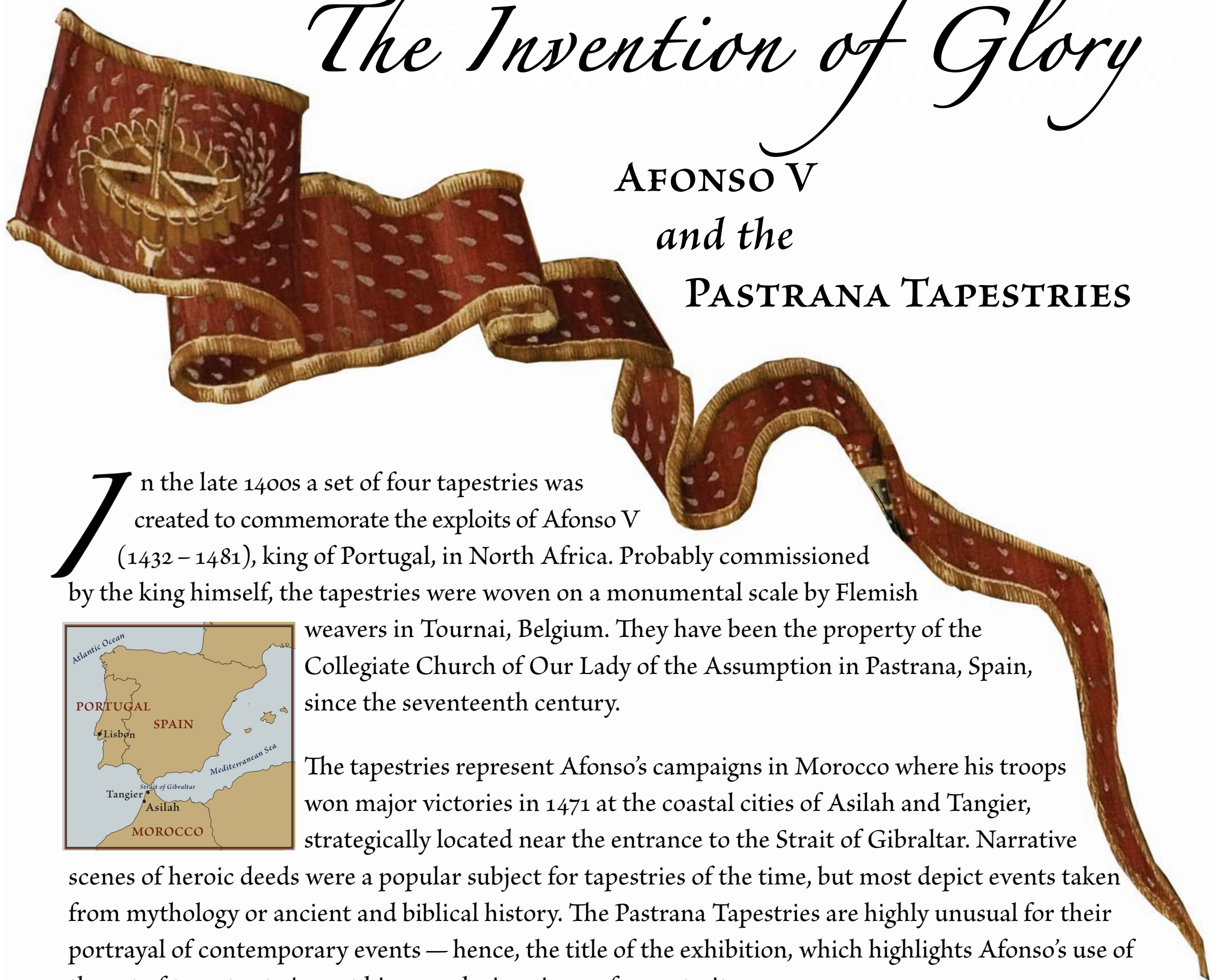


# *The Invention of Glory*

AFONSO V

*and the*

PASTRANA TAPESTRIES



In the late 1400s a set of four tapestries was created to commemorate the exploits of Afonso V (1432 – 1481), king of Portugal, in North Africa. Probably commissioned by the king himself, the tapestries were woven on a monumental scale by Flemish

weavers in Tournai, Belgium. They have been the property of the Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Pastrana, Spain, since the seventeenth century.



The tapestries represent Afonso's campaigns in Morocco where his troops won major victories in 1471 at the coastal cities of Asilah and Tangier, strategically located near the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar. Narrative scenes of heroic deeds were a popular subject for tapestries of the time, but most depict events taken from mythology or ancient and biblical history. The Pastrana Tapestries are highly unusual for their portrayal of contemporary events — hence, the title of the exhibition, which highlights Afonso's use of the art of tapestry to invent his own glorious image for posterity.

Passchier Grenier, the outstanding tapestry merchant of the day, almost certainly carried out the commission. His illustrious clients included crowned heads of Europe and the dukes of Burgundy, for whom his workshops in Tournai produced tapestries in the same style and technique as those made for Afonso V. The complex, multifigured compositions teem with vivid, colorful images of knights, costumes, ships, and military paraphernalia against a backdrop of maritime and urban landscapes, all exquisitely rendered in wool and silk threads. The works have been recently conserved and are regarded as among the finest Gothic tapestries in existence.

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

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

# CONQUEST OF ASILAH

*The three tapestries in this gallery depict episodes in the Portuguese conquest of the city of Asilah in 1471: the landing of the Portuguese fleet off the coast of Morocco; the siege and bombardment of Asilah; and the final assault with hand-to-hand combat inside the city walls.*





*The battle was hard-won. A terrible storm sank many of the Portuguese ships, with great loss of life, and it poured rain for all three days of the siege. Although several cannon appear in the tapestry depicting the bombardment, chroniclers of the period agree that “the storm at sea persevered so much that no more than two pieces of heavy artillery could be brought ashore.” The rain prevented an intended barrage of cannonballs from ships offshore, but Afonso V and his troops still managed with their two cannon to breach the walls and take the city.*

*In the tapestries, the misery of warfare is minimized. Instead, the designer reinvented the event, with Afonso’s heroic image and the ideals of chivalry in mind. Despite the tumult (and with no sign of rain), the sunlit scenes have a joyful atmosphere, with numerous musicians sounding fanfares. The king appears as a noble knight, splendidly clad in gleaming armor and rich brocades, risking his life for God and country. Standard-bearers, carrying the banner of Portugal and the royal emblem of Afonso V, always precede the king, locating him amid the jumble of figures. The victory at Asilah paved the way for the conquest of Tangier, depicted in the final tapestry in the series.*



## LANDING AT ASILAH

### *Arrival of the Portuguese Fleet off the Coast of Morocco*

Carracks, large sailing ships that transported the Portuguese army to Africa, are clustered at left. Flying from the masts are emblems of Portugal , Afonso V , and Saint George , Portugal's patron saint. Monkeys  have climbed aboard two of the ships, signifying that the events are taking place in Africa. To the right of the carracks, soldiers are being rowed to shore.

### *Portuguese Soldiers Approach the City of Asilah*

Afonso V and his son João, wearing patterned silk brocades over their armor, appear twice in the central section of the tapestry: at lower left, riding in a rowboat, and at upper right, marching toward the city. In the waters near the city walls, drowning soldiers slip beneath the waves.

### *Moroccans Prepare to Defend the City of Asilah*




Behind the crenellated walls, the Muslim residents try to defend Asilah with swords, shields, and spears. The Flemish weavers of the tapestry, unfamiliar with North African architecture, depicted a city that resembles one in northern Europe with high-pitched roofs and pointed spires.





## SIEGE OF ASILAH

### Prince João on Horseback

A wooden fence surrounds the Portuguese camp outside the walls of Asilah. It was intended to protect the soldiers from attack by Moroccan horsemen, who had repelled previous Portuguese incursions in North Africa. The fence is decorated with the insignia of Portugal , the red cross of Saint George , and the emblem of Afonso V . The prince appears just inside, mounted on a richly caparisoned horse and preceded by three trumpeters.

### The Bombardment

The Portuguese bombard Asilah with cannon, cracking the walls. Some soldiers fire muskets and crossbows, while others are armed with long spears. Wooden screens in front of the cannon protect them against enemy projectiles. Before firing cannonballs, soldiers pulled on the ropes to raise the screen. The masts and crow's nests in the background rise from the Portuguese ships blockading the port.

### King Afonso V on Horseback

The king appears inside the fence astride a horse covered with an elegant red, white, and gold caparison. Two trumpeters precede him, sounding fanfares. Banners with the arms of Portugal hang from their instruments. A pennant flying overhead bears Afonso's emblem, a golden paddle wheel spewing life-giving drops of water.





## ASSAULT ON ASILAH

### *Prince João on Horseback*

The prince wears a gleaming suit of armor under a floral-patterned brocade. His horse is richly attired in a caparison with a sheen that suggests brown velvet. The jumble of figures around the prince includes trumpeters and soldiers wielding muskets, crossbows, and other weapons.

### *Storming the City*

Portuguese soldiers scale the city walls, climbing through gaps or on ladders. With the end of the bombardment (seen in the previous tapestry), swords are unsheathed for hand-to-hand combat.

### *King Afonso V on Horseback*

While Afonso sits motionless in the other tapestries, here he raises his sword, ready to enter the fray. The king is preceded by his standard-bearer, Duarte de Almeida, dressed in full armor and carrying Afonso's personal emblem, the golden waterwheel. In another battle five years later, Duarte would lose both hands defending the banner of Portugal.



# CONQUEST OF TANGIER

The people of Tangier expected the governor of Asilah, Muhammad al-Shaikh, to send reinforcements to help them repel the Portuguese army. Preoccupied with his own war against the governor of Fez, he instead signed a treaty granting the Portuguese dominion over Tangier. On learning of this agreement, the Tangerines fled, fearing their city would suffer the same fate as Asilah, where an estimated two thousand inhabitants died and five thousand were taken captive.

The tapestry depicts the Portuguese cavalry and infantry marching in formation from the city in the background, probably Asilah, to the walls of Tangier. They carry no guns or swords, as they expected to occupy the city peacefully. The absence of the standard-bearers carrying the arms of Portugal and Afonso V indicates that the king is not present. The soldier mounted at left on a white horse is probably the son of the Duke of Braganza, Dom João, whom Afonso V appointed to lead the expedition.

The central section of the tapestry depicts the city empty except for a soldier raising the banner of Portugal in victory. At right, the Muslim inhabitants walk into exile, carrying their belongings. With a basket on her head, a woman flees with her three children, holding one in her arms and another by the hand while carrying a baby in a blue cloth slung over her back.



## CONQUEST OF TANGIER

The leader of the expedition, probably Dom João, son of the Duke of Braganza

Soldier raising the Portuguese banner in victory

Fleeing Moroccans, including a woman with her three children

