

It is certainly curious that tapestry work, the technique nearest akin to pure loom work, is not represented at all among the silk fabrics of L.C., while we have from the same site quite a number of fine tapestry fragments executed in wool.¹⁸ This absence of silk tapestry work may be purely accidental, and this is the more probable seeing that a small number of specimens, among them one or two that appear distinctly early in style, are found among the Ch'ien-fo-tung textiles.¹⁹ Or might the suggestion be hazarded that this technique of hand-work on the loom with the needle was an acquisition from the West? That it existed there is attested from very early times by Assyrian reliefs as well as by Greek vases of the sixth century B.C.²⁰

Absence
of silk
tapestry.

Finally among methods of decoration applied to finished textiles we find embroidery on silk illustrated by a number of interesting specimens.²¹ The work is always in chain-stitch and shows the same minute care in its execution that has continued to distinguish Chinese needlework down to our days. The prevalence of more or less naturalistic floral designs is as marked as in the numerous embroidery pieces from the 'Thousand Buddhas' and in those recovered from the T'ang graves of Astāna. This gives to the work of all of them a curiously modern appearance. Akin to embroidery is the decoration of the rich red silk, L.C. 09. a, consisting of small square metal beads sewn on to the fabric. Mention may here be made also of two small silk bags, L.C. iv. 01. a-b, Pl. XLIII, covered with a patchwork of small pieces of different coloured silks forming a geometrical pattern.

Silk em-
broidery.

SECTION V.—THE DECORATIVE DESIGNS OF THE L.C. FABRICS

The material, technique of weave, and methods of decoration in the silk fabrics from L.C., as we have seen, offer points of considerable archaeological interest. But that attaching to the designs found in the figured silks and to the style they reflect is far greater still; for these relics bring before our eyes, often in surprising freshness, specimens of the earliest stage so far known in that glory of China, its decorative textile art—a stage which but for the two or three fragments from the Tun-huang Limes seemed completely lost to us. Better than any comments or analysis Plates XXXIV–XLIII, containing reproductions of selected tissues and of drawings of patterns prepared under Mr. Andrews' care, will show the perfection of design and technical execution reached at that stage. It is such as might well be expected in the original home of silk weaving, and at a period when, according to historical evidence, that ancient Chinese craft already looked back upon a past of many centuries.

Interest of
designs in
figured silks.

The early date of the specimens and the fact that silk production was still at that time a monopoly of China would necessarily prepare us for a style of design distinctly Chinese, such as the great mass of decorated silk fabrics from later phases of the industry in China exhibit. Yet, as Mr. Andrews has justly observed in the introductory remarks of his paper, the first impression derived from a casual examination of these relics might well be 'the absence of general resemblance to anything in textiles with which we are familiar'.¹ Closer investigation of details, however, soon awakens 'recollections of kindred forms used in various materials, and first of all those of the tomb sculptures of the Han period'. It would be an interesting task on the one hand to examine these links with approximately contemporary Chinese sculpture and earlier remains of Chinese plastic art, and on the other to trace the influence of those earlier textile designs upon the patterns of the figured silks of T'ang times which the Shōsōin Collection and the hoard of the 'Thousand

Style of
decorative
designs in
silks.

¹⁸ See below, pp. 241 sq.

¹⁹ Cf. *Serindia*, ii. p. 901; iv. Pl. CVI, CXII.

²⁰ Cf. von Falke, *Seidenweberei*², p. 1.

²¹ See L.C. 032, 33; v. 013; vii. 04, 5.

¹ Cf. Andrews, *Chin. Figured Silks*, p. 4.