

Another specimen is to be found on a perfectly preserved silk cover, about two feet long, intended for a manuscript roll. Its narrow bands of silk tapestry, extremely fine in texture, show a richly and yet delicately tinted pattern which consists of an adaptation of the palmette and connecting scroll and bears an unmistakably Chinese character. As if this artistic manuscript cover had been specially designed to bring home to us a fascinating problem, we find it decorated also with broad bands of thick silk damask showing a pattern of pronounced 'Sassanian' type, winged lions facing each other with curled tails. The difference of styles thus brought into closest juxtaposition by the hand which fashioned the cover, is a most suggestive illustration of the widely distant civilizations that once met at Tun-huang.

The question as to the origin of these silk damasks of 'Sassanian' pattern is as yet difficult to solve. That the designs represented in them are borrowed from Hellenistic art as transplanted to Mesopotamia and thence to Iran, must be considered certain. But are we justified in assuming that the fabrics themselves, showing this close resemblance in style to the 'Coptic' finds in Egypt, were manufactured in, and imported from, the Sassanian dominions in Mesopotamia or Persia? Whatever silk was worked up there and in the Near East, until the first silk-worms were introduced into the Byzantine empire about 550 A.D., must have been brought from China itself—or from Khotan. Can we reasonably assume that silk first travelled all the huge distance to Persia from the 'land of the Seres,' always the most important place of its production, in order to be brought back again in the shape of damask to Tun-huang, on the very border of China? The aggregate journey for caravans would even now amount to at least a year and a half, whereas the distance from the nearest silk-producing provinces of China to Tun-huang could be accomplished easily in less than three months. And the art of silk-weaving must have reached a high standard in China long before Han times, as my finds of fine silk and damask fragments along the Tun-huang *Limes* conclusively prove.