Ceiling

Place of origin: Toledo (province) (made)
Date: c.1490 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown (made)
Materials and Techniques: Pine wood, covered with gesso, painted and gilded
Museum number: 407-1905
Gallery location: In Storage

Descriptive line
Carved, gilded and painted woodwork ceiling from the Palacio de Altamira in Torrijos (near Toledo)

Physical description
Wooden ceiling decorated with an all-over framework of geometric starburst designs. Octagonal and arranged in three zones radiating from a muqarnas boss at the centre. A more ‘Gothic’ section with four squinches provides the transition from the square hall to the octagonal dome.

Dimensions
Diameter: 625 cm

Museum number
407-1905

Object history note
Bought for £480 from Messrs. L. Harris & co. (The Spanish Art Gallery, Conduit Street, London), RF 88519/1904 and 8375/1904. Transported from Spain per E. Tanton. Recorded as "Large ceiling of wood, painted and gilt, in parts and fragments, and 6 panels plaster casts; the contents of 24 packages. (5 plaster panels broken)"

Two more portions of plaster work 'pieces of stucco frieze with Arab inscriptions...from the lowest frieze of the Hispano Moresque ceiling' were presented by Messrs. L. Harris on 30th July 1909 (RF 3792/1909). A.B. Skinner explained on the acceptance papers 16/8/1909 that 'Portions of this frieze were missing, but all was received, which was thought to exist at the time - sufficient for the repeating design existed to allow the frieze to be completed by making plaster casts. Mr Harris subsequently obtained the pieces under consideration and offers to give them to the Museum.'

Displayed in the apse of gallery 48 by at 1926, until 1992

One of four surviving ceilings from the Palacio de Altamira in Torrijos, near Toledo, built for Gutiérre de Cárdenas, chamberlain to Isabella the Catholic, and his wife Teresa Enríquez, the queen's cousin. A good example of the taste for Mudéjar styles among the Spanish elite at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The squinches contain the coats of arms of the Cárdenas and Enríquez families. The construction, design and decoration show continuation from the marquetry ceilings created for the Alhambra a century and a half before. (M. Rosser-Owen, 2010).

Description at accession:
"Vaulted ceiling of carved pinewood, painted and gilt; in some parts the painting is on a canvas priming. From a palace at Torrijos near Madrid, built for Gutierrez de Cardenas and his wife Teresa Enríquez, whose arms are shown in the spandrels. The ceiling is octagonal in plan, fitted by means of spandrels to a a square room. In the apex is a stalactite pendant within an octagonal panel, from which eight ribs radiate; the ribs are intersected by cross-bars, the surface being thus divided into sixteen panels, which together with the top panel are filled in with geometrical arabesque ornament enriched with leafy and floral designs; under the whole is a frieze of stalactite ornament. Each of the four slightly coved spandrels contains a shield of arms of the families referred to, on a ground of interlacing branches; between each pair of spandrels is a panel of matted ornament with conventional S-shaped device in the middle. With the vault are portions of plaster work, representing parts of the frieze of the wall which supported the vault. Hispano-Moresque; late 15th century."

A measured diagram (original on accession register) shows an elevation of the ceiling ‘Plano para la colocacion di los arteronados’

Historical context note
For contextual information see also:

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O297196/ceiling-unknown/