

Relations
between silk
industries of
Near East
and China.

the chapel of the Thousand Buddhas was walled up is abundantly proved by historical evidence. Nor can there be any doubt either that the methods of weaving figured fabrics, of tapestry work and embroidery, were well known and of wide application from very early times both in the East and in the West.¹ But recent researches, largely stimulated by abundant finds of decorated fabrics in Egyptian graves of the late Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, have raised a variety of important questions bearing on the ancient silk industry both of the Near East and of China and on the interchange of art influences from both sides which it had helped to spread.² For the consideration of these questions the value of old and datable textile specimens coming from Central Asia or the Far East is obvious. Taking into account the period to which our Ch'ien-fo-tung textile relics belong, and of which the chronological limit is fixed in at least one direction, as well as the important geographical position occupied by Tun-huang on the Central-Asian high road along which overland trade between the silk-producing regions of China and the West has moved ever since its first opening, it will be clear that a careful study of the decorative designs displayed by our fabrics may well claim wider importance and interest.

Decorated
silk fabrics
reproduced.

To attempt their systematic discussion as a whole would be impossible for me here even if at the present time I had still access to the original materials and were able to consult all the publications which deal with related textile remains preserved in the West and Japan. But fortunately the interest presented by the designs of the Ch'ien-fo-tung fabrics was recognized by Mr. Andrews and myself from the first, and, effectively guided by the expert advice which Professor J. Strzygowski had been kind enough to give me in 1911, we were able to arrange in good time for the preparation of an adequate series of reproductions and drawings illustrating the more characteristic of our textile patterns. Executed with special care under Mr. Andrews' personal direction, these illustrations, embodied in Plate CVI-CXXIII, may be accepted as in all respects trustworthy.³ The designs received special attention also in the detailed notes on individual fabrics which my artist collaborator and Miss Lorimer prepared for the Descriptive List. Besides contributing many of the entries concerning our decorated fabrics from Ch'ien-fo-tung, Miss Lorimer has also offered very valuable help by recording detailed references to certain decorative motifs familiar from 'Sassanian' and other early textile remains of the West, with which some of the designs represented among our fabrics are manifestly connected.

Points of
archaeo-
logical
interest.

It is only with the help of the materials thus secured from two valued collaborators that I can now proceed to examine, firstly the plain differences of style observable in the designs of the Ch'ien-fo-tung fabrics, and secondly the questions which are thereby raised as to their places of production. Brief as my remarks must be, and restricted to points of essential archaeological interest, it will not be possible to avoid making some reference also to the effect which the ancient silk trade carried through Central Asia is likely to have had on the propagation of decorative textile motifs, and to the fresh light which the far older silk fabrics discovered on my third expedition are likely to throw on this question.

¹ Cf. Falke, *Geschichte der Seidenweberei*, i. p. 5; also Migeon, *Les arts du tissu*, pp. 1 sq., 6. For references to other works dealing with the early history of silk-weaving, see Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, p. 583, note 2.

² To Professor J. Strzygowski belongs the merit of having first pointed out with intuitive emphasis the wide extent of the influence which the textile products of Iran and of the regions linked with it in culture and political relations exercised for centuries, first upon the decorative arts of the Hellenistic East, and then upon those of Southern Europe. He also foreshadowed the nexus which future researches were

likely to trace between the 'Sassanian' style of those fabrics and motifs originally derived by Persia from the Far East; cf. *Seidenstoffe aus Aegypten*, in *Jahrbuch der K. Preuss. Kunstsammlungen*, 1903, xxiv. pp. 147 sqq. For the importance of this source of Oriental influence on Byzantine and later Christian art, cf. also Diehl, *Manuel de l'art byzantin*, pp. 255 sqq., and Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, pp. 583 sqq., where full references to other works will be found.

³ The drawings in Pl. CXVI. A, subsequently added in 1917, were produced under my own supervision.