





Draping, Wrapping, Hanging: Transposing Textile Materiality in the Middle Ages

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Abstract | This volume focuses on the mobile nature of textile patterns in the East and West during the Middle Ages and investigates the question of cultural specificity in the use of textile imitations in a range of media. As coveted objects of trade and diplomatic gift exchange, textiles were widely distributed using the cross-cultural networks between Byzantium, the Islamic world, and East Asia. Within this broader world of medieval textile exchange, the notion of textile patterns that are adapted in architecture, ceramics, metalwork, and manuscripts stands at the center of this volume. Questions to be discussed are the portability of textile patterns, the adaptation of textile motifs in a variety of media, and the appropriation of textile forms and patterns from other cultural contexts. Twenty years ago, Lisa Golombek argued for a 'draped universe of Islam', ascribing to Muslim culture a sensibility particularly attuned to textiles and their patterns. Golombek rightly emphasized the rich textile production of the Islamic world and the use of architectural decoration that refers to woven models. While this argument is certainly convincing, considering the fluidity with which textile patterns appear in other materials and contexts and how textiles evoke monumental decoration, the phenomenon itself is not exclusively Islamic. Rather, it is part of a broader medieval sensibility that is finely attuned to the subtleties of textiles and intrigued by the possibility to move their patterns and texture back and forth between fabrics, walls, and other objects. The topics of articles in this volume of *The Textile Museum Journal* range from representations of jewelry in late antique textiles, silks with bird motifs produced in both Iran and the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to women's clothing in the fourteenth-century Mongol courts of Iran and China.

This volume of *The Textile Museum Journal*, with the title *Draping the Middle Ages*, focuses on the mobile nature of textile patterns in the East and West from the fifth to the fourteenth century CE and investigates the question of cultural specificity in the use of textile imitations in a range of media. As coveted objects that were exchanged through trade and as diplomatic gifts, textiles were widely distributed using the cross-cultural networks between Byzantium, the Islamic world, and East Asia—the regions that are the focus of this volume. Within this world of medieval textile exchange, the notion of textile patterns that were adopted in and adapted to architecture, ceramics, metalwork, and painting are a central idea, together with the fact

that textiles moved, carried along trade routes and as diplomatic gifts.

The question of materiality is central to these studies, although not along the lines of an iconography of materials (*Materialikonologie*) that Thomas Raff analyzes in detail.¹ In the present context, it is not the symbolic significance of specific materials within a broader system of matter and meaning that is to be examined. Rather, the focus of discussion is placed on the ways in which a range of materials—jewels, paint, paper, stone, stucco, to name just a few—are employed in order to emulate other specific media: in the present context, primarily textile. At the same time, these parameters of exchange also imply the broader question of the materiality of textiles in and of



themselves, how textiles work as medium of transfer, and also how similar imagery is treated differently in various workshops in different regions.

Recent studies on medieval art including Western Europe, the Islamic world, Byzantium, Central Asia, and China have increasingly been concerned with questions of materiality, focusing on both technical and symbolic aspects of this topic. A rich literature has developed with regard to miniatures, panel painting, and reliquaries, as well as the attendant goldsmith work.² Materiality in medieval architecture, while a central topic, has been studied with regard to a number of materials, particularly marble, mosaics, and stained glass.³

Textiles, however, have played a relatively marginal role in this discussion, with a few notable exceptions, and only in very recent years have more studies emerged that engage with the materiality of fabric as it relates to other media. Textile pages in Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts have also been studied in detail as they related to fabrics available to the courts of the period.⁴ Questions of the movement of patterns between manuscripts and architecture have also been examined, for instance in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Armenian manuscripts from Cilicia in southeastern Anatolia.⁵ In the case of the Marriage Charter of the Byzantine princess Theophanu and emperor Otto II, dated 972, a connection has been drawn between the textile motifs appearing in its background—roundels in which griffins pounce on lambs, alternating with lions attacking bulls—and the ways in which the textile aspect is rendered in the document (figs. 1, 2a, and 2b).⁶ Strikingly, the gold letters of the text appear to float on the surface of the parchment (fig. 2b), creating an effect not unlike that of gold embroidery attached to silk, and so the simulated textile nature of the document is highlighted. The background evokes purple silk when viewed from afar, yet upon close inspection, blue and red emerge as distinct colors and push forward the materiality of the painted parchment that lies behind the textile pattern.

FIG. 1 (left)
Marriage Charter of
Theophanu, dated 14
April 972. Parchment,
144.5 × 39.5 cm.
Niedersächsisches
Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel,
NLA WO 6 Urk, Nr. 11.
Photograph: Patricia
Blessing, used by permis-
sion of Niedersächsisches
Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel

2 Kessler 2004, pp. 19–44;
Fricke 2012; Kumler and
Lakey 2012; Hahn 2012;

Weinryb 2013; Weinryb 2016.
3 Mitchell 2012; Milwright
2005; Barry 2007.

4 Bücheler 2014; Bücheler
2012; Wagner 2004.
5 Crowe 2010.

6 Cutler and North
2007; Zchomelidse Ms.;
Garrison 2017.



FIG. 2a

Detail from Marriage Charter of Theophanu, dated 14 April 972. Parchment, 144.5 × 39.5 cm. Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel, NLA WO 6 Urk, Nr. 11. Photograph: Patricia Blessing, used by permission of Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel.



FIG. 2b

Detail from Marriage Charter of Theophanu, dated 14 April 972. Parchment, 144.5 × 39.5 cm. Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel, NLA WO 6 Urk, Nr. 11. Photograph: Patricia Blessing, used by permission of Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Wolfenbüttel.

With regard to architecture, however, the study of the role of textiles and the transfer of their motifs has been relatively limited, with the exception of regions such as Iberia and southern Italy.⁷ In these regions, a combination of Islamic influences, trade connections to eastern Mediterranean textile centers and, in the case of Iberia, a strong local textile production centered in the Muslim-ruled al-Andalus brought to the fore a clear engagement with textiles across media, including architecture, but also, for instance, ivory. The overall problem of integrating textiles into the study of architecture is perhaps related to the longstanding separation of the decorative arts—textiles tend to be included among them—from ‘major’ genres including painting, architecture, and sculpture.⁸

Transfer: Trade and Diplomacy

Moveable objects and notions of portability are intrinsically connected to the importance of textiles in the Middle Ages and in later periods that are not covered in this volume. In effect, the functions of textiles are often closely connected to their portability. The latter was, in turn, one of the driving forces behind the transfer of motifs from one region to another. Some of the connections highlighted in the contributions in this volume were the product of such interchange. The inherently portable nature of textiles made for ideal merchandise and diplomatic gifts. After all, fabrics are relatively lightweight and not breakable, unlike, for instance, ceramics that are more difficult to transport on account of both weight and fragility; although large carpets can be surprisingly heavy, this feature certainly did not hamper trade. Thus, the portability of objects and the converging tastes for luxuries among royal courts around the Mediterranean were crucial factors for textiles, if not exclusively since this exchange included a vast range of other object categories considered to be precious.⁹ Trade from Central Asia to the Middle East, and onwards towards the Byzantine Empire and the Western Mediterranean, brought with it ways in which textiles and their painted and carved



renderings were used in funerary and residential contexts: together, not one as the replacement of the other, not painting as a substitute for silk, but as combined layers in complexly decorated spaces. Yet the archaeological record for textiles is at times so limited that representations of fabrics in other, more durable, media—painting, stone, stucco—are the only evidence available for the kinds of textiles that might have been used. Hence, such representations at time tend to take over our imagination, if correctives are not offered to illustrate that textiles and their representations were often used side-by-side, and that the latter were not only cheap substitutes or mere copies of luxury goods that remained out of reach. The most striking textiles in these contexts are often those—at times embroidered, at times woven—with roundel patterns containing a variety of animals (fig. 3) or human figures (fig. 4), produced across Eurasia between the fifth and thirteenth centuries.

Beyond their primary functions as materials for clothing or furnishings, textiles could take on

FIG. 3
Textile with boar's head roundels, silk split-stitch embroidery on plain weave silk, 56 × 48 cm, Iran, Afghanistan, or China, 7th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Sir Joseph Hotung Gift, 2004, inv. no. 2004.260. Image licensed under Creative Commons Zero.

⁷ Caskey 2008; Caskey 2011; Marinetto Sanchez 2012; Bush ms.; Bush 2006; Bush 2018.

⁸ Weigert 2012.

⁹ Grabar 1997; Hoffman 2001; Canepa 2014; Shalem 2016.



FIG. 4

Textile with musicians, lampas with silk and gold thread, 10.3 × 20.8 cm, attributed to Spain, 13th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1928, inv. no. 28.194. Image licensed under Creative Commons Zero.

multiple other roles, for instance as wraps for relics or covers for letters. Such uses, sometimes secondary, are often the reason for the preservation of extant textiles. While we know that textiles were frequently used for clothing—such as royal garments and robes of honor given as favors—we often know little of the clothes themselves. Medieval costume is rare and, for the most part, has only survived in funerary contexts, especially in Europe and China.¹⁰ Rare survivals, such as a seventh- to ninth-century Sogdian silk shirt sold at Sotheby's in London in spring 2018, or a kaftan from eleventh-century Iran in the Sarikhani Collection show how textiles with medallion patterns could be shaped into clothing, and point to the fact that the kinds of pieces often represented in paintings indeed existed.¹¹ Within cultures, including Islam and Judaism, that use shrouds rather than everyday dress to cover the bodies of the deceased before burial, the additional problem emerges that clothing from the medieval and early modern periods is hardly ever recovered in archaeological contexts since graves do not contain them. Thus, the tombs of eleventh- and twelfth-century Muslims excavated in Fustat on the outskirts of Cairo have yielded a great number of fabric lengths used for shrouds, but little information with regard to what people wore.¹²

Within medieval Christian contexts, the preservation of relics was one of the main uses for textiles; they could serve to line reliquary caskets or wrap relics, often in multiple layers.¹³ As techniques of textile conservation have improved, new possibilities of accessing the wrappings of relics (i.e. undoing the wrapping without risking damage to fabric and relic) and studying them have emerged. The recent restoration of the textiles from the twelfth-century shrine of Bishop Godehard (d. 1038) in the conservation workshop of

the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg, Switzerland from 2010 to 2014 is an excellent example of the potential of such projects, and the results are on view in the Dommuseum in Hildesheim.¹⁴ At the same time, textiles themselves could become relics; for example, the so-called Veil of Saint Anne (c. 1094–1101) preserved in the cathedral of Apt, France, is an elaborate late eleventh-century Fatimid linen fabric with additional decoration woven in silk and gold in tapestry weave. The veil was enclosed in a glass reliquary before restoration in the 1930s when it was removed from the tight container.¹⁵ The use of textiles to wrap relics and treasury objects and to sew church vestments has resulted in a large number of textile fragments being preserved in Christian contexts. Textiles from the eastern Mediterranean, made in both Byzantine and Islamic contexts, were frequently used in church treasuries across Europe, part of the larger phenomenon of integrating Islamic pieces into the possessions of churches, often turning them into containers for relics or liturgical objects.¹⁶ Thus, the study of medieval textiles in some regions is greatly skewed, such as Spain. While vestments and clothing have been preserved in church treasuries and in some Christian burials, such as that of bishop Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada (d. 1247)¹⁷ or the royal tombs in the Monastery of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas in Burgos, medieval Islamic costume from al-Andalus is largely unknown.

The textiles used in the wrapping of relics had often traveled as trade goods or diplomatic gifts. Such gifts were the second major factor in the transfer of textiles from one location to another. The diplomatic implications of textiles reached beyond the simple transfer of fabrics to the use of robes of honor bestowed upon ambassadors. Examples abound in

10 For examples from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century royal tombs in the Monastery of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas in Burgos, Spain, see Feliciano 2005. Examples from China and Central Asia are discussed in Eiren Shea's contribution in this volume. On costume as a vehicle of

transfer, see also Flood 2017.

11 Sotheby's 2018; Canby 2016, cat. no. 24.

12 Sokoly 1997.

13 Bagnoli 2014.

14 For a preliminary publication, see Schorta 2010. An overview is also available on: <http://www.dom-hildesheim.de/de/content/der-godehardschrein>, accessed

23 July 2017. Some of the restored textiles from the shrine were shown in the exhibition "Hülle und Zier: Mittelalterliche Textilien im Reliquienkult," Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, Switzerland, 27 April–9 November 2014, see: <http://abegg-stiftung.ch/exhibition/huelle-und-zier/>, accessed 24 July 2017.

15 Mackie 2015, pp. 113–4 and figures 1.18 (veil in flask), 3.30, and 3.30 detail; Elsberg and Guest 1936.

16 Shalem 1996; von Fircks and Schorta 2016.

17 Mantille de los Ríos y Rojas 1995; further on preservation, see: Mackie 2015, pp. 33–34.

the context of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in fraught relationships such as the one between the Ottoman and Mamluk courts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁸ From this point of view, textiles in historical contexts were intrinsically tied to mobility; in addition to textile trade and fabrics sent as diplomatic gifts, we need to consider portable architectures, such as tents.¹⁹ Textiles imbued with religious significance are also crucial; an example is the *kiswa*, the cover for the Ka'ba sent to Mecca on a yearly basis as a gift from Muslim courts bestowed prestige on the giver, which more so than on the holy site it was to adorn, since that site is, of course, the holiest place in Islam in the first place.²⁰

Textile Aesthetic and Ornament

In an article on the uses of textile in the medieval and early modern Islamic world, Lisa Golombek argued for a 'draped universe of Islam', ascribing to Muslim culture a sensibility particularly attuned to textiles and their patterns.²¹ In her discussion of the manifold uses of fabrics, Golombek emphasized the rich textile production of the Islamic world and the use of architectural decoration that refers to woven models.²² Following Golombek, Oleg Grabar suggested that a prevalent textile aesthetic exists in Islamic architecture closely connected to geometric ornament covering large sections of monuments.²³ Both arguments are convincing, considering the fluidity with which textile patterns appear in other materials and contexts, and textiles evoke monumental decoration. Elizabeth Ettinghausen raised the same issue in a study of twelfth- and thirteenth-century

Islamic architecture in Iran and Anatolia, pointing to the relationship between geometric patterns in brick, tile, and stone and an aesthetic interested in draping structures in fabric, rather than specific examples of extant textiles.²⁴ In her recent encyclopedic study of textiles from the Islamic world, Louise Mackie emphasized the textile aesthetic prevalent in Islamic art and observed that references to multiple media are a central part of this concept.²⁵

In her study, Golombek also emphasized the rich textile production of the Islamic world and the use of architectural decoration that refers to woven models. She proposed the concept of a textile aesthetic explicitly in order to move beyond the problematic notion of a *horror vacui*, a concept that Alois Riegl and Josef Strzygowski used as an explanation for overwhelming ornament.²⁶ It is important to note Riegl did not specifically apply the concept of *horror vacui* to Islamic art, but rather to a range of cultures.²⁷ In Strzygowski's work, the concern with ornament as a negative feature appeared as early as 1902 within the 'Orient oder Rom' discussion, and is also part of his work on the carved decoration of the façade of the Umayyad palace of Mshatta, Jordan.²⁸ The stone façade, shipped to Berlin as a gift from the Ottoman sultan to the German emperor in 1903, is preserved in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin. An additional difficulty in prying apart the complex historiographical problem surrounding the use of the term *horror vacui* is that Strzygowski dated the Mshatta façade to the second or third century CE, rather than to the early Islamic period.²⁹

It is important to note that the question of *horror vacui*, for Riegl and Strzygowski, was not

¹⁸ Allsen 1997, pp. 55–6 and 71–98; Muhanna 2010.

¹⁹ Golombek 1988, pp. 31–2; Redford 2012.

²⁰ Golombek 1988, p. 32; Gruber 2014, pp. 244–7.

²¹ Golombek 1988, pp. 25–6.

²² Golombek 1988. Further on the problem of ornament and architecture through a historiographical lens, see Payne 2012.

²³ Grabar 1992. For a recent engagement with issues of

motif transfer and textiles, see Schulz 2016.

²⁴ Ettinghausen 1999.

²⁵ Mackie 2015, pp. 32–3.

²⁶ Golombek 1988, p. 25. While Golombek does not specifically address the issue of *Kunstwollen*, the concept seems implied in her discussion and, albeit cursory, reference to Riegl.

²⁷ Riegl 1893. Pp. 23, 62, 84, 151–2, 160, 241. A further issue to explore at

the historiographical level is the relationship of this argument to *Ornament als Verbrechen* by Adolf Loos, with arguments presented in several lectures beginning in 1909, and first published in French in 1913, contrary to the popular view that the completed essay was published in 1908; see: Tourmikiotis 1994, pp. 23–7 and Long 2009. The first publication of this text in German is Loos 1929.

²⁸ Schödl ms., pp. 227–35 and 280–97.

²⁹ On the rather venomous controversy between Strzygowski, Riegl, and Ernst Herzfeld concerning the date and attribution of the structure, see Leisten 2005.

limited to Islamic art.³⁰ The emphasis on horror vacui in Islamic art is later and, as Golombek noted, appears in Richard Ettinghausen's work.³¹ While Ettinghausen did not cite Riegl or Strzygowski, some of the ideas he proposed are closely connected to these scholars' definition of horror vacui. In fact, Ettinghausen argued that by the ninth century, Muslim craftsmen filled as much space as possible, working with patterns of increasing complexity to leave as little empty surface as possible.³² Ettinghausen attributed this phenomenon in part to a discrepancy between the urban context of the workshops that produced the objects in question, and an empty, hostile hinterland.³³ This argument is problematic in that the hinterland of cities is not necessarily hostile and that urban settlements were not divorced from their surroundings. Still, the historiographical implications of these assumptions surrounding horror vacui are essential in that it took art historians a long time to take ornament as a category of art historical inquiry seriously again, particularly in Islamic art.³⁴ Arguably, this observation has larger implications for the study of textiles, and of textile-based patterns in other materials, because the discussion of ornament is inherently tied to the study of motif transfer.

While the argument of a textile aesthetic in Islamic art can be sustained with a large number of examples from a range of periods and geographies, the phenomenon itself is not exclusively Islamic. Rather, it is part of a broader medieval and early modern sensibility, in which makers and users were finely attuned to the subtleties of textiles and intrigued by the possibility of moving patterns and textures back and forth between fabrics, walls, and other objects. In order to more firmly introduce these notions, we will turn to a few examples from medieval



FIG. 5
Detail of stucco decoration,
Comares Hall, Alhambra,
Granada, c. 1335–1345.
Photograph: Patricia Blessing.

Iberia, where a strong engagement with textile motifs appears in monuments and objects created under Jewish, Muslim, and Christian patronage. Late thirteenth-century stucco decoration in the cloister of the monastery of Santa Maria la Real de las Huelgas in Burgos in northern Spain, founded in 1187, at first sight evokes contemporary fabrics from Islamic al-Andalus and similar textiles imported from the eastern Mediterranean, yet the variations displayed in each field reach beyond the possibilities of the looms that facilitated complex-weave structures these textiles had, where repetition is a condition of the pattern.³⁵ The presence of textiles in the tombs of the royal family of Castile at the site connects this element of architectural decoration to the question of costume, and to the larger issue of space and textile and, by extension, textile spaces.³⁶ Similarly, the phenomenon of a textile aesthetic appears in the fourteenth-century palaces of the city's Nasrid rulers at the Alhambra in Granada, where Olga Bush, Purificación Marinetto Sánchez, and Cynthia Robinson have discussed textile motives in stucco and woodcarving.³⁷ The stucco wall decoration of the Comares Hall (c. 1335–45) evokes a textile draped along the walls of the building (fig. 5). Textiles with

30 Discussing Strzygowski, Golombek cites *Asiens bildende Kunst in Stichproben, ihr Wesen und ihre Entwicklung* (Augsburg: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag GmbH, 1930). This book is a general survey that draws heavily on Strzygowski's, at that point,

30-year-long career as a scholar and reuses many of his earlier ideas. The idea that Greek art is superior to "oriental" (not exclusively Islamic) art because ornament is too heavily used in the latter category appears in Strzygowski's work in the early 1900s, see:

Schödl ms., pp. 281–7.

31 Golombek 1988, p. 25 referring to Ettinghausen 1979.

32 Ettinghausen 1979, p. 16.

33 Ettinghausen 1979, pp. 18–9.

34 Payne and Necipoğlu 2016.

35 Palomo Fernandez and Ruiz Souza 2007; Blessing n.d.

36 Feliciano 2005.

37 Bush ms.; Bush 2018; Marinetto Sánchez 2012; Robinson 2011. Overview of the site in Grabar 1978.

FIG. 6
Curtain fragment, possibly from the Alhambra Palace, mid-1300s, Spain, Granada, Nasrid period, silk, gilt-metal thread; lampas weave, 48.30 × 25.40 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1939.35. Photograph © The Cleveland Museum of Art.





similar visual properties exist and could have been used within the building to further blur the boundaries between wall and fabric (fig. 6). Additionally, textiles exist that are closely associated with the site in their patterns and dates, but not archaeological context.³⁸ These include large format pieces that may have been used within the building to further blur the boundaries between wall and fabric and smaller fragments of textiles with bands of poetry that correspond to the poetic inscriptions of the Alhambra.³⁹ These textiles tie into the same discourse of beauty and amazement—*‘ajab* in Arabic—as the architecture, notions that are strongly evoked not only at the literary but also at the visual level.⁴⁰

Other examples include cartouches with the motto of the Nasrid rulers, “[There is] no victory but God” (*lā ghāliba illā allāh* in Arabic) woven in gold thread (fig. 7) in the same cursive script used to render the phrase in stucco decoration throughout the Alhambra (fig. 8).⁴¹ The textile aesthetic employed within the Alhambra was not an isolated case. Similar examples exist in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Mudéjar architecture. Examples include the Halevi Synagogue in Toledo, completed in 1356, and the Capilla de Villaviciosa in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, added soon after the city fell to the crown of Castile in 1236.⁴² These are only a few examples that display the intricate relationship between textiles

FIG. 7 (above)
Silk lampas fragment with Nasrid motto woven in gold thread on dark blue ground, Granada, 14th century, 6.5 × 46 cm, The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv. no. 881A-1892. Photograph © The Victoria & Albert Museum.

FIG. 8 (below)
Detail of stucco with Nasrid motto, “lā ghāliba illā ‘llāh—there is no victor but God,” Comares Hall, Alhambra, Granada, c. 1335–45. Photograph: Patricia Blessing.



³⁸ Mackie 2015, pp. 192–203.

³⁹ Mackie 2015, pp. 204–5; further examples: London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. no. 830-1894, see

Rosser-Owen 2014; The Textile Museum, Washington, DC, inv. No. 84.29, <https://museum.gwu.edu/digital-catalog-unravel->

[ing-identity](https://museum.gwu.edu/digital-catalog-unravel-), pp. 30–1, fig. 7.

⁴⁰ Mottahedeh 1997; Sumi 2004.

⁴¹ London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no.

881-1892; Madrid, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan.

⁴² Dodds 1992, pp. 124–8; Ecker 2003.



FIG. 9
Left door from narthex into naos, with curtain hooks at top, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532–537. Photograph: Patricia Blessing.

and their imitations in the Middle Ages. While it is important to understand the relationship between textiles and other materials in a fresh light, María Judith Feliciano has emphasized the need for new approaches to textiles in general, using the case of Spain as an example.⁴³

Textile Spaces

In addition to critical reflections on the directions of movement, interchange, and adaption in various media, scholars have begun to rethink broadly the relationship between textiles and interior spaces. Such approaches are crucial in the study

of cross-media uses and combinations of materials in the Middle Ages, and to understand the meanings of textile furnishings, wall ornament, and moveable architectures such as tents or canopies.⁴⁴ The term “textile spatiality” that Tristan Weddigen suggests in order to take into account the prevalence of textiles in medieval and early modern interiors is central in this regard, and points to the essential value of understanding textiles both *in* space and *as* space.⁴⁵ Questions of materiality emerge as the tactile nature of the fabrics is translated onto the walls and a space is created that invites touch, although the latter often remains elusive. Thus, both tactile and haptic spaces remain closely tied to vision.⁴⁶ In many cases, true haptic spaces emerge in that touch is invited, but not possible, and hence remains in the realm of the metaphorical.⁴⁷

Oftentimes, medieval and early modern spaces imply the use of textiles together with patterns that imitate them and assume a complex relationship between the materials. Hence, space is thoroughly transformed once the presence of textiles is acknowledged. This is generally true for a study of interior spaces, which considers furnishings—not an easy task, since these are rarely preserved, but one that may be undertaken with painstaking archaeological observations. An example is the presence of curtain hooks (figs. 9 and 10) in the sixth-century imperial church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. While studies of the Hagia Sophia’s architecture, mosaic decoration, and seas of marble abound, the monument’s ephemeral elements of decoration, particularly those of a textile nature and including curtains, have been noted only in rare cases.⁴⁸ Yet the awareness shown in these studies of details such as curtain hooks that point to textile furnishings that have not been preserved is a crucial element in understanding the presence of fabrics in medieval and early modern spaces. At the same time, archaeological evidence for textile furnishings that could

⁴³ Feliciano 2014.

⁴⁴ Introduction and bibliography in Reineke 2017.

⁴⁵ Weddigen 2014. For related discussions, see also

Weddigen 2017.

⁴⁶ Pallasmaa 2005, pp. 30–5; Paterson 2007, pp. 85–7.

⁴⁷ Paterson 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁸ A hook of unknown

provenance can be seen in Maguire 1989, cat. 3, p. 50, with references to the hooks in situ in Hagia Sophia, and further bibliography.



FIG. 10 (above right)
Detail of central door
leading from narthex into
naos, with curtain hooks
in upper right-hand corner,
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul,
532–537. Photograph:
Patricia Blessing

be part of such spaces has also been increasingly studied.⁴⁹ In an effort to further an understanding of medieval and Renaissance interiors in Europe beyond the limits of archaeological evidence and extant objects, Eva Oledzka turns to book illuminations to examine ways in which textiles were represented, and how some of these images could be reflections of actual use.⁵⁰ These studies highlight the importance of bringing together the study of areas that are often kept separate within art history: architecture and textile, book painting and archaeology, textiles and wall-painting, reliquaries and domestic spaces, among others.

Overview of contributions

The topics of articles in this volume of *The Textile Museum Journal* range from the woven imitation of jewelry in late antique Egypt to costume history in the Mongol Empire, and to eleventh- to thirteenth-century silks with bird motifs in Iran, Spain, and the Byzantine Empire. Authors' fields of expertise complement each other to cover a wide chronological range from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries, and to include a variety of materials that will allow for a discussion of medium and materiality with textile as a central component. Contributors in this volume address the issue of studying textiles at the levels

⁴⁹ De Moor, Fluck, and Martinssen-von Falck 2009.

⁵⁰ Oledzka 2016.

of conservation, materials, and archaeology along with questions of transfers between materials and regions. While there is no exclusive focus on Islamic art and architecture, the concept of a textile aesthetic is nevertheless relevant because it allows scholars to assume a central place for textiles. This shift is in line with the development of scholarship in art history that has, over the past two decades, expanded to discuss textiles more broadly beyond the confines of excellent and essential studies by textile specialists, many of whom are affiliated with museums that house major textile collections, such as the Cleveland Museum of Art or the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg, Switzerland. While the focus of this volume is on the period between c. 400 and 1400 CE, and on a geographic area spanning from the Mediterranean to China across Eurasia, it is clear that the study of textiles within trans-cultural context can reach much further both chronologically and geographically. As these studies have shown, and as the contributions in this volume illustrate further, the direction of movement between media is not always one-sided and not necessarily straightforward to determine.

In her study of the relationship between textile and jewelry in the late antique Mediterranean, Elizabeth Dospěl Williams points out that woven jewels were not simply a cheap imitation of the actual goldsmith's work. Rather, Williams argues, the ways in which jewels were reproduced in tapestry weave, a technique that allows for rich chromatic nuance and texture, suggest a conscious engagement with medium and process. Along these lines, the presence of jewel motifs in architecture is a further step to be considered, in a relationship between textiles, jewels, and monumental decoration that is in no way uniliteral. As Williams points out, the engagement with medium and process that many of the productions discussed here have in common are still relevant for contemporary designers. Along this line of thinking is the notion that textiles have become something

banal in the present day when textiles are seemingly available anywhere, and cheaply. Of course, the kinds of high-quality fabrics produced by firms such as Fortuny in Venice are a different matter entirely.⁵¹

In her contribution, Eiren L. Shea focuses on elite women's costume in the Ilkhanid and Yuan dynasties, the branches of the Mongol Empire in present-day Iran and China, respectively. While only few elements of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century costume have been preserved, including rare examples of headdress, Shea makes a case for the relevance of contemporary depictions of court scenes as sources for both the types of costume that were worn and the exchange of textiles across the Mongol Empire. In the case of Mongol women's costume in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as Shea shows, painted representations and archaeological evidence converge and together offer correctives to primary sources that are, nevertheless, instructive with regard to the ways such clothing could be worn and at what occasions.

In focusing on a group of silks with bird motifs from Iran, Byzantium, and Europe, created in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, Meredyth Lynn Winter examines how a common artistic language could emerge due to the transfer of textiles that allowed for shared vocabularies among textile designers and weavers who worked in varying environments. Closely examining weaving techniques, Winter examines the relationship between weavers' technical skills, color, and patterns of medieval silks, and relates those observations to the results of stylistic features, colors, and motifs.

Seen together, these three studies offer a nuanced picture of the ways in which textiles could be used, imitated, alluded to, and transported in a geographical space stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to China. Chronologically, similar phenomena could also be observed in antiquity, or into the early modern period, beyond the periods covered here. With regard to the ubiquitous presence of textiles,

⁵¹ See: <http://fortuny.com/venice/product-category/fabrics/>, accessed 29 August 2017.

the following three studies tell stories that differ in another, fundamental aspect from the contemporary experience. While in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages textiles were often expensive and hard to come by, they were nevertheless omnipresent due to their varied use. Not only as clothing, window coverings, and carpets—things that most present-day readers probably own—but also as wall-hangings, curtains for doorways and niches, decorative accents for architecture, covers and wraps for relics and other precious objects, diplomatic gifts and marks of honor; textiles took on multiple roles, often simultaneously. In all three articles, the question of transfer plays a central role and, as the reader will see, both geographical distances and those between different materials will be discussed from various angles. Hence, the authors provide ways to think about matters of transfer, medium, process, ornament, and use grounded in specific case studies, creating models to be taken on in further research.

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