





Textiles

in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Front cover: Details of Chinese silk (p. 73), English printed cotton (p. 57), American embroidered sampler (p. 59), and Spanish or Italian velvet (p. 45). Inside front cover: Detail of English printed cotton and linen fabric (p. 55). Inside back cover: Detail of Japanese Noh robe (p. 80). Back cover: Details of African textile (p. 71) and Flemish lace (p. 54).

Title page: Wiener Werkstätte silk sample (p. 64). P. 3: Detail of Late Antique tapestry panel (p. 25).

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Director's Foreword:

Antonio Ratti Textile Center

With the opening in mid-December of the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, occupying approximately 25,000 square feet on the ground floor of the Museum, the Metropolitan has realized a long-cherished objective of providing a centralized, state-of-the-art facility for the study, examination, storage, and conservation of substantially all of its textiles.

Shortly after the Museum's founding in 1870, its curators began to acquire textiles from every epoch and every culture within their respective fields, with the result that the

Metropolitan now possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of textiles anywhere in the world. Because these textiles have been assembled according to the civilizations and cultures that produced them, they have historically been housed and cared for by many separate departments within the Museum. This manner of collecting has produced remarkable diversity throughout our holdings, from archaeological frag-

ments—the earliest dating to about 4000 B.C.—to intricately woven tapestries, velvets, and carpets, to fine needlework, such as embroideries and laces, to hand- and machine-printed

fabrics of the twentieth century. All of these textiles represent in various ways the iconographic and ornamental expressions of their respective civilizations, as well as the geographic and historical paths by which the techniques and motifs employed in their creation have traveled from one civilization to another. Taken as a whole, the Metropolitan's textiles thus constitute a vast documentary and aesthetic resource.

The primary advantage to maintaining varied curatorial responsibility rather than segregating textiles in a separate department—using medium as the governing principle—is that the textiles have been selected and studied, and their significance understood, in the full context of knowledge of all of the arts of the civilizations from which they came. Thus, for example, Asian garments have been acquired and displayed in the context of other Asian art forms, and European carpets, in the context of the finest European furniture and furnishings of the appropriate periods. Far from being isolated, textiles at the Metropolitan have always been an integral part of each of the curatorial departments.

Nonetheless, a disadvantage of department-by-department collecting is that the textiles have been cared for and housed in widely dispersed facilities, with very different methods of access and storage. Anyone wishing to compare examples from several departments in the course of a single inquiry will



Opposite: Detail of Sicilian chasuble (p. 53). Above top: Border from Navajo wearing blanket (p. 69). Above: Sleeve ornament from Late Antique tunic (p. 27)



Visitors to the Metropolitan's old Textile Study Room in 1918 (above) and 1926

encounter considerable difficulty, and it has compromised the availability of the textiles to visiting scholars, colleagues, and members of the general public.

Such limited access was not always the case. The Metropolitan had established the Textile Study Room in 1909, in recognition of the value of our collections to manufacturers, designers, and artisans. The Study Room made available duplicate specimens and small pieces of fabric stitched on sliding frames and in drawers. Textiles not on exhibition were also kept there in wooden cabinets. The Study Room, which most recently housed Asian and European

fabrics and costumes, became totally inadequate and out of date as Museum collections grew and knowledge of conservation increased. While the Study Room provided access following the best standards at the time, the continuing use of the frames—the pulling out and pushing in—and even the potential danger from harmful acids in the wood were considered hazardous for the collections. In the last few years we have restricted visitors, as the textiles were being prepared for transfer to the new Center.

Our objective in planning for a new textile facility was to find a way to continue collecting department by department and at the same time provide optimum storage conditions, comprehensive conservation assessment, easier access, and improved study areas. With the construction of the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, we have achieved these goals.

One of our major concerns during the planning phase was the fragility of the medium. By increasing access, we might expose the textiles to further deterioration through unregulated humidity, light, and dust, among other factors, as well as to damage from handling. We had to devise a scheme that would safe-

guard the textiles while allowing them to be available for study. We also had to ensure a controlled storage environment, with stable climate and physical surroundings, that would be designed to enhance our preservation programs. After considerable analysis, we decided to make the new facility not only the first to centralize storage, conservation, and study for textiles from the majority of our curatorial departments, but also the first to utilize the information technology that would provide catalogue data for each example and a digitized photographic image for many of them. Such a computerized state-of-the-art system would satisfy many of the initial inquiries by visitors and scholars and thus minimize handling of the fabrics, reducing the risk to the original materials.

Within the past several years, Museum-wide knowledge of the use of digitized images has increased considerably, as has the technology supporting these interests, and the system used in the Ratti Center will utilize sophisticated equipment as well as custom-designed software. Consequently, the scope of the inquiries—especially those relating to the various textile collections—

can be greater than ever before. Moreover, the ease with which these can be carried out—the computers replace a manual catalogue-card system—will transform the scholarly process and will no doubt stimulate new directions for textile study.

Accordingly, the new computer system will be networked throughout the Ratti Center, in the library, storerooms, and workrooms, and during the next few years additional terminals will be installed within the Museum, in curatorial offices and conservation laboratories. The system includes not only basic descriptive information but also the necessary data fields to implement highly sophisticated and protective collections management, including the tracking of all textiles throughout the Museum: those in the Center, those housed in a few other departments, and those on exhibition or on loan elsewhere. While the system's basic function is information retrieval for the Museum's curators and conservators, its publicaccess component will also enable outside scholars and students to pursue broad historical and crosscultural themes across the full range of our holdings. We cannot at this time assess the extent of the public's desire to study our collections, but



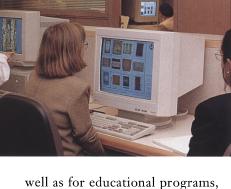


Above and right: Using the new computer data system in the Antonio Ratti Textile Center. Below: Scanning a fabric

there is no doubt that this facility, with its new technological resources, backed by a collection of textiles matched in range and depth by only a

few in the world, will encourage new courses of study, publications, lectures, and other activities in the field, all of which will promote greater public interest in textiles and an understanding of their key importance in documenting artistic expression throughout the history of mankind.

Another aid to scholars and to all visitors to the Center is a reference library, initially comprising about 1,200 books as well as periodicals relating to the field. The library is linked electronically to the on-line catalogue of the Thomas J. Watson Library. Adjacent to the Center's library are two well-equipped areas, to be used by the staff and the public for the study of the actual textiles, as



well as for educational programs, including graduate seminars and programs for more general audiences. Nearby are carrels for visiting fellows and scholars, who may be doing prolonged research on the Center's collections.

We must never forget that the first duty of any great museum is to the objects in its care, and with the design and construction of the Ratti Center the Metropolitan has done everything possible to ensure optimum conditions for the long-range preservation of the textiles. Every item transferred to the Center has been reexamined by conservators to evaluate its storage requirements, and each has been fitted with a specially prepared support composed of



Above: Conservators working in the new facility. Below: Medieval textile under repair

material of the highest quality and selected for archival properties. The storage cabinets and shelves have been custom-manufactured in accordance with the most rigorous and technologically advanced conservation specifications. A significant portion of this storage furniture was funded by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, constituting one of the largest ever made by the N.E.H. for such a purpose.

To further ensure the ongoing conservation and care of the textile collections, we have constructed an entirely new 9,000-square-foot laboratory within the Center, housing the Textile Conservation Department, immediately adjacent to the study-storage areas. This expanded space is fully equipped with state-ofthe-art scientific apparatus for analysis and treatment; a laboratory for dyeing yarns used in restoration; a testing facility for conducting research on conservation materials; laboratories for chemical and microscopic analysis of fibers and dyes; a 20-by-30-foot wet-cleaning facility supplied with a purified, demineralized water system; a 24-by-50-foot open-plan conservation work space; a sewing room; computer room; and treatment-record reference area and conservation library. In this new laboratory, between ten and twenty conservators will be able

to work at any given time in close proximity to the collections and will

is one of the largest, most technically advanced, and well-equipped facilities for conservation, storage, and study of textiles in any art museum. The Center was made possible in part by a grant from the Fondazione Antonio Ratti of Como, Italy. Its founder, Antonio Ratti, has shown remarkable generosity and a deep commitment to the field with his decision to become the major funder of this project. Mr. Ratti, who was born in Como in 1915, has devoted his entire professional life to textiles, as a fabric designer, manufacturer, collector, and entrepreneur. In Como he revived the ancient tradition of silk making, typical of the finest work of the region, and built the Ratti Group, which is today one of the most important international companies producing high-quality printed fabrics in silk



do so for the first time with fully adequate facilities. Furthermore, they will have immediate access to information provided by the computer database, and eventually there will be a link to conservation-treatment records, providing up-to-date material and technical analyses to be used by the various departments. Conservators and the Ratti Center's curatorial staff, working with these new resources, will be able to diligently monitor the textile collections in storage or on exhibition.

The Antonio Ratti Textile Center

and other natural fibers. Most recently, in 1985, he created the Fondazione Antonio Ratti, or Antonio Ratti Foundation, for the purpose of supporting research in the cultural, artistic, and technological aspects of textiles. Long a collector of ancient fabrics, Mr. Ratti has now donated his personal holdings to the Fondazione, where they are being preserved, restored, and catalogued. Given Mr. Ratti's history of entrepreneurship and his passionate interest in textiles, it is not surprising that he immediately understood our



urgent need for a completely new facility for the Museum's textile collections. We are deeply grateful to him for helping us to realize the new Antonio Ratti Textile Center at the Metropolitan. We also extend our thanks to the David H. Koch Charitable Foundation and Toyota Motor Corporation for their additional and generous support of this important project.

The broad concept and the initial plans for the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, both for the storage facility and the conservation laboratory, were developed by Nobuko Kajitani, conservator in charge of the Department of Textile Conservation. This was a project of truly Herculean proportions, and we gratefully acknowledge the high degree of professionalism and astuteness she brought to it. The daunting organizational and logistical task of implementing the plans and seeing them through to the successful completion of the Ratti Center was entrusted to textile conservator Elena Phipps, who served as comanager of the project along with Barbara Drake Boehm, associate curator of Medieval Art. They acquitted themselves faultlessly

The new conservation space in the Antonio Ratti Textile Center and (detail) customdesigned storage drawers

throughout this difficult assignment.

Penelope K. Bardel, former associate director, returned to

the Museum as a consultant to oversee the project, and to her as well as to Jennifer Russell, associate director for administration, who inherited some of the day-to-day stewardship, I am most grateful. Thomas Campbell, recently appointed assistant curator of textiles in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts and supervising curator of the Ratti Center, worked closely with Elena Phipps during the last stages of the Center's construction. I also wish to thank Jay Hoffman of Gallery Systems, who designed the computer programs for the information systems, and Kay Bearman, administrator for Twentieth Century Art, who coordinated the complex process of assembling the curatorial data. We owe the successful design of the Center to the firm of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates and particularly to architect Bill Pendergrass, who worked closely with the planning staff to meet the demanding conservation requirements of the facility.

Philippe de Montebello Director



Introduction

The history of textiles touches on practically all aspects of humanistic study. Archaeologists and social historians measure the technical sophistication of past cultures from the types of textiles they produced, while anthropologists study their use in daily life and ritual. The portability of textiles has made them one of the most significant commodities in the history of mankind, even on occasion being exchanged in lieu of currency, and therefore a central focus of economic studies. For historians of design, they are a medium through which aesthetic influences have been transferred around the world. For example, richly patterned silks from the Far East were traded along the so-called silk roads to the shores of the Mediterranean more than a thousand years before the invention of printing.

All these factors ensure that textiles have a significant place in the study of the past. But there are a number of other aspects that give certain types of textiles a special interest for the art historian. Most importantly, the prominent role that luxury textiles played in the secular and religious life of many societies ensured that no cost or effort was

spared in making them as beautiful and artful as possible. As a result, they often represent the highest creative achievement of a society or of a particular milieu within it, combining inspired design, fine quality materials, and impeccable craftsmanship.

Yet, despite the prized position that textiles have occupied in past cultures, modern society has a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the medium. The situation is best illustrated by the fate of numerous antique textiles in Europe and

America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1870 and 1930 there was an enormous demand for decorative works of art to furnish the mansions that industrial millionaires were building for themselves on both sides of the Atlantic. Textiles were particularly sought after as they provided a grandeur that was then much in vogue, and photographs of the palatial interiors in which they were used demonstrate their variety and quality, from medieval tapestries and Renaissance velvets

to rare Middle and Far Eastern carpets. The same photographs, however, also record a less fortunate consequence of this market. Despite the high prices paid for some of these objects, considerable numbers were subsequently treated as if they were little more than lengths of modern furnishing fabric. Tapestries were cut to make overdoors or curtains; fragile silks were used as table covers; and ecclesiastical velvets and embroideries were adapted as upholstery covers.

During the early 1930s, after the Wall Street Crash, when many of the rich chose to live in smaller apartments, a significant portion of these items reentered the market, where they circulated for amazingly



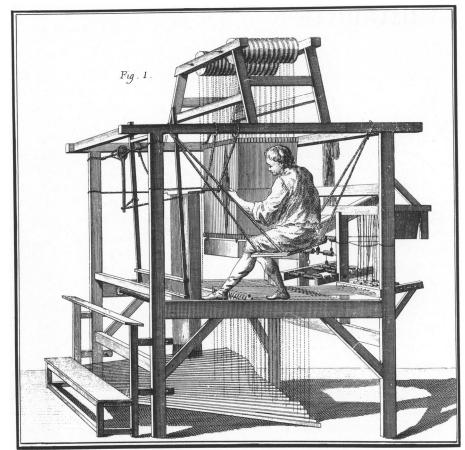
Above: Lower border from "The Bridal Chamber of Herse" (p. 48). Below: Drawloom, from 19th-century edition of Jiao Bingzhen's "Book of Agriculture and Sericulture," 1712. Gift of Mrs. Marion B. Huggins, 1959. Opposite: Drawloom, from "Recueil de Planches sur Les Sciences, Les Arts Liberaux, et Les Arts Mecaniques," vol. 11, Paris, 1772. Denis Diderot and J. LeRond d'Alambert, eds. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933 (33.23)



low sums for the next thirty years. Although prices have revived since the 1970s, and there is keen competition in some fields, most historic textiles are still undervalued in proportion to their original cost, let alone to their current rarity or significance.

A variety of circumstances have contributed to the neglect of textiles, two of which are especially responsible for blurring the distinction between the more and the less important pieces. First, the mechanization of production techniques during the nineteenth century has obscured our understanding of the extent to which most historic textiles were once rare luxury goods. Second, this lack of discrimination has been fostered by nineteenthand early twentieth-century art studies, which have largely focused on the creative genius of particular artists. Consequently, they have provided little incentive for investigations of the textile medium, which often involved the collaboration of designers, cartoonists, and weavers, regarding whom there is frequently little or no documentation.

In the course of the twentieth century, scholars have begun to move away from this emphasis on the creative act of the individual to consider artistic production in the broader context of patronage. This shift of emphasis has led to a realization that while the traditional distinction between the "fine" and "decorative" arts is useful in some



respects, it is deeply misleading in others. One of the consequences is a gradual reassessment of the relationship of the fine arts to other media, especially textiles. It is in this respect that textile collections such as that of the Metropolitan Museum and study facilities such as the Antonio Ratti Textile Center have an important role to play.

What, then, are the factors that determine our approach to historic

textiles? A basic consideration is their diversity. The term "textile" applies to a wide variety of woven, knotted, embroidered, and compressed materials made from fibrous and synthetic substances. As such, it encompasses an extraordinarily broad range of objects produced around the world in the course of six millennia: from the plaited and braided accessories of primitive societies to the complex weaves made by



suited to figurative imagery. The most surprising realization for many is that artists of the past have as readily provided designs for textiles as for any other medium. For example, the images on the gold and ""

Above: Detail of "The Unicorn Leaps across a Stream" (p. 42). Below: Detail of "The Flagellation" (p. 38). Opposite: Figure of Music from the Savonnerie carpet (p. 51)

modern factories; from the products of amateurs to those of highly trained workers in labor-intensive industries; and from utilitarian items of costume and furnishing to priceless objects for display designed by the most famous artists of the day. Carpets and tapestries, velvets and brocades, embroideries and laces, painted and printed fabrics—all produced by different techniques in different contexts—need to be judged and appreciated in a variety of ways, just as frescoes, drawings, and watercolors are judged by widely divergent criteria. In the case of textiles, however, these criteria are often less familiar to a modern audience than those that we apply to the fine arts.

In general, two issues are fundamental to our appreciation of all the different types of textiles: the processes by which they were made and the purposes for which they were used. The first can be broken down into four components: the role of the designer in the creation of an object; the nature of the raw material and the means by which it was turned into a finished fabric; the labor involved in that process; and the value of the materials.

As far as design is concerned, certain types of textiles, especially embroidery and tapestry, are well

ple, the images on the gold and " embroideries for which England was famous throughout Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries appear to share a common source with contemporary illuminated manuscripts. Similarly, the designs embroidered by professionals and amateurs in the monasteries, courts, and noble households of Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were often provided by artists associated with those establishments. During later periods some of the most ambitious projects worked on by noted painters such as Raphael, Rubens, Charles Le Brun, and Boucher were tapestry cartoons. In more recent times textile design has been an important part of the work of artists as diverse as William Morris and Raoul Dufy and groups like the Wiener Werkstätte and the Bauhaus. Although these







examples are European, analogous illustrations might be cited from Middle Eastern and Asian cultures.

Another widespread misconception regarding figurative textile designs is that they in some way merely reproduce those found in other media. While it is true that many amateur embroideries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were copied from earlier engravings and that many woven and printed fabrics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries borrowed motifs that originated elsewhere, the assumption is totally misleading in regard to other types of textiles. For example, although tapestries were "copied" from fullscale cartoons, the cartoons were only a tool in the creative process and their status has been elevated out of all original proportion by modern interest in Old Master drawings.

If figurative embroideries, tapestries, and carpets are relatively accessible to a modern audience, who can easily appreciate the interpretation of the design and the delicacy of the stitching or the fineness of the weave, the criteria governing the relationship between the pattern and texture of other, loom-woven textiles are often more difficult to understand. In consideration of these textiles, the second of the four components mentioned above—the nature of the raw material and the mechanical means by which it was turned into finished fabric-is of primary importance.

Different fibers have widely divergent properties. For example, because of its suppleness, silk can be woven into incredibly fine fabrics. In addition, its natural sheen can be used to make subtle damask effects, and, in the case of silk velvet, its lightness enables opulent textures to be created that are almost impossible to obtain with other natural fibers. Equally, silk is not generally appropriate for hardier fabrics, and for those fibers such as wool, cotton, or linen are utilized. Similar advantages and limitations might be cited for these materials. For example,

linen damasks can be bleached and pressed in a manner that would be inconceivable with other textiles, while the physical properties of wool made it the perfect medium for the vast tapestries that decorated the walls of medieval European castles and churches.

If the nature of the raw material determined what type of textile it was suited for, the weaving technique itself imposed strict limitations on design. The width of the fabric, the texture, and the number of colors that could be used were dictated by the size and complexity of the loom. Within these restrictions, designers had to create repeating motifs that worked as local units but also combined as a rhythmic whole.

Certain weaves were extremely difficult to produce and, in some

Left: Length of Genoese velvet (p.52). Below: Detail of embroidered chasuble (p.49). Opposite (top): Detail of border from wool Mughal carpet woven at approximately 900 knots per square inch (p.33)





cases, almost prohibitively time consuming. For example, the manufacture of polychrome velvet was so involved that after a brief period of production in Italy during the early fifteenth century most subsequent European manufacture concentrated on monochrome velvet, sometimes with the inclusion of metallic thread, until well into the seventeenth century. Even then, polychrome velvets were largely limited to certain centers, like Genoa, that specialized in such luxury goods (see p. 52).



Similar technical difficulties arose in the making of printed fabrics. The rapid expansion of this industry in Europe during the late eighteenth century was a direct reflection of technological developments, essentially the successful adaptation of copperplate printing to the textile medium, that enabled complex designs to be generated in marketable quantities. Knowledge of these issues may not affect our sensory response to different types of textiles, but they help us to appreciate the innovation and ingenuity with which designers and weavers overcame the technical constraints they faced.

The third component that needs to be considered in the context of textile production is that of labor. In some cases, as with tapestries, carpets, and other loom-woven textiles, the labor-intensive nature of the manufacturing process favored the development of highly structured industries, which were often jealously protected by strict guild laws. In other cases, as in the making of embroidery and lace, no more was required than a needle (or bobbins) and thread, which were readily available to cottage industry or the amateur practitioner. Yet, whatever the technical requirements, most of the textiles we now take for granted were luxury items simply because they had to be woven, knotted, or stitched by hand, and the labor involved in producing them was staggering.

The creation of a single repeat in most of the woven textiles illustrated

in this Bulletin, for example, would have meant hundreds of manipulations of the loom and weeks of labor to turn out sufficient quantities of a fabric to make the intended costume or hanging. Similarly, with scores and even hundreds of knots per inch, many of the classic Middle and Far Eastern carpets required years to produce. The same was true of finequality European and Chinese tapestries and carpets. Several of the large pieces illustrated in this publication, such as those on pages 42-43 and 46-47, would have taken teams of weavers from twelve months to two years to complete. Certain types of lace could mean months of work, while the quilts and embroideries that we associate with amateur production around the world represent hours of loving care and effort.

The fourth component essential to our understanding of textile production is the cost of the raw materials, which often dwarfed that of the labor involved. The inclusion of silk or metallic thread, either in the form of wire or as a thin filament wrapped around a silk core, could vastly increase the unit cost. Many historic textiles were subsequently destroyed in order to extract the precious metal, a fate shared by numerous antique tapestries at the time of the French Revolution. However, generally speaking, the circumstances in which textiles are likely to have survived tend to favor the more valuable pieces, with the consequence that a fairly large proportion of the historic silks, tapestries, and embroideries we



see today do contain metallic thread. It is important to remember that most of the great textiles commissioned by patrons of the past cost many times more than the annual salaries of the artists by whose work we often judge their patronage.

As a result of the cost of labor and precious raw materials, high-quality production frequently required substantial funding in advance. Some manufacturers received funds from rich middlemen and merchants who dealt in a variety of major commodities such as grain, wine, and bullion, in addition to textiles. In other cases, workshops were directly supported by the rulers and nobles for whose use the textiles were being produced. From the ateliers of the Safavid dynasty in Iran and the Ottoman court manufactories in Constantinople to the tapestry and silk ateliers established by European monarchs, such royal workshops inevitably reflected the iconographic interests and aesthetic tastes of these reigning figures.

If the preceding issues relate to the processes by which textiles were made, an understanding of their purpose is equally important to their appreciation. From the mountains of Peru to the shores of Japan, and from the steppes of Russia to the banks of the Nile, the majority of the dwellings of the past might be described as empty spaces that were humanized by textiles. Textiles provided insulation, comfort, privacy, and decoration for those who could afford them. For peripatetic cultures, they had the additional advantage of being portable. Whether one's abode was a damp, cold castle or a hide tent, both could be transformed into warm and colorful interiors in the time it took to hang them with textiles. On a lesser scale, the embroidered samplers made by young women around the world were an introduction to a skill that would subsequently enable them to make and decorate bed covers, hangings, cushions, and curtains for their homes.



Opposite: Hawking scene from Safavid velvet panel (p. 31). Above: Detail of Inka tunic (p. 68)

Textiles were also valued by past societies because of their potential for display. Luxury textiles were an immediate, overwhelming demonstration of wealth and power, and numerous examples might be cited of the ways in which they were used to reinforce the status of an individual. The richness of the textiles at the Byzantine court at Constantinople between the sixth and twelfth centuries or at the Ottoman court in subsequent periods was reported far and wide through diplomatic channels. In Europe usage was similarly extravagant. The famous Field of Cloth of Gold meeting between François I and Henry VIII at Guisnes in 1520 derives its name from the gold-brocaded velvets, much like the one illustrated on page 45, with which the lodgings of the French and English courts were lavishly decorated.

Quite apart from the displays of precious textiles with which patrons sought to demonstrate their wealth and the gifts with which they might exact loyalty, textiles were also a ready vehicle for what we now think of as propaganda. In an age when the visual image was rare in any medium, vast tapestries or embroideries depicting an individual's mili-

tary campaigns or the mythological heroes with whom he or she wished to be identified were a potent means of suggestion. This *Bulletin* includes a number of items that incorporate imagery or armorial devices in a manner that exemplifies this practice, for example the Yuan dynasty mandala illustrated on page 76, which includes portraits of the patrons for whom it was made, and the late seventeenth-century French embroidery illustrated on page 50, which depicts Louis XIV as Jupiter.

Decorative textiles and garments were also appropriate for more emblematic demonstration. In Islamic culture, silk ateliers, working exclusively for the caliph, produced elaborately embroidered fabrics, known as *tiraz*, which expressed a courtier's allegiance to the ruler. In China, from the fifteenth century until the end of the imperial era at the beginning of the twentieth century, the status of courtiers was indicated by exquisitely embroidered rank badges.

Similarly, many cultures have had sumptuary laws specifying the types of garments that different ranks of



society were permitted to wear. The Byzantine court exercised a monopoly over the production and use of certain types of silks, especially those dyed with imperial purple, while in Ottoman Turkey fabrics woven with gold thread in the imperial ateliers of the Topkapi Saray were reserved for the sultan. In Japan religion and myth have endowed textiles with particularly subtle talismanic properties. Documents recording the repertoire of patterns for dress and furnishings at the imperial court survive from the seventh century, while during the Edo period (1615-1868) a rigid social hierarchy prescribed the minutiae of life, including details of dress.

Dress continues to demonstrate status today, if in a more moderate way. Haute couture clothes are still an instant declaration of wealth, and the world's media is finely tuned to the distinctions between one designer label and another.

Apart from the points raised above, two further issues need to be taken into account in the appreciation of historic textiles. First, it is important to remember just how few survive. The dry conditions of pharaonic tombs in the Nile Valley have ensured the preservation of large numbers of Egyptian textiles, dating from as early as 5,000 B.C., but that situation is exceptional. In most climates the fragile nature of

the medium has meant that survival of any examples is rare from before the seventh or eighth century A.D., although archaeological evidence often indicates that a sophisticated industry had long existed. For instance, silk design during the beginning of the medieval period was enormously influenced by the textiles made in Iran by the Sasanian empire (A.D. 224-642), but practically nothing of that earlier production survives. Even in later periods the output of entire industries may have been lost. The so-called Bayeux Tapestry of the Norman invasion of England is the only survivor of a type of monumental embroidery that may once have played an important part in the figurative art of early medieval northern Europe.

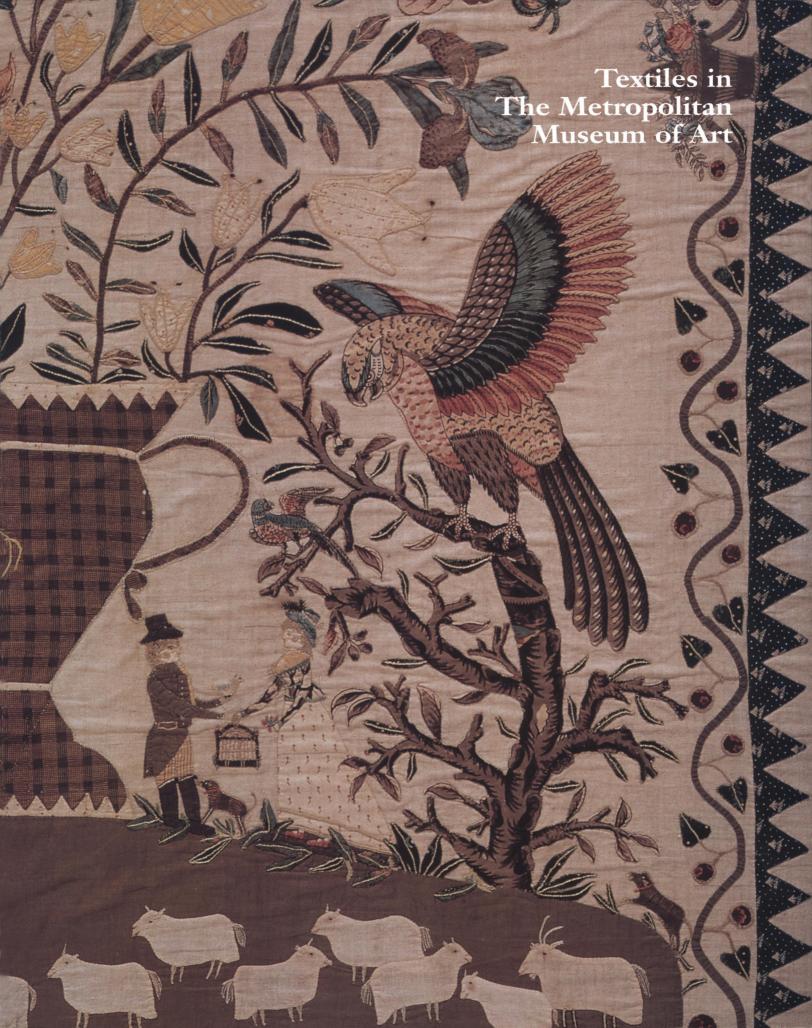
The second issue we have to consider, a consequence of the fragility of the medium, is that surviving textiles are often in an advanced stage of decay, color loss, or disintegration. It is therefore important for a contemporary audience to have some sense of the relative condition of a piece so that they can exercise the imagination necessary to understand the object. How else can one begin to appreciate the splendor of a silk banner that once streamed above a cavalry charge, if it is now held together by netting. Or judge a gown whose distinctive folds once

Above: Shells and sea grasses from Edo period woman's robe (p. 78). Opposite: Lower right corner from American appliquéd coverlet (p. 60)

gave an Egyptian queen a style quite as striking as anything one sees in the pages of a modern fashion magazine, but which must now lie flat behind glass because of its fragility.

The challenge for the modern museum is to present and interpret its collections for the public and at the same time to apply the lessons of modern science in order to delay the destructive effects that display of textiles inevitably involves. The storage, study, and conservation facilities provided by the Antonio Ratti Textile Center will place the Metropolitan Museum at the forefront of this effort.

Thomas Campbell
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European Sculpture and Decorative
Arts, and Supervising Curator,
Antonio Ratti Textile Center





Double-Woven Wool Fragments

Iran, Shahr-i Qumis, Site VI, Room 23. Sasanian, 6th century A.D. H. largest fragment 5 ½ in. (14.3 cm). Purchase, H. Dunscombe Colt Gift, 1969 (69.24.32a,b,c)

Wool-and-Cotton Fabric Decorated with Bands of Rosettes and Pearls

Iran, Shahr-i Qumis, Site VI, Room 23. Sasanian, 6th century A.D. H. 9 in. (23 cm). Purchase, H. Dunscombe Colt Gift, 1969 (69.24.35)

A number of unique textiles in the Museum's collection come from a British excavation, partially funded by the Metropolitan, at Shahr-i Qumis. This site, the ancient city of Hecatompylos, founded by the fol-

lowers of Alexander the Great in the third century B.C., is situated in the dry plains of Gurgan in northeastern Iran, an environment that contributed to the preservation of the textiles. Large numbers of products and peoples moving along the so-called Silk Road passed

through this region during the first seven centuries of the first millennium, an era in which Mesopotamia and Iran were ruled by the Parthian and Sasanian dynasties.

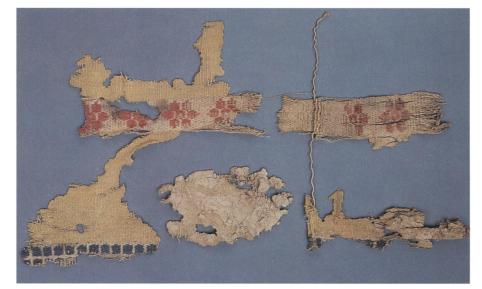
One portion of the excavations at Shahr-i Qumis was a tower in an abandoned Parthian manor building that was reused as a mausoleum during the Sasanian period in the sixth century. Interred in the burial were bones of a single body that had first been exposed according to Zoroastrian custom. The bones, enclosed in a leather container, were wrapped in cotton, wool, and silk textiles still partially preserved. A coin of the tenth year (587-88) of the reign of the Sasanian king Hormizd IV was found wrapped in one textile and provides an approximate date for the find. The textiles include undecorated and decorated fabrics with stylized plant designs, stripes, and checkered patterns, the latter visible on a heavy wool double-



woven fabric (69.24.32). Of particular interest is the earliest known example of a weft-faced compound tabby of wool and cotton (69.24.35). Abraded by use, the white rosettes on a red band and white pearls on blue bands are shown here from the better-preserved back side, on which the colors are reversed.

Although the textiles of Shahr-i Qumis hardly reflect the splendid fabrics and garments described in the ancient texts or those remaining from the Islamic era, these fragments are of immense importance, as many of them document the earliest stages in the production of various types of textiles that later became widespread in the Near Eastern and European worlds.

— P.O.H.



Wool Textile Decorated with a Walking Ram

Egypt or Iran, 7th or 8th century A.D. H. 8¾ in. (22.2 cm). Anonymous Gift, 1977 (1977.232)

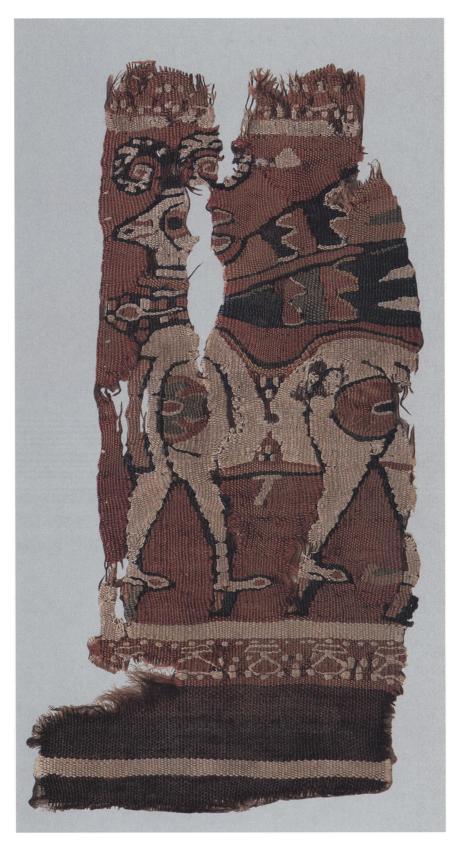
Many ancient textiles have been recovered in Egypt, where the dry climate contributed to their excellent state of preservation. Some of these fabrics, notably silks from Antinoë and "Coptic" linens decorated with wool, are striking works of art.

The vibrantly colored wool fragment, acquired in Egypt, illustrates a ram and is closely related in weave and design to "Coptic" textiles. Significant details in the iconography, however, relate it to works made in Sasanian Iran and Mesopotamia in the mid-first millennium. Such details include the neck ribbons, signifying the animal's association with the royal court, the frontal horns, the striding pose, and the articulation of the body.

By the sixth century the influence of Sasanian motifs was widespread and is apparent in the art of the Mediterranean, Central Asia, and farther Asian worlds. Regrettably no remains of original Sasanian figured textiles are preserved in excavations in Mesopotamia or Iran, and speculation continues concerning the place of manufacture of the Sasanian-style textiles found in Egypt and Central Asia and other examples preserved in European church treasuries.

This textile fragment beautifully illustrates both the stylizations that characterize certain fabrics in the sixth to eighth centuries and the strikingly colorful effect that must have contributed to the wide popularity of these works of art.

— *P.O.H.*



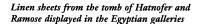




Sheet of "Royal Linen"

From Thebes, Tomb of Hatnofer and Ramose. Dynasty 18, Year 6–7 of Hatshepsut (ca. 1466 B.C.). Linen; greatest w. 63 ½ in. (161 cm); greatest l. 203 in. (515 cm); wt. 2.9 oz. (140 gr.); 118 warp, 77 weft per square inch (46 warp, 30 weft per cm). Rogers Fund, 1936 (36.3.111)

The earliest Egyptian funerary texts record linen cloth among the principal offerings for the deceased, and price lists indicate that the finest quality fabric was highly prized. The



tomb of Hatnofer and Ramose contained a variety of linen sheets that came from the storehouses of Queen Hatshepsut, a funerary gift for the parents of Senenmut, one of her favorite courtiers.

This sheet was woven of superfine thread that must have been spun from flax harvested when the plants were very young. The length of cloth would have taken months of constant industry to weave. The upper left corner has a series of inlaid weaver's marks (see detail), and the right corner, a single cross. One end of the sheet has a warp selvage; the other is finished with a plied fringe; and one weft selvage is decorated with an inlaid fringe. This cloth must be that described by the Egyptians as "royal linen," the highest quality. The sheerness of the featherweight fabric and its silken softness lend credence to New Kingdom representations of elaborately pleated garments that allow the contours of the body and even the color of the skin to show through. The cloth was repaired and laundered in ancient times.

—С.Н.R.



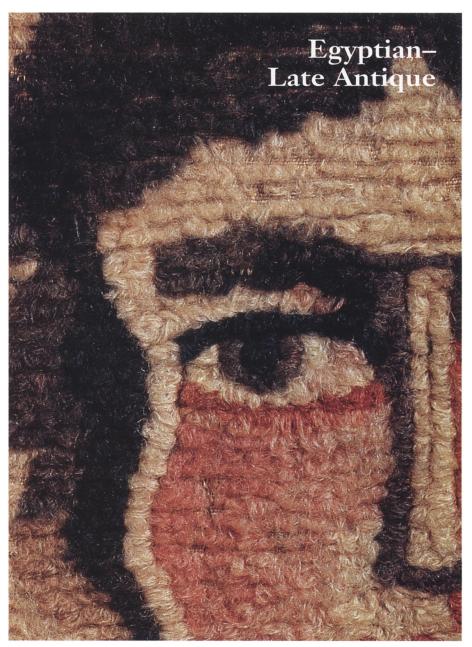
Personification of Luna, the Moon, or Head of Diana, Goddess of the Hunt

Egypt, late 3rd–early 4th century A.D. Linen and wool, 22 x 24¾ in. (56 x 63 cm). Gift of Helen Miller Gould, 1910 (10.130.1076)

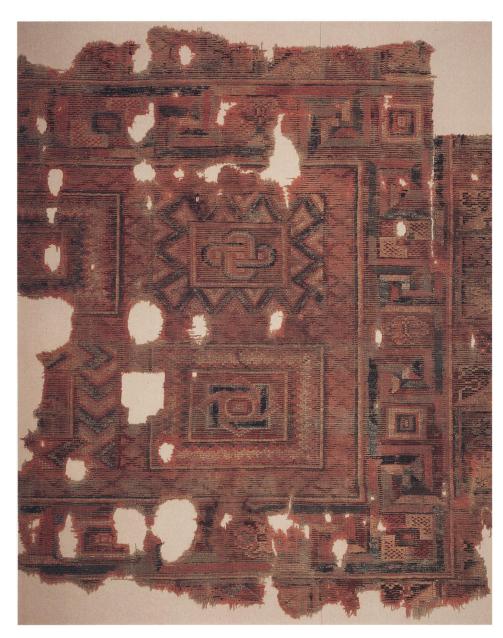
The golden medallion containing the beautifully worked face of a woman successfully evokes her association with the moon. In her curly brown hair the crescent-shaped ornament identifies a personification of Luna, the moon, or perhaps of Diana, goddess of the hunt, who often wears such a symbol of the moon. While large fabric fragments like this one were discovered as burial wrappings, their original use is uncertain. Domestic wall hangings were often worked in the woven woolen pile used for the decorations on this textile.

Vividly colored woolen yarns replaced the linen threads to create a dramatic image suggestive of wall paintings and floor mosaics. Such designs should be understood as part of the cultural mainstream of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine world, and not as a theme or style restricted to Egypt. The Museum's head, a finely worked illusionistic image in three-quarter view, is typical of the Hellenistic traditions of the late third or early fourth century, and it is often associated with three similar heads of the same date on two fabric fragments now in the Museum of Popular Art, Athens. Our textile is from the collection of Dr. Chauncey Murch (Luxor).

— H.C.E.







a floor cover be so directly linked, as this one is, to decorative floor patterns. Its geometric field pattern resembles Roman and Early Christian mosaic pavements found throughout southern and eastern Mediterranean lands.

The technique represented here is not the true knotted-pile weaving of Oriental carpets but the cut-loop technique seen in some Egyptian weavings going back to dynastic times. Supplementary wefts of the required colors were inserted and drawn up at intervals to create loops that, when cut, formed a thick fabric.

This is a rare example of an early textile that most certainly functioned as a floor covering. In addition to the design connection already noted, our fragment has pile throughout. By contrast, the majority of surviving piled Byzantine period textiles have discrete areas of cut loops for pattern set against expanses of plain linen ground, an arrangement unsuitable for floor use.

-D.W.

Rug Fragment

Egypt (Byzantine period), 4th or 5th century A.D. Wool pile on wool foundation, approx. 63 asymmetrical knots per square inch; 40 ¼ x 46 ½ in. (102.2 x 117 cm). Rogers Fund, 1931 (31.2.1)

This brilliantly colored fragment, with its interlocking designs and shaded geometric meander, is a tour de force of illusionism. The double border of a meander enclosing squares and rosettes and an angular reciprocal vine with leaves and bunches of grapes frames a field, which probably consisted originally of four or six rectangles. Rarely can the design of





Tapestry Panel of the Triumph of Dionysos

Egypt, said to be from Akhmim, 4th century A.D. Linen and wool, 8 ½ x 13 ½ in. (22 x 34 cm). Gift of George F. Baker, 1890 (90.5.873)

The story of Dionysos' suffering, victories, and theophany had great currency in the Mediterranean world of the fourth to sixth centuries A.D. His myth formed the central drama of the mystery cult surrounding the god and offered potent imagery for the broader society, pervaded by the wish for success in life and an existence after death. Dionysos' triumphant return from the conquest of India, shown here, was a moment when he emerged as bearer of a great and ultimately victorious message.

The composition, related to late imperial depictions, is striking: Dionysos, in a turreted crown and with feminine breasts, holds grapes aloft and advances in a chariot drawn by panthers. The god's centrality and composure are magnified by the activity and luxuriant vegetation around him. His gyrating entourage includes Pan, a meditative female (left), and an ecstatic Maenad

(right) with a knife ready to goad a bound Indian captive. The sweep of the lower border as well as the backward- and upward-looking dolphins in the spandrels add to the triumphant revelation of the god.

A pendant to this panel is in the Hermitage. The two must have belonged to a set, perhaps of ritual garments. Ours is said to be from Akhmim, in Greek and Roman times called Panopolis because its ancient god Min was identified with Dionysos' cohort Pan.

— М.Н.





Wall Hanging with Mounted Riders Hunting

Egypt (possibly Akhmim), 5th century A.D. Linen with colored-wool tapestry-weave ornament, 41 x 24¼ in. (104 x 63 cm). Gift of George F. Baker, 1890 (90.5.905)

This beautiful portion of a hanging shows three mounted riders, nude except for their Phrygian caps and the cloaks thrown over their shoulders. Although the riders are placed in an arcade, the dogs at their feet identify the scenes as a hunt. Above the figures are a series of busts in medallions, and below (not shown), worked diagonally on the field, are rosettes of varying sizes, baskets full of the fruits of the harvest, and medallions with a Victory, an eros, and another mounted rider. As with most themes found on Egyptian fabrics of the so-called Coptic period, such images were popular throughout the Mediterranean world, on clothing and, as here, on household

furnishings. Scenes of the hunt, symbolic of prosperity and well-being, were popular with both Christians and non-Christians. Similar combinations of flowers, baskets, busts,

and game animals appear on many fabrics of the fifth century, but few are of such exceptional quality. Typical of this period is the presentation of the animals in profile and the men in three-quarter view. Also typical are the enlarged heads of the men, with the whites of their huge eyes a dominant part of the pattern. This hanging may be from Akhmim, as it is from the collection of Emil Brugsch (Bey) of Cairo, who bought many works from the Akhmim finds.

--H.C.E.





Tunic with Dionysiac Ornament Egypt, said to be from Akhmim; 5th century A.D. Linen with purpleblack wool, l. 53 ½ in. (135 cm). Purchase, Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1926 (26.9.8)

A long, wide version of the tunic was the ubiquitous garment of the Late Antique world. Most preserved examples come from cemeteries in Egypt, but few are intact, since the ornament was prized and cut away.

This gracefully rich example is one of several complete tunics in the Museum's collection. Drop-shaped pendants, semimedallions, and linked medallions capture burgeoning ornament: vine leaves, sprouting urns, springing and poised animals, and dancing, shield-bearing warriors. These motifs allude to the arrival of Dionysos and the promise of vitality and rebirth. The allusion is made explicit in the shoulder decoration (see p. 5), where certain details establish connections with our tapestry panel (p. 25). Dionysos, again wearing the turreted crown, is seated alongside a woman in a diadem, perhaps Ariadne or possibly the nymph Nikaia, who figures in his epic. Beneath them are two bound female (?) captives in spotted garments. Animals in repose encircle the scene.

Like the panel, this tunic is said to be from Akhmim. In the first century B.C. Strabo referred to the city as an old settlement of linen workers, and the characterization was probably also valid for the pharaonic period. Today Akhmim remains an important textile center, an example of the continuities of some industrial traditions despite great social changes.

--M.H.



Tapestry-Woven Fragment

Iran or Iraq, mid-8th century. Wool, 18¼ x 12 in. (47.6 x 30.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1950 (50.83)

This fragment of tapestry-woven cloth demonstrates the dependence of early Islamic art on traditions that predate the advent of Islam in the Middle East. Here, the influence comes from Sasanian art in Iran. The allover repeat pattern of staggered rows of rosettes is also represented, for example, on the rock reliefs of the Sasanian monument Taq-i Bustan, dating from the late sixth or early seventh century.

On the basis of inscriptions on two closely related textiles, one in silk, the other a wool-tapestry fragment like ours, the Museum's piece can be dated to the reign of the Umayyad caliph Marwan II (r. A.D. 744-49). It has been suggested that the design layout originally consisted of a series of parallel bands. However, it is also possible that the green ground area with the rows of rosettes was part of a central field zone and that the red ground strip, which preserves both edges, was the main border. In that case, the textile may have been part of a floor covering.

— D.W.





under whose aegis they were woven and to whom the recipients owed loyalty (and wellbeing). Since the inscription on a similar tiraz fragment gives the name of a known ruler of Yemen, an entire group of pieces related by technique, color, and style of script may be dated to the second half of the tenth century and considered royal production. Our fragment has a fringe that suggests it was part of a shawl.

---D.W.

This repeat-patterned cloth is made from a mixture of silk and cotton known as *mulham*. Some *mulham* fabrics were dyed yellow for women's dresses, but most were undyed and white. To appear publicly in such elegant material was considered appropriate only for the wealthy and sons of the caliphs. Arab geographers localize the production of *mulham* to Iran and Central Asia.

Mulham cloth may have decorations, mainly inscriptions, which were added by embroidering at the time of manufacture. A small number of examples, such as this one, bear patterns printed with different stamps on the glazed surface of the cloth. Lions in brown squares with pearl borders alternate with lions in squares of undyed fabric. The style of the animals with floral elements and the squares with pearl borders are similar to those on glazed ceramic tiles from Ghazni, in eastern Afghanistan, the capital city of a dynasty of Turkish slave commanders who ruled from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. Another fragment of this textile belongs to the Cleveland Museum of Art.

—D.W.

Tiraz Fragment

Yemen, second half of the 10th century. Ikat-dyed cotton, plain weave, inscribed with black ink and gold leaf; 23 x 16 in. (58.4 x 40.6 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1929 (29.179.9)

The striped textiles of Yemen were famous in medieval times throughout the Islamic world. They were made in the ikat technique, in which the cotton warp threads were bundled together and resist-dyed before being arranged on the loom to form patterns of arrowheads and diamonds. These and other textiles bearing inscriptions were called tiraz, from the Persian word meaning "embroidery." They were produced in tiraz factories, some of which were commercial and others, royal. Textiles from the latter were destined for court use or the revenue derived from them accrued to the royal treasury.

Royal textiles usually bore inscriptions naming the ruler or caliph

Fragment with Printed Lions

Probably Iran, 10th or 11th century. Silk and cotton, plain weave, with printed-and-gilded pattern; 23 ¼ x 39 ½ in. (60.5 x 100 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1931 (31.106.64)





Simonetti Carpet

Egypt (Mamluk period), late 15th or early 16th century. Wool pile on wool foundation, approx. 100 asymmetrical knots per square inch; 29 ft. 7 in. x 7 ft. 11 ½ in. (901.7 x 242.6 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1970 (1970.105)

The Simonetti carpet, named for a former owner in Rome, is widely considered to be one of the two most impressive and attractive Mamluk carpets to have survived. The other is a large three-medallion silk rug in the Austrian Museum of Applied Art, Vienna. Our example is unusual for its type: it is very long, has a five-medallion design (most have one or three), and is in a splendid state of preservation.

Mamluk carpets stand apart from other Oriental rugs. Once described as "a kaleidoscope translated into textile form," their design is typically made up of myriad facets of a mosaic organized into large and small square, octagonal, and starshaped compartments. Richly colored, although in a limited palette of mainly wine red, blue, and green, the mosaic bits shimmer and dazzle with a complexity and sensuousness

that belie their technical simplicity. The layout relates to Roman and Cairene mosaic floor designs, as well as to Late Antique textiles, while individual elements of the ornamental vocabulary, such as the umbrella-

shaped leaves, lancet leaves, candelabra-like devices, and palm trees, derive from Egyptian sources and traditions.

-D.W.





Velvet Panel

Iran (Safavid period), mid-16th century. Silk velvet, cut and voided, with a satin-weave foundation and faced with foil-wrapped silk; 31 x 13 ½ in. (78.7 x 34.3 cm). Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1952 (52.20.11)

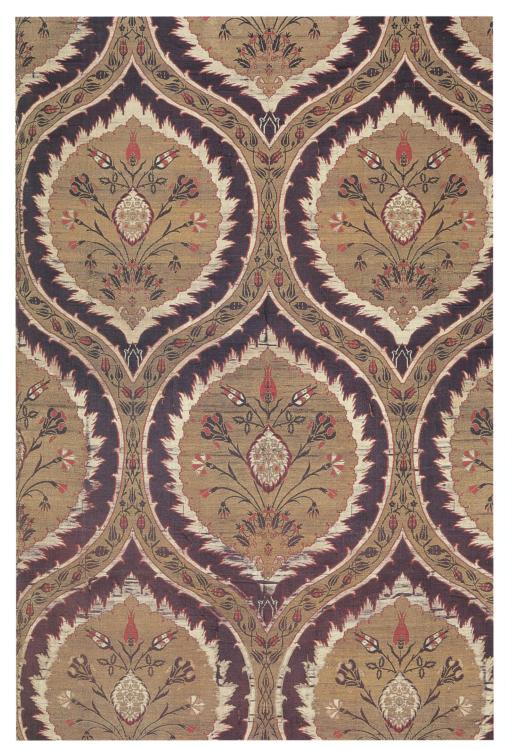
Persian velvets are among the most sumptuous textiles ever produced. The richness derives from the use of highly reflective metal-wrapped threads and a wide array of brilliant colors. To achieve the desired variety of hues, Persian weavers skillfully manipulated many warps simultaneously and introduced additional short warps where extra color was called for. Such technical proficiency made possible very complicated floral and figural designs.

This example features a lattice pattern formed by staggered rows of lobed medallions. The princely pastime of falconry is the subject of the medallion scenes: the hawk sits on her master's gloved hand while an attendant, holding a bag and a receptacle, approaches. A duck flies away from the falconer. The background of these scenes was once



covered with metal thread, now mostly worn. Leafy vines populated with lions' heads and spotted dragons meander through the wine-colored void between the medallions. At least five other fragments of the same textile survive. A similar pattern appears on a contemporary ivory scabbard.

-D.W.



made from sixteenth-century
Ottoman brocaded silks belong to
the Armory Museum at the Kremlin,
Moscow. A number of other
Christian vestments survive that
were fashioned from Islamic fabrics
or, in the case of one seventeenthcentury Persian cope, woven in the
requisite shape. Oriental textiles
enjoyed enormous status in Europe
for several centuries, as is evidenced
by the wrapping of Christian reliquaries in Islamic silks in medieval
times. Another piece of this fabric is
in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

—D.W.

Brocaded Panel

Turkey (Ottoman period), second half of the 16th century. Silk, plain compound satin, brocaded with silvergilt wrapped silk; 49 ½ x 26 ¾ in. (125.7 x 67 cm). Anonymous Gift, 1949 (49.32.79)

The ogival lattice pattern of this luxury fabric is quite typical of Ottoman Turkish taste, as is the profusion of finely drawn tulips, rosebuds, irises, narcissi, and carnations adorning each gold-ground compartment. The gold bands forming the lattice hold scrolling vines and tulips. The purple ground of the fabric is uncommon, probably because of the costly nature of the purple dye that was derived from murex shells.

The rounded lower corners of this panel (not shown in the details) suggest that it was part of a chasuble. Several Russian chasubles





Fragmentary Carpet with Blossom and Lattice Design

India (Mughal period), reign of Shah Jahan (1628–58). Wool pile on silk foundation, approx. 900 asymmetrical knots per square inch; dimensions as presently arranged 12 ft. 11 ½ in. x 4 ft. 7 ¼ in. (395.6 x 140.3 cm). Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.723)

This fragmentary carpet represents the highest level of Indian production, what might be called imperial grade. It looks and feels like velvet, but the pile is actually knotted from pashmina wool, made from the fleece of Himalayan mountain goats. The weave is extremely fine, especially for a carpet as large as this one must have been. What remains is approximately one quarter of the original. (The illustration above is a detail.)

In most Islamic cultures the finest carpets were woven in silk. Only in India was wool, admittedly a very special wool, prized more than silk. During the eighteenth century silk carpets were produced in certain provincial centers in the fashion of the great seventeenth-century Mughal carpets made of *pashmina*.

The style of this carpet, with its total reliance on floral forms, is consistent with the taste of the emperor Shah Jahan, as is manifested also in the architectural decoration and manuscript margin illumination created by the gifted artists of his court. The carpet combines frontally drawn blossoms incorporated into a repeating vine-scroll pattern in a traditional Persian manner with trees depicted in the border in profile in a characteristically Indian fashion.

-D.W.



Sash

India (Mughal period), late 17th or early 18th century. Silk embroidery on cotton, 10 ft. 5 in. x 2 ft. 3 in. (317.5 x 68.6 cm). The Alice and Nasli Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Alice Heeramaneck, 1983 (1983.494.9)

One of the key elements of dress at the Mughal court was the *patka*, a sash or girdle tied around the waist with the ends hanging loose in front. The sash's end panels were usually decorated, since they were visible. Less elaborate decoration or even plain ground was used for the broad expanse of fabric between them, the area customarily gathered and hence concealed. To the sash were attached various accessories such as daggers and thumb rings.

Many surviving sashes, particularly early ones, were woven of fine pashmina wool and had patterns incorporated in the weave. Others were stenciled, painted, and dyed, or embroidered like the present example. Here, the decoration, applied mostly in a chain stitch, is confined to a narrow border of blossoms and reciprocal vines that outlines the piece and to the end panels (one is shown above), where eight delicate identical flowers gently twist and sway. Both the use of flowers in profile and the colors (red, white, yellow, and mint green) hark back to the style made popular under Shah Jahan.

-D.W.



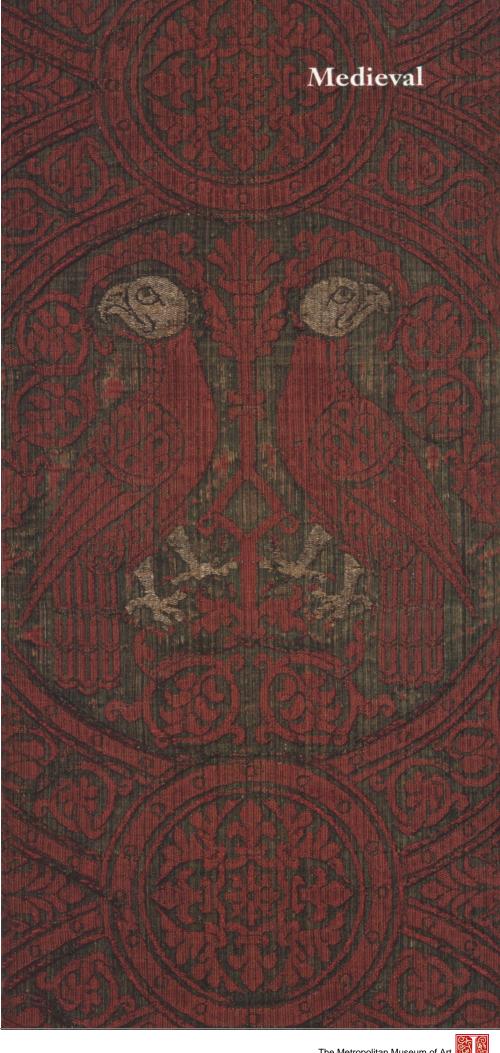
Woven Silk with Paired Parrots in Roundels

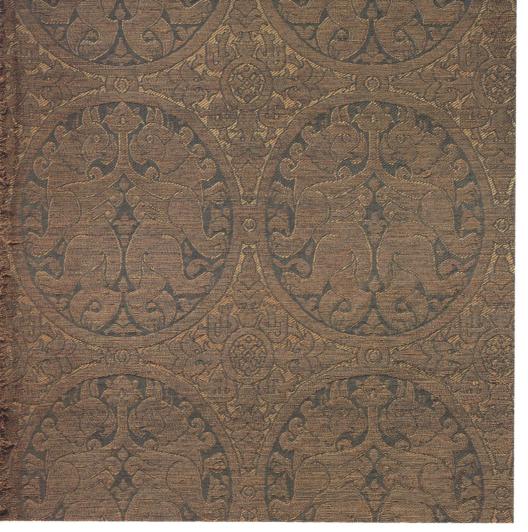
Probably Sicilian, 13th century. Silk and gilt metal on silk, warp-faced plain-weave foundation, weft-faced plain-weave pattern; 18 x 8 ¼ in. (45.7 x 21 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1946 (46.156.30)

With its brilliant contrasting colors and accents of metallic threads, the silk is visually commanding and luxurious, indicative of princely tastes in the Middle Ages. Whereas paired animals in circles are part of the standard repertory of Byzantine, Western medieval, and Islamic decoration in silks up to about 1300 and in many other media—from sculptural reliefs to ceramics to ceiling decoration—the motifs of this textile bear comparison to the pianata, an embroidered fabric associated with Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303), preserved at Agnani, Sicily. Large silks of this richness were used to make vestments-including stockings—and ceremonial hangings, but smaller fragments, such as this, lined ivory boxes, covered manuscripts, and protected saints' relics.

—В.Д.В.







Chasuble

English, 1330–50. Silver and silvergilt thread and colored silks in underside couching, split stitch, laid-and-couched work, and raised work, with pearls on velvet; 51 x 30 in. (129.5 x 76.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1927 (27.162.1)

"About the same time [1245], my Lord Pope, having noticed that the ecclesiastical ornaments of certain English priests, such as choral copes and mitres, were embroidered in gold thread after a most desirable fashion, asked whence came this work? From England, they told him. Then exclaimed the pope, 'England is for us surely a garden of delights, truly an inexhaustible well." Thus the chronicler Matthew of Paris describes Innocent IV's enthusiasm for vestments he saw in England. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Vatican had acquired more than one hundred such examples of opus anglicanum (English work).

Woven Silk with Addorsed and Regardant Griffins in Circles

Sicilian, North African, or Central Asian, first half of the 13th century. Silk and silver-gilt metal on parchment over cotton, 69 ¼ x 38 ¼ in. (177.2 x 97 cm). The Cloisters Collection, 1984 (1984.344)

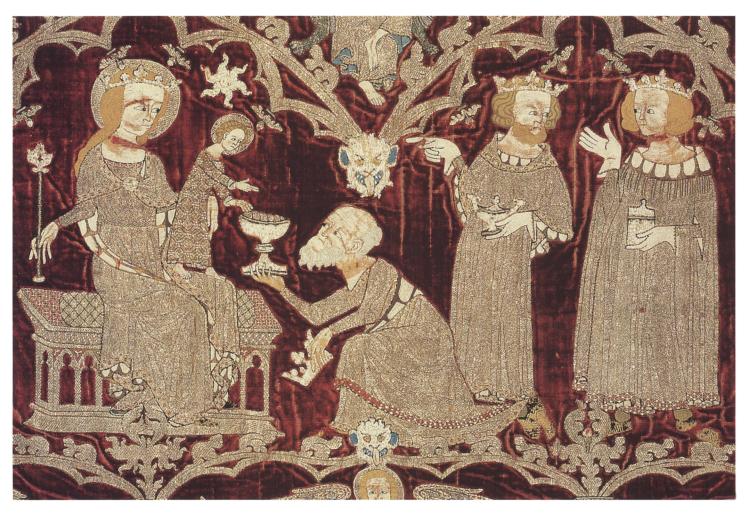
The silk is a complete loom width and represents addorsed and regardant griffins enclosed in interlocking roundels, with stylized floral motifs filling the interstices. A band along its top edge (not shown) loosely imitates an Arabic inscription. Such large and rich silks have been preserved almost exclusively in the great church treasuries of Europe and are associated with popes, emperors, and sainted bishops. Related pieces of this size were used chiefly for vestments and as funeral palls. A silk with a very similar design, but no gold, was excavated from a tomb at Bremen Cathedral.

The design, palette, use of gold, and inscription reflect a taste for fine

textiles that extended outward from the Mediterranean basin. This silk is said to have been sewn onto a thanka in a Tibetan monastery. This fact, combined with unusual technical aspects of the metallic threads, has led to the suggestion that it was made in Central Asia. While fixed attributions for such eminently portable objects must be approached with caution, such a provenance is not inconsistent in the context of medieval collections; rather it is further testament to the dialogue among centers of textile production and use, exemplified in an inventory of the cathedral of Lugo in northern Spain, which includes a cope produced in Baghdad.

--B.D.B.





This example is remarkable for the rich texture of the gold threads and for the detailing of the faces. Along with scenes of the Annunciation to the Virgin, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Coronation of the Virgin are images of saints, among them English kings. The framing of the elongated figures under Gothic canopies as delicate as spun sugar is reminiscent of fourteenth-century English manuscript illumination and of the rare surviving examples of English Gothic panel painting.

The chasuble, worn by the priest for the celebration of the Eucharist, has been cut down from a larger fabric, probably following a change in fashion in liturgical vestments. It was preserved in the private chapel of a Roman Catholic family in Yorkshire until it was sold at auction earlier in this century.

--B.D.B.





The Flagellation

Italian (Florence), mid-14th century. Silk and metallic threads on linen, 10½ x 16 in. (26.7 x 40.6 cm). Bequest of Charles F. Iklé, 1963 (64.27.18)

This embroidered panel representing the Flagellation is a remarkable expression of the Florentine Gothic style. While the needlework has been attributed to the Florentine Geri Lapi, the designer has not been recognized.

Cooperation between painters and embroiderers is evidenced in Cennino Cennini's fifteenth-century Il libro dell'arte: "You sometimes have to supply embroiderers with designs of various sorts....Get these masters to put cloth or fine silk on stretchers for you....If it is white cloth, take your regular charcoals, and draw whatever you please. Then take your pen and your pure ink, and reinforce it, just as you do on panel with a brush." In some worn areas, underdrawing of the type described by Cennini can be discerned. More than twenty shades of silk and metallic threads give richness to the design, and the gold background is enlivened with raised scrolling vines.

The Flagellation is one of twelve panels attributed to Geri Lapi depicting the life of Christ, of which nine are in the Metropolitan. The format and subject indicate that the ensemble decorated an altar frontal, perhaps the antependium described in the inventory of Jean, duc de Berry.

-B.D.B.

Altarcloth

German, second half of the 14th century. Linen embroidered with satin, chain, chevron, and Roumanian stitches; 156 x 47 ¼ in. (396.2 x 120 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.87)

The Adoration of the Magi appears on one end of this exceptionally

large, well-preserved altar covering from the convent of Altenberg, not far from Trier in Germany. Christ as judge; Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Thuringia, mother of a thirteenth-century abbess of Altenberg; and Saint Nicholas, patron saint of the convent, are among the other figures represented in richly textured embroidery. A monk in their company kneels on a coat of arms identified as that of Henricus de Cronenberg.

An inscription in Latin names the nuns who served as needleworkers—Sophia, Hadewigis, and Lucardis—and invokes Jesus with the prayer that their work be acceptable to him.

Linen was a cloth valued since ancient times. The Gospel accounts specify that the body of Jesus was wrapped "in fine linen." Linen became an important material in the service of the altar, more lustrous and less likely to soil than cotton. The nuns at Altenberg may have had an additional reason for creating this white-on-white embroidery: they were known as "white canons" because of the color of their habits. The embroidery is one of three that passed into private and, eventually, museum collections after the secularization of the convent by Napoleon in 1803.

-B.D.B.





Hector of Troy

From a series of the Nine Heroes. South Netherlandish, 1400–1410. Wool, 13 ft. 9½ in. x 8 ft. 8 in. (421 x 264 cm). Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1947 (47.101.2d)

The subject of the Nine Heroes first occurs in a French poem of about 1312, written for the bishop of Liège, which celebrates three worthies each from the pagan, Hebrew, and Christian traditions: Hector of Troy, Alexander, and Julius Caesar; Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus; and

Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godefroy of Bouillon. Tapestries representing the heroes as princely ancestors and exemplars of virtue appear in the inventories of French royalty beginning in the second half of the fourteenth century. The arms of the Valois princes are repeatedly woven into the group of five heroes that survives in the Museum's collection.

Each of the heroes was assigned a coat of arms, and it is on the basis of the arms that the hero in this hanging (detail above) has been identified as Hector. The ideal Trojan warrior,

he was also portrayed in the *Iliad* as a devoted husband and father, a loving son and friend.

Both the style and composition of the hangings are closely related to French painting in stained glass, not only in the fantastic Gothic architecture framing the figures but also in the patterned grounds behind the figures and in the use of yellow in the architectural designs to imitate silver stain on glass. The costumes suggest a date of about 1400.

--B.D.B.



The Annunciation

Netherlandish, mid-15th century. Silk and metallic threads on linen; *or nué*, couching, stem, and overcast stitches; 8 ½ x 7 ½ in. (21 x 19.5 cm). Gift of Lois and Anthony Blumka, in memory of Victoria Blumka, 1990 (1990.330)

In a domestic interior the Virgin Mary kneels before a prie-dieu on



which rests her prayerbook. The angel Gabriel descends at the left, greeting her with the Gospel announcement of the forthcoming birth of Jesus: "Ave [Maria] gratia plena dominus tecum" (Hail [Mary], full of grace, the Lord is with thee; Luke 1:28).

This embroidery, originally part of an orphrey (a decorative band on priestly vestments) or an altar frontal, is virtually intact. The selvages at left and right are preserved, and the top and bottom have been trimmed only slightly. In its present form, with the scene almost complete and its shimmering silks still remarkably vibrant, it can be appreciated much like a Netherlandish panel painting, a medium with which it has many compositional and iconographic aspects in common. The embroidery typifies the celebrated or nué technique of Netherlandish embroidery, in which the gold not only provides a glittering appearance but adds to the rich

three-dimensionality of the pictorial surface that is a special capability of the textile medium.

--B.D.B.

A Lady and Two Gentlemen in a Rose Garden

South Netherlandish, 1450–55. Wool warp; wool, silk, and metallic weft threads; 9 ft. 5 ½ in. x 10 ft. 8 in. (288.9 x 325.1 cm). Rogers Fund, 1909 (09.137.2)

The hanging is one of a set of four that shows elegantly dressed men and women against a striped background strewn with rose bushes. The lady at the center, with a rolled headdress set over jeweled pads, offers a rose to the gentleman at the left, who already cradles a rose in his elaborate hat, or *chaperon*. The richness of the costumes is enhanced by the abundant use of metallic and silk threads. The designs for the figures seem to have come from prints or pattern books, since they recur on hangings in other collections.

The clothing suggests a date in the mid-fifteenth century. The series has traditionally been associated with Charles VII of France (r. 1422-61), whose personal devices included (but were not limited to) the colors red, green, and white and the rose. Moreover, these colors were not uniquely used by him, so Charles cannot be surely identified as the tapestries' owner. Still, the association of such hangings with a royal or aristocratic patron is appropriate, since a number of French and English princely inventories of the mid-fifteenth century include tapestries with striped grounds. Made as wall hangings, as can sometimes be seen in contemporary manuscript illumination, they were also used to decorate bedrooms, often as canopies and valances for the bed itself.

--B.D.B.











The Unicorn Leaps across a Stream

From The Hunt of the Unicorn. South Netherlandish, 1495–1505. Wool warp; wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts; 12 ft. 1 in. x 14 ft. (368 x 427 cm). Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1937 (37.80.3)

The Unicorn tapestries at The Cloisters are the most celebrated medieval hangings in the Metropolitan Museum's collection; their quality and rarity are equaled by only a few examples in the world and surpassed by none. Their celebrity notwithstanding, there are many remaining questions about the tapestries, including the number of series from which they came, the patron or patrons for whom they were made, and the metaphoric links between the scenes of the unicorn hunt and the life and Passion of Christ.

In this hanging the unicorn, pursued by men and dogs, crosses a rivulet deep in the forest. As it prepares to step out onto the bank, more hunters armed with spears take aim as the rest of the company approaches.

The hangings are remarkable for botanical accuracy and appealing in their presentation of such details as the ducks swimming in the stream in the foreground or the thirsty hunting dogs lapping up the fresh water of the stream. The style of the figures has been convincingly compared to illustrations in books printed in Paris at the end of the fifteenth century, while the shimmering quality of the silks and the richness of the palette rival contemporary painting.

---B.D.B.



The Queen of Sheba before King Solomon

Upper Rhinish (Strasbourg), 1490–1500. Linen warp; wool, linen, and metallic wefts; 31 ½ x 40 in. (80 x 101.6 cm). The Cloisters Collection, 1971 (1971.43)

Elaborating on the account in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 10:1-3), the Queen of Sheba stands before Solomon and poses a riddle concerning the apparently identical flowers in her hand and the indistinguishable children before her. She asks: "Tell me, King, whether the flowers and children are of the same or different kind." Solomon replies: "The bee does not pass up a good flower; kneeling shows the female style," indicating that a bee will fly to the real flower and that the girl is the child who kneels to gather fruit in her skirt.

The depictions of Solomon and Sheba echo the compositions of some late-fifteenth-century prints. The tapestry, however, is enlivened by color, texture, and background details. There are gilt and metallic threads in the queen's sleeves, the king's crown, scepter, and finial, and both figures' belts. The textures of the queen's gown and mantle are

rendered with knots that were tied with wool and then cut. This technique is associated with Strasbourg workshops, an attribution strengthened by the form of German in the inscriptions. The tapestry was probably used as a wall hanging or cushion cover.

—*В.*D.В.

framing inscription: PORREXIT. MANVM . SVAM . INLIBATIONEM / ET . LIBAVIT . DESANGVINE . VVE . ECCL . CI . C . LO., from Ecclesiasticus in the Vulgate Bible (50:16): "He stretched forth his hand to make a libation, and offered of the blood of the grape." While the biblical text refers to Simon the high priest, here it describes Jesus' sacrifice, reenacted in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The apple on the glass symbolizes the incarnation of Christ (the water) by means of the Virgin (the glass) to save mankind from sin (the apple). The roses in the corners signify Jesus' blood, and the pansies, remembrance and meditation.

The hanging is one of a small group related by style, subject, symbolism, exceptionally fine weaving, and extensive use of metallic threads. Another was recently acquired as a gift (acc. no. 1994.484). This hanging may be the one mentioned among the possessions of Juana la Loca, queen of Spain, in 1555.

-B.D.B.

The Christ Child Pressing the Wine of the Eucharist

South Netherlandish, ca. 1500. Linen warp; wool, silk, and gilt weft yarns; 19 % x 18 ¼ in. (50.5 x 46.4 cm). Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.709)

The Christ child appears in front of a curtain and squeezes juice from a bunch of grapes into a chalice.

Around him are a book, an orb, and an apple on a glass.

The meaning of the tapestry, replete with such symbolism, is found in the



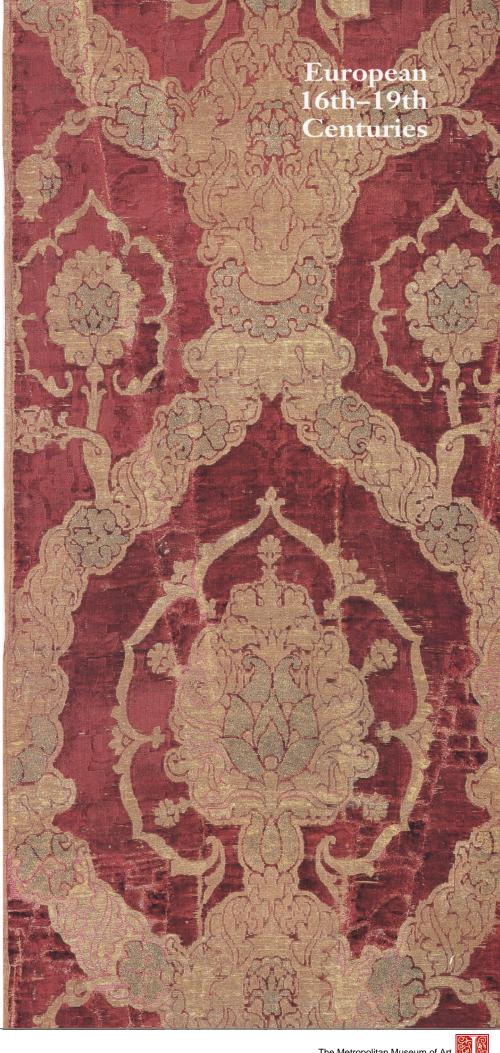
Length of Velvet

Spanish or Italian, late 15th—early 16th century. Silk and metal thread, 12 ft. 4 in. x 1 ft. 11 in. (376 x 58.4 cm). Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.49.8)

Sumptuous velvets, such as this example, were among the most highly prized luxury fabrics of the Renaissance. Utilizing variations on a relatively small number of decorative motifs—most notably the pomegranate, palmette, artichoke, and garland—these silken-pile textiles developed from earlier fifteenth-century subtle voided patterns, formed by the appearance of the ground fabric where there was no pile on the surface, into visually and technically more complex designs. Here, the symmetrical pattern of elaborate artichoke forms within lobed compartments surrounded by ogivally arranged intertwined leaves and flowers is woven with metal thread, and some details are executed with metal loops (bouclé) for additional texture. The jewel-tone silk velvet primarily forms the background, which, in areas, has a subtle "sculpted" leaf pattern achieved by juxtaposing two different heights of the velvet pile.

Woven in Italy—particularly Florence, Venice, and Genoa-as well as in Spain, velvets were coveted throughout Europe and also sought after in Turkey, where production demonstrated reciprocal influences, especially with Venetian weavings. This particular example exhibits Eastern influence in the crenate collar or clip motif that secures the garlands. Contemporary paintings, inventories, and extant examples clearly indicate the international appeal of velvets and their varied uses: from ecclesiastical vestments to caftans and Europeanstyle garments for the very wealthy, to opulent furnishings, cloths of honor, and diplomatic gifts.

-A.Z.



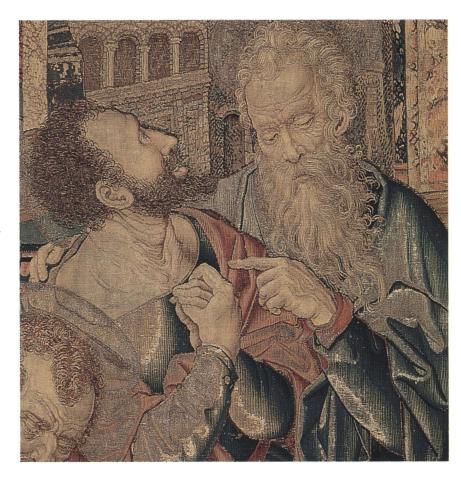


The Last Supper

Flemish (Brussels), ca. 1520–30. Designed by Bernart van Orley, Flemish, ca. 1491–1541/42; probably woven by Pieter de Pannemaker, Flemish, fl. 1517–35. Wool, silk, and silver-gilt thread; 11 ft. x 11 ft. 6 in. (335 x 350 cm). Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.1915)

Van Orley was court painter to Margaret of Austria and the leading tapestry designer in Brussels in the first half of the sixteenth century. This splendid *Last Supper* is part of a series of four tapestries, designed about 1520 and possibly woven for the duke of Alba, illustrating the Passion of Christ.

Both the overall composition of *The Last Supper* and some of the figures are closely based on a 1510 woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, while the marble piers and patterned tablecloth—and the elaborate wall hangings depicted within the





tapestry itself—signal the Flemish taste for rich surface ornament. The fanciful architecture of the background, evocative of Roman antiquity, reveals instead an Italian influence, as does the scene's dramatic intensity, which derives from Leonardo's famous mural of this subject. Van Orley was also profoundly influenced by Raphael's cartoons for the Acts of the Apostles tapestries. That series, designed for the Sistine Chapel, was woven in Brussels, and the cartoons provided Flemish artists with a paradigmatic model of the grand, heroic narrative style current in contemporary Roman art. In The Last Supper, populated by muscular, rhetorically gesturing figures engaged in a moment of high drama, van Orley has fully realized tapestry's potential for emulating monumental painting.

—L.W.-S.



The Bridal Chamber of Herse

From a set of eight tapestries depicting The Story of Mercury and Herse. Flemish (Brussels), ca. 1550. Wool, silk, silver and silver-gilt thread; 14 ft. 5 in. x 17 ft. 8 in. (439 x 538 cm). Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.135)

The love affair between the god Mercury, son and messenger of Jupiter, and Herse, one of the three daughters of King Cecrops of Athens, is recounted in the Metamorphoses of Ovid; however, the particular scene of The Bridal Chamber of Herse is not described in the text. Basing his composition and the figure of Herse on Caraglio's print after Raphael's Marriage of Alexander and Roxana, the unknown tapestry designer—either an Italian follower of Raphael or a Flemish artist with an Italianate style—creates a palpable moment: Mercury steps from his sandals as he rushes forward toward his beloved; cupids remove his cloak, draw back the bed hangings, and take off a modest Herse's slipper.

Woven in Brussels in the preeminent tapestry atelier of Willem de Pannemaker (whose mark appears in the lower right corner), the tapestry demonstrates the weavers' virtuosity in depicting the details of the lush interior, replete with elaborately patterned wall hangings and bed furnishings.

The borders are thematically unrelated to the main scene. The side figures, representing the Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the Cardinal Virtue of justice, are copied from designs first used for one of Raphael's Acts of the Apostles tapestries; in the lower border the figures of Love, Fortitude, Temperance, and Diligence are based on another source and are probably Flemish in origin.

-A.Z.

Chasuble with The Gathering of the Manna

Netherlandish (probably Gouda or Leiden), dated 1570. Linen, wool, and silk; silk embroidery; l. (shoulder to hem) 44 in. (111.8 cm). Rogers Fund, 1954 (54.176.2)

In this very rare example of a tapestry-woven ecclesiastical vestment, the more expected materials and techniques are imitated in trompe l'oeil: the main fabric simulating a pomegranate velvet, and the pictorial scene, embroidery. The chasuble is part of a set that also includes two dalmatics (one in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the other in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). All three vestments bear the coats of arms of the De Visshervan der Gheer and Van Culemborch families. The probable owner, Johannes De Vissher van der Gheer (ca. 1527-1591), was canon of the Chapter Church of Saint Barbara at Culemborg and later vicar of the



Musical Garden Party

English, third quarter of the 17th century. Silk tent stitch embroidery on canvas, 13 x 20 ½ in. (33 x 52 cm). Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1314)

While there is a long tradition of exceptional professional embroidery in England, domestic needlework attained a high point in the seventeenth century, when it was a requisite skill of accomplished young women. In addition to decorating clothing and accessories, they also applied their talents to mirror frames, writing boxes, table covers, and pictures. Prints served as sources for the figures, flowers, and animals drawn on the fabric and given to the embroideress. Themes depicted include Old Testament stories, political subjects, allegories, and scenes of daily life.

Musical Garden Party presents activities at a country house. Before a formal garden, ladies perform for an appreciative male audience. By using very fine-gauge canvas and silk threads, the embroideress was able to capture many fashion details, such as feathered hats, lace trimming, and the floral pattern of a gown. Facial features, however, are left unembroidered. The hovering putto with bow and arrow hints at impending romance.

-A.Z.

Chapter Church of Saint John at Utrecht. His motto, "We are bent, not broken, by the waves," describes not only the bulrushes depicted below but also perhaps the effects on the wearer of the tumultuous political and religious climate of the Netherlands in 1570. The depiction of the Israelites gathering the manna that sustained them in the desert prefigures the eucharistic host. This reference would be clearly apparent at the moment of the Consecration, when the priest, who at that time celebrated the Mass facing the altar with his back to the worshipers, raised the host on high.







Air

From a set of eight wall hangings depicting the Elements and the Seasons. French (Paris), ca. 1683. Silk and wool tent stitch and couched metal-thread embroidery on canvas,14 ft. ½ in. x 9 ft. 1 in. (428 x 277 cm). Rogers Fund, 1946 (46.43.4)

Reflecting the grandeur of the official court style of Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), named premier peintre by Louis XIV in 1662, the impressive program of Elements and Seasons is made more personal by having the king, the marquise de Montespan, and six of their children take the roles of the central figures. The complete set, of which four hangings are in the Metropolitan Museum, may be identical to wall decorations in tapisserie de petit point that decorated the king's apartment at the Château de Rambouillet. Here, the monarch is shown as Jupiter, seated on an eagle and holding thunderbolts and a Medusaheaded shield. Also meant to personify Air, the image is surrounded by winged creatures: parrots, raptors (including a hooded falcon), songbirds, and butterflies, as well as wind instruments.

Commissioned by the marquise de Montespan (1641–1707), the hangings were probably embroidered at the Parisian convent of Saint-Joseph-de-la-Providence, which also executed other royal projects, including furnishings for Versailles. One of the marquise's favorite charities—she was named a director in 1681 and retired there ten years later—the convent provided needlework vocational training for orphan girls.

-A.Z.

Music

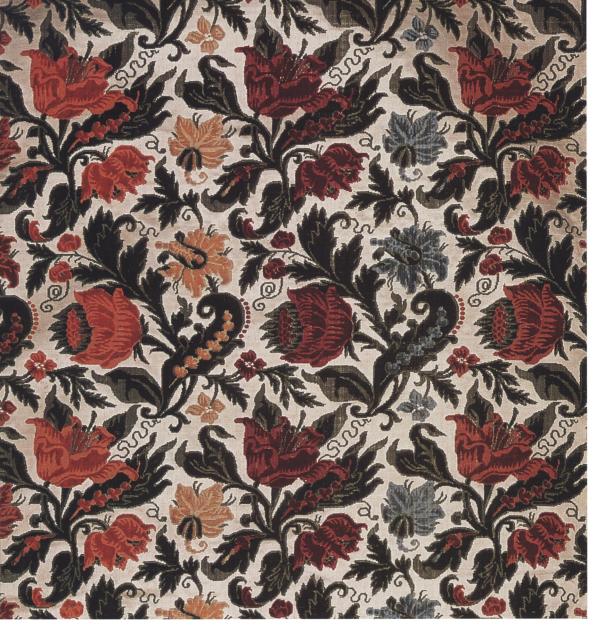
French (Paris), Savonnerie Manufactory (Lourdet Atelier), 1687–89. Wool carpet, Ghiordes knot; 29 ft. 6 in. x 16 ft. (899 x 488 cm). Rogers Fund, 1952 (52.118)

In an effort to correct the French balance-of-trade deficit, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, superintendent of finance to Louis XIV, banned imported luxury goods and established new industries as well as encouraged existing manufactories to produce substitutes worthy of royal patronage. The most ambitious project for the Savonnerie was Louis XIV's commission for ninety-three carpets to cover the nearly 500-yard length of the Long Gallery of the Louvre. All but one of the original carpets were completed by 1685. Ten more were later woven to replace those given as royal gifts or for future presents. Music is a reweaving of the design of the carpet given to the king of Siam in 1685.

The individual compositions which had to harmonize with each other as well as the stuccowork, painted ceiling, and landscape decorations of the walls-reflect Le Brun's supervision and his forceful classicism. At either end of our carpet, figures of Music are depicted in grisaille in imitation of bas-relief sculpture. Other references to the antique include rams' heads, the outer border motifs, and the acanthus scrolls that fill the interstices or become cornucopias of flowers and fruit. Royal imagery of crossed L's, dolphins, fleurs-de-lis, crowns, and a sunflower dominates the center.

--A.Z.





Length of Velvet

Italian (Genoa), late 17th–early 18th century. Silk, 84 x 23 in. (213.3 x 58.4 cm). Purchase, Friends of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Gifts, 1992 (1992.15)

While Lyons was the undisputed center of the silk-weaving industry during the eighteenth century, Genoa provided much of the high-quality velvet for both furnishings and fashion. A specialty was polychrome-velvet weaving, such as this fabric (shown in a detail), which was possibly intended to be used for an elegant wide-skirted mantua, or gown. The relatively small pattern repeat of stylized and seminaturalistic flowers appears more complex, as it is rendered with seven different

colors, a feat of technical virtuosity. The individual motifs are further modeled by juxtaposing cut and uncut (ciselé) pile, which reflect light differently. This mutable effect is more dramatic if the fabric is in movement, as one's perception of the colors changes dramatically when the fabric is vertical or horizontal, flat or draped.

-A.Z.

Chasuble

Probably Sicilian, 18th century. Silk satin, embroidered with silk and silver-gilt thread; l. (shoulder to hem) 43 ¼ in. (111.1 cm). Gift of Catherine M. Randazzo Guirreri and John J. Randazzo, in memory of the Saverio Randazzo family, 1984 (1984.462.1)

According to tradition and testimony, this chasuble together with its matching stole, maniple, chalice cover, chalice veil, and burse-was made in Sicily, as a gift from his bishop, for Nicolo Spedaliere (also recorded as Spitaleri), head priest of the mother church of Partanna. It is entirely feasible that the vestments were made by a women's religious order or at a school that practiced this type of embroidery. The nearly symmetrical pattern of full-blown, seminaturalistic flowers, small blossoms, curving leaves, and scrolls is characteristic of the late Baroque ornament that appears on some Sicilian and Italian vestments from the late seventeenth to the mideighteenth century.

Similarly typical is the combination of painterly polychrome silk embroidery, worked in long and short stitches and French knots, with metal thread couched in a variety of patterns. Although the chasuble maintains its traditional surface division into central orphrey and side panels, which previously may have been of different materials, there is no structural reason to do so, as the entire decoration is embroidered and the pattern flows over these boundaries.

-A.Z.









Hallé presumably also provided the tunic, which was modeled on an imperial Roman cuirass, with pendant straps (pteruges) at the shoulders and skirt. The white wool bodice appears to be a contemporary replacement, the original embroidery having been reapplied to new backing, which nonetheless shows considerable use. The leonine mask, confronted griffons, and acanthus foliage on the breastplate are built up in relief and are covered with a rich embroidery of gold thread and sequins.

—S.W.P.

Cravat End

Flemish (Brussels), mid-18th century. Linen bobbin lace, so-called *point d'Angleterre*; 12 ½ x 17 ½ in. (31.7 x 44.4 cm). Gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harkness, 1948 (48.41.1)

Figural lace panels, such as this one, were items of gentlemen's highfashion neckwear, meant to be attached to the end of a long, fine fabric cravat. The elaborate imagery, time-consuming to achieve, made the panels extremely expensive accessories. Drawing inspiration from contemporary formal gardens, the design of this example centers on a fountain with playing water jets, which issue from the tip of Amor's raised arrow and fall to fill a basin for swimming birds. Set among the parterres planted with tulips and other flowers is a fountain in the form of the mythical wyvern, spouting water from its mouth, and garden statuary representing a nesting bird. A whimsically incongruous dagged cloth is festooned—tied to trees and secured by overlarge tassels.

The ambiguous term *point*d'Angleterre does not refer in this instance to needlelace or the country of origin, but to a group of highest-quality bobbin laces made in Brussels. The reference to England may denote the principal market for this type.

—A.Z.

Costume Armor

French, ca. 1780–90. Helmet: linen, papier-mâché, graphite, gold; tunic: wool and cotton embroidered with metallic thread and sequins; l. (of tunic) 28 ½ in. (72.4 cm). Funds from various donors, 1988 (1988.65.1,2)

Wearing classical-style armor was popular during the Renaissance, when nobles sought to evoke through their costume the might and majesty of ancient Roman emperors and heroes. Greco-Roman-style armor, sometimes of steel but more frequently of lightweight materials, such as copper, papier-mâché, and textiles, continued to be worn in the Baroque age for tournaments, carousels, ballets, and other court pageants. This rare, perhaps unique, example dates from the end of this tradition and originated in the Paris of Louis XVI.

The helmet is based on a Greek Corinthian prototype and is fashioned of paper-mâché with gilt relief decoration against a contrasting blue-black graphite ground. Inside is pasted the Parisian retailer's trade label, identifying him as *Hallé*, *dit Mercier*, who supplied the French court with theatrical armor, costumes, and scenery.



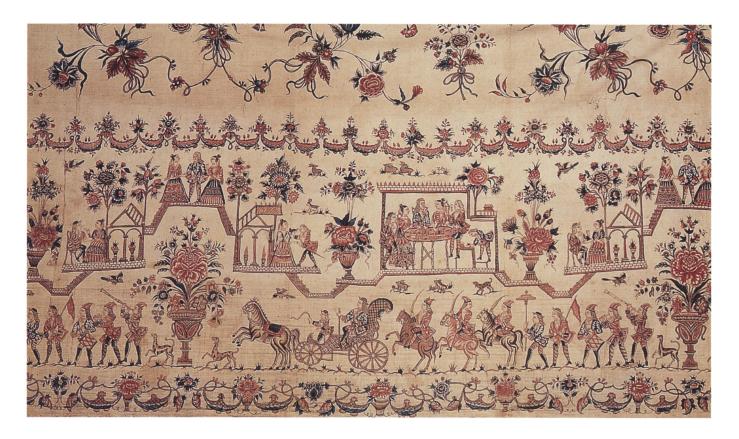
Hunting and Fishing Scenes

Designed by Robert Jones, English, active 1761–80. English (Old Ford), dated 1769. Cotton and linen, copperplate and block printed, with penciling; 81 ½ x 39 in. (206.1 x 99 cm). Rogers Fund, 1983 (1983.365)

The pastimes of the privileged classes, popular themes depicted in English prints and paintings of the eighteenth century, are also the subjects for this furnishing fabric. The technique of colorfast copperplate printing, invented by Francis Nixon of Drumcondra, Ireland, in 1752, made the reproduction of such complicated, large, and detailed compositions possible, but only in one color. To create this technical tour de force, Robert Jones combined both innovative and traditional methods. Two different copperplates, one for each subject, were used to first record in aubergine the scenes of fashionable gentry engaged in hunting and fishing. Additional colors were then painstakingly added, one by one, using woodblocks—a procedure requiring great skill to ensure that all the impressions were correctly registered. As a final touch, blue was added by penciling. Obviously proud of the accomplishment, Jones discreetly worked into the compositions in several places the name of his firm, its location, and the date January 1, 1769.

-A.Z.





Portion of a Skirt or Petticoat

Indian (Coromandel Coast) for the Dutch market, third quarter of the 18th century. Painted and dyed cotton, 33 % x 67 ½ in. (85.4 x 171.4 cm). Purchase, Friends of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Gifts, 1992 (1992.82)

Although the primary goal of the Dutch East India Trade Company and its English equivalent (established 1597 and 1600, respectively) was the acquisition of pepper and spices in Malaysia, the Indian painted and dyed cottons used for subsequent foreign barter also generated excitement at home. Introduced perhaps by accident during the seventeenth century, the fabrics fascinated the European consumer, who had no local equivalent that could compete for brightness, variety, and fastness of color and relatively low cost. The designs were achieved by repeatedly painting with mordants and resist dyeing the cloth for each color and shade.

Experts at customizing exports, Indian chintz makers had manufactured specific designs for their earlier trading partners in the Near East, Africa, and Asia. Similarly, designs were developed to meet the needs of individual European markets and to appeal to regional tastes. This type

of pattern, with lively and anecdotal figural compositions—from a semi-military parade to couples visiting and dining—was intended for the



Dutch market. It found particular favor in the northern Netherlands province of Friesland, and especially in the town of Hindelopen, where it would most likely have been everyday wear for a wealthy farmer's wife.

-A.Z.

Quilt Top

English, 19th century. Cotton, with wool crewel embroidery; 104% x 89% in. (266 x 228 cm). Gift of Adele Pharo Azar, in memory of her husband, Jemile Wehby Azar, by exchange, 1987 (1987.63)

Although patchwork quilting is usually associated with America, it also has a tradition in Europe, particularly in Germany and England. The number of differently patterned printed cottons, ranging in date from the 1790s to the 1820s, suggests that the maker of this quilt top had access to sample books or samples.

The design opportunity offered by such a variety of fabrics was challenged by the seemingly small size of each sample. The maker, however, turned this limitation into a strength. For some of the hexagons, motifs were cut from several patterns and juxtaposed for a controlled kaleidoscopic effect; others are composed of different color combinations of the same design. On the back of the quilt top, bits of old bills and correspondence appear in the hexagonal paper templates used as cutting guides. In the outer guard borders the tentlike shapes are each of a different fabric and perhaps indicate the prevalent sample size.

The large floral motifs and the central bird are executed in a different technique, *broderie perse*, in which the forms are removed from larger pieces of glazed printed cotton and applied to the quilt top with crewel embroidery, which is also used for the flower stems.

Kennet

Designed by William Morris, English, 1834–1896. English (Merton Abbey), Morris and Co., designed 1883. Printed cotton, 108 x 38 in. (274.3 x 96.5 cm). Purchase, Edward C. Moore Jr. Gift, 1923 (23.163.7)

As one of the forerunners of modern design, Morris took much of his inspiration from the arts and crafts of the past. His disgust with the inferiority of many Victorian industrially made textiles, which he found lacking in both quality and appropriateness of design, led him to study the aesthetics and techniques of earlier historic examples—from tapestries to embroideries. This knowledge enabled him to take inspiration from the past but create for contemporary needs.

Thus, a two-dimensional design such as Kennet could be—and was—successfully used for wall-paper, woven silks, and printed fabrics. The effect in each medium, however, was altered by choices in color combinations (bold or subtle), materials (shiny or matte), and textures (flat or pile). While the undulating flower stalks look back to Italian fifteenth- and sixteenth-century velvet designs, they also presage the advent of Art Nouveau.

-A.Z.





"Four Seasons" Shawl

French or Scottish, mid-19th century. Wool and silk, 74 ¼ x 72 ¼ in. (188.6 x 183.5 cm). Gift of Mrs. Edwin E. Butler, in memory of her father, Dudley B. Fuller, 1926 (26.179)

A shawl was a required fashion accessory during much of the nineteenth century. In the early 1800s long, rectangular, stolelike examples, handwoven in India with *boteh* (pinecone) or paisley patterned end panels,

were coveted for use with Empirestyle dresses. This style was followed by the square shawl and then, with the introduction of wider skirts, by "plaids"—a term used not to describe the pattern but to connote a very large and long shawl, usually ten feet by five feet.

Stylistically, this shawl demonstrates both a "four seasons" layout—in which the ground color is different in each of the quadrants—and an organization à la pivot, indicating the manner in which

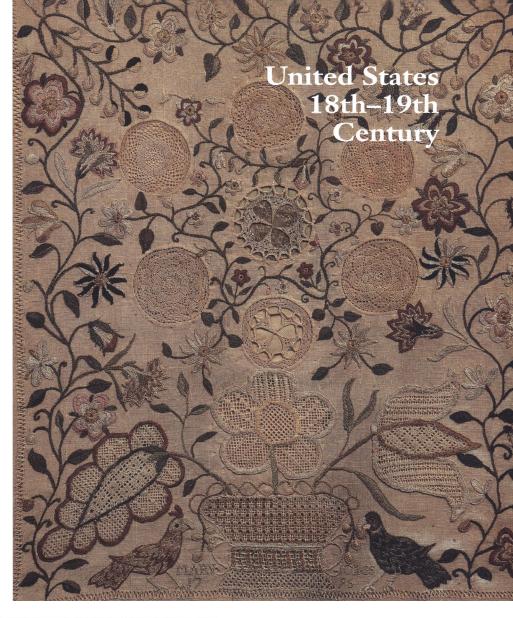
the vegetation swirls around a central point. The design for the shawl is probably French, but it may have been purchased by a Scottish manufacturer and jacquard-woven in Paisley.

-A.Z.

Dresden-Work Sampler

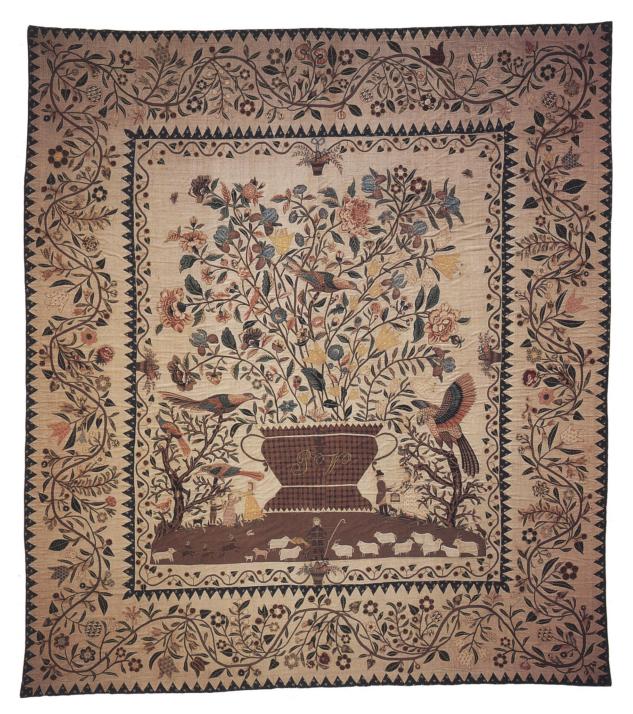
Sewn by Mary Jones, American. Philadelphia area, 1795. Silk and cotton embroidery on linen, 15 ¼ x 13 ¼ in. (36.2 x 33.7 cm). Gift of Barbara Schiff Sinauer, 1984 (1984.331.22)

Before the nineteenth century most American girls received only rudimentary academic educations. Instead, their schooling focused on skills that would enable them to enter their traditional role in society-that of wife, mother, cook, and housekeeper. In the days when a woman might be expected to sew all of her family's clothes and linens, learning proficiency with a needle was one of the most important aspects of her education. To this end, most girls produced samplers to practice fancy sewing and to have a visible record of their progress to present to their parents at the end of the school term. Few samplers, however, were as exceptional as the one completed by a Mary Jones in 1795. It belongs to a small group dating to the second half of the eighteenth century that are unique to the Philadelphia area. Known as





Dresden-work samplers, they are of white linen decorated with white drawn work and needlepoint-lace insertions. Mary Jones's sampler is also ornamented with a floral border worked in colored silks and, highlighting the intricacies of the work yet further, gold leaf behind the central circle of lace. When hung on her parents' parlor wall, Mary's sampler must have been convincing testimony to her sewing talent.



Appliquéd Coverlet

Probably by Sarah Furman Warner Williams, American. New York City, ca. 1803. Linen and cotton, with silk embroidery; 103 ½ x 90 ½ in. (262.9 x 229.9 cm). Gift of Catharine E. Cotheal, 1938 (38.59)

This highly decorative masterpiece reveals a sophistication rarely encountered in hand-worked American textiles. It was made for a young New Yorker named Phebe Warner early in the nineteenth century, and the inspiration for its design was

derived from two types of textiles popular in the 1700s: imported Indian "palampores" (printed bed hangings that usually featured large flowering trees) and needlework pictures of pastoral landscapes commonly worked by schoolgirls.

The unquilted bedcover is decorated with appliquéd figures cut from large-patterned English chintzes and printed linens as well as pieces of small-patterned cottons. The figures cut from chintz, such as the huge birds that peer down upon the lilliputian people and animals

below, are sewn with a nearly invisible whipstitch. The pieces from the small-patterned fabrics are decorated around their edges with silk embroidery.

Phebe Warner received this coverlet about 1803 as a wedding gift from her first cousin, Sarah Furman Warner Williams. While a few pieces of Williams's appliquéd work exist in other museums, none are as keenly original or as well preserved as this treasure from our collection.

Embroidered Carpet

Made by Zeruah Higley Guernsey Caswell, American, 1805–1895(?). Castleton, Vermont, 1835. Wool embroidery on wool, 13 ft. 4 in. x 12 ft. 3 in. (400 x 373 cm). Gift of Katharine Keyes, in memory of her father, Homer Eaton Keyes, 1938 (38.157)

According to tradition, Zeruah Guernsey made this entire carpet, which lay for many years in her family's best parlor, from wool she sheared from her father's sheep. She spun, dyed, and wove the fabric base and then embroidered each square with chain stitch in a variety of bold naturalistic designs. She had help with only two of the squares; two Native American medical students who were staying with her family contributed the squares marked L.F.M. and F.B.

Known as the "Caswell" carpet (although Zeruah did not marry Memri Caswell until eleven years after she completed it), this piece has always been one of the most beloved objects in our collection.





The striking blue cat at the center of the lowest row even inspired the writing of a popular children's book. Other notable squares are the two that show either puppies or kittens playing on brightly striped carpeting; these engaging creatures were undoubtedly copied from popular prints of the day. The large rectangular piece at the left side of the carpet, embroidered with a basket of fruit and flowers, served as a detachable hearth rug. In the summer it was laid over the parlor's empty hearth.



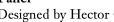
Appliquéd Portiere

Designed by Candace Wheeler, American, 1827–1923. New York City, ca. 1884. Silk velvet on metallic cloth, with silk embroidery; 74 x 50½ in. (188 x 128.3 cm). Gift of the family of Mrs. Candace Wheeler, 1928 (28.34.2)

This portiere represents the important collection of Wheeler's work in the Museum's holdings. The majority of the thirty-six pieces we own were given by Wheeler's family in 1928, at a time when her contribution to the field of design was largely forgotten. In recent years the extraordinary work of this pioneering figure has been the focus of much interest. Wheeler began her professional career after raising a large family; at age fifty-two she became a member of Louis C. Tiffany's Associated Artists, a shortlived (1879-83) but highly influential interior design firm. After splitting with Tiffany, Wheeler went on to form her own company, also called Associated Artists, which worked exclusively on designing and producing textiles for the home.

This portiere was probably made during the early years of that firm. Interestingly, it is unfinished; the embroidered silk details that enliven the uppermost full-blown velvet tulips were never completed on the lower flowers. Perhaps a client, or Wheeler herself, decided not to include the piece in a decorating scheme. Wheeler's firm did not produce only expensive custom projects like the portiere; the majority of the pieces in our collection are printed and woven fabrics intended for the growing middle-class market.





Designed by Hector Guimard, French, 1867-1942. French, ca. 1900. Silk and paint on silk, 27 x 18 in. (68.6 x 45.7 cm). Gift of Mrs. Hector Guimard, 1949 (49.85.11)

Guimard studied at the École des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and is best known for his architectural achievements at the end of the nineteenth century, including several entrances for the Paris Métro. His designs were a unique version of the Art Nouveau, which developed in part as a European reaction to a mechanized world brought on by the Industrial Revolution and in part to the then-outmoded historical revivalist style prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century. Art



Nouveau embraced a return to natural, organic forms, incorporating sensuous curves and elaborate flourishes. Guimard envisioned his architecture as a totality, within which interior space, decoration, and furnishings corresponded to the exterior structure and appearance of the building. Thus every detail upholstery, wall and floor coverings, ceiling ornaments, hardware, and fixtures —was a part of his creation.

This silk panel conveys Guimard's brilliant elegance and sensuality. Its strongly marked lines seem to take

possession of the form. The panel, possibly an insert for the bodice of a dress of cream-colored silk tabby, is embellished with machine embroidery in white and ivory silk and worked in stem and satin stitches. Parts of the design are painted light tan with black details.

—₹.A.









Wiener Werkstätte Silks

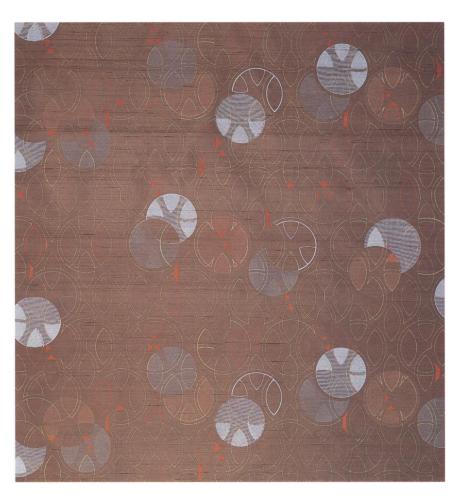
1. Triangle, 1910–13. By Josef Hoffman, Austrian, 1870–1956.
2. Hameau, 1910–11. By Wilhelm Jonasch, Austrian, 1892–?.
3. Gloggnitz, 1916. By Gustave Kalhammer, Austrian, 1886–1919. Each 5 ½ x 4 in. (14 x 10.2 cm). Rogers Fund, 1954 (54.197.5).
4. Textile Sample, 1915. By Josef Hoffman, Austrian, 1870–1956. 8½ x 5¼ in. (21.6 x 13.3 cm). Gift of Joanne F. du Pont and John F. Pleasants, in memory of Enos Rogers Pleasants III, 1984 (1984.537.96)

The Wiener Werkstätte was founded in Vienna in 1903 by Josef Hoffman and Koloman Moser as a school for teaching modern design and craftsmanship. It also served as a retail outlet for the work of its students and teachers. The textile section, begun in 1905, was equipped to print every kind of woven material. Hand-printed and painted materials, mostly in silk, were produced in the Werkstätte's own workshop, while machine-printed fabrics, usually a form of silkscreen but sometimes resembling block-print techniques, were manufactured by the firm of Johan Backhausen & Söhne, which still turns out a limited selection today.

Every textile was given a pattern name and recorded with the designer's name so that the large number of fabrics could be traced. Their sale and distribution were highly successful, and the Werkstätte opened a showroom on Vienna's famous Karnterstrasse. More than eighty artists contributed designs over a period of thirty years.

Wiener Werkstätte artists worked in an austere, rectilinear manner with a graphic elegance, sometimes incorporating folk art, geometric and architectural motifs, and floral repeats. The designs are bold in their use of flat shapes and strong colors. The gridlike character and striking geometry reflect the architectural training of many of the artists.

─∃.A.



Length of Printed Fabric

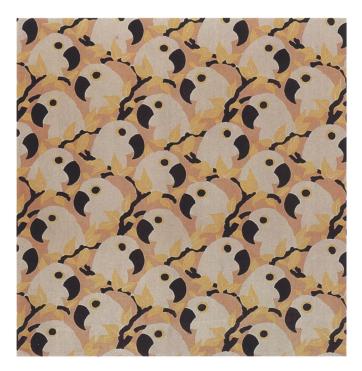
Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, American, 1867–1959. Manufactured by F. Schumacher and Company. New York City, 1955. Silk and synthetic fiber (Fortisan), w. 50 in. (127 cm). Purchase, Charles L. and Jane D. Kaufmann Gift, 1991 (1991.131)

Although Wright had always designed the custom interior furnishings for his architectural projects, he did not design a large range of commercially available products for the home until 1955. In that year he created a furniture line for the Heritage-Henredon Furniture Company and a complementary group of textiles and wallpapers, called the "Taliesin Line," for F. Schumacher and Company. These uniquely modern furnishings were priced to be accessible to the average consumer. However, most "average consumers" were not familiar with Wright's design vocabulary and did not respond favorably to

patterns that seemed radical for the time. Neither the furniture nor the fabric and wallpaper were commercial successes.

The Museum has been collecting examples of this now-rare fabric since the 1970s. One of the most beautiful of the patterns, shown here in a detail, was Design 104. It was produced in seven different colors (this example is "wood brown") and cost \$6.75 per yard. The abstract modular design of circles and pointed ellipses was based on the floor plans of homes Wright created in the early 1950s for his sons, Robert Llewellyn and David.

—A.P.



branches combines his love of bold fantasy and brilliant color. The simplicity of the repeated imagery gives emphasis to the vivid yellows and salmon pinks. Poiret's affinity for orientalism and the exoticism of the Ballets Russes as well as for the brightness and gaiety of contemporary painters such as Matisse is superbly demonstrated here.

—J.A.

Textile Sample

Designed by Paul Poiret, French, 1879–1944. Manufactured by The Maison Martine, ca. 1923. Silk, 90 x 34 in. (228.6 x 86.4 cm). Purchase, Edward C. Moore Jr. Gift, 1923 (23.178.11)

After completing school, Poiret began an apprenticeship with the couturier Jacques Doucet in Paris and by 1903 opened his own fashion house. Poiret was a principal figure in the artistic revolution known as Art Deco (a name taken from the 1925 Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels). In 1911 he founded the École Martine. an art school. Unlike traditional European art academies, here young women were encouraged to design in total creative freedom. To further their creativity, Poiret's students took trips to the botanical gardens, the aquarium, and the countryside, where they made sketches of plant and animal life to use in their designs. From these, textiles were produced for fashion, upholstery, curtains, wallpaper, carpets, and all types of home furnishings.

Poiret, whose own creative genius took the form of liberating women's wear from its corseted past, invented many of his own textile patterns. This print of parrots sitting in tree

Tri-Color Arch

By Claire Zeisler, American, 1903–1991. 1983–84. Hemp and synthetic fiber, h. 74 in. (188 cm). Gift of Peter Florsheim, Thomas W. Florsheim, and Joan Florsheim-Binkley, 1987 (1987.371)



During the 1960s artists experimented with fiber, releasing it from the constraints of the loom to create freestanding sculpture. Zeisler, who had studied at the American Bauhaus in Chicago and had been taught by the Russian avant-garde sculptor Alexander Archipenko as well as by the Chicago weaver Bea Swartchild, became a formidable force in this field. She began her weaving in a conventional manner, making place mats and then textiles for the apparel industry, but by 1961 Zeisler started to use knotted sisal, which became off-loom textile art. She continued to use fiber, most often natural hemp, which she wrapped around a steel armature. In 1963 she was one of five artists whose works were chosen for "Woven Forms," the first American fiber art exhibition at the American Craft Museum.

In Zeisler's *Tri-Color Arch* the techniques are prominent yet subservient to the overriding form. She emphasizes the hemp wrapping and

includes unwoven strands, which cascade to the floor as a part of the shape. The natural, undyed hemp strands are, as in many of her works, wrapped with red, dark blue, and light blue threads, which outline the primary structure.

─Ĵ.A.

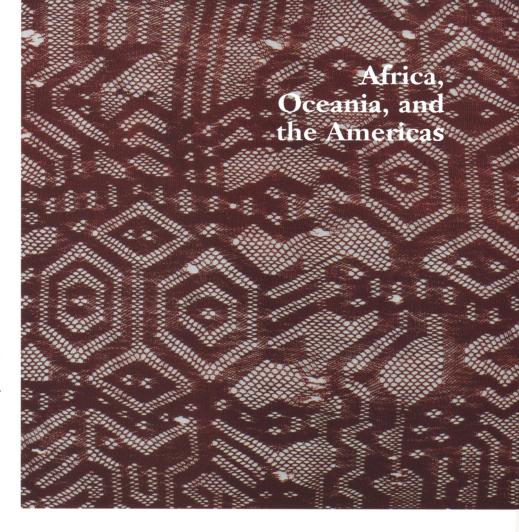
Openwork Mantle

Peru, Ica Valley (Ocucaje), 2nd–1st century B.C. Wool (camelid fiber), sprang technique; 54½ x 74½ in. (138.5 x 189 cm). Gift of Rosetta and Louis Slavitz, 1986 (1986.488.1)

Images of twelve "oculate beings" are worked into this mantle by a technique—interlinked sprang—that replicates the pattern in mirror image on either side of the vertical center. The oculate beings are composed of stylized frontal heads with concentrically ringed eyes (from which they get their name) and semierect spotted bodies. They stand in two horizontal registers and alternate right side up and upside down across the width of the mantle. Their heads, too, can be read two ways, yet another indication of the visual complexity of which the ancient Peruvians were capable.

The mantle is an early example of a type of Peruvian textile thought to be a man's cloaklike garment long in use in Precolumbian Peru.

Fully articulated by the late centuries B.C., mantles continued to be made until long after the Spanish conquest of the sixteenth century. A number of complete early mantles are known from Ocucaje in the southern Ica Valley, the source of the present example. It is one of the largest Peruvian textiles made in sprang, a technique in which there is no weft and the pattern is produced by hand manipulation of the warp. Openwork Ocucaje mantles had a funerary function.







Tunic

Peru (Nasca-Wari), 8th-9th century. Wool, tapestry weave; 21 ½ x 43 ¼ in. (54.5 x 109.8 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1929 (29.146.23)

The primary items of clothing for men in ancient Peru were tunics, with or without sleeves. They had a vertical slit opening at the top for the neck. Considerable effort and time were invested in making elaborate tunics since, in addition to being practical, among many groups they were statements of ethnic affiliation, social status, and religious beliefs.

Peruvian tunics display a great deal of variety in weaving technique and patterning and a wide range of colors. This example, made in the slit-tapestry technique, with identical halves joined at the center and along the sides, is bold in color and very unusual in design. Its main pattern consists of two yet-to-be-identified, probably reptilian creatures with spotted zigzag bodies facing each other at the center line of the tunic. Their large heads have bicolored eyes, bared teeth, whiskers or barbels, and ears or fins.

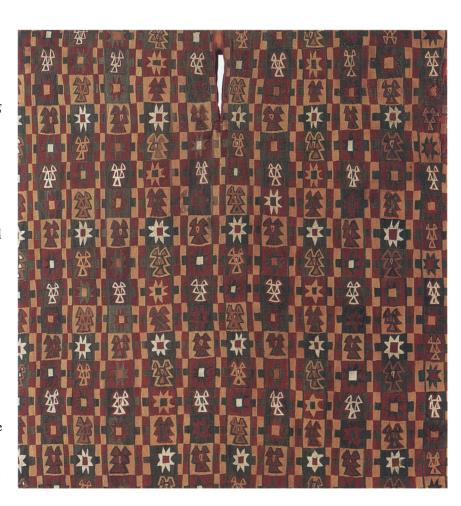
The tunic is currently said to be "Nasca-Wari" style. While the shape and weaving technique are Nasca characteristics, the rendering of the eyes in two halves is indicative of the

Wari style. This suggests that the tunic was woven in the Nasca area at a time when this region was under the influence of the Wari state.

—Н.К.

Tunic

Peru (Provincial Inka), 15th–16th century. Cotton and wool, tapestry weave; 36% x 29% in. (93.7 x 76 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1933 (33.149.100)



Inka tunics, called *unku* in the Quechua language of the Andes, are usually longer than they are wide. They were made from a single piece of cloth, the loom length being the width of the shirt—that is, they were woven sideways, with the warp in the short direction, and then folded over. The sides were sewn together, leaving holes for the arms at the top The slot for the neck was woven with discontinuous warps.

Fine tapestry tunics like the present example were items of great prestige and value during Inka times. Their ownership and use were strictly controlled by the state. They were commonly bestowed as royal gifts by the emperor to reward military achievements or political service or to create bonds of loyalty. Inka tunics convey a strong sense of order and rigid organization in the layout of the designs and standardization in the choice of motifs. The grid arrangement on this example is very common, with squares containing eight-pointed stars alternating with stylized fish or birds. The tunic was probably woven by artists on the far southern coast of Peru, where the eight-pointed star was a frequent design motif.

—Н.К.

Wearing Blanket

Arizona or New Mexico (Navajo), 1860–70. Wool, 69 x 48 in. (175.3 x 121.9 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1039)

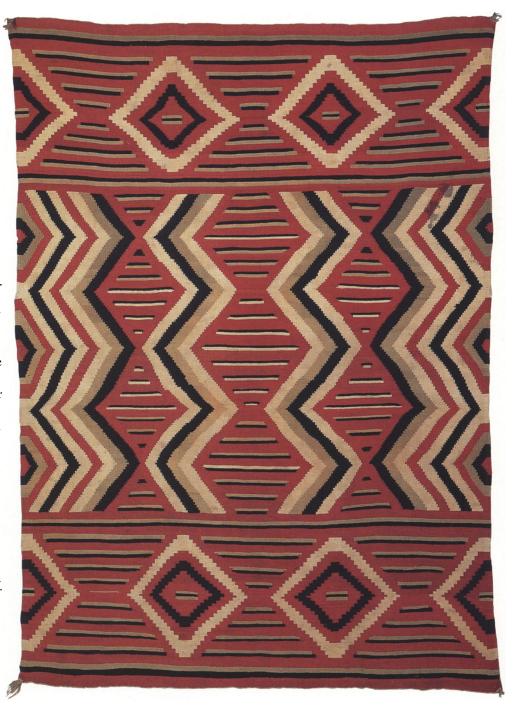
A long tradition joins Native
American and European aspects of
textile design and technique in the
southwestern United States. The
cultivation and weaving of cotton
was practiced among the peoples of
the region from about the tenth century, but the importation of woolbearing sheep during the centuries
of Spanish domination profoundly
shaped the production and use of
textiles. Mexico, with its own
Spanish-based traditions, was also

influential as both a source and a market.

In spite of the turbulent events of the nineteenth century, in which the region became part of the United States, many Indian textiles were produced. The Navajos in particular became significant weavers. During the second half of the century a major body of work was made, and after 1865 much of it was intended for sale. Wearing blankets, or serapes, are prominent in Navajo work of this period. They are strongly

colored and vibrantly patterned. Many, as in the present example, elaborated on long-established design themes. Differing weaving traditions are reflected in the horizontals, diamond shapes, and serrated edges, which are characteristically Navajo, and the vertical zigzags, based on Saltillo patterning. A town in northwestern Mexico, Saltillo has given its name to a large number of locally made textiles of Europeanderived design.







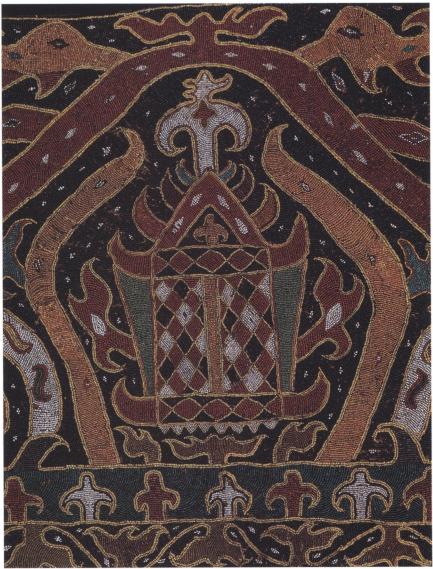
Beaded Ceremonial Hanging

Sumatra (south-central Lampung), probably 18th century. Glass and shell beads, nassa shells, cotton, and plant fibers; 48 ½ x 162 in. (123 x 412 cm). Gift of Anita E. Spertus and Robert J. Holmgren, in honor of Douglas Newton, 1990 (1990.335.28)

Located along one of the main trade routes in Southeast Asia, the large island of Sumatra has long been among the most important regions for the development of textiles in that part of the world. For many centuries Indian, Chinese, Javanese, Arab, Portuguese, and Dutch traders brought exotic materials to coastal areas of Sumatra. The people of the Lampung region of south Sumatra incorporated these influences into their own regional styles and used the resulting textiles in their rites for naming, circumcision, marriage, and death.

Among the textiles that were developed in this region were several types of "ship cloth" (so called because of their depictions of ships): palepai, narrow and often over three meters long; tatibin, narrow and usually less than a meter in length; and tampan, about a meter square. Palepai and tatibin cloths were used only by the aristocracy.

This extremely rare beaded cloth features two ships, one on each side of a central mountain or tree of life, which is also carried on a ship. The large old ceramic and glass beads



used on this hanging originated in Europe and Asia and contribute to its weight of approximately 154 pounds (70 kilograms).

-M.G.

Textile

Mali or Niger (Fulani) or Sierra Leone (Mende or Temne), before 1880. Cotton and wool, 120 x 51 in. (304.8 x 129.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1971 (1971.30)

This textile, with its checkerboardwithin-checkerboard pattern, is a masterful example of the art of narrow strip weaving. The fabric is kept lively by subtle changes in the woven design and by additional embroidered motifs featuring triangles and chevrons. Bundles of warp threads produce thick lines at three-quarter-inch intervals, further dividing the pattern and emphasizing the fineness of the workmanship. The cloth consists of fifteen strips assembled edge to edge that were cut from a single continuous band woven on a horizontal double-heddle loom. Using this method, the weaver plans the patterns carefully, holding in mind an overall concept of what the finished textile will look like. Consistency is important if the strips are to align when sewn together. In this African region such weaving is usually a male occupation.

The origins of the textile are uncertain. Although purchased in the 1870s in Ghana by Joseph Upton, a Boston merchant, it does not resemble cloth produced there. Easily transportable, cloth has long been a valued trade commodity throughout West Africa. This textile most closely resembles textiles of the Fulani, who live along the bend of the Niger River; however, it also shares affinities with textiles of the Mende and Temne of Sierra Leone.

—*К.В.*





Panel with Peonies and Butterfly

Chinese (Song–Yuan dynasties [960–1368]), 12th–14th centuries. Silk, gold paper, and gold-wrapped silk embroidery on silk satin damask; 8 ½ x 10 ¼ in. (21.6 x 26 cm). Purchase, Joseph E. Hotung Gift, 1987 (1987.277)

The most distinctive embroidery stitch in this panel is a form of detached looping called needlelooping. Until recent years, Chinese examples of this technique were rare, but now there are a number of pieces in various collections. Needlelooping developed mainly during the thir-

teenth and fourteenth centuries, after which it gradually fell into disuse. This small panel features peonies and a butterfly, both popular motifs in the decorative arts of the Song and Yuan periods.

In making this piece, a gilt-paper shape was cut for each area of the design, such as a single peony petal. Rows of simple looping stitches were then worked over the gilt paper. The pattern of small holes seen in the peonies and butterfly was achieved by skipping selected looping stitches, thus allowing glimpses of the paper, which is sandwiched between the ground and the needle-

looping. Gold also shines through the interstices of the wide chain stitches of the stems and border.

The thread used in this embroidery is subtly varied in color, especially in the peony petals. A dye made from safflowers produced the particularly delicate light red tones, which are remarkably well preserved.

—J.D.



society were permitted to wear. The Byzantine court exercised a monopoly over the production and use of certain types of silks, especially those dyed with imperial purple, while in Ottoman Turkey fabrics woven with gold thread in the imperial ateliers of the Topkapi Saray were reserved for the sultan. In Japan religion and myth have endowed textiles with particularly subtle talismanic properties. Documents recording the repertoire of patterns for dress and furnishings at the imperial court survive from the seventh century, while during the Edo period (1615-1868) a rigid social hierarchy prescribed the minutiae of life, including details of dress.

Dress continues to demonstrate status today, if in a more moderate way. Haute couture clothes are still an instant declaration of wealth, and the world's media is finely tuned to the distinctions between one designer label and another.

Apart from the points raised above, two further issues need to be taken into account in the appreciation of historic textiles. First, it is important to remember just how few survive. The dry conditions of pharaonic tombs in the Nile Valley have ensured the preservation of large numbers of Egyptian textiles, dating from as early as 5,000 B.C., but that situation is exceptional. In most climates the fragile nature of

the medium has meant that survival of any examples is rare from before the seventh or eighth century A.D., although archaeological evidence often indicates that a sophisticated industry had long existed. For instance, silk design during the beginning of the medieval period was enormously influenced by the textiles made in Iran by the Sasanian empire (A.D. 224-642), but practically nothing of that earlier production survives. Even in later periods the output of entire industries may have been lost. The so-called Bayeux Tapestry of the Norman invasion of England is the only survivor of a type of monumental embroidery that may once have played an important part in the figurative art of early medieval northern Europe.

The second issue we have to consider, a consequence of the fragility of the medium, is that surviving textiles are often in an advanced stage of decay, color loss, or disintegration. It is therefore important for a contemporary audience to have some sense of the relative condition of a piece so that they can exercise the imagination necessary to understand the object. How else can one begin to appreciate the splendor of a silk banner that once streamed above a cavalry charge, if it is now held together by netting. Or judge a gown whose distinctive folds once

Above: Shells and sea grasses from Edo period woman's robe (p. 78). Opposite: Lower right corner from American appliquéd coverlet (p. 60)

gave an Egyptian queen a style quite as striking as anything one sees in the pages of a modern fashion magazine, but which must now lie flat behind glass because of its fragility.

The challenge for the modern museum is to present and interpret its collections for the public and at the same time to apply the lessons of modern science in order to delay the destructive effects that display of textiles inevitably involves. The storage, study, and conservation facilities provided by the Antonio Ratti Textile Center will place the Metropolitan Museum at the forefront of this effort.

Thomas Campbell
Assistant Curator, Department of
European Sculpture and Decorative
Arts, and Supervising Curator,
Antonio Ratti Textile Center



Panel with Animals, Birds, and Flowers

Chinese (Song–Yuan dynasties [960–1368]), 11th–13th centuries. Silk-floss embroidery on undyed silk tabby, 14 ½ x 14 ½ in. (35.5 x 38 cm). Rogers Fund, 1988 (1988.296)

The square is embroidered with a rich assortment of animals and birds amid flowers. Clockwise from top left are a wild goose, a parrot, a phoenix, and a pheasant. At the four sides are a spotted horse, a standing deer, a reclining spotted deer, and a rabbit. In the center are a lotus and a trefoil water plant. Flowers

include camellia, poppy, tree and herbaceous peonies, hibiscus, and rose of Sharon. The brightly colored designs are mainly in float stitch, with occasional details in laid work and stems in chain stitch.

Technically, this work is closely related to embroidery fragments found by Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot in Chinese Central Asia and dated to the ninth century. Similar embroideries came from early tenth-century sites in southern China. The Central Asian connection is suggested by the overall pattern of animals and birds on a floral ground and in the animals' treatment and postures

—particularly the backward glance. Spotted animals, especially horses and deer, are favorite Central Asian subjects.

A carbon-14 test indicated a date of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, which is in general agreement with the technical and stylistic dating.

—7.C.Y.W.



Cosmological Diagram

Chinese (Yuan dynasty [1279–1368]), 13th–14th century. Silk tapestry (*kesi*), 33 x 33 in. (83.8 x 83.8 cm). Purchase, Fletcher Fund, and Joseph E. Hotung and Danielle Rosenberg Gifts, 1989 (1989.140)

Silk tapestry (kesi in Chinese) was a highly developed art form in Central and eastern Asia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a period when major Tibetan monasteries, such as that of the Sakya sect, enjoyed the patronage of Mongol emperors in China. Many of the finest kesi produced at this time were imperial gifts for the monks or commissioned by the monasteries. There were a number of silk-weaving centers in the eastern Mongol empire capable of this high-quality work.

This Tibetan cosmological diagram, woven in extremely fine polychrome silks, features Mount Meru, the axis of the cosmos, in the center, surrounded by seven square

mountain ranges interspersed with seven oceans. Beyond the mountains are four great continents, flanked by lesser continents, represented by Chinese-style landscapes and framed by different shapes according to their location. The four cardinal directions are indicated by their color attributes. The northern quadrant, originally a golden yellow, is now faded almost to white.

The cosmic world is illuminated by the sun and the moon, represented in Chinese iconography by the three-legged crow in the sun and the hare under a cassia tree in the moon. In the corners, outside the diagram, are vases, from which issue floral scrolls and the eight precious objects of Buddhism.

—7.C.Y.W.

Welcoming the New Year

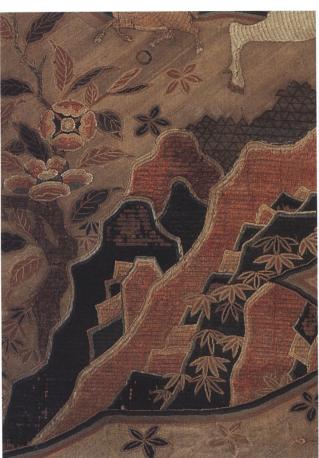
Chinese (Yuan dynasty [1279–1368]), 14th century. Silk and plant-fiber embroidery on silk gauze, 84 x 25 in. (213.3 x 63.5 cm). Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1981 (1981.410)

This embroidered hanging of boys in Mongolian hats with goats outdoors is appropriate for winter's coldest days. The boys' activities and costumes recall traditions found in northern Asia. In the early centuries of our era the Xiongnu (Huns) were said to have trained their children for battle by having them ride goats, but on this later panel, combining northern elements with native Chinese motifs, the goats serve as symbols. As the word for goat (yang in Chinese) is a homophone with the word for the male principle, associated with warmth, growth, and light, the arrival of yang after winter heralds the beginning of spring. The square of floral decoration on the upper front of one boy's red robe is typical of Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty costumes and may have served as a precursor to the rank badges officially adopted during the native Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

As in a companion piece in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, the embroidery on fine silk gauze employs both a counted-stitch technique (a form of tent stitch) for the ground and satin stitch, among others, for the boys, goats, and aspects of the outdoor setting, such as the pines, prunus blossoms, and rocks. Radiating from the eyes, the stitching pattern of the goats lends them great vitality.

---7.D.











Vajrabhairava Mandala

Chinese (Yuan dynasty [1279–1368]), ca. 1330. Silk and gilded-paper tapestry, 96 % x 82 in. (245.5 x 209 cm). Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1992 (1992.54)

This mandala, in Sakya-pa style (originating from the Sakya monastery in Tibet), shows Vajrabhairava, the wrathful manifestation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri, as the central deity. The basic scheme is conventional but the decoration is rich and complex. The design is made by color changes and slits in the weave, and the use of gilded paper in such areas as crowns and jewelry gives a three-dimensional effect. Shading is achieved by the interpenetration of the wefts of two different colors or two shades of the same color.

Portraits of the donors in the lower corners are identified by Tibetan inscriptions in cartouches (from left): Tugh Temur, greatgrandson of Khubilai Khan, who reigned as Emperor Wenzong of the Yuan dynasty in China from 1328 to 1332; Qoshila, elder brother of Tugh Temur, who reigned briefly in 1328 as Emperor Mingzong (see detail); and Bhudhashri and Bhabucha, their respective spouses. It is possible that this tapestry was based on a painted mandala used in a Buddhist initiation ceremony for the Mongol emperors and empresses conducted by a Tibetan monk appointed emperor's preceptor.

According to historical records, Mongol emperors in China often commissioned tapestry portraits based on painted ones. This mandala provides the only known surviving example of imperial Mongol portraits in this technique.

—7.C.Y.W.



Twelve-Symbol Dragon Robe Chinese (Qing dynasty [1644–1912]), 18th century. Metallic thread and silk embroidery on silk twill, 56 % x 63 ½ in. (143.8 x 161.3 cm). Gift of Lewis Einstein, 1954 (54.14.2)

Official costume in imperial China was highly regulated, and the decorative motifs of court costumes were specific to rank. Among the emblems employed for the emperor's ceremonial robes were the twelve imperial symbols, as seen on this example: sun, moon, constellation, mountain, pair of dragons, bird, cups, water weed, millet, fire, ax, and the symmetrical fu symbol. A bright yellow was reserved for the emperor, but for occasions such as ceremonies performed at the Altar of Heaven, the appropriate color was blue. The garment worn for the actual rituals

was the more formal court robe (chao pao). The dragon robe (qi fu) was appropriate for the periods of fasting that preceded the ceremony.

Except for a few details in black,

white, and pale blue silk, this robe is embroidered in very fine gold and silver threads, which are laid in pairs and couched. Aside from the imperial symbols, the dragon robe required additional motifs: nine large dragons rendered full face or in profile; and clouds, waves, and mountains symmetrically arranged to represent an orderly universe. Our example is further embellished

with auspicious wan and shou medallions, Buddhist and Daoist symbols, and bats.

−₹.D.





Kosode (Woman's Robe) with Design of Shells and Sea Grasses Japanese (Edo period [1615–1868]), early 17th century. Plain-weave silk with warp floats, silk embroidery, and impressed gold; l. 55 in. (141 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul T. Nomura, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. S. Morris Nomura, 1992 (1992.253)

This richly decorated robe is among the earliest extant *kosode*. Its design of irregularly scalloped bands of pale blue alternating with shell-strewn bands of white evokes the sandbars and floating clouds of Japan's coastal

scenery. The fabric, woven in an intricate keyfret pattern with lotus and floral motifs, was imported from Ming China. It was resist dyed in pale blue, reserving the white ground to achieve the effect of a wave-washed shore, and then embroidered with scattered shells and seaweed in rich colors and naturalistic detail. The alternating blue bands were subtly but gorgeously embellished by accenting the woven floral pattern with impressed gold foil. The primary motif of scattered shells is familiar in Japanese decorative arts, especially lacquer, from the

late Momoyama period (1568–1615). The decorative technique of embroidery combined with gold leaf is also inherited from Momoyama textiles.

—B.B.F.



Kosode

Japanese (Edo period [1615–1868]), second half of the 17th century. Pinch-dyeing (*kanoko shibori*), silk and metallic-thread embroidery on white satin; l. 53 ½ in. (135.9 cm). Purchase, Mary Livingston Griggs and Mary Griggs Burke Foundation Gift, 1980 (1980.222)

A lavish combination of color, pattern, and texture on supple white satin, this *kosode* reflects the fashion of the Kambun era (1661–73) in the flourishing urban centers of Kyoto, Edo (Tokyo), and Osaka. The

design is boldly composed of large cherry blossoms falling over a cypress fence that cuts diagonally across the lower half of the garment and is balanced by a large carriage wheel at the shoulder. Smaller and more naturalistic cherry blossoms embroidered in silk and gold-covered thread enhance the impact of the abstract forms with opulent delicacy. The intricate allover dappling on the blossoms, leaves, and wheel was produced by an arduous technique of resist dyeing, whereby small bits of fabric were pinched and tightly bound in regular rows to prevent

penetration of the background color. Such ingenious design and accomplished craft were fostered by the demands of an increasingly prosperous, literate, and leisured merchant class. A growing taste for extravagant dress among all classes was viewed as a threat to the social hierarchy, and during the 1680s a series of sumptuary edicts specifically restricted clothing of the costly materials and techniques used in this robe.

—*B.B.F.*



Noh Robe (Nuibaku)

Japanese (Edo period [1615–1868]), second half of the 18th century. Silk embroidery and gold leaf on satin, l. 61 ¼ in. (153 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul T. Nomura, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. S. Morris Nomura, 1989 (1989.367)

Books decorated with seasonal motifs and auspicious patterns scattered over tall nandina shrubs are intricately embroidered on a silk ground embellished by gold leaf to create a profusion of color, texture, and pattern. Varied embroidery techniques give distinct textures to the designs on the books, smooth berries, glossy leaves, rough nandina bark, and delicate bird feathers. The books also bear stenciled patterns in gold leaf.

Gorgeous robes are essential to the mysterious beauty of Japan's Noh theater. Early Noh costumes were similar to the luxurious apparel of aristocratic patrons, who rewarded favorite actors with costly garments. By the early seventeenth century Noh costume developed into an independent mode of lavish stage attire. Although there are no set costumes for most roles, age, gender, and status are differentiated by robes of specific fabric types and patterns. The type known as *nuihaku*, literally "embroidery and metallic leaf," is brilliantly represented here. The term denotes a category of Noh costume used mainly as an overrobe for noblewomen. As in this example, designs are usually pictorial or naturalistic. *Nuihaku* are also worn folded down at the waist as part of a two-piece costume representing jealous spirits or supernatural beings and for certain male roles are used as underrobes.

---B.B.F.



