

# TEXTILES OF LATE ANTIQUITY



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



# Textiles of Late Antiquity



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Essay translated by Marsha Hill

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## Foreword

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**T**he Metropolitan Museum has collected Late Antique textiles from Egypt since 1889, purchasing important collections from Theodore Graf (1889) and Friedrich Fischbach (1909), and receiving the extensive Baker Collection (1890) as a gift from the owner. These collections, which brought so many of the textile treasures seen on these pages to the Museum, had been formed at a time when vast numbers of Late Antique textiles were available, but their origin and context were poorly recorded and little studied.

When the Museum undertook its own excavations in Egypt beginning in 1907, a systematic study of the art of ancient Egypt was planned. The monuments and artistic production of the Late Antique period were included in this plan, the product of a convergence of Museum president J. Pierpont Morgan's interest in early Christianity and the Byzantine period and the desire of the Egyptian Department's first curator Albert M. Lythgoe for exhaustive breadth. An area including the cemetery of Bagawat in Kharga Oasis which dated to the third through fifth

centuries A.D. was selected as one of the Museum's first excavation sites (1908).

From its work in Kharga Oasis the Museum was eventually allotted in the partition of finds a highly important group of textiles marking the advent of the eastern coloristic style in Egypt. This style is described in the following essay by Annemarie Stauffer, professor at the Fachhochschule Köln, Fachbereich Restaurierung und Konservierung von Kunst- und Kulturgut. Another significant result of the work, however, was that it fostered in Herbert E. Winlock, who oversaw those excavations, a receptivity to the vitality and expressive strength of the culture and art of the period, preserved most eloquently in its textiles. Winlock went on to become director of the Egyptian Expedition and then director of the Museum. Some of the Museum's most important textiles—the Akhmim tunics encrusted with exquisite ornament, a large hanging with telling portraits of Dionysos's revelers, and a rug fragment with pure, luminous colors—were purchased between 1926 and 1931 by Winlock for the

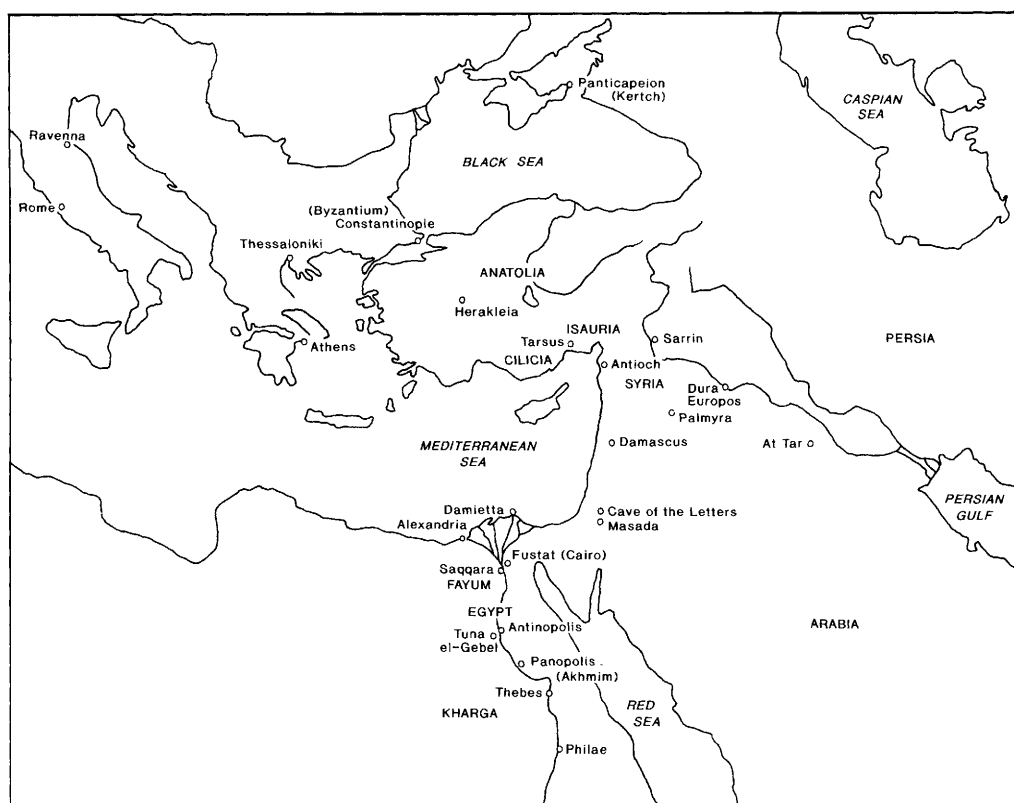


Museum with the financial support of trustee Edward S. Harkness, at a time when interest in the period had generally languished elsewhere. Generous gifts from trustee George D. Pratt about the same time (1926–33), comprising many related textiles from the early Islamic period, also drew on the Museum's long-time relations with Egypt.

Following this period of formation, the collection of Late Antique textiles lay largely dormant. This was mainly because art historians within the Museum and in the scholarly community in general found it difficult to bring into focus the age in which they were produced. During the last fifteen years, however, as Professor Stauffer writes, interest in Late Antiquity has quickened, partly as a result of the Muse-

um's 1977 exhibition "The Age of Spirituality." We are beginning to grasp an art that drew visual nourishment from many sources and put forth a fluid and yet strikingly lucid vision all its own. The textiles—fine hangings for homes and public buildings and garments for the people of the age—evoke the ambiance of the period as only textiles can do. Now, with the Antonio Ratti Textile Center's new, accessible storage and extensive visual and documentary archives, the textiles of Late Antiquity can begin to play their role in the continuing search for a better understanding of an intriguing period in the history of art.

Philippe de Montebello  
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Map of the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, and Asia Minor with ancient sites mentioned in the text

## Textiles of Late Antiquity

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Annemarie Stauffer

To this day Late Antique textiles found in Egypt are widely designated as *Coptic* textiles,<sup>1</sup> following a tradition established a hundred years ago when excavators first reported on the discovery of such pieces.<sup>2</sup> The term *Coptic*, however, refers to native Egyptian Christians, while the design and imagery of these textiles can only very rarely be attached to an unequivocally and narrowly Christian-Coptic context. Until fairly recently it was difficult to place Egyptian decorated textile fragments in a larger perspective and to recognize them as the late products of an industry that had already blossomed for centuries in the Near and Middle East. One reason for this difficulty was the apparent lack of contemporary and earlier finds in neighboring regions. For a long time this absence of comparative material caused the Egyptian pieces to stand out as the sole examples of weaving from classical antiquity. Textiles from other regions of the Near East have since come to light, leading to a reassessment of the weaving finds from Egypt and for some of them a redetermination of their place of manufacture. It also became clear that most textile finds from Egypt can be

dated to the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. by stylistic comparisons to works of art produced in other media. In those centuries, however, the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt were still strongly influenced by cultural and iconographic traditions inherited from Hellenistic and Roman times. This was especially true among traditionally educated aristocrats and wealthy citizens who were largely the owners of elaborately decorated textiles.<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Alois Riegl and Joseph Strzygowski<sup>4</sup> undertook significant studies of the third through sixth centuries A.D. After this the period was hardly the subject of intensive research until the 1970s when two important exhibitions were held in New York and Frankfurt. These catalyzed a new interest among archaeologists, art historians, philologists, and scholars of other disciplines in an epoch whose fascination lies in the many levels of understanding and diverse possibilities for interpretation allowed by its artistic forms of expression.<sup>5</sup>

What does “Late Antiquity” mean and what differentiates this period from classical antiquity at one end and the early Middle Ages or early



1. The domed tombs of Bagawat Cemetery in Kharga Oasis. The Museum excavated very early examples of Late Antique tapestry weavings at the cemetery, including the tunic opposite. (Photography by the Egyptian Expedition)

Islamic period at the other? In the eyes of today's historians, the end of the period can be marked by certain pivotal events—the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), the Justinian campaigns to the Near East and Egypt (543), or the spread of Islam (640/42). Among the consequences were the closing of the School of Philosophers at Athens (529) and the closing of the Temple of Isis at Philae in Egypt (535),<sup>6</sup> events that were also felt by contemporaries to have epochal significance.<sup>7</sup>

As for the beginning of the period it is more difficult to pinpoint specific initiating events. Did it start with the spread of Christianity, or with a deliberate “reorientalizing” process whereby many people consciously reused Eastern-Parthian customs and traditions in all realms of life? Recently it has been convincingly demonstrated that in the renowned

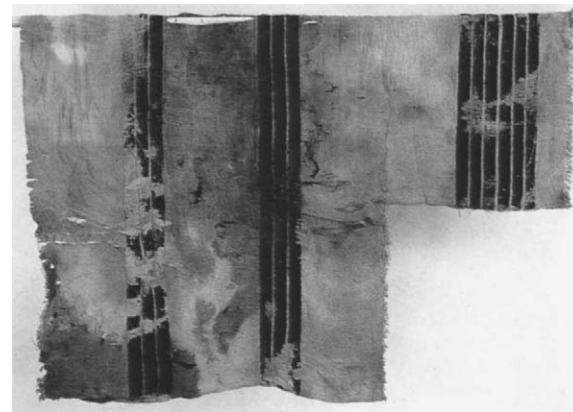
Syrian city of Palmyra, since at least the end of the second century A.D., Roman-Western and Parthian-Eastern cultural elements played equally strong roles.<sup>8</sup> Such coexistence of different cultural currents and traditions is in fact the distinguishing feature of the period between the early third and seventh centuries. It is this period that can be designated “Late Antiquity” for the region of the eastern Mediterranean under discussion here.<sup>9</sup>

The possibilities for multiple readings and interpretations of Late Antique images are especially apparent in the everyday realm, in unofficial art from the domestic sector. Here textiles held a preeminent place as a medium for ornament and image. Thus today textiles are among the most important communicators of Late Antique imagery. All textiles, from expensive wall hangings to simple pillows for the dead,



must be understood in close connection to the lives of their owners and patrons. In ancient times private possessions were chosen according to personal taste, just as they are today. Textiles were no exception, whether they were meant to hang in the reception room of a villa or in the private chamber of a middle-class citizen's townhouse, whether they were to be worn as a robe of state by an official or as clothes for a special occasion by an ordinary person.<sup>10</sup> Apart from calling attention to the varied possibilities of use for textiles, especially in a society in which weavings performed not only the function of clothing but also of interior decoration, the extraordinarily large quantity of items allows for a remarkably clear and detailed insight into Late Antique culture in general, as well as into the highly developed manufacturing techniques.

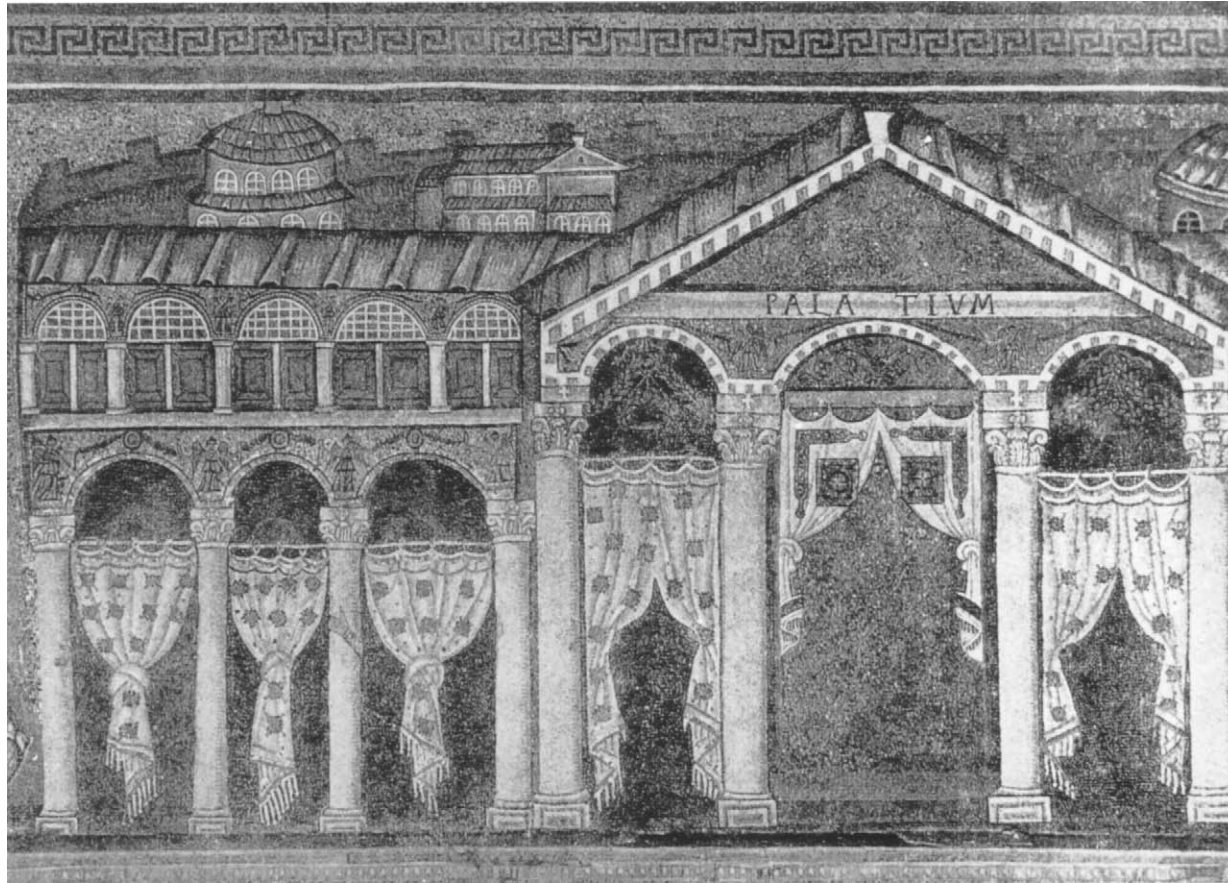
To understand the particular development that Late Antique textiles from Egypt represent, it is important to remember that they are only a small, very late part of antique textile manufacture. Having been buried in the sand and kept from both light and humidity, they survived only accidentally and provide a mere glimpse of the splendor of the textile production of the period. The roots of figured and colored tapestry weaving must be sought in much earlier times than Late Antiquity, however, in at least the first millennium B.C. in the area of the Near and Middle East.<sup>11</sup> Textiles from that period and region were apparently distinguished from their counterparts in pharaonic Egypt and the Greco-Roman world by rich, often figural decoration and glorious colors.<sup>12</sup> The workshops from which these brilliantly decorated weavings originated were called in Roman times *ergasteria*,<sup>13</sup> ("workshops where wool is processed"). Only wool could be so radiantly and durably dyed and, by combining various basic tones in the unspun state, produced in a range of mixed



2. Tunic from Bagawat Cemetery, Tomb XCVIII (MMA acc. no. 33.10.40)

tones.<sup>14</sup> It is also clear (and this is consistently confirmed by the below-mentioned finds) that the technique used in making figural decoration was tapestry weaving. Tapestry weaving, which allows the creation of an individual design by the insertion of single threads into the warp, is closer technically to embroidery than to pattern weaving accomplished by means of sophisticated looms with heddles and shafts.<sup>15</sup> A naturalistic type of representation with three-dimensional effects similar to ancient classical painting could be achieved by this technique, based on the use of fine color gradations. The visual impression of such tapestry weaving is described by ancient authors in connection with the wall hangings, covers, and cushions with which Ptolemy II adorned his state barge and official reception tent in the third century B.C.<sup>16</sup> In the same king's palace hung panels with life-size figures, whose naturalism startled ancient visitors.<sup>17</sup>

Examples of tapestries from Roman times were found at Palmyra, which is situated at the border between the Roman and Parthian empires.<sup>18</sup> Its location allowed the city to play a prominent role in the exchange of goods and



3. The Palace of Theodoric depicted in a mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy. Reproduced from F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Baden-Baden, 1958), pl. 108

ideas between East and West. Some of the Palmyra finds can be dated precisely to the first to third centuries A.D.

Other multicolored tapestry weavings from the arid regions of Arabia and the Roman province of Palestine round out the picture and mark the spread of the style. Finds from Dura Europos (first to third century A.D.) in Syria,<sup>19</sup> At-Tar in southern Mesopotamia (third to sixth century A.D.),<sup>20</sup> Masada (first century A.D.),<sup>21</sup> and the Cave of Letters (first century A.D.),<sup>22</sup> near the Dead Sea should be mentioned. Only a few threads of gold-purple weaving once belonging to examples of the legendary Phoenician garments have been found.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the cemeteries

near Kertch (Panticapeion) on the Black Sea's northern coast are an important findspot for ancient textiles (first century B.C. to third century A.D.).<sup>24</sup>

The dated finds from the Levant and the Black Sea coastal area thus show that apparently in the first to third centuries A.D. the use of colorful tapestry-woven wall decorations and clothing decorated with colorful tapestry-woven ornaments had penetrated gradually from the east into the Greco-Roman cultural region. The earliest of the Late Antique tapestry weavings from Egypt can be dated to a slightly later period, about A.D. 250 to 300. Garments decorated with colored stripes, as mentioned above, had

been known there before, but from the third century onward such decorations apparently began to be produced in great quantities for a much wider market. The coloristic style spread in a wave of popularity throughout Egypt, a land which until then had followed its own, entirely different tradition of clothing and textile ornament based on the cultivation of flax (figs. 1 and 2).<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, this development is also apparent in the written sources from the third century.<sup>26</sup> Strzygowski around the turn of the twentieth century and Pfister subsequently<sup>27</sup> referred to a new interest in Eastern forms, which spread to Egypt from the east both indirectly through Syria and directly from Persia.<sup>28</sup> It is important to recall that the Palmyrenes, whose predilection for richly decorated fabrics is revealed even in their building ornament, controlled trade in Egypt from the beginning of the second century when the important exchange points were in their hands. If only for a short time, they also put their stamp on the country politically after invading Egypt in the middle of the third century. New decorative patterns might have spread to Egypt with these Palmyrenes as well as through intensified trade in general with regions at the delta of the Euphrates and with India.<sup>29</sup>

Looking closely at Late Antique textiles found in Egypt, the numerous occurrences of Eastern designs and imagery<sup>30</sup> in the textiles raise the question of whether some of those fabrics, above all large hangings, were produced in Egypt itself or were imported from Persia, Syria, or Asia Minor.<sup>31</sup> Here again written sources are instructive. Based on the price edict of Diocletian (about A.D. 301), it appears that the port city of Alexandria was in close contact with Antioch and ports in Cilicia and elsewhere on the coast of Asia Minor.<sup>32</sup> Egyptian papyri agree; there are references to garments from



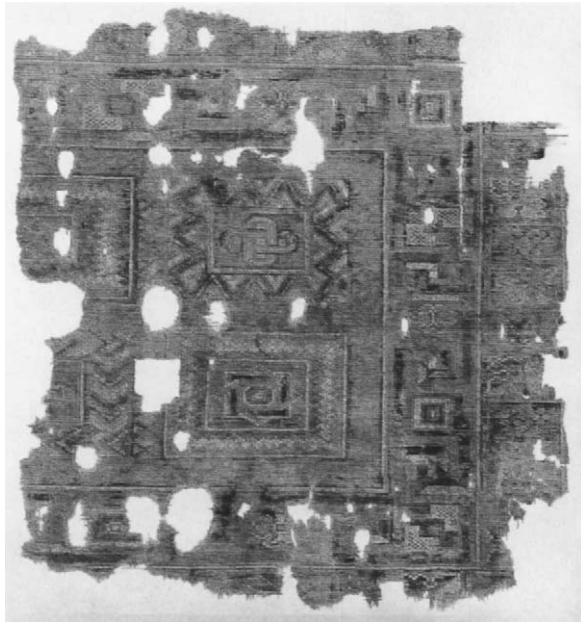
4. Square with a bird (cat. no. 18)

Antioch, shirts from Damascus, shirts and cloaks from Anatolia, Isaurian tunics, linens from Tarsus, and so on.<sup>33</sup> Textile finds confirm the written evidence: the only preserved hanging whose place of manufacture is known was made in Herakleia in Anatolia.<sup>34</sup> This hanging is closely related in coloring and execution to a whole group of red-ground, pure wool hangings, to which the Metropolitan Museum's red-ground fragment of a vine with a bird and basket (cat. no. 48, page 21) also belongs.

A resist-dyed hanging has recently been associated with probable manufacture in Antioch on the basis of a series of church representations which can be precisely identified.<sup>35</sup> The workshop of a famous hanging depicting fish, which was found at Antinopolis in middle Egypt, can also be connected with workshops in Antioch.<sup>36</sup> The Museum's large pure wool cloth with overlaid squares (cat. no. 49, page 25) might have been produced as well in a workshop familiar with Syrian traditions.

Most of the Late Antique tapestry weavings found in Egypt, however, must have been pro-





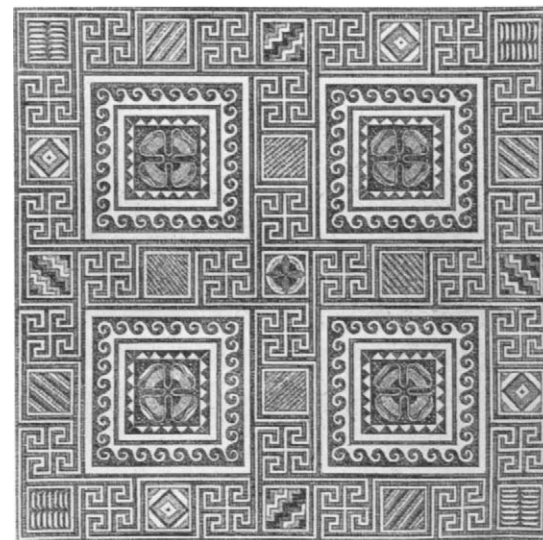
5. Rug fragment (cat. no. 54)

duced in the country itself. Although the number of pieces with a precisely known provenance is extremely small, they clearly indicate a qualitative gradient between textiles from great cities like Antinopolis or Panopolis (Akhmim) and weavings found at rural sites, such as Karanis in the Fayum. Unfortunately, we are lacking both papyri and textiles from the great metropolis of Alexandria.<sup>37</sup>

Large wall hangings such as cat. nos. 1, 46, and 47 (pages 20, 23, 22) could only be produced in large well-organized workshops. These hangings represent one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of ancient textile production. For a long time small cutout clothing ornaments were considered typical of Egyptian textiles. Scholars have begun to realize, however, that large wall hangings and curtains occupied an important place in the houses of the rich and presumably also in official buildings. They were bought and hung not as single pieces, but in sets. The mosaic representation of the palace of

Theodoric in San Vitale in Ravenna (fig. 3), mosaics in Hagios Georgios in Thessaloniki, or the illuminations in the Ashburnham Pentateuch are good contemporary illustrations of such sets.<sup>38</sup> Also the Museum's fragment of a curtain with riders (cat. no. 47, page 22), which is roughly the upper third of the original, was not meant to hang alone. It was one of a double-paneled partition or door curtain, whose sections could be wrapped around side pillars. It belonged originally to a furnishing ensemble whose central piece is probably in St. Petersburg.<sup>39</sup> The hanging with columns and tondos (cat. no. 1, page 20) was likewise part of an ensemble of four hangings from Sheikh Shata near Damietta in the Delta. These were sold separately in Paris in 1900 and are today found in different museums.<sup>40</sup>

Fragments of colorful braided bands (cat. no. 7, page 43) can also be recognized as elements from ensembles of wall hangings. Such bands formed part of the woven pillars that separated individual sections of a tapestry scene.



6. Mosaic from Misis Mopsuestia in Cilicia, Turkey. Reproduced from Ludwig Budde, *Antike Mosaiken in Kilikien* (Recklinghausen, 1969), vol. 1, fig. 31

This is evident in the Dionysos hanging in the Abegg Foundation, Riggisberg, Switzerland, or in a hanging in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, both of which show figures within an arrangement of pillars and arcades.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from workshops concerned with the production of large decorative sets, other specialty workshops must have existed. Square pieces such as the ornament with a haloed personification thought to be Spring (cat. no. 9, page 32) might have been produced in series in one type of workshop. The naturalistic style, whose effects could only be achieved with a wide palette of the finest colored yarns, dates the earliest of these pieces to the fourth or early fifth century. Contrary to the usual practice of the time, such squares were not woven directly into the ground but treated like *emblemata* in mosaic art; they were produced separately and subsequently inserted, that is, sewn on. Again, series of two or four pieces of this type are known, forming iconographic ensembles, such as the four seasons, the goddess Ge who personified earth, together with the river god Nilos, and mythological couples such as Dionysos and Ariadne or Adonis and Aphrodite.<sup>42</sup> Later examples such as figure 4 and cat. no. 19 are transformations and simplifications of such *emblemata*. Significantly later designs, like these last, of the fifth and sixth centuries are no longer associated with an allegorical cycle, but stand alone.

Following similar iconographic schemes, other specialty workshops created large covers of the type of cat. no. 8 (page 32). Their manufacture was presumably the business of the *kaunakopoi*, or perhaps the *tapiduphoi*, respectively the weavers of looped fabrics and the carpet makers.<sup>43</sup> These artisans specialized in forming naturalistic images by using colored wool loops, a technique closely connected to the working method of the mosaicist. In fact icono-



7. Papyrus pattern sheet. (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, P 9926)

graphic connections between looped weavings and Late Antique mosaics can be observed in many cases. An outstanding example is the Museum's rug, which can be directly juxtaposed with a pavement from Misis-Mopsuestia in Cilicia in Turkey (figs. 5 and 6).<sup>44</sup> The loop technique was taken over in the sixth and seventh centuries for the creation of large wall hangings with Christian motifs.

Just as there were specialists who made large hangings and covers for room furnishings,<sup>45</sup> others were adept at the production of richly decorated clothing (such as cat. no. 31, page 26), which came into style in Egypt beginning in the mid-third century. At this time the shirtlike tunic was the usual clothing. For farm



8. Detail from cat. no. 26: from left, the Nativity scene with brick manger and animals, the bathing of Christ, and the Annunciation. (Photograph by Bill Barrette)



9. Detail from a silk band in the Abegg Foundation, Riggisberg, Switzerland: from left, the Annunciation, part of the Nativity (note the donkey's ear and edge of a brick manger), and, after a gap, the bathing of the child (the infant and, following classical prototypes, a nymph are visible). (From a drawing by the author)

workers and servants, it was short and tucked-up, often without sleeves; for officials, nobles, and well-to-do citizens, it was long with expansive long sleeves. Usually more than one tunic was worn—one layered over the other. The outer garment, depending on the wealth of the wearer, was decorated with woven ornamentation. Women might also wear veils or headcloths of fine linen, but little is known about the purpose of the caps and hairnets (see page 29). They do not appear in Late Antiquity, nor in early Islamic times, in representations of living people yet are found in great numbers in Late Antique and early Islamic-period cemeteries. The upper classes wore leather shoes, sometimes adorned with gold stamping (see cat. no. 36, page 45). The form and appearance of the

Egyptian costume changed little over the centuries. Strikingly, early Islamic tunics were made exclusively of wool and were both wider and shorter than Late Antique examples (compare cat no. 31, page 26, with cat. no. 43, page 28).

Regretfully weavers working in tapestry techniques are never specifically identified as such in written sources but simply fall under the general rubric of weavers: the *gerdioi*. This is explained by the fact that colored tapestry designs were woven directly in the ground of the garment in pre-Islamic times, weaving and tapestry thus amalgamated in one operation.

In view of the perfect execution of intricate designs one has to wonder how the weaver transferred these so precisely into the ground fabric and fit them into the very limited space of an ornamental band, square, or roundel. The old question as to whether the artist, in whatever medium, made use of a pattern book and how it must have looked,<sup>46</sup> can be definitively answered in the case of Egyptian tapestry weavers. Drawings on papyrus and later on paper, which were found in Egyptian settlement dumps, can be identified as patterns (fig. 7).<sup>47</sup> Such patterns could not only be reemployed as desired for the production of several garments, but could be combined, or individual motifs could be interchanged among them. This might explain the almost exact repetition of certain designs and partly accounts for the somewhat monotonous recurrence of certain popular motifs over centuries.

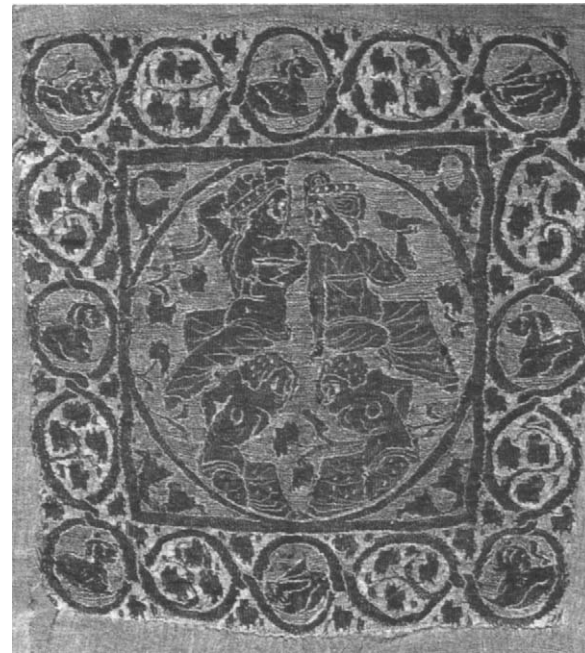
Decorated silks, produced by a different technique, must be mentioned briefly. Decorated silk weavings were known in Egypt since the fourth century A.D. at the latest. Silks and the knowledge of silk-weaving spread from the Near and Middle East to Egypt. To what extent these silks were also produced in Egypt itself is still unclear. The finds are rare but sufficient,



nevertheless, to allow us to deduce that before the Islamic conquest of Egypt (640–42) they must have been among the rarest and most costly creations available. This explains why their designs were imitated many times in other techniques, especially tapestry weaving. In the Museum's collection is a piece of unique documentary value, one that shows that wool weavers also adapted silk designs. A small band (fig. 8) depicts scenes from the life of Mary and infancy of Christ. Such scenes were rather popular in Late Antique–early Christian minor arts and are preserved on other artifacts. Interestingly there is a silk of similar theme,<sup>48</sup> which is however technically much more sophisticated and of a finer quality (fig. 9). The weaver of the Museum's wool band undoubtedly used a model whose iconographic roots can be traced back to a prototype like the silk piece or something similar.

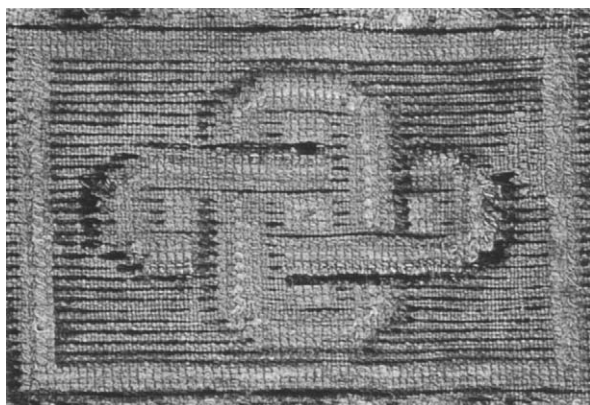
Lately scholars have started to look with fresh eyes at the subject matter of Late Antique textiles from Egypt. While the early excavators and subsequently first cataloguers concentrated on searching for Christian sources and subject matter, today new approaches to the art of Late Antiquity in general and a number of recent finds have led to promising new insights. Three lines of research are particularly interesting to follow.

Attention has been drawn to the flexible nature and diverse readings of ancient classical motifs in general, and in Egypt especially.<sup>49</sup> In this respect, the cult and worship of Dionysos, Nilos, and Aphrodite are of special importance (fig. 10 and see cat. nos. 10, 11, and 45, pages 30–31, 44, 18–19). As guarantors of fertility, rebirth, and eternal life the gods are the representatives of a cyclical, cosmological salvation principle that was more aligned with Eastern-Parthian and traditional Egyptian thought and

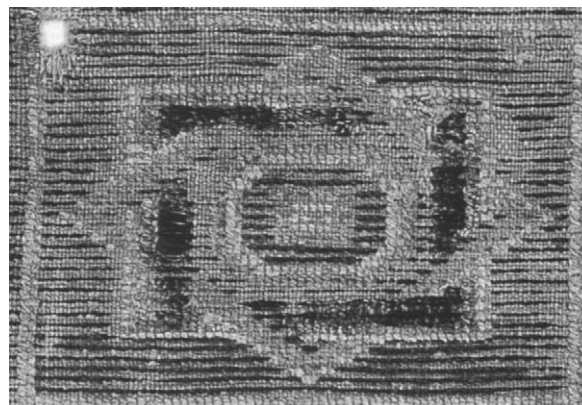


10. Tunic shoulder square showing Dionysos and Ariadne seated above two captives (detail of cat. no. 31)

life than was the eschatological view of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> As can be demonstrated in the imagery and written sources, the Christian doctrine of salvation was at first at least partly interpreted in a cosmological way: thus Christ was equated with Dionysos or Nilos, divine powers that guaranteed prosperity and thus steady renewal. The official church recognized the danger to its fundamental teachings in this way of thinking and protested occasionally against it; however, the monuments show a widespread persistence in systems of thought that had been familiar for thousands of years.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the ancient concepts were so strong that the imagery of Late Antique textiles is dominated by symbols of fertility (*fecunditas*), fortune (*felicitas temporum*), paradise (*tryphe*), and cyclical renewal. Age-old magical ideas were alive particularly in clothing ornaments that aimed at protection from evil powers and attraction of beneficial ones.<sup>52</sup> Traditional symbolism even underlies some of



11. Heracles knot (detail of cat. no. 54)



12. Interlaced squares (detail of cat. no. 54)

the geometric designs, which became rapidly popular from the fourth century A.D. onward. The Heracles knot (fig. 11) or the overlaid and interlaced square (fig. 12), for example, might allow a cosmological interpretation, whose origin, like the origin of the motifs themselves, can be traced to the Parthian culture.<sup>53</sup>

Other scholars stress not so much the multiplicity of interpretations possible in Late Antique textile as actual changes in the meaning of certain motifs: through the Coptic church, Late Antique themes would have been transformed into Christian ones, gods to saints, magic power to divine providence.<sup>54</sup>

Lastly, attention has been drawn repeatedly to examples of pagan-antique, non-Christian, possibly even anti-Christian, imagery. Janine Balty recently called attention to the long survival of Platonic circles in connection with the interpretation of a mosaic in Sarrin, Syria.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly interesting because large wall hangings from Egypt, such as the Dionysos hanging at the Abegg Foundation already referred to, have to be understood as being closely related to the iconographical and conceptual scheme of the same mosaic.<sup>56</sup> Balty's iconographic studies based on contemporary literature have shown that cyclical life-guaranteeing

gods and powers were propagated as life ideals by the Neoplatonists and represented in their houses.<sup>57</sup> Cassiopeia, who appears as Venus-maritime ("Venus-from-the-sea") in Late Antique Syrian mosaics, belongs in the same thematic circle. Pavements like the Syrian ones can be directly juxtaposed with fragments of large hangings that show Venus/Aphrodite or the Nereids as central motifs.<sup>58</sup>

The end of Late Antique textile production and the transition to another style occur between the fifth and sixth centuries. At least in the technical execution of tapestry weaving this change can be identified precisely: in place of the naturalistic shading technique of Late Antiquity, areas of contrasting color are clearly offset against each other. As in wall paintings of the same period, intense colors are employed. Motifs have dark contour lines and are transformed into easily recognizable forms. Hands and heads are often shown as oversize. The ancient imagery, the old models, remained, but in many cases they appear to have been merely copied, no longer understood. Traditional motifs survived for a long time and to some extent were reinterpreted as Christian symbols; for example, the Earth goddess Ge proffering her bounty (roundel in cat. no. 27, page 33)

became a Christian symbol for divine providence and paradise.<sup>59</sup> Beginning in the sixth century unambiguously Christian themes appear increasingly as clothing designs. In many cases they are unnamed male and female saints. These figures are identified as saints by a halo or sometimes a palm branch but always by a richly decorated robe. In a few cases specific Judeo-Christian scenes can be identified. The Old Testament story of Joseph, for example, was among the most beloved subjects and appeared

in several versions again and again on clothing pieces of the sixth through eighth centuries. Numerous examples survive (see cat. no. 29, page 37).<sup>60</sup> The basis for the popularity of this theme of Joseph and his coat of many colors might be found in the importance attached to decorated robes for the Egyptians through the centuries: beautiful garments were considered the only appropriate clothing for the eternity of Paradise. The textile finds from Egypt reflect some of that eternal splendor.

1. Among recent literature, see Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes* (Paris, 1990); Alexandra Lorquin, *Les tissus coptes du Musée National du Moyen Age—Termes de Cluny* (Paris 1992); László Török, *Coptic Antiquities*, vol. 2 (Mainz, 1993); Yvonne Bourgon-Amir, *Les Tapisseries Coptes du Musée Historique des Tissus de Lyon* (Montpellier, 1993).

2. See, e.g., the journals and excavation reports of Albert Gayet: *Antinoë et les sépultures de Thais et Sérapion* (Paris, 1900); idem, “L’exploration des nécropoles de la montagne d’Antinoë,” *Annales Musée de Guimet* 30 (1902): 25–46, 116–154. For individual expeditions, see Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya, *Un siècle de fouilles françaises en Egypte 1880–1980* (Paris, 1981); Annemarie Stauffer, *Spätantike und koptische Wirkereien* (Bern, 1991), p. 11ff.

3. Thelma K. Thomas has clearly shown this phenomenon in her research on niche decorations and their owners (*Niche Decorations from the Tombs of Byzantine Egypt* [Ann Arbor, MI, 1990], passim).

4. Alois Riegl, *Die ägyptischen Textilfunde im k. und k. österr. Museum* (Vienna, 1889); Joseph Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom* (Leipzig, 1901); idem, “Seidenstoffe aus Ägypten: Wechselwirkung zwischen China, Persien und Syrien,” *Jahrbuch der Königlichen Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 24 (1903): 147–78, esp. 173.

5. Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, exhib. cat. (New York, 1977); Dagmar Stutzinger, ed., *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, exhib. cat. (Frankfurt, 1983). For thought-provoking studies on the developments in the eastern Mediterranean, see F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (London, 1989); Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990); Burkhard Fehr, “Lectio

graeca—Lectio orientalis,” *Visible Religion* 7 (1990): 83ff.; Janine Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient* (Paris, 1995), esp. pp. 263–306; Henry Maguire, “Christians, Pagans and the Representation of Nature,” *Riggisberger Berichte* 1 (1993): 131ff.; idem, “Garments Pleasing to God,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), p. 215ff.; idem, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park, MD, 1987); Eunice Dautermann Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Urbana-Champaign, IL, 1989), esp. pp. 1–33; Anna Gonosová, “Textiles,” in Florence Friedman, ed., *Beyond the Pharaohs* (Providence, 1989), pp. 65–72; Thomas, *Niche Decorations*. All titles include bibliographies.

6. On Athens, see Michel Tardieu, “Sabiens coraniques et ‘Sabiens’ de Harran,” *Journal asiatique* 247 (1986): 11–29; I. Hadot, “The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arab Sources,” in R. Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle Transformed* (London, 1990), p. 289ff.; Janine Balty, *La Mosaïque de Sarrin* (Paris, 1990), p. 99ff. On Philae, see Pierre Nautin, “La conversion du temple de Philae en église chrétienne,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 17 (1967): 1–43.

7. For the problem of divisions of historical epochs, see Arnold Esch, *Der Historiker und die Erfahrung vergangener Gegenwart* (München, 1994).

8. Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, *Das Tempelgrab Nr. 36 in Palmyra* (Mainz, 1992).

9. The situation was different in the Roman West, a subject beyond the scope of this essay.

10. Asterius of Amaseia, *Homilia* 1; Ewa Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Egypte du IVe au VIIIe siècle* (Brussels, 1972), p. 32.



11. Friedrich von Lorentz, "Barbaron hyphasmata," *Römische Mitteilungen (Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäolog. Instituts, Abteilung Rom)* 52 (1937): 165ff.
12. Ibid., passim; Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5 (1995): 78f.
13. R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* 4 (Leiden, 1956): 235ff.; S. Calderini, "Ricerca sull'industria e il commercio in egito," *Aegyptus* 26 (1946): 34f.
14. Annemarie Stauffer, "Kleider, Kissen, bunte Tücher," in Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, ed., *Palmyra—Kulturbegegnung im Grenzbereich* (Mainz, 1995), p. 59 and pls. 93 and 94. Cotton, which can also be dyed well, was not used for tapestry weaving, but for printing. When bleached it was used for fine veils and shawls, (ibid., pl. 101). Silk was only rarely employed in tapestry weaving.
15. In more detail, see Annemarie Stauffer, "Cartoons for Weavers from Graeco-Roman Egypt," in Donald Bailey, ed., *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, forthcoming); A. J. B. Wace, "Weaving or Embroidery?" *American Journal of Archaeology* 52 (1948): 51–55.
16. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* 5:204ff.
17. Theocritus, *Idylls* 15, 5:78f. Though later than these early attestations of the style, actual oriental tapestry fragments found in the graves dating to the time of the Eastern Han Dynasty (A.D. 25–220) in western China may give us some impression of the size and appearance of such hangings; see [*The Ancient Kingdom Lou-Lan*, in Chinese], exhib. cat. (Tokyo, 1992), pp. 55 (no. 152), 130 (no. 335); T. Yamanobe, *Fabrics from the Silk Road* (Kyoto, 1979), pp. 102 (no. 58), 114 (no. 64).
18. For the state of research and further literature, see Schmidt-Colinet, *Palmyra*, p. 28ff; Stauffer, "Kleider, Kissen," p. 57ff. For the transfer of technical know-how to Byzantium, see Daniel De Jonghe and Marcel Tavernier, "Les damassées de la Proche-Antiquité," *Bulletin de Liaison du Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens* 51 (1987): 14ff.
19. Rudolf Pfister and Louisa Bellinger, *The Textiles: Dura-Europos Final Report IV* 2 (New Haven, 1945).
20. Hideo Fujii, "Roman Textiles from At-Tar Caves," *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987): 215ff.; idem et al., "Textiles from At-Tar Cave," *Al-Rafidan* 10–12 (1989–91): 109ff., 145ff., 157ff.; idem, "Textiles from At-Tar Caves—Part II (3)," *Al-Rafidan* 14 (1993): 109ff.; idem, "Human-Figured Emblems by Tapestry-Weave Technique," *Al-Rafidan* 15 (1994): 77ff.
21. Abigail Sheffer and Hero Granger-Taylor, "Textiles from Masada," *Masada Final Reports* 4 (Jerusalem, 1994): 153ff.
22. Yigael Yadin,  *Finds from the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem, 1966), passim.
23. Rey-Coquais, *Studies*, p. 78ff.
24. Dora S. Gertsiger, "Antichniye Tkani v Sobranii Ermitazha," in K. S. Gorbunova, ed., *Pamyatniki Antichnovo Prikladnovo Iskusstva* (Leningrad, 1973), p. 71ff.
25. Rosalind Hall, *Egyptian Textiles* (London, 1986); Stauffer, *Spätantike*, p. 22ff. In regard to figure 2, the Kharga textiles will be published by Nobuko Kajitani.
26. See H. Buschhausen et al., eds., *Der Lebenskreis der Kopten* (Vienna, 1995), p. 78ff.
27. Rudolf Pfister, "Les débuts du vêtement copte," *Etudes d'orientalisme* 2 (1932): 433ff.
28. For numerous finds of Persian silks, especially in Antinopolis, see Marielle Martiniani-Reber, *Lyon, Musée Historique des Tissus: Soieries sassanides, coptes et byzantines* (Paris, 1986); Pfister, "Les débuts." The sea route to Persia gained importance after the troubles at the Roman-Parthian border in the 3rd century A.D.; see Jacques Schwarz, "Le commerce d'Alexandrie au début du 4ème siècle," *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten* (Mainz, 1983), p. 41ff.
29. Schwarz, "Le Commerce d'Alexandrie," p. 41; Raphaela Drexhage, "Der Handel Palmyras in Römischer Zeit," *Scripta Mercaturae* 14 (1980): 17ff.; Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, "Zwei verschränkte Quadrate im Kreis," in Annemarie Stauffer, ed., *Textiles d'Egypte* (Bern, 1991), p. 23 and n. 7.
30. This category includes bands with rows of pearls, representations of jewelry, and a number of animals, often winged, as well as such symbols as H-forms and L-forms (so called *gammadions*) and probably also the star consisting of two interlaced squares (see below, n. 53).
31. Ewa Wipszycka, "Textilhandwerk und der Staat," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 18 (1966): 7; Stauffer, *Textiles d'Egypte*, p. 13ff.; Pierre-Louis Gatier, "Un Témoignage sur des églises d'Antioche," *Syria* 65 (1988): 383ff.; John Peter Wild, "Berenike 1995," *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter* 20 (1995): 8.
32. Schwarz, "Le commerce d'Alexandrie," p. 41f.; Siegfried Lauffer, *Diokletians Preisedikt* (Berlin, 1971), passim.
33. Johannes Diethart and Ewald Kislinger, "'Hunnisches' auf einem Wiener Papyrus," *Tyche* 2 (1987): 9ff.; Stauffer, *Spätantike*, p. 30.
34. James Trilling, *The Roman Heritage: Textiles from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, 300 to 600 AD*, exhib. cat. (Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 31 (pl. 1); Henry Seyrig and Louis Robert, "Sur un tissu récemment publié," *Cahiers archéologiques* 8 (1956): 27ff.
35. Gatier, "Un Témoignage," passim.
36. Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes*, p. 62; Annemarie Stauffer, "Platon genos amphitrites—Bemerkungen zu einem antiken Behang mit Fischen" (forthcoming).
37. For occasional allusions to wool weaving in Alexandria, see M. Abdel Aziz Marzouk, "Alexandria as a Textile Center," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 13 (1948/49): 119ff.; for rural

centers, see Peter van Minnen, "Urban Craftsmen in Roman Egypt," *Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelgeschichte* 6 (1986): 31–88.

38. For Ravenna, see Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Baden-Baden, 1958), pl. 107–10; for Thessaloniki, see Wladimir Dorigo, *Late Roman Painting* (Milan, 1966), fig. 216; for the Ashburnham Pentateuch, see Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes*, p. 63.

39. M. E. Matje and K. Ljapunova, [*Textile Art from Coptic Egypt*, in Russian] (Leningrad, 1951), p. 90f., fig. 17, pl. 6. For generous help in the investigation of this hanging, I am grateful to Alexander Kakovkin, St. Petersburg. A comparable piece is in the British Museum, London; see Hero Granger-Taylor in D. Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, exhib. cat. (London, 1994), p. 102ff., no. 112.

40. Mentioned in Albert Gayet, *Le costume en Egypte*, exhib. cat. (Paris, 1900), p. 228 (nos. 471–74). For another piece from this set, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, see Alfred F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from the Burying Grounds in Egypt*, vol. 1 (London, 1920), p. 24ff. (no. 341).

41. Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes*, pp. 84–85; Larry Salmon, "An East Mediterranean Puzzle," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* 67 (1969): 136ff.

42. See R. Shurinova, *Coptic Textiles* (Moscow, 1969), pl. 12 and cat. nos. 16, 17; Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes*, pp. 66–67. Two squares in the former Iklé Collection are similar in theme to cat. no. 9 in this catalogue: see Hero Granger-Taylor in R. Temple, ed., *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, n.d.), pp. 11–13, 30ff.

43. Ewa Wipszycka, *L'industrie textile dans l'Egypte romaine* (Warsaw, 1965), p. 115; Calderini, "Ricerca sull'industria," pp. 82, 130f.

44. Ludwig Budde, *Antike Mosaiken in Kilikien*, vol. 1 (Recklinghausen, 1969), fig. 31.

45. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* 12:514; Calderini, "Ricerca sull'industria," passim; Stauffer, *Spätantike*, p. 22.

46. See Philippe Bruneau, "Les mosaïstes, avaient-ils des cahiers de modèles?" *Revue archéologique* (1984): 241ff.; Stauffer, "Cartoons for Weavers."

47. R. W. Scheller, *A Survey of Medieval Model Books* (Haarlem, 1963), figs. 2, 3; Ulrike Horak, *Illumierte Papyri, Pergamente und Papiere*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 1992), pls. 1–4, 15–19; for further examples, see Stauffer, "Cartoons for Weavers," n. 8.

48. Liselotte Kötzsche, "Die Marienseide der Abegg-Stiftung," *Riggisberger Berichte* 1 (1993): 183ff. The Metropolitan Museum's piece is not a tapestry weave, as identified by Kötzsche.

49. In Egypt pagan heroes or gods such as Dionysos, Herakles, and Aphrodite were particularly revered; see Stutzinger, *Spätantike*; Bowersock, *Hellenism*.

50. For the way Egyptians divided the year into cycles, see Roger Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), p. 20ff.

51. H. Maguire, *Christians, Pagans*, passim.

52. Ibid.; E. D. Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*; H. Maguire, "Garments," passim; G. Vikan, "Medicine and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38, (1984): 65ff.

53. Schmidt-Colinet, *Zwei verschränkte Quadrate*, passim; Henry Maguire, "Magic and Geometry," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994), 265ff.; idem, in E. D. Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 3ff.; S. Crosby in C. Rogers, ed., *Early Islamic Textiles* (London, 1983), p. 12ff.

54. H. Maguire, *Christians, Pagans*, passim.

55. Balty, *La Mosaïque de Sarrin*, p. 109ff.; idem, *Mosaïques Antiques*, pp. 265–305.

56. Balty, *La Mosaïque de Sarrin*, p. 99ff.; idem, *Mosaïques Antiques*, pls. 15 (1, 2), 46 (1, 2), 47 (1, 2). On this theme, see also Johannes Deckers, "Dionysos der Erlöser," *Römische Quartalschrift* 81 (1986): 145ff.

57. Balty, *Mosaïques Antiques*, pp. 291ff., 299ff.

58. Rutschowskaya, *Tissus Coptes*, pp. 120–21.

59. For the Christian interpretation of antique motifs, see H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, passim; idem, "Garments," passim.

60. Stauffer, *Spätantike*, p. 150ff. and bibliography; Claudia Nauerth, "Bemerkungen zum koptischen Joseph," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 58 (1987): 135–37.











### Hanging

5th–6th century

Cat. no. 1

One of a set of four nearly identical hangings found together, this may have hung between the columns of a colonnade or in a doorway. The designs on the two columns are typical of the interest in architectural variety in the period. The small lotus branches suggest that the hangings were meant to evoke the Late Antique ideal of paradise as an enclosed garden in which lotus trees grew.

*Previous spread:*

### Hanging

Late 5th–early 6th century

Cat. no. 45

Dionysian scenes were widely popular in the Late Antique world, especially in Egypt, among educated people of all religions. In this vivid wall hanging, leafy tendrils frame twelve (originally fifteen) busts of

satyrs, maenads, and others who attended the god Dionysos in his *thiasoi*, or revelries, including his tutor Silenus, the bald man at the lower right, and Heracles, the bearded man at the upper left.



**Fragment of a Hanging**

4th century

Cat. no. 48

This fragment with its brilliantly colored, painterly depiction of a blue bird and basket of grapes was originally part of a series of decorated bands on a wall hanging or curtain that was probably used in a domestic setting. It

was found in Egypt, though apparently made at a textile center elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean; another fragment of the same curtain is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.







# **Fragment of a Hanging**

5th century

Cat. no. 47

Suggesting wealth, well-being, and power, mounted riders with their hunting dogs gallop across the top of the hanging beneath busts of winged victories. The dramatic staring eyes of the men date this fragment of a curtain panel to the fifth century A.D. In the lower section baskets of fruits and flowers and another winged victory emphasize the sense of prosperity conveyed by the design.





### Hanging

Late 6th century

Cat. no. 46

Winged victories, or Nikes, were often associated with honorific or funerary contexts, although the vase held by the two here suggests that they merely symbolize general prosperity. Such winged victories were adopted by Christians to depict angels.



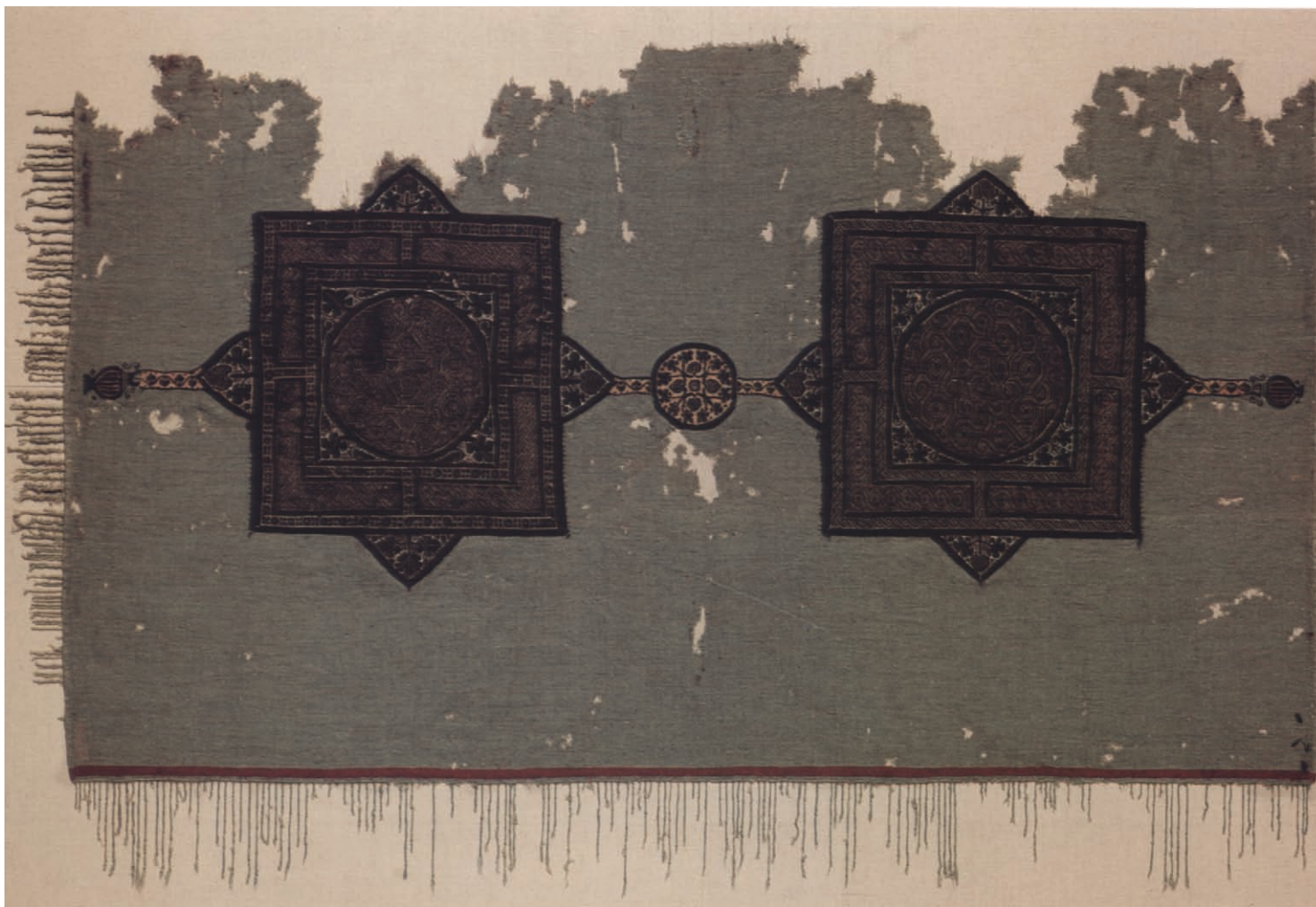
**Rug Fragment**  
4th–5th century  
Cat. no. 54

The colors, geometric patterns, and illusionistic play of this fragment are derived from the mosaic floors of Late Antiquity.

With its thick cut-loop pile, in its entirety it surely functioned as an actual floor covering.







**Cover (?) Fragment**

5th century

Cat. no. 49

Large eight-pointed stars formed by overlaid squares are filled with a delicate interlace, a pattern formed by bands that seem to pass over and under one another. This fragment, perhaps part of a cover that would have

had identical ornamentation at its other end, belongs to a small group of finely woven pieces executed with rich coloration in a style more generally associated with monochrome design on undyed linen.





# Tunic

5th century

Cat. no. 31

A longer, wider version of the tunic was the ubiquitous garment of the Late Antique period. This tunic is one of four in the Museum's collection said to be from Akhmim, an ancient weaving center and apparently a center of both pagan and

Christian thought and religion. The burgeoning ornament of this tunic expresses Dionysian themes, culminating with an image of the god himself on the shoulder squares (see figure 10, page 13).

**Child's Tunic with Hood**

7th century

Cat. no. 37

This charming tunic is made to fit and to please a child of perhaps seven or eight years old. The ornamental bands depicting very stylized frontal figures in a laurel scroll represent a survival of the popular Dionysian/ bucolic themes.







**Tunic**

8th century

Cat. no. 43

The bright colors, bold schematic figures, and contrasting vegetal tracery of the ornamental insets give this fine woolen tunic a strong visual appeal. Discoloration at the hem and cuffs shows where separately woven geometrically patterned woolen tapes were once attached (see page 46).



### Hat

4th century

Cat. no. 41

Found on the head of a woman in a burial excavated and recorded by the Museum's Egyptian Expedition, this is one of the rare datable examples of headwear. Drawstrings served to tighten the hat over layers of cloth wound turbanlike around the head.

### Hat

3rd–4th century or later

Cat. no. 39

This hat, similar in basic form to the red hat above, has been drawn tight at the crown.



### Hat

5th–8th century?

Cat. no. 40

All these hats were made in a technique known as “sprang” which produced an expansive network, especially visible here.

### Hat

5th–8th century?

Cat. no. 35

This hat and the red-and-white candy-striped hat above have a narrow extension almost like a tassel at the top, which seems to be a later vogue.











**Tapestry panel**

4th century

Cat. no. 10

In this panel, perhaps from a ritual or festival garment, Dionysos in his chariot, bearing grapes aloft, triumphantly celebrates his conquest of India. While a part of the popular Dionysian cycle, this episode in particular had also been embedded in Egyptian ruler mythology since Alexander. The highly impressive composition and framing of the scene in this panel attest to its sophisticated models.





### Textile Fragment

4th century

Cat. no. 8

Woven in a loop pile, the golden ground of the medallion successfully evokes the connection between the woman and the moon. The crescent-shaped ornament in her hair identifies her as Luna, the moon, or Diana, goddess of the hunt. Such images were widely used on textiles and mosaics throughout the Late Antique world.



### Tapestry Square

4th–5th century

Cat. no. 9

The goddess Ge, or Earth, and personifications of the seasons were depicted in Late Antique domestic art for their associations with good fortune and prosperity. Here the youthful woman raising her mantle overflowing with fresh blossoms is probably Spring.

**Tapestry Roundel and Band  
from a Tunic**

7th century

Cat. no. 27

On this roundel and vertical band from a tunic, which were known in that context as *segmentum* and *clavus*, haloed females appear with animated lions and palmettes and vases. Such elaborate decorations woven on a red ground were popular in the last centuries of the Late Antique era. The females, related to goddesses or attributes of the seasons (as in cat. no. 9, *opposite*), are highly stylized and therefore difficult to identify specifically. The leaflike feet of the standing figure is a characteristic stylization in this period. The lions and vases and palmettes are reminiscent of motifs in the art of the Sasanians, the Middle Eastern kingdom that succeeded the Parthians.







### Tapestry Square

4th–5th century

Cat. no. 12

Two putti, one astride what may be a hippopotamus and holding a rodlike bouquet derived from pharaonic precursors, play in a beautifully colored and shaded Nilotic environment of fish, ducks, and lotus. In the entourage of the river god Nilos, himself often linked with Dionysos, young boys symbolized the levels of the Nile inundation and, therefore, fertility and prosperity.

### Tapestry Square

4th–5th century

Cat. no. 13

As finely woven and clearly articulated as the square above, this one shows three dancing shepherds surrounded by plants and frolicking horned animals. The center figure holding an unidentifiable oval object may be Pan or a satyr. With Maenads and satyrs, shepherds such as these and soldiers such as those on the tunic bands in cat. no. 31 (page 26) formed part of Dionysos's dancing and singing procession.





### Textile Fragment

4th century

Cat. no. 20

Vases sprouting leaves or vines, the vines themselves often inhabited by birds and animals, evoked the wonder of creation, its mystery and teeming promise. In these finely woven vertical bands, this beautifully lucid ornamental theme is expressed in the monochrome purple style that was especially popular in the third through fifth centuries.



### Ornamental Band from a Tunic

6th–early 7th century

Cat. no. 14

The illusionistic modeling of the Nilotic fauna, the delicate yet rich blue-green of the background, and the rare combination of materials give this tunic band a luxurious appeal. Other pieces from the same set of tunic ornaments are in other museums, and their features indicate a fairly late date for the set and thus for the selective survival of this sort of painterly illusionistic modeling.





**Ceremonial or Official Scarf (?)**  
5th–6th century?  
Cat. no. 30

The original use of this unique red and purple scarf is uncertain. Literary descriptions suggest that such scarves may have been worn as symbols of civic

rank or draped over the head and brought around the body as part of the liturgical wardrobe of ranking Christian clergy.





### Roundel

7th century

Cat. no. 29

A popular theme on roundels for tunics was the Old Testament story of Joseph. Inspired by silk weavings, the nine events shown here are from Genesis 37:9–36, beginning with the sec-

ond dream of Joseph in the central medallion, where the bowing sun and moon are visible above his reclining figure, and ending with his purchase by Potiphar at the upper right.





### Fragmentary Band

5th–6th century

Cat. no. 26

The early events in the life of Christ appear on this band, possibly from a tunic—from the right, the Annunciation to the

Virgin (most of the angel Gabriel lost), the Bathing of the Christ Child (an apocryphal story), the Nativity with the child in the manger, and the Adoration of the Shepherds. The scenes are similar to those on Early Christian works in other media, including silks.



**Textile Fragment**

7th–8th centuries

Cat. no. 57

This ornamental band, probably from a garment, bears stylized naturalistic forms—a row of pointed leaf shapes containing little palm trees—that hark back to Late Antique precedents. However, the manner of stylization and brightening of the palette indicate a date early in the Islamic period.







### Textile Fragment

9th century

Cat. no. 55

Traces of another medallion at the lower edge suggest that this fragment may have come from a hanging or other textile decorated with a repeat pattern of rows of roundels. Such patterns in tapestry weave must have been made in imitation of woven silks. In this case, despite the blurring of forms, a highly stylized winged horse with beribboned ankles can be recognized. The image is ultimately derived from a Sasanian prototype.





**Tiraz Fragment**  
8th century  
Cat. no. 60

Although the decoration of this *tiraz* (Islamic inscribed textile) is Late Antique in its arrangement, with alternating roundels and registers, elements such as the camel surrounded by a beaded border (*left*) reflect Middle

Eastern sources. The bright coloring, extreme stylization of figures, and especially the presence of (illegible) Arabic script place this fragment, which may have been a sleeve-band, in the Islamic period.

## Two Ends of a Shawl

9th–10th century

Cat. no. 61

The decoration of these shawl ends consists solely of bands of inscription in Arabic and Coptic, attesting to the relationship between Coptic (as the Islamic rulers termed native Egyptian) weavers and Muslim patrons and consumers. The Arabic is given, or rather implied, in a highly ornamentalized and here unreadable type of Kufic script characterized by elements resembling pine trees.





## Checklist of the Exhibition

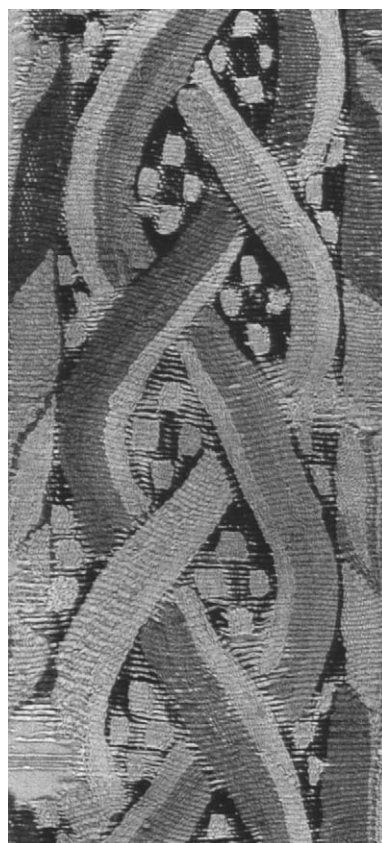
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The exhibition “Textiles of Late Antiquity” was organized as a cooperative venture by the Museum’s departments of Egyptian, Islamic, and Medieval art. It celebrates the new accessibility of these rarely seen and compellingly beautiful textiles with the opening of the Antonio Ratti Textile Center.

The wealth of textiles preserved in Egypt is a primary source for the visual understanding of the Late Antique period (4th–7th centuries A.D.), one of great interpenetration of cultures. The exhibition draws on the rich textile holdings of the Museum to illustrate this world and the power of imagery and design as mediators in it. The objects are organized according to several themes. A brief introductory section deals with the materials (linen, wool, silk) and techniques (primarily plain weave, tapestry weave, loop pile). The next section explores the wide repertoire of imagery and design found in the textile art of the period—Hellenistic divine and allegorical imagery, geometry, interlace, and Christian themes. The focal point of the exhibition is a group of amazingly preserved and finely ornamented garments, large vivid hangings, and fine furnishing textiles, all of which offer the illusion of entering that world, knowing its inhabitants and the

texture of their lives. A postscript follows the evolution of Late Antique designs into the early Islamic period (7th–10th centuries).

The textiles are the curatorial responsibility of the Department of Islamic Art and are stored in the Antonio Ratti Textile Center. In the checklist below, although all the textiles were collected in Egypt, specific provenance information is not usually available. It has been given wherever possible.



Cat. no. 7, detail

### 1. Hanging with columns and blossoms (page 20)

5th–6th century  
From Sheikh Shata near Damietta  
Polychrome wool and undyed linen, tapestry-weave ornament  
90½ x 61½ in. (229.9 x 156.2 cm)  
Gift of Arthur S. Vernay, Inc., 1922  
22.124.3,4

### Technique

### 2. Roundel with mounted horseman spearing a lion

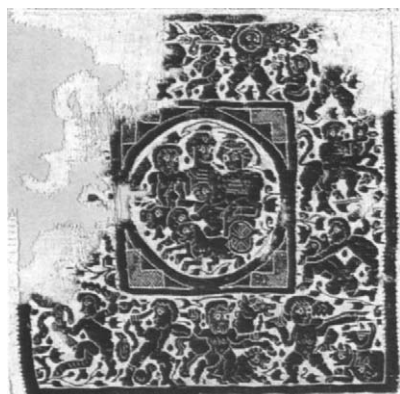
7th–8th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Red and white silk; cut from repeat pattern textile  
Diam. 6⅞ in. (16.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.6

### 3. Roundel with mounted warriors and a lion

6th–7th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Beige and blue colors remain, polychrome silk embroidery on undyed linen  
Diam. 7⅞ in. (20 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.16

### 4. Textile fragment with a leaf

4th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
11⅞ x 9⅞ in. (30 x 23 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.71



Cat. no. 11, detail

**5. Fragment of a hanging with a haloed figure**

5th century  
Resist-dyed linen  
15¼ x 7½ in. (40 x 19 cm)  
Gift of Kirkor Minassian, 1926  
26.93

**6. Fragment of a cover or blanket with interlace square**

4th century  
Undyed linen, weft-loop pile;  
murex-purple wool and undyed  
linen tapestry weave design  
21⅞ x 18 in. (55.5 x 45.5 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.43

**7. Interlace band from a curtain or hanging**

5th century  
Polychrome wool and undyed  
linen, tapestry weave  
7½ x 18¾ in. (19 x 47.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.841

**Color, Imagery, and Design**

**8. Fragment of a textile with head of Luna or Diana (page 32)**

Late 3rd–4th century  
Undyed linen and polychrome  
wool, design in weft-loop pile  
22⅞ x 24⅞ in. (56 x 63 cm)  
Gift of Helen Miller Gould, 1910  
10.130.1076

**9. Square with head of Spring (page 32)**

4th–5th century  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Polychrome wool, tapestry weave  
9¼ x 9⅞ in. (23.5 x 25 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.848

**10. Panel with the Triumph of Dionysos (page 31)**

4th century  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen and purple wool,  
tapestry weave  
8⅞ x 13⅞ in. (22 x 34 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.873

**11. Fragment with square showing the Triumph of Dionysos and Labors of Heracles**

6th century  
Undyed linen and purple wool,  
design in tapestry weave  
12⅞ x 11⅞ in. (32 x 30 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.244

**12. Square with putti in a Nilotic landscape (page 34)**

4th–5th century  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen and polychrome  
wools, tapestry weave  
6⅞ x 5½ in. (17.5 x 14 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.825

**13. Square with dancing shepherds and horned animals (page 34)**

4th–5th century  
Undyed linen and red wool,  
tapestry weave  
6½ x 7¼ in. (16.7 x 18.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.824

**14. Ornamental band with Nilotic elements (page 35)**

6th–early 7th century  
Polychrome silk, wool, and  
undyed linen, tapestry weave  
7⅞ x 11½ in. (18.5 x 29 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.154

**15. Roundel with putto and horse**

7th century?  
Undyed linen and red wool,  
tapestry weave  
Diam. 2¼ in. (7 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.827

**16. Cuff band with female bust**

Late 7th–8th century  
Polychrome wools and undyed  
linen, tapestry weave  
3¼ x 9¼ in. (8 x 24.7 cm)  
Rogers Fund, 1909  
09.50.969

**17. Pair of squares with warriors**

5th–6th century  
Polychrome wools and undyed  
linen, tapestry weave  
7¼ x 6⅞ in. (19.5 x 17.5 cm); 7½ x  
6¼ in. (19 x 17 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.148, 90.5.149



Cat. no. 32



**18. Square with quail**  
5th century?  
Polychrome wools and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
10½ x 10¼ in. (26.5 x 26 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.150

**19. Square with basket of fruit and flowers**  
5th century?  
Polychrome wools and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
16½ x 12 in. (41.5 x 30.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.642

**20. Fragment with ornamental bands made of vases with leaves** (page 35)  
4th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
26¼ x 14¼ in. (66.5 x 36 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.36

**21. Fragment with eight-pointed star containing an Amazon**  
3rd–5th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
11½ x 12 in. (28 x 30.5 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.242

**22. Fragment with rotated overlaid squares containing vases and an ankh**  
3rd–5th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
20½ x 11¼ in. (53 x 28.5 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.95

**23. Fragment with roundel and L-shaped band, both with interlace ornament**  
4th–5th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
25½ x 17¼ in. (65 x 45 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.124

**24. Vertical bands with figure slaying a lion, one with bust of an emperor**  
6th–7th century  
Purple and white silk  
21½ x 2¼ in. (53.6 x 7 cm); 21¼ x 2½ in. (55 x 6.5 cm)  
Fletcher Fund, 1946  
46.156.18bc

**25. Square with Holy Warriors spearing a serpent**  
7th–8th century  
Purple and white silk  
5 x 5½ in. (12.5 x 13 cm)  
Fletcher Fund, 1946  
46.156.18a

**26. Fragmentary band with scenes from the infancy of Christ** (page 38)  
5th–6th century  
Outside of Egypt, within the Byzantine empire  
Red, blue, green wool, white silk, and undyed linen, warp-faced compound twill  
3⅞ x 10¼ in. (8.5 x 26 cm); 3⅞ x 10½ in. (9.6 x 27.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.11

**27. Vertical roundel and band with figures related to goddesses or seasons** (page 33)  
7th century  
Polychrome wool and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
33⅞ x 3⅞ in. (86 x 8 cm); maximum diam. 9½ in. (24.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.817, 90.5.687

**28. Group of related tunic ornaments with Christ and with the Virgin flanked by angels (?)**  
7th–8th century  
Polychrome wool and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
Vertical band, 29½ x 3¾ in. (74 x 9.5 cm), 90.5.815  
Sleeve band, 5¼ x 12¼ in. (14.5 x 31 cm), 90.5.818  
Roundel, maximum diam. 9 ½ in. (24 cm), 90.5.689  
Medallion from a vertical band, maximum diam. 5¼ in. (14.5 cm), 90.5.579



Cat. no. 36

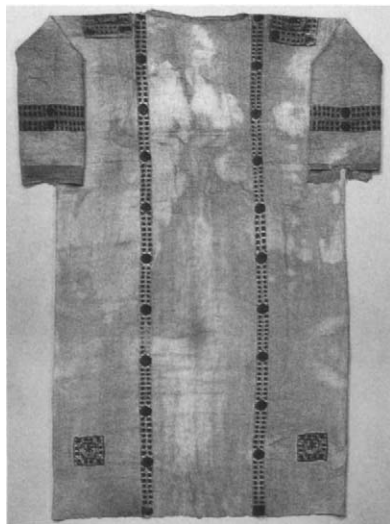
**29. Roundel with episodes from the story of Joseph** (page 37)  
7th century  
Polychrome wool and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
Diam. 10¼ in. (26 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles K. Wilkinson, 1963  
63.178.2

**30. Ceremonial or official scarf (?)** (page 36)  
5th–6th century?  
Red and purple wool and undyed linen, weft-faced plain weave with tapestry weave design  
92¾ in. (235.5 cm) with fringes  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.632

## Garments

### 31. Tunic with Dionysos and Dionysian themes (page 26)

5th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen and purple wool,  
design in tapestry weave  
72 x 53 in. (183 x 135 cm)  
Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1926  
26.9.8



Cat. no. 42

### 32. Tunic with Dionysian figures, including a sea- or river-god

5th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen and wool, design in  
tapestry weave  
68¾ x 53 in. (174.6 x 135 cm)  
Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1926  
26.9.9

### 33. Hat\*

3rd–4th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen, sprang technique  
Circum. 20 in. (50.8 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.30

\*Information on hats in the exhibition is based on a study by Nobuko Kajitani, Conservator, “Head Coverings from Roman Egypt in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” which was presented at the Early Textiles Study Group, Manchester, England, in September 1994.

### 34. Hat

Perhaps 3rd–4th century  
Said to be from Saqqara  
Yellow wool, sprang technique  
Circum. 16½ in. (41 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.2

### 35. Hat (page 29)

5th–8th century?  
Red, green, purple and yellow  
wool, sprang technique  
Circum. 21½ in. (52 cm)  
Gift of Miss Lily S. Place, 1921  
21.6.2

### 36. Shoes

4th–7th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Red leather with gilded design  
L. 9¼ in. (23.5 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.34ab

### 37. Child's tunic with hood (page 27)

7th century  
Green wool ground; tapestry-weave design in polychrome wool and undyed linen  
34 x 39 in. (86.4 x 99 cm), with hood  
Gift of George D. Pratt, 1927  
27.239

### 38. Hat

3rd–4th century or later  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Pink wool, sprang technique; embroidery in green, pink  
Circum. 22 in. (56 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.32

### 39. Hat (page 29)

3rd–4th century or later  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Blue and orange wool, sprang technique  
Circum. 21¼ in. (55 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.31

### 40. Hat (page 29)

5th–8th century?  
Said to be from Saqqara  
Undyed linen, red and yellow wool, sprang technique  
Circum. 19¼ in. (49 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.362

### 41. Hat (page 29)

4th century  
From Thebes, Roman Burial XXIV  
Red wool, sprang technique  
Circum. 23¾ in. (60 cm)  
Rogers Fund, 1925  
25.3.217



Cat. no. 43 (with hem tape attached)

### 42. Tunic with vertical bands of vine leaves and interlaces, and squares with dancing warriors

5th century?  
Said to be from Akhmim  
Undyed linen, supplementary weft loop pile, both sides; purple wool and undyed linen tapestry weave ornament  
66½ x 55 in. (169 x 140 cm)  
Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1926  
26.9.6



43. **Tunic with red-ground ornaments featuring Late Antique motifs** (page 28)

8th century  
Said to be from Tuna el-Gebel  
Undyed and polychrome wool,  
design in tapestry weave; woven  
tapes formerly at cuffs and hem  
80½ x 45¼ in. (201 x 115 cm)  
Gift of Maurice Nahman, 1912  
12.185.2

44. **Tunic hem band with repeating motif of confronted griffins (?)**

8th–9th century  
Undyed linen and polychrome  
wools, weft pattern  
9 x 18½ in. (23 x 46 cm)  
Rogers Fund, 1931  
31.48

#### Hangings

45. **Hanging with heads of Dionysian group** (page 20)

Late 5th–early 6th century  
Said to be from Antinopolis  
Polychrome wool, tapestry weave  
40¼ x 62¼ in. (102 x 158 cm)  
Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1931  
31.9.3



Cat. no. 50, detail (tree of life)

46. **Hanging with winged victories** (page 23)

Late 6th century  
Undyed linen with polychrome  
wool, design in tapestry weave  
51½ x 68¾ in. (130.8 x 174.6 cm)  
Rogers Fund, 1912  
12.182.45

47. **Fragment of a hanging with riders** (page 22)

5th century  
Undyed linen with polychrome  
wool, design in tapestry weave  
41 x 24¼ in. (104 x 63 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.905

48. **Fragment of a hanging with bird and basket** (page 21)

4th century  
Polychrome wool, tapestry weave  
25¼ x 19¼ in. (64 x 50 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.153

#### Domestic Furnishings

49. **Fragment of a cover (?) with geometric and interlace decoration**

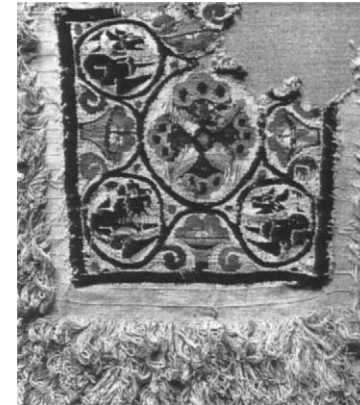
5th century  
Polychrome wool and undyed  
linen, design in tapestry weave  
25½ x 38¼ in. (65 x 97 cm) with  
fringe  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.807

50. **Large cover with trees of life, rabbits, and birds**

4th–5th century  
Undyed linen and polychrome  
wool, design in tapestry weave  
91¼ x 60½ in. (232 x 156 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.902

51. **Large interlace roundel from a domestic textile or tunic**

4th century  
Purple wool and undyed linen,  
tapestry weave  
14⅞ x 13⅞ in. (37 x 35 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.301



Cat. no. 53, detail

52. **Fragment of a cover or blanket with interlace roundel and stripes** (page 25)

4th century  
Undyed linen, weft-loop pile;  
tapestry weave design in purple  
wool and undyed linen  
34½ x 38¼ in. (87.5 x 97 cm)  
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
90.5.899

53. **Fragment of a cover or blanket with square featuring flowers and animals**

5th–6th century  
Undyed linen, weft-loop pile;  
tapestry weave design in poly-  
chrome wool and undyed linen  
19½ x 22½ in. (49.5 x 56 cm)  
Purchase by subscription, 1889  
89.18.123

**54. Rug fragment with mosaic floor pattern** (page 24)  
 4th–5th century  
 Said to be from Antinopolis  
 Polychrome wool, cut weft-loop pile  
 40¼ x 46½ in. (102 x 117 cm)  
 Rogers Fund, 1931  
 31.2.1

#### Islamic Afterword

**55. Roundel with winged horse**  
 (page 40)  
 9th century  
 Polychrome wool and undyed linen, tapestry weave  
 10½ x 7¼ in. (26.7 x 18.4 cm)  
 Rogers Fund, 1974  
 1974.113.7

**56. Tiraz (inscribed textile) fragment with bold Kufic script**  
 9th century  
 Said to be from Fustat  
 Undyed linen and polychrome wool, tapestry weave  
 5 x 18 in. (12.7 x 45.7 cm)  
 Rogers Fund, 1927  
 27.170.79

**57. Band with vegetal ornament**  
 (page 39)  
 7th–8th centuries  
 Undyed linen and polychrome wool, design in tapestry weave  
 20½ x 4¼ in. (52 x 10.8 cm)  
 Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
 90.5.837

**58. Sleeve fragment with band of naturalistic ornamental elements**  
 8th–10th century  
 Undyed linen and polychrome wool, design in tapestry weave  
 7⅞ x 7 in. (20 x 18 cm)  
 Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
 90.5.167

**59. Band with horned quadruped**  
 9th–10th century  
 Undyed linen and red wool, design in tapestry weave  
 9⅞ x 12⅞ in. (25 x 31.5)  
 Gift of George F. Baker, 1890  
 90.5.829

**60. Tiraz (inscribed textile) fragment with animals in roundels**  
 (page 41)  
 8th–9th century  
 Polychrome wool, tapestry weave  
 8 x 12 in. (20.3 x 30.5 cm)  
 Rogers Fund, 1974  
 1974.113.4

**61. Two ends of a shawl with lines of inscriptions** (page 42)  
 9th–10th century  
 Fayum  
 Polychrome wool and undyed linen, design in tapestry weave  
 22¾ x 12½ in. (57.8 x 31.7 cm);  
 23¾ x 12¼ in. (60.3 x 31.1 cm)  
 Gift of George D. Pratt, 1931  
 31.19.13(bottom) and .15(top)



