

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2018
Desert Encounters: Arts, Cultures and Kingdoms of the Silk Roads
Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

Textiles Along the Silk Road

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September 28, 2018

PEOPLE AND OTHER IMPORTANT DATES

Chinese Dynasties

Han Dynasty 202BCE-220CE

Sui Dynasty 581-618

Tang Dynasty 618-907

Song Dynasty 960-1279

Liao Dynasty 907-1125

Jin Dynasty 1115-1234

Yuan Dynasty 1271-1368 (part of the Mongol Empire 1206-1368)

Iranian Empires

Achaemenid Empire 550–330 BCE

Parthian Empire 247 BCE–224CE

Sasanian Empire 224–651CE

Turkic people

Uighurs established the Kingdom of Qocho (Turfan) in the 9th cent. It was destroyed by the Mongols in the 14th cent.

Viking Age: ca. 800-1066

Battle of Talas 751: Arabs-Turks army against the Chinese. Talas River, Kyrgyzstan.

An Lushan Rebellion 755-763: led by General An Lushan (of Sogdian or Turkic origin) against the Chinese.

Byzantium began to produce silk in the 6th cent.

MAIN TEXTILE STRUCTURES

The (three basic) **binding systems** from which all the other structures developed are: **tabby**, **twill**, and **satin**.

A **brocaded** textile is a textile with an extra brocading weft that is limited to a specific area of the width without touching the selvages.

Damask or (technically known as) self-patterned compound. A textile usually made in **satin**, with a sequence of one **warp** and one **weft**, which appears around the 12th century. In China a similar type made in tabby or twill was recorded as *qi* 綺 or *ling* 綾 and it is conventionally called “Chinese Damasks.”

Kesi 絨絲 is a Chinese **silk tapestry**, possibly a later development of the Iranian wool **gelim**.

Lampas is a complex patterned textile that can be constructed in tabby, twill, satin, damask, etc. with an extra weft (sometimes floating on the back) bound with a binding warp in tabby or twill structure. The pattern consists of weft effects. It began to appear at the end of the 10th cent. but became very popular during the 13th cent. During the Mongol period, in the East, this structure was especially used to produce the popular “golden cloths” which are recorded as *nasij* or *nashishi* 納石失 and transliterated in Italian sources as *nacchi* or *nachetti*, or simply “*panni tartarici*” (**Tartar cloths**). Among the main types produced there was also the *sadalaqi* that was initiated by the Persian scientist Jam al-Din in 1287 in Kabaliq (modern Beijing).

Tiraz: an Islamic textile generally made as a plain structure with an embroidered, painted, or printed inscription in Arabic (also Persian, etc.). The term was used also to name textile workshops.

A **warp-faced compound** is a ground with complementary warps in series (generally of two) and one weft only.

Ground and pattern are woven simultaneously. Simply known as **jin** 錦 during the Han was produced until the 8th or 9th century.

A **weft-faced compound** is a weft-patterned textile with complementary wefts in series (a main warp, a binding warp, and a weft composed of two or more series of threads). Like in the warp-faced compound, ground and pattern are woven simultaneously but the pattern is visible only on the verso. It was very popular during the Tang and was of two types in tabby, known in the West with the name of **taqueté**, and in twill with the name of **samit(e)**. In Chinese sources are also recorded as “foreign patterned textiles” and “Barbarian textiles.”

Zandanijī. A term generally accepted in the last sixty years to name weft-faced compound twill produced in Central Asia, in particular in Zandan, Uzbekistan.

MAIN PLACES AND TEXTILE ITEMS/ICONOGRAPHY

Sogdian-Turfanese region refers to that area that stretched from Bukhara (Sogdiana, modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) to Turfan (Xinjiang, China) and beyond to Dunhuang (Gansu, China).

Yingyang, Henan Province, and Huzhou, Zhejiang Province: earliest silk fragments.

Pazyryk, Altai Mountains: oldest woven carpet in the world (5th cent. BCE).

Niya and Loulan graveyards, Xinjiang Province: Han textiles.

Temple of Bell, Palmyra, Syria (1st cent. CE): Han fragments.

Yingpan, Xinjiang Province: man (mummy) wearing a caftan with Roman-style cherubs (3rd–4th cent. CE).

Astana cemetery, Xinjiang Province, and the Mogao caves in **Dunhuang,** Gansu Province: many Tang textiles.

Taq-e-Bostan, Iran: Sasanian rock reliefs with textile iconography (7th cent.).

Afrasiab (Sogdiana): Wall paintings in the Hall of Ambassadors (7th cent.).

Moschevaya Balka, Northern Caucasus: textile fragments and clothing from the 7th to the 10th cent.

Dulan, Qinghai Province: Tibetan royal tombs (7th-10th cent.).

Taiyuan, Shanxi Province: Xu Xianxiu tomb, Northern Qi Dynasty (6th cent.).

Chengdu, Sichuan Province, is called “the city of brocade.”

Fondaco dei Turchi (Fondue of Turks), Venice, Italy (13th cent.).

Palatine Chapel, Norman Palace, Palermo, Sicily, Italy (12th cent.). Famous for the wooden *muqarans* (honeycomb) ceiling and its mosaic. It was built in the 12th cent. by Christian, Muslim, and Jewish people.

Beijing also called **Dadu** or **Kambaliq** during the Mongol period.

OTHER TERMS

Solidus/i: Byzantine coins.

Kufic script: a type of Arabic script created in the 7th cent. The quadratic form began to appear around the end of the 14th cent.

Yassa: Mongol secret law.

Arbans: Decimal division system of the army in group of ten created by the Mongols.

Yam: Mongol postal system created on the old **caravanserai**.

‘Phags-pa: quadratic script of the Mongols.

Paizi: Mongol passport.

Boghtaq or Kuku: Mongol female headdress.

Further Readings

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