire story, instead, as a narrative. But what does it really relate? Not historical facts, obviously. It is a narrative that reminds us of the very thin border between truth and fiction, between historical event and urban saga. A newspaper article in the left-liberal daily *La Repubblica* offers a telling example of an analogous, mostly unconscious mode of dealing with Italy's Fascist past: on 26 September 2012 it announced an

exhibition on the *bozzetti* and sketches for the event discussed here with the headline: "1938, Hitler invade Firenze".<sup>84</sup> Only those reading the entire article then learned what we already know: that in this case Hitler was not an invader, but rather Mussolini's courted guest. The 1938 visit to Florence was a genuinely political act on the part of the Italian Fascist regime and the dark tones of the urban *mise-en-scène* accompanying it cannot simply be traced back to Hitler and National Socialism.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of whether 'Hitler's carpet' was actually used in this decorative scheme, its story testifies to the great political-diplomatic role of oriental carpets as marking territories, in this case national ones, and bearing on their delicate surfaces good and bad memories of these diplomatic encounters.

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<sup>84</sup> Gaia Rau, "1938, Hitler invade Firenze", in: *La Repubblica*, 26 September 2012, local news section "Firenze", p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> This attitude is described by the historian Filippo Focardi in a recent

book with the telling title *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano: la rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale*, Rome/Bari 2013, which focusses on the period 1943–1947.

This study focuses on a mid 17th-century Persian carpet, most probably from Isfahan, which is currently kept in the Museo Bardini in Florence (inv. no. 555). This carpet came to be known in oral tradition as ‘Hitler’s carpet’ because it was reputedly used on 9 May 1938 to welcome Hitler on the platform of Florence’s main train station. The first part of the article provides a historical overview of the political role of carpets. Relevant historical sources and accounts of the particular uses and the rituals and codes involving audience-hall carpets in the medieval Islamic world are gathered and discussed in order to establish the carpet’s political function. Thus, to a certain degree, light is also thrown on the long history preceding the common present-day diplomatic use of carpets in official arrival ceremonies for political figures and on the particular story of its use in Florence in 1938. Drawing upon archival materials, visual and written alike, the second part of the article focuses on oral tradition and Florentine urban narratives associated with the Bardini carpet and aims to explain the complex relationship between fiction and reality in the construction of its modern biography.

Museo Bardini, Florence: Fig. 1. – Fototeca Musei Civici Fiorentini, Florence: Fig. 2. – Fototeca Musei Civici Fiorentini, Florence (Fondo Bardini): Figs. 3, 4, 6, 7. – From *Lensi 1923/24* (note 15): Fig. 5. – Reuters/Contrasto: Fig. 8. – Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington: Fig. 9. – Archive of the authors: Fig. 10. – © Banca Dati dell’Archivio Storico Foto Locchi, Firenze, [www.archiviofotolocchi.com](http://www.archiviofotolocchi.com): Figs. 11, 13. – Museo Stibbert, Firenze: Fig. 12. – From “La cronaca della grande giornata” (note 76): Fig. 14.

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