



Inv. no. 1/1989

CAT. 42. TEXTILE WITH ANIMALS AROUND A STYLIZED TREE

EGYPT; 9TH-10TH CENTURY

Islamic artists adopted motifs from Antiquity that had previously had a more or less pronounced symbolic significance that was lost in the new cultural context. Examples are sphinxes, harpies, griffins, sun symbols, and the Tree of Life.

This last motif, the Tree of Life, is an ancient symbol dating back several millennia before the Christian era, and whose significance is quite vague. It is the tree of the gods that links heaven and earth. It is often flanked by two or more animals or mythical creatures and became a well-established motif in textiles with medallion patterns (cat.no. 11). There is no evidence that the motif has any specific significance in Islamic art, where it should be viewed as a decorative relict.