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Calligraphic Fragment from the Alhambra

Spain

Second half 14th century, Grenada

Stucco

H:19cm W:29cm D:2cm

The Alhambra Palace, which sits overlooking the city of Granada in southern Spain, is an abiding reminder of the glories of Islamic Spain. It is both the last, and the greatest, example of the final flowering of Arab-Islamic culture in the region under the Nasrid dynasty (1238-1492). Beyond the spectacular architecture and setting of the buildings which make up the complex, one of the most notable features of the interiors are their remarkable calligraphic stucco decorations, cladding entire rooms with poetry, Qur'anic quotations, and the ubiquitous Nasrid motto featured on the present piece.²

Over the past five centuries, the great palatine city-fortress has suffered demolitions, rebuilding, the depredations of Napoleon's armies and earthquakes, with most of what remains either in situ or in the museum situated within its grounds.³ Architectural elements from the Alhambra are therefore rare and highly sought-after, making the present piece [Fig. 1] particularly important. The inscription, written in a distinctive Nasrid variant of thuluth used for architectural inscriptions as well as on other media, reads wa la Ghalib illa A[llah] ("There is no victor but G[od]").

A full report by William Greenwood is available.

Literature:

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