TEXTILES OF CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIA

PRESTEL

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The Silk Road Textile Collection

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Contents

Preface

This sumptuously illustrated book brings together exquisite silk textiles from the Silk Road in China, from the northwestern regions of Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia and Gansu.

Arranged chronologically, they remind us that silk originated in China and flowed westward from Chang'an to Europe along trade routes that are now inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Zhang Qian made his first journey to the west during the early Han dynasty (2nd century BCE), after which the Silk Road network grew and flourished, reaching its peak in the Tang period. Then, and across later centuries, these routes were traversed by diverse peoples: merchants, artisans, soldiers and settlers. Their cultural exchanges are vividly embodied in the textiles of this catalogue.

The first section highlights the weft-faced compound twill silks (samite) of Central Asian style from the Tang dynasty. Woven probably by Sogdians and used by Tuyuhun and Tubo peoples during the High Tang period (late 7th to early 8th centuries CE), some of these textiles have previously undocumented patterns. Though fewer in number, the Kitan silks of the Liao dynasty dazzle with intricacy, their embroideries mirroring artistic dialogues between northern and southern China.

An embroidered mandala of the Xi Xia Kingdom is adorned with donor figures and offers rare testament to the Tangut people's engagement with silk. Mongol- and Yuan-period artefacts spotlight tapestry weave silk (*kesi*) and gold-brocaded textiles, the former reflecting Uighur-Mongol craftsmanship, and the latter embodying traditions of eastern Jurchen and Mongol tribes. Ming- and Qing-period silks, preserved in Tibetan monasteries and used by monastic communities, starkly illustrate the unbroken thread of exchange between central dynasties and frontier regions.

This catalogue benefits immeasurably from contributions by important textile specialists. Although it is regrettable that these textiles, which once traversed the Silk Road, are now collected abroad, we are privileged to have them rigorously studied and authoritatively documented by leading experts in this field.

May these Silk Road treasures continue to be safeguarded, researched, and shared – a legacy as enduring as the threads that bind East and West.

Prof. Feng Zhao
Dean of School of Art and Archaeology, Zhejiang University
Honorary Director of China National Silk Museum

Introduction

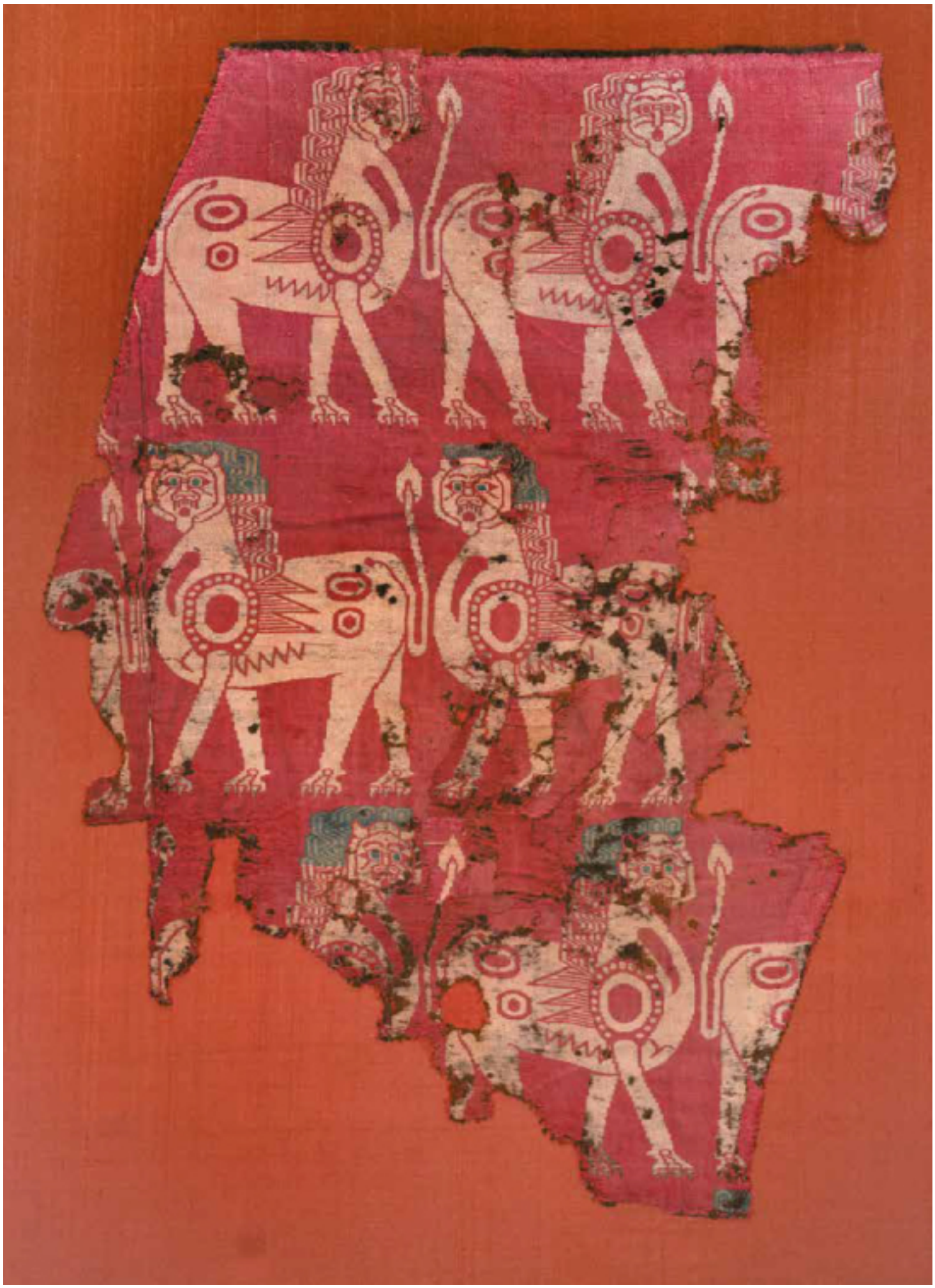
fig. 1

Silk fabrics, made from the thinnest and longest fibres, are greatly admired for their splendour and particular shine. The special beauty of Chinese silks was treasured outside China's borders, and it was in the monasteries of surrounding countries that they largely survived. There they were used in yearly festivals, particularly in Thyangboche in Nepal where the Mani Rimdu festival is celebrated in autumn, at similar festivals in Ladakh, summer festivals in the monastery of Hemis, and winter ceremonial occasions across many other Buddhist monasteries. As part of the festivals, monks perform ritual dances, wearing colourful robes and capes of silk brocades.

On some of the robes, depictions of dragons are surrounded by auspicious symbols. These dragon robes were originally designed and intended for the Chinese court, but then gifted to high-ranking monks and other dignitaries in Tibet. This custom was practised over many centuries by the emperors of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. In Tibet the dragon robes were not used in their original form, but retailored into Tibetan *chuba*s to fit the local style. Other fabulous Chinese silks which were used at the Chinese court as hangings or for other decorative functions, such as stool covers, served in Tibet for the decoration of temples.

fig. 1 Black Hat dance performed at Likir Monastery, Ladakh, January 1980

fig. 2 Textile depicting lions, Central Asia, 7th–8th century. Musée d'Art et d'Archeologie de Cluny



Manuel Cohen/Scala, Florence

fig. 2

The dragon is the dominant feature in many Chinese textiles. In China it is considered to be a benevolent creature and, in particular, it serves as a symbol of imperial authority. The form of the dragon changed over the centuries, a fact that can be used to attribute textiles to specific periods. Dragons are frequently pictured coiling their bodies. Many textiles in these pages show them in their magnificent early forms, exuding power.

Early articulations of dragons appear on silks woven in the tapestry (*kesi*) technique at the time of the Song and Yuan dynasties in the 12th and 13th centuries. Originally conceived as fabrics for costumes for Uighur nobles in Central Asia, they survived as fragments used in Tibet to protect the pages of books between their wooden covers. Some of these rare textiles show a phoenix, in China the emblem of the empress.

During the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–76), most monasteries in Tibet were destroyed, but many valuable artefacts were saved. Tibetans fleeing from persecution took lightweight objects, particularly textiles, with them to their new homes in Nepal and India. Over the centuries, textiles, particularly richly decorated, luxurious silks, have been traded in Central Asia along trade routes which extended in the west to European countries. This was already being documented by historians in Roman times. While no silks have survived in Europe from the Roman era, Central Asian silks produced and traded between the 7th and 9th centuries survived in Western Europe in graves and church treasuries.

A samite found in the Abbey of Cluny, Burgundy, compares well with a samite (no. 21) in this book. It shows animals on a red background, in the same arrangement, with the same anatomical forms, and bearing similar decorations on their bodies.

The Silk Road Textile Collection spans two millennia and an extensive geographical area from western Central Asia to China. It comprises examples of varied, distinct, complex weaving techniques and embroideries. Rather than adhering to a plan or theoretical concept, this collection is unified by the similarity of the aesthetic qualities of the widely differing textiles.

TEXTILES ALONG THE SILK ROAD

Textiles along the Silk Road

Trading around the Taklamakan Desert and beyond

The Silk Road was not a single road, but comprised various routes carrying goods in both directions between the west and east and branching off to other countries. The approach over land from the west nearing China was the section facing most danger, both from bandits and the austere climate, when it was necessary to skirt the great sand desert of the Taklamakan. Groups of traders, travelling together for safety, formed immense camel trains, carrying goods which passed to the north or south of the desert, from oasis to oasis, meeting in the eastern Tarim Basin to travel onwards into China.

Around 2,000 years ago and for another thousand years, the oasis towns of the desert were centres of wealth where local kings exacted levies from traders and merchants bought and sold goods for onward despatch in either direction. Excavations have revealed the extent of some of the riches: kings buried in luxurious imported Chinese silks fashioned into their own regional style of costume, or dressed in woollen garments from western regions or Bactria, designed with western patterns. There was gold to ornament their heads and feet, with beaten plaques and gold beads for necklaces.

They were buried in simple wood coffins with carpets to lie on or to cover their coffins. These were products of oasis towns such as Loulan, Khotan, Niya or Turfan. Famous and thriving carpet centres, these towns catered to all tastes: Hindu figures on carpets from Shanpula near Khotan; lions in the Greek manner with key-fret borders; geometrics and blankets which were exported, sold locally or used as money to purchase land. Their patterns can be seen on walls and cave paintings, manuscripts and excavated textiles today.[1] [2]

Quantities of foreign objects also moved along the Silk Road: silver gilt dishes and bowls from Persia, decorated with real or mythical hunting scenes of Persian royalty; Sasanian and Hellenistic-shaped vessels made in Bactria; Roman-inspired vessels moulded with Roman gods; and much more. Pottery of foreign shapes and designs, glass, gemstones, and carvings of strange animals (unicorns in wood and bronze) were among the goods in transit. Above all else there was silk travelling from China to the great western markets of Asia, or on to Byzantium, or Rome, where the cost of Chinese silk began to decimate the Roman treasury.[3]

For hundreds of years the main traders along the Silk Road were Sogdian. Their country was broadly based in an area to the west of the Taklamakan Desert and centred on Samarkand (in present-day Uzbekistan), and into modern Tajikistan. They were Persian by descent and the country was originally part of the Achaemenid Empire, conquered in 327 BCE by Alexander the Great. Their language was a dialect of Persian, which was to become the *lingua franca* for trade along the Silk Road.

They observed various beliefs: Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity. By the 5th century CE it had become a kingdom of great wealth with its own culture and a sophisticated weaving tradition, and by the 6th and 7th centuries pearl-roundel patterned silks were being traded to Tibet and into China. In the early Tang dynasty (618–907), millions of Sogdians lived in western China; Chinese pottery tomb figures show Sogdian traders mounted on camels, part of the immense caravans travelling round the Taklamakan Desert from the west and into China.

Within China they were rapidly to become sinicised. Leaving behind their origins as traders and caravan leaders, they took on high positions in the army and as civil officials, including controlling positions in Chinese weaving ateliers. In their native Sogdiana they were famous for their archery skills, and the excavated murals from royal palaces show their sophisticated lives, their real or imaginary battles and their myths and legends. Above all they are shown wearing their distinctive dress of three-quarter length coats, frequently of pearl-roundel decorated silk, with contrasting pattens around the neck opening and on their wide cuffs.[4] [5]

1. Kuhn and Zhao Feng 2012, p. 123, no. 3.5; and Zhao Feng and Zhiyong Yu 2000.
2. Zhang He 2019.
3. Watt 2005.
4. Afrasiyab murals, 7th century, Afrasiyab Museum; Penjikent murals of the Rustam Cycle, 6th–7th century, State Hermitage Museum; and Penjikent mural of archers, 6th–8th century, National Museum of Antiquities, Dushanbe.
5. Abegg-Stiftung 1998.

Textiles along the Silk Road

1

Arm guard or bracer for archery

Probably Sogdiana, 6th–8th century
Silk embroidery on a silk foundation. Split stitch, herringbone stitch and plaited lacing
Length: 17.7 cm; circular measure at widest point, excluding lacing: 30 cm

The silk cuff is an exceptional textile from a professional embroidery atelier. Its purpose was to be an arm guard for archery, known as a 'bracer', which would protect the forearm from the bow-string whiplash. An earlier example from the 2nd–3rd centuries was discovered in a grave near Niya, on the south side of the Taklamakan Desert, also made of silk and with simple ties.[1]

The sophisticated decoration is executed in fine, even split stitch in silk threads on a silk ground. The design of a winged horse is bold and assured and has great charm. There are two panels, each with the horse facing away from the wrist and viewed from either side of the arm. Each panel is bordered by a double row of pearl roundels, finished at the corners with three superimposed, embroidered squares. On one side, a lacing system would have allowed the cuff to be adjusted by tightening or loosening the triple cords running the length of one side, yet not allowing it to open entirely. The three cords would have interlaced into loops, where the top of the loop is sewn to one side of the opening and the crossed ends sewn to the other side, so that the wearer's hand could slide into the cuff.[2]

The embroidered style is reminiscent of a textile with boars' heads in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, also worked in split stitch, and the squares at the end of the rows of pearls are similar in style to the embroidery here.[3] The squares and pearls are seen again on a samite weaving of a winged horse within a pearl roundel (see also no. 16).[4]

The original colours are mostly lost, due to fading, and the remaining colours show blue, green and purple (now faded almost to brown), natural white and probably yellow and cream, though these last colours are barely visible. Red is the most fugitive of the vegetable dyes and would undoubtedly have been present. So would a green, which is achieved by mixing yellow and blue dyes together, but becomes bluish in tone as the yellow fades out of the silk.

The winged horses mirror each other in terms of colouring: where one horse is blue in tone and edged with a light colour, the other has a pale coat edged with a slightly darker, perhaps green, colour. The wings on one side are three bands of pale colour and two bands of blue, which are reversed on the other side. The same applies to the scarves which flutter behind the horses.

The scene itself is derived from the Greek myth of Pegasus, the winged horse. He was born from the neck of the snake-haired Medusa, when Perseus slew the monster, and was tamed and ridden by Bellerophon after he made sacrificial offerings requesting help from his father, the god Poseidon. Bellerophon needed the aid of Pegasus to kill the fire-breathing monster Chimera. After this success, Bellerophon believed himself so powerful that he could fly up to the home of the gods on Olympus. The gods were angered, as Bellerophon was half mortal; and he fell to earth. Pegasus, however, was promoted into the heavens, existing even today as a constellation in the skies of Western astronomy.

It is remarkable that a Greek myth should be so perfectly represented, arriving through trade or conquest by Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE). The scene shows the winged Pegasus, a ribbon tied round his tail, and a royal scarf, derived from Sasanian royalty, fluttering behind him. There is a large leafy tree, now very faded, and vegetation beneath his feet. Above is a snake, recalling the snake hair of his mother, Medusa, and from his head springs a leafy branch of crescents and a spiked ornament from his forehead. These last two are unusual, since winged horses are normally shown with a crescent moon on the forehead (see no. 16), sometimes with small circles resting on it, as if representing stars.[5]

One might ponder whether the arm protector was ever made to be used in this world. The example excavated at Niya was worn by a sumptuously dressed figure, who was accompanied only by a simple bow and a group of arrows. It might be the case that the example here was also made to be used in the heavenly hunting grounds of the afterlife.

1. Excavated in 1995 at Niya, Tomb 8, Minfeng, Xinjiang; now in the Urumqi Museum, illustrated in Kuhn and Zhao Feng 2012, p. 123. The silk is woven in five colours with part of the inscription: 'Five Stars rising in the East are auspicious for the Middle Kingdom to attack the Southern Qiang'. The emperor had written in 61 BCE: 'When the Five Stars appear in the East, the Middle Kingdom will have a great victory and the barbarians a great defeat.'
2. Nara National Museum 2008.
3. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.260. Paintings in the Bamiyan Buddhist caves in Afghanistan also show textiles with boar roundels and peacocks. See also *Painting of the Ambassadors*, Afrasiyab west wall mural, Afrasiyab Museum, showing ambassadors wearing costumes with animals, including boars' heads, within pearl roundels.
4. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.255.
5. For Sogdian equestrian figures in Sogdian dress, see Penjikent murals of the Rustam Cycle, 6th–7th century, State Hermitage Museum; and Penjikent mural of archers, 6th–8th century, National Museum of Antiquities, Dushanbe.

CENTRAL ASIAN SAMITES

Central Asian samites

Weft-faced weavings of the 7th–9th centuries

The Silk Road Textile Collection includes rare and exquisite silk, weft-faced weavings created between the 7th and 9th centuries that feature lions, stags, deer, bulls and various birds, primarily enclosed in roundels or medallions. In terms of aesthetics and weaving refinement, they are comparable to textile items held in some of the world's revered institutions, such as the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Qinghai Tibet Culture Museum in Xining, the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou, and the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg. These textiles were produced during the Islamisation of Central Asia and the rise of the Tibetan Empire across and beyond the Tibet-Qinghai plateau, where they might have been acquired and used by local inhabitants.

The exhibition 'Cultural Exchange Along the Silk Road: Masterpieces of the Tubo Period', which ran from July to October 2019 in Dunhuang, Gansu Province, featured similar textiles. Although it was a ground-breaking event that drew scholarly attention to the subject matter, an exhibition catalogue in English has never been published.[1] The exhibition's Chinese-language catalogue is one of the very few publications on similar types of Central Asian, or perhaps Sichuanese, silk weavings.[2]

Comprehensive in its scope, this publication is for a diverse range of readers. It aims to provide a valuable resource for scholars in Asian studies and arts and to foster interest in pre-modern Central Asian textiles and art history among a larger public. Although not all textiles in the Silk Road Textile Collection have been radiocarbon dated, they well exemplify a combination of Sino-Iranian motifs, often categorised as 'Sasanian' or 'Sogdian', that became more popular at the end of the Sasanian period (224–651), when Buddhism was at its peak in Tang China (618–907). Besides textiles with various types of beaded roundel, this collection also includes examples with free-standing animals or animals enclosed in roundels made of small circles, serrated, spiked or lobed borders, or circular framing devices (sometimes composed of animals running in a circle).

Most likely, silk textiles featuring beaded roundels enclosing floral motifs began to be woven around the 5th century; and, a century later, roundels with single animals or animals in pairs appeared. Eventually, by the 8th century, the beaded roundel was also combined or substituted with a particular floral motif that, by then, had become a Buddhist emblem across East Asia.[3] The same floral motif was adapted within early Islamic textile patterns in the West.[4]

The motifs between the roundels also changed over time. Earlier fragments show a crossed-floral motif, as an adaptation of the tree of life was preferred (no. 2). But later examples show a variety of secondary motifs, such as smaller roundels (no. 6), ogives or quatrefoils (no. 17) enclosing animals, complex star motifs (no. 4), or animals with no frames (no. 14). The combination of roundels, animals and secondary motifs was eventually readapted by the Mongols, manifest until the end of the 14th century in complex 'cloth of gold' (generally lampas or brocaded) across Eurasia.

Only one specimen, no. 18, according to carbon-14 analysis, can be dated between 530 and 610 CE.[5] It features rams in pairs, with ribbons at their necks, enclosed in beaded roundels with four square motifs at the four cardinal directions, which recall the Chinese character *hui* 回 (to return). Most of the textiles in the Silk Road Textile Collection might have derived from articles of clothing; possibly they were once parts of

exquisite robes, bestowed upon chiefs and rulers of various groups of people living between Central Asia and the western regions of China. This textile (no. 18), however, appears as a sample, probably created in one of the workshops in the eastern part of the Silk Road, developed from Sasanian weavings such as those discovered in Egypt and also found on Sasanian stuccos.[6]

The bold outline of the pattern and the colour choice resemble a few fragments discovered in Xinjiang. In particular, the four squared motifs are details that appear in early textiles excavated from Astana, which often were Chinese copies of Central Asian textiles sharing a Sasanian repertoire of royal images and motifs. These were produced in Turfan, Xinjiang, which was one of the main production areas in the western regions of China. A comparable long and narrow fragment in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2004.255), possibly from the same area, features identical types of beaded roundel with four square motifs, but enclosing winged horses with the same bold outline.

These early textile types can be counted among those in Central Asian style mentioned in documents discovered in Mogao Cave 17, in Dunhuang, Gansu. Recorded as *Fan jin* 番锦 and *Hu jin* 胡锦, they are measured in 长 *zhang* (pieces/sheets) like those imported from Persia (*Bosi* 波斯). They differ from the *Hanjin* 汉锦 or Chinese textiles (from the central plains), measured in 匹 *pi* (bolts).[7]

Weaving structures

We do not know with certainty when the weft-faced weaving technique was introduced to Central Asia and the western regions of China. Still, early western weft-faced wool examples featuring cherubs, grapes and palmettoes, datable to the beginning of the first millennium CE, were discovered in the Taklamakan Desert.[8] By the 4th century, the Chinese had adapted the technique to silk and begun weaving textiles with Z-spun threads. Eventually, by the 5th century, unspun silk weaving made with reeled silk fibres began to appear, and Iranian motifs, such as winged pedestals, were combined with Chinese characters. Such textiles were generally created as tributes or gifts for foreign people.

But in the 7th century, despite technological advancement, weaving production around the Taklamakan was still limited to specific areas and involved spun silk. The pilgrim-monk Xuanzang (602–664), who travelled to the western regions, recorded that, in Khotan, textiles were made with spun silk, derived from silkworms fed with mulberry leaves and other plants. The strong Buddhist ethos in the area meant that silkworms were not killed; only when they had changed into moths and broken away from the cocoons could silk be reeled.

Eventually, by the 8th century, the Chinese silk, warp-faced weaving or *jin* 锦 disappeared and was entirely substituted by silk, weft-faced compound twill (samite) featuring complex compositions – such as those that characterise the Silk Road Textile Collection. These became the predominant patterned weavings used across Eurasia, and continued to be generally recorded in Chinese documents as *jin* 锦.[9]

Most weft-faced weavings featuring roundels enclosing animals are believed to have been found in East Asia (and stylistically similar pieces have turned up in northern

Caucasus and European churches and treasuries). However, Iran and Central Asia are generally considered to be the original areas of production. A high trade taxation was imposed by the Sasanians, so Sogdians and other Central Asian people produced work similar or identical to Sasanian pieces and traded these to the Chinese, who eventually recorded them as 'Persian textiles' (*Bosi jin* 波斯锦).

But Sichuan (known as *Shuguo* 蜀国) was also one of the main silk centres where, since antiquity, exquisite *Shujin* 蜀锦 had been produced. This is confirmed by the four mini patterning looms excavated in 2013 from a Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE) tomb in Laoguanshan, Chengdu, dated to the second century BCE, that replicate the loom used for weaving warp-faced compounds. More specifically, this loom produced a type of five-colour silk featuring clouds, beasts, Chinese characters and small circles representing the planets.[10] The roundels in the Silk Road Textile Collection featured in no. 9, no. 11 and no. 15 include similar aligned beads in alternating colours like the planets on the five-colour warp-faced weavings.

Chinese sources record Sichuan's importance in reproducing Persian or Central Asian weavings. In particular, in the *Sui Shu* 隋书 (Book of Sui Dynasty), it is mentioned that the emperor of China required an artisan called He Chou 何稠, a descendant of Sogdian ancestors whose grandfather moved to Sichuan in the 6th century, to reproduce a Persian golden weaving.[11] Except for an example of golden weaving dated to the 7th century, excavated from a Tibetan tomb in Dulan, no other coeval examples of weaving with golden threads have so far been discovered in China. At the time, golden motifs were embroidered, stamped or painted. It was not until the 9th–10th centuries that the Chinese began to produce golden brocades.[12]

But the creation of large floral medallions, or *baohua* 宝花 (floral treasure), enclosing animals, is also attributed to Sichuan. These became popular in the 8th century. Dou Shilun, Duke of Lingyang, who also was of Central Asian heritage, oversaw public works in Yizhou (modern-day Chengdu) and witnessed the acquisition and development of 'foreign' patterns in the area. He is regarded as the man who devised the floral medallion enclosing animals.[13] Some textiles in the collection feature floral medallions with defined lobes including running animals, such as the wild ass, which recalls the type depicted among other animals on Tuyuhun-Tibetan coffins from Qinghai. These textile compositions might be further variations of the Duke of Lingyang style and evidence of a unique and innovative taste different from that of the Chinese and Central Asians.

While more information regarding the weaving of the warp-faced compounds has been disclosed thanks to the discovery of the four mini looms in Sichuan, we still have no information regarding the type of loom used for weaving weft-faced textiles. Possibly, they were created on a variation of the traditional Iranian *zilu* loom, which is a large vertical loom still used in Meybod, Yazd province, Iran; it does not include a mechanical patterning system or a reed to divide the warps, and it is often operated by two weavers, working simultaneously on the front and the back.[14] The use of such a loom would explain the different dimensions of the roundels or the single animals in the textile compositions – which were probably created without an equal division of the warp ground – and the various types of binding on the reverse. Or, possibly, they

Central Asian samites

were woven on a version of the later Song tower drawloom, which was also operated by two people: a 'thread-puller' sitting at the top of the loom to control the warps, and a weaver at the bottom weaving the wefts to create the pattern. This type of loom is still in use in Chengdu.[15]

A Turfan document (66TAM61:16a) mentions the presence of bamboo workers among local artisans, who were probably not only experts in the construction of looms but also familiar with the production of *Shujin*.[16] Bamboo for the construction of drawlooms was indeed imported to Turfan from northern Sichuan. It is possible that a drawloom similar to the Iranian *zilu* loom was also acquired in Sichuan before the rise of Tibetans, around the 5th or 6th century. Throughout the 6th century, the Tuyuhun in Qinghai traded large quantities of silk as well as Sichuan and Qinghai horses, Persian mares, camels and yaks. Also, envoys from Kucha, Khotan, Gaochang and Persia used the Tuyuhun roads across Qinghai and Sichuan and along the Yangtze River to reach Jiankang (later renamed Nanjing), the capital of the Southern dynasties (420–589). Eventually, owing to the large number of foreign merchants in Chengdu and the high demand for patterned *Shujin*, the Chinese government established strict purchasing controls in the area.[17]

Regardless of the loom in use, it appears that the weavers deliberately produced weavings with floating wefts on the reverse. In this regard, the textiles in the Silk Road Textile Collection can be divided between those with floating wefts on the reverse and those without.[18] Textiles with floating wefts on the reverse have so far been excavated only in Qinghai, and dated to the 7th or 8th centuries. However, a few examples in the Silk Road Textile Collection stand out for their rare or even unique structures, suggesting weaving technique advancement.

No. 8, which perhaps were cuffs of a robe, feature a sequence of beaded roundels enclosing a pheasant. The dark ground of the roundel is created with floating wefts on the back, which are not randomly woven as one can see on other pieces, but symmetrically pulled out on the compound's reverse to create the beads' central sections. Similarly, no. 11, possibly part of a large hanging, shows a sequence of two large composite roundels made with two types of frame enclosing pairs of confronting pheasants – but only one of the roundels shows floating wefts on the reverse. In this case, the floating wefts were used to systematically weave the ground of the internal frame made with aligned beads, and more randomly for the bodies of the pheasants.

Categorisation and iconography

The specific technical and iconographic features of the weft-faced compound twills in the Silk Road Textile Collection were developed from similar textiles that, for almost seventy years in the West, were erroneously classified as *zandanījī*, which was a cotton textile produced in Zandana, near Bukhara, Sogdiana (present-day Uzbekistan). In 1959, a silk, weft-faced twill featuring roundels enclosing pairs of confronting stags was discovered in the Collegiate Church of Huy in Belgium. The piece contains an inscription identified at the time by Walter B. Henning (1908–1967), a well-known

German scholar of Iranian languages, as an archaic form of Sogdian inscription, which he read as 'Long 61 spans, Zandanīčī…'[19]

The further discovery of many other similar pieces and motifs in European churches and treasuries and worldwide collections led Dorothy G. Shepherd (1916–1992), then curator of textiles at the Cleveland Museum of Art, to distinguish two groups of *zandanījī*: the first (*zandanījī* I) made with triple Z-twisted primary warps, based on the sample from Huy; and the second (*zandanījī* II) made with untwisted or slightly Z-twisted primary warps, based on a sample from the Sens Cathedral, France. The latter recalls the type of roundel and overall composition with a pair of lions seen in no. 3. A third group (*zandanījī* III) was added later by Anna Jerusalimskaja, curator at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Her classification was based not on the weaving features but on the patterns and styles of the weavings, mainly featuring hunting scenes like those that she discovered in Moschevaya Balkha in northern Caucasus.[20]

In 2011, the silk from Huy was radiocarbon dated, and the inscription was reanalysed. The piece turned out to be a 9th-century weaving with an Arabic inscription referring to the value of the textile, which commander ʿAbd al-Raḥmān had acquired for thirty-eight dinars.[21] However, pre-Islamic accounts do not mention any silk *zandanījī*. *Zandanījī* is mentioned in the 10th-century account *The History of Bukhara*, written by al-Narshakī (ca. 286/899–348/960), who recorded that it was a textile, probably made of cotton, produced in Zandana and Vardāna, valued at the same price as 'brocade' (most likely a silk patterned textile), and 'exported to all countries such as Irāq, Fārs, Kirmān, Hindūstan and elsewhere'.[22]

The common and accepted categorisation of such weavings as 'Sasanian' or 'Sogdian' is due to their depictions in the well-known Sasanian rock relief of Taq-e-Bostan in Iran, and in Sogdian wall paintings. However, these textile patterns are also depicted in the Bamiyan Caves in Afghanistan, Buddhist sites in Kizil and Toyuk in Xinjiang, and Dunhuang in Gansu. Many motifs can be attributed to the Iranian cultural sphere, such as the duck with ribbon (called *pativia*), the winged horse, the ram or the lion. They are insignia of the Sasanian Empire, also recognised as *farr* or divine glory, that extended to Central Asia.[23] However, other animals, such as stags, deer, birds or boars' heads, were more likely developed in Central Asian territories under the Hephthalites, Tocharians and Turkic rulers.

Single animals initially depicted in alternate rows, such as in the exquisite and fine no. 16 and no. 21, began to be enclosed in beaded roundels and depicted in pairs. Each animal was at the side of a tree of life on a pedestal, which was initially made as a pair of open wings, then as a curly floral motif, or replaced by two running animals.

Sasanian elements were eventually combined with Chinese floral motifs, leading to an aesthetic synthesis which is reflected in the Silk Road Textile Collection textiles. Unlike the three groups of those erroneously called *zandanījī*, many of the textiles in the collection have unique features that were developed later. Although they present many patterns like those mentioned above, the overall composition of some is much more complex and refined. Besides textiles featuring alternate rows of single animals not