



FRONTISPIECE

PANEL FROM THE WILTON DIPTYCH, NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON.

SILK WEAVES OF LUCCA AND VENICE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

By

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EARLY Italian weaves are conventionally assigned to Lucca or to Venice. The principles, however, on which these attributions are based have never been clearly defined, and therefore the foundations are lacking for a safe distinction between "Lucchese" and Venetian weaves. It is true that in the earliest period of Italian silks Lucca is mentioned more frequently in documents than either Venice or Genoa, the third city of great importance in the trade and manufacture of Italian weaves, according to the records. Unfortunately, it is only in very rare instances that we can connect the description in a literary source of a Lucchese weave with one of the silk fragments preserved in our collections. Thus a "diasper" of Lucchese origin, amply described in an inventory dated 1295, of St. Peter's, Rome,¹ could be identified by Falke² with a fragment in the Victoria and Albert Museum. But this fragment reproduces a pattern of Byzantine origin, of a type transmitted to Italy through the intervention of the Arabs in Spain and Sicily. This pattern differs widely from the vast majority of silks which Falke and others describe as Lucchese not on the basis of documents but because they are technically "diaspers" like the one identified by Falke. Now documents mention diaspers from Antioch and Cyprus, and therefore this technical term, the meaning of which is by no means unmistakably clear, does not help to distinguish Lucchese weaves from others. Falke believes that until the middle of the 14th century, when Venice began to attain importance, Lucca dominated the field completely. This thesis is too simple to be historically sound or credible; besides, it utterly disregards the consideration that Genoa also must have played an important part in the early evolution. If we add to these reflections the fact³ that early in the 14th

⁽¹⁾ Moriz Dreger: *Kuenstlerische Entwicklung der Weberei und Stickerei*, p. 147.

⁽²⁾ Otto von Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, ed. 1921, p. 28 and fig. 221.

⁽³⁾ Muratori, *Rerum ital. scriptores*, t.XI, col. 1320.

century Lucchese weavers emigrated in numbers to Venice, Florence, Milan, and Bologna, it will easily be understood that insurmountable difficulties seem to stand in the way of any effort to attribute certain patterns to Lucca.

There might, however, be a way out of these difficulties. If it could be shown that patterns similar to those ascribed to Lucca by Falke occur frequently in the painting and sculpture of this region, it would certainly be strong argument in favor of Falke's attributions. Lucca itself had lost importance in both fields since the completion of its cathedral around 1250; we must therefore look to Pisa, Florence, and Siena for comparative material. The result is completely negative. Instead of the loosely arranged, unframed pairs of animals—such as peacocks and gazelles—which Falke considers typical of Lucchese weaves, we find an overwhelming preponderance of severe Byzantine patterns, similar to the fragment in the Victoria and Albert Museum. An example of this Byzantine influence is the marble pavement of S. Miniato, Florence, dated 1207.⁴ It is derived from Byzantine textiles, such as one illustrated by Falke (see Falke, Fig. 194), and shows a peculiarity rarely found in Italian silks—a pattern of circles filled with birds facing each other, instead of looking in the opposite direction. Somewhat similar is an Italian fragment of uncertain origin in Braunschweig (Fig. 1A), which in turn recalls the pattern on the state robes of the Grand Duke Apokaukos (Fig. 1B) reproduced in a portrait of that prince in an illuminated Byzantine manuscript at Paris.⁵ Here, for once, we have an opportunity to admire not a small fragment but the gorgeous effect of a complete suit of Byzantine state robes. The name given to these Byzantine silks in contemporary sources, *basilicia*, or *pannus imperialis*,⁶ denotes the political implication. Western princes who strove to imitate the splendor of the older and more legitimate empire of Byzantium had to follow the style of the Eastern emperor in their apparel. The rising conflict between this politically inspired conventionalism and the new forms of Western art can be seen in the tomb statue of the Emperor Henry VII, carved in 1315 by Tino di Camaino, in the Cathedral of Pisa (Fig. 2). In imitation of the *panni imperiales*, the pattern on the emperor's garments shows animals enclosed within circles; but these animals are the lion of the House of Luxemburg on the dress, the imperial eagle on the cloak.⁷

⁽⁴⁾ Illustrated in Falke, No. 211.

⁽⁵⁾ Bibl. Nat. Gr. 2144, reproduced by Jean Ebersolt, *La Miniature Byzantine*, pl. LVIII.

⁽⁶⁾ cfr. Francisque-Michel, *Recherches sur le commerce . . . des étoffes de soie*, Paris 1852, I, 354.

⁽⁷⁾ See Péleo Bacci, "Monumenti Danteschi" in *Rassegna d'Arte*, VIII, p. 73.



FIG. 1A
ITALIAN SILK IN BRAUNSCHWEIG, XIII CENTURY
(SEE FALKE, FIG. 242).



FIG. 1B
PORTRAIT OF THE GRAND DUKE APOKAUKOS.
FROM AN ILLUMINATED BYZANTINE
MANUSCRIPT IN PARIS.



FIG. 2
DETAIL FROM THE TOMB STATUE OF EMPEROR HENRY VII, CARVED IN
1315 BY TINO DI CAMAINO, CATHEDRAL OF PISA.

Both are decidedly Gothic in appearance, and for this reason the silks cannot have been imported from the East. Nevertheless, even at this late date the resemblance of these designs to their Byzantine originals is undoubtedly stronger than to any of the contemporary weaves supposed to have been manufactured in nearby Lucca.

In Constantinople itself at this time animal patterns were probably going out of fashion. The geometric type of Byzantine silks, which appears, *e.g.*, in the portrait of Nikephoros III Botaniates (1078-81)⁸ (Fig. 3A), is used by the painters of Siena to enhance the majesty of the Virgin and the Saints. We find such designs both in Duccio's and Simone Martini's *Maestà* (Fig. 3B). Again no trace of Lucchese patterns. Another even more interesting influence can be seen in the dress of the angel in Simone Martini's Annunciation (Fig. 4A), where the design of loosely distributed boughs and flowers has a distinctly Chinese touch. Thirty years before Simone painted his Annunciation, Pope Boniface VIII was buried in St. Peter's in raiments partly of Chinese fabric. A fragment of these, similar in design to Simone Martini's, is in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 4B).

At Florence, about the middle of the 14th century, in painted fabrics, particularly in the work of Orcagna (Fig. 5A), are found wreaths of "thorn-leaves"—a floral design of typically French Gothic origin. Thorn leaves also occur in one of the finest of Italian silks of that period, with fantastic animals of Chinese influence (Fig. 5B) (Falke, Fig. 415, attributed to Lucca). Otherwise there is no connection, nor can the Lucchese origin of the weave be proved. The same is true of the precious fabrics depicted on the Wilton diptych (National Gallery, London), in which an undoubtedly French master represents Richard II of England kneeling before the Virgin (Fig. 6). The King's cloak shows the design of a hind within a circle; this, like the design on the Emperor's tomb at Pisa eighty years before, is an adaptation to modern requirements of the *pannus imperialis*. The hind, which appears in larger scale on the reverse, was the King's personal emblem. We know that as late as the 15th century Lucca still produced *drap d'or impérial de Lucques*⁹ and also that French trade relations with Lucca seem to have been closer than with any other Italian city¹⁰ during the 14th century; it is therefore possible, though it cannot be proved, that Richard II had his royal robe woven at Lucca. On

⁽⁸⁾ In the *Homelies of St. John Chrysostomos*, Paris, Bibl. Nat. Coislin 79, reproduced in Ebersolt, l.c. pl. XXXII.

⁽⁹⁾ Francisque-Michel, l.c. I, 358.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Dreger, l.c. p. 147.



FIG. 3A
PORTRAIT OF NIKEPHOROS III BOTANIATES (1078-81).



FIG. 3B
"MAESTÀ" BY SIMONE MARTINI, 1315,
PALAZZO PUBBLICO, SIENA.



FIG. 4A
DETAIL OF ANGEL FROM THE "ANNUNCIATION" BY SIMONE MARTINI, 1333,
UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE.

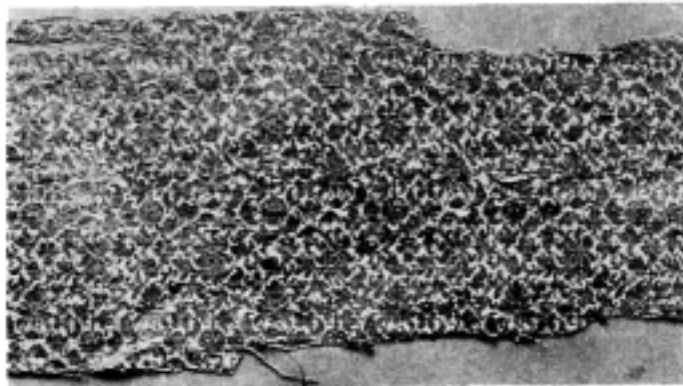


FIG. 4B
FRAGMENT OF CHINESE SILK FROM THE TOMB OF BONIFACE VIII, 1303,
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK.



FIG. 5A
DETAIL FROM ALTAR-PIECE BY ANDREA ORCAGNA, 1357,
SANTA MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE.

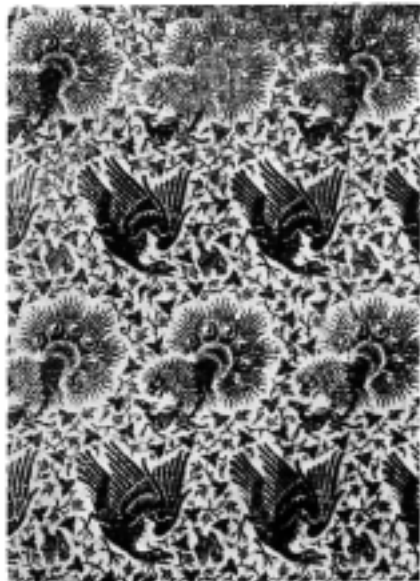


FIG. 5B
ITALIAN SILK, XIV CENTURY
(FALKE, FIG. 415).



FIG. 6
DETAIL FROM THE WILTON DIPTYCH, NATIONAL GALLERY,
LONDON.



FIG. 7
DAMASK AT STRALSUND, ITALIAN, XIV CENTURY.

the dress of Edward the Confessor (frontispiece), one of the saints standing behind the King, is found a design of symmetrical birds approximately corresponding to a damask at Stralsund¹¹ (Fig. 7), which is considered to be Lucchese, and perhaps may be so in view of the possibly analogous case of the King's cloak. Thus, strangely enough, a Lucchese origin could be proved for none of the fabrics represented in Tuscan art, while there is at least some probability of such an origin in the case of a picture painted by a French master for the King of England. Would this indicate that these precious fabrics were ordered more frequently from abroad? However that may be, in the course of the 15th century Venice seems to have beaten Lucchese competition not only in Italy but even abroad, if we can trust the extremely scanty documentary material. Behind the throne of a charming French Virgin in the Louvre¹² which dates from the early 15th century (Fig. 8A) there is a curtain showing a design almost identical with a brocade (Fig. 8B) reproduced in Flemming's *Encyclopaedia of Textiles*.¹³ This is supposed to be Venetian, which is not unlikely because similar palmettes are found later in the 15th century on weaves of undoubtedly Venetian origin. By that time Venetian fabrics are represented in paintings done at places as distant as Florence (Giovanni del Biondo, Vatican Gallery); and the Marches, where Ottaviano Nelli in his Madonna at Gubbio (Fig. 9A) comes close to the combination of Gothic and Persian elements, found in a Venetian brocade (Fig. 9B) of the Berlin Schlossmuseum.¹⁴ Even more interesting than this is a detail in the same painter's frescoes in the Palazzo Trinci at Foligno (1422), where a genuine Persian design¹⁵ is used in the scene of the Death of the Virgin (Figs. 10A, 10B).

Designs adapted from West Islamic weaves appear at an early date in and near Venice (Fig. 11A). Thus in Guariento's Madonna at Padua (Fig. 11B), an even freer version is seen in the mysterious and beautiful portrait of a lady, sometimes attributed to Pisanello, but more probably French, which came from the Mackay collection to the National Gallery, Washington (Fig. 11C).

The importance of Pisanello himself can hardly be overemphasized. He is as great an innovator in the field of textiles as he is in painting or in

⁽¹¹⁾ *Encyclopaedia of Textiles*, published by E. Weyhe 1927, pl. 73, 2.

⁽¹²⁾ Lemoisne, *Gothic Painting in France*, pl. 28.

⁽¹³⁾ Published by E. Weyhe, New York, 1927, pl. 57, 3.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Encyclopaedia of Textiles*, pl. 63.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Musées Royaux des Arts décoratifs de Bruxelles, *Catalogue d'Étoffes*, p. 85. Recent attributions to Spain of this brocade seem less convincing.



FIG. 8A
VIRGIN AND CHILD, FRENCH, ca 1400,
LOUVRE, PARIS.



FIG. 8B
BROCADE, VENETIAN (?), EARLY XV CENTURY,
KUNSTGEWERBE MUSEUM, COLOGNE.



FIG. 9A
MADONNA AND CHILD BY OTTAVIANO NELI, GUBBIO.



FIG. 9B
BROCADE, VENETIAN, XIV-XV CENTURY, KUNSTGEWERBE MUSEUM, BERLIN.



FIG. 10A
DEATH OF THE VIRGIN BY OTTAVIANO NELLI, 1422,
PALAZZO TRINCI, FOLIGNO.



FIG. 10B
BROCADE, PERSIAN, XIV-XV CENTURY,
MUSÉES ROYAUX DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS,
BRUSSELS.



FIG. I I A
SILK FABRIC OF WEST ISLAMIC DESIGN,
XIV-XV CENTURY (FALKE, FIG. 307).



FIG. I I B
MADONNA AND CHILD BY GUARIENTO, CIVIC MUSEUM, PADUA.



FIG. 11C
PORTRAIT ATTRIBUTED TO PISANELLO, NATIONAL GALLERY,
WASHINGTON.

the medallist's art. One of his numerous drawings of textile patterns intended to be used as a model by the weaver ¹⁶ shows a typically Venetian design emerging from its Oriental prototypes (Fig. 12A); the still characteristically Persian flower has the tips of its leaves curled in the manner that was adopted by Venetian weavers (Fig. 12B) and that reappears in the background patterns of so many Venetian paintings, *e.g.*, Michele Giambono's *Madonna and Child in the Hertz collection* (Fig. 12C). In this and similar designs Pisanello initiates the three-dimensional tendency that is so noticeable in Venetian fabrics of this period, particularly in certain pomegranate patterns (Fig. 12D). There we also find the naturalistic stem of a tree, likewise taken over from Pisanello. Both motifs are combined in a manner almost identical with the fabric last mentioned in the gorgeous robe worn by one of the Kings in Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* (Fig. 13A). In the dress of the beautiful young King in the same painting the pattern is developed in long drawn-out tendrils; again Pisanello has set the type for this design in his numerous fashion studies (Fig. 13B).

The rôle of the Bellinis, father and sons, is not nearly so important as Pisanello's. Jacopo's sketchbook in the Louvre contains several designs for textiles (Fig. 14A), but they are variations of West Islamic patterns lacking the inventive genius of Pisanello (Fig. 14B). Gentile, in his portrait of a Doge (Fig. 15), uses the patterns with curling leaves and naturalistic detail just described as typically Venetian (see Falke, Fig. 437); later, during his stay in Constantinople, he reproduces very faithfully the exotic splendor of Turkish velvets and brocades in his portraits of Mahomet II (National Gallery, London), and of a Turkish prince, in Boston (Gardner Museum) (Fig. 16). Thereafter reproductions of textiles in Venetian paintings begin to lose their local color; inroads are made not only by Oriental "originals" but, more surprisingly still, by the increasing importance of patterns produced at Florence. In an altar-piece by Carlo Crivelli, painted in 1487 (now in Berlin), the elaborate pattern on the cloak of one of the saints reveals its Florentine origin not only by the use of the fleur-de-lys, the heraldic symbol of that city (Fig. 17), but, what is more important, the pattern shows the ornament "alla grottesca" developed in Florence. Thus the triumphal entry of the Renaissance closes this chapter in the history of Venetian Gothic weaves.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Falke, pl. 449.



FIG. 12A
DRAWING FOR A TEXTILE PATTERN
BY PISANELLO.



FIG. 12C
MADONNA AND CHILD BY MICHELE GIAMBONO,
HERTZ COLLECTION, ROME.



FIG. 12B
VELVET, VENETIAN, KUNSTGEWERBE
MUSEUM, BERLIN.



FIG. 12D
POMEGRANATE VELVET, VENETIAN,
SIMONETTI COLLECTION, ROME.



FIG. 13A

DETAIL FROM THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI BY
GENTILE DA FABRIANO, 1424, UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE.



FIG. 13B
FASHION STUDIES BY PISANELLO.



FIG. 14B
FROM A DESIGN BY JACOPO
BELLINI, KUNSTGEWERBE
MUSEUM, BERLIN.



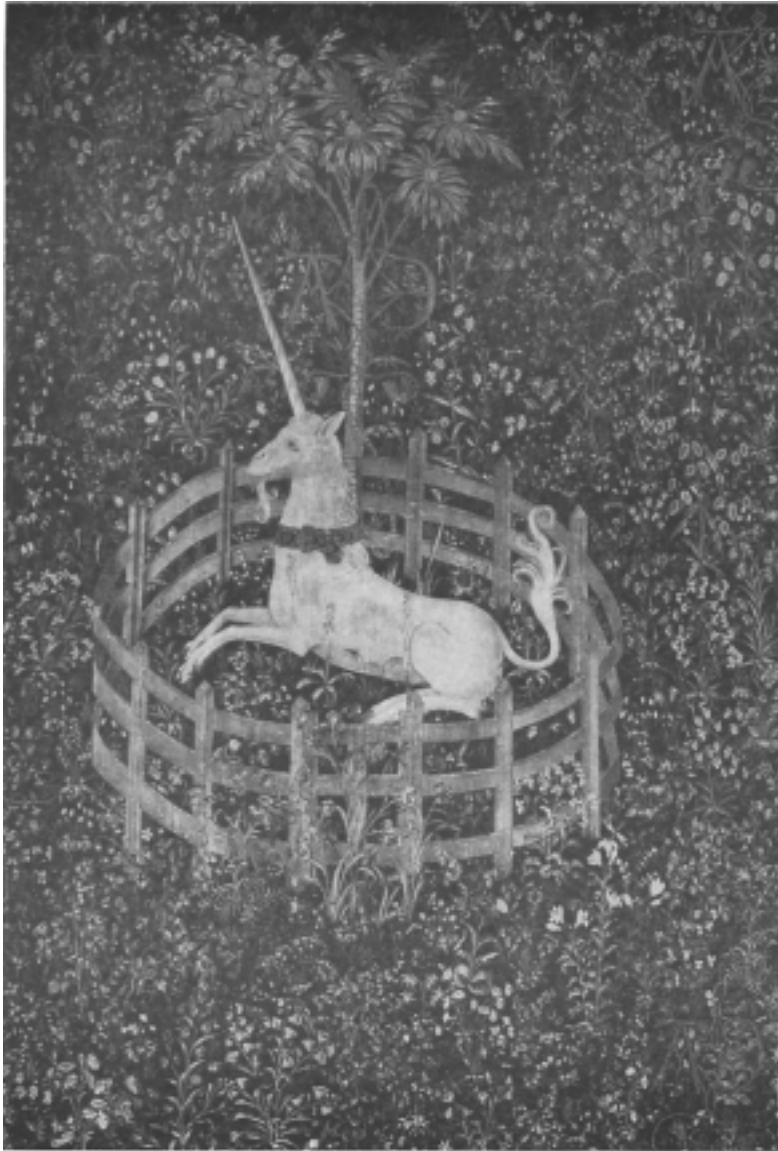
FIG. 15
PORTRAIT OF A DOGE BY GENTILE BELLINI (1425-1507),
CORRER MUSEUM, VENICE.



FIG. 16
PORTRAIT OF A TURKISH PRINCE BY GENTILE BELLINI,
GARDNER MUSEUM, BOSTON.



FIG. 17
DETAIL FROM AN ALTAR-PIECE BY CARLO CRIVELLI, 1487,
BERLIN.



THE UNICORN IN A GARDEN ENCLOSED. LATE XV-EARLY XVI CENTURY.
THE CLOISTERS, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.