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The Ornamentation Of Textiles. Mme. Paul Errera's Collection At Brussels.
By Octave Maus.

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The Ornamentation of Textiles

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TEXTILES. MME. PAUL
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IN the vast domain of decorative art, the ornamentation of textile fabrics forms a subject of study at once one of the most attractive and one of the most instructive. Therein one may trace stage by stage the successive evolutions of taste from the remotest times; therein are reflected as in a clear mirror all the contributions of the various ages towards the development of what we term "decorative feeling."

The history of textile work is inextricably mingled with that of humanity itself, revealing as it does, here the evidence of religious life, here again exact traces of the civil life of the nations. The mosaic law, as M. Dupont-Auberville reminds us, prescribed the use of embroidered ornaments on the sacred vestments, and many thousands of years before our era, the skilled workers of India and Egypt, Assyria and Phoenicia were producing, with

a deftness worthy of our envy, textiles adorned with designs as beautiful and as delicate as any our finest artists can show to-day. The Egyptians and the Babylonians reserved their cotton for use in the manufacture of sacerdotal robes, mortuary wrappings and other religious purposes, while linen was employed for articles of luxury or every-day wear. They confined themselves to these two branches of the textile industry, for China had long held a monopoly in silk, which, however, introduced into Egypt some two or three centuries before the Christian era, rapidly spread over the entire East.

From Egypt the Greeks brought back with them the art of weaving, and the importance assumed in Rome by the *plumarii*, the *phrygiones* and the *tinctores* is well known. The industry sought refuge at a later period in the cloister and the convent, to escape the devastating influences of foreign invasion and public tumult. Sumptuous appointments became general in the Church, and this had a decisive influence on the textile industry. Hence arises the introduction of gold and silver threads into the ornamented woof of the priestly



FIG. I. ITALIAN: SILK

XII. CENTURY

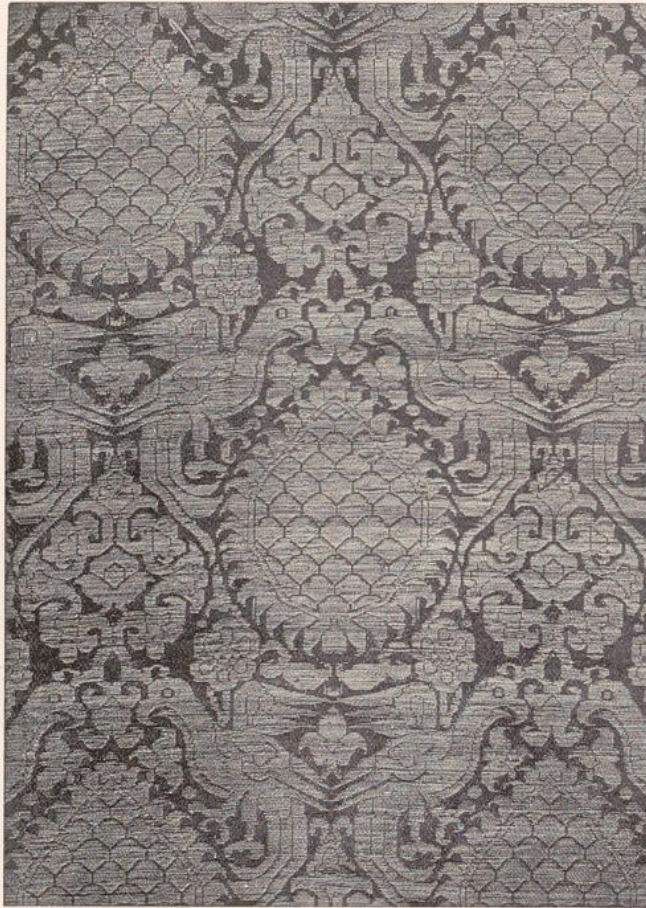


FIG. 2.—SICILIAN: SILK AND GOLD

XII. CENTURY

vestments. A striking contrast this to Christ's poor robe of brown serge and the camel's hair loin-cloth of John the Baptist! Later still, the Crusades spread the new artistic movement throughout Europe. Italy and France became inspired by the novel elements derived from the fertile sources of the East, while Spain—with Andalusia rivalling Persia itself in the luxury of its ornamented fabrics—followed the path indicated by the Arabs.

The Renaissance brought into touch the artist and the craftsman, and the most celebrated masters of the day, both in Italy and in France, thought it in no way derogatory to devote their genius—as in our own time William Morris and his colleagues devoted theirs—to the invention of designs for textile materials. Hence, in the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries, sprang an admirable growth of art which invests the woven products of that period with everlasting interest and value.

The invention of *indiennes*, or calicoes—cloths printed first on the wood-block principle, and later from copper-plates—gave fresh impulse to the textile industry about the close of the seventeenth century; but the decorative taste of the day was for the most part so poor that the process cannot be said to have had a fair chance.

One must go back to the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries to discover original and typical decorative compositions. Here we find the same elements frequently repeated and diversely applied. In the thirteenth century the types were ordinarily the lion and the eagle, symbolical of force and majesty; the lion and the goose, to signify strength combined with prudence; or the lion and the dove, representing power and gentleness in one. Occasionally figures

of angels were introduced into the designs. In the next century we find the aster employed in infinite forms, together with an ornamental style borrowed from that of the workers in iron. The weaver's art reached its apogee at this period. Later the decorative schemes based on *flora* and *fauna* gave place to others, in which were incorporated scrolls and rings and floral ornaments geometrical in design. This brings us to the seventeenth century, where we find landscapes and uprooted trees, birds on the wing or at rest, none of these bearing the stamp of the sincerity of the earlier times. Still worse was the eighteenth century, with its ribbons and shells and rock-work, its feathers and serpentine figures, and its depressing pastorals, all of



FIG. 3.—SPANISH: SILK AND GOLD

XII.—XIII. CENTURY.

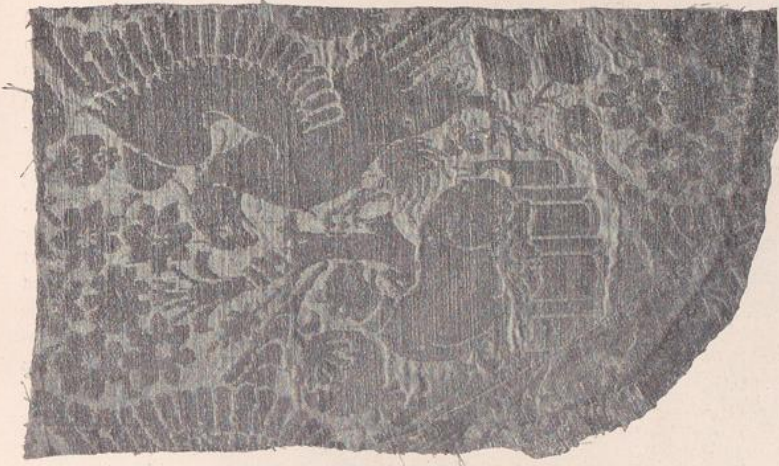


FIG. 4.—ITALIAN: SILK AND GOLD

XII.—XIII. CENTURY.

The Ornamentation of Textiles



FIG. 5.—BYZANTINE OR ITALIAN: SILK AND GOLD

XIII.—XIV. CENTURY

which dishonoured the materials on which they figured.

The study of this most interesting phase of art, at which I have but cursorily glanced in my preceding remarks, has been undertaken with complete earnestness by Mme. Paul Errera, of Brussels, who, not content with being merely a charming *mondaine*, has devoted herself to the fascinating pursuit of collecting art textiles with an ardour seldom seen among amateurs. Her collection was started in 1891, most of the specimens coming from Paris or from Spain or Italy. There are now nearly 500 articles in this fine collection, all methodically classed and artistically arranged in their glass cases.

A well-arranged catalogue adds much to the interest of this almost unique display. The most ancient specimens of textile work in Madame Errera's collection are of Coptic origin, while the most recent date from the end of the eighteenth century. There are a few pieces of old

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embroidery of great value, but apart from these the collection consists exclusively of ornamental textile work.

With a spirit of generosity worthy of more frequent imitation, Madame Errera has recently presented a part and promised the rest of her treasures to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels in Brussels. A brief description of some of the most, important specimens, with a few reproductions, may therefore be of interest:—

Fig. 1. This is a beautiful fabric in light, double-faced silk, striped with yellow and blue and violet on a ground of *beige*. It is ornamented with birds, *affrontés*, with Arabic inscriptions on their wings, a pendant hanging from the mouth, and the feet tied. In the interstices are palm-leaves *stylisés*, decorated in the centre by a head and by a cross at the circumference. These designs are done in outline.

According to Mme. Errera, this stuff is of Italian manufacture of the twelfth century.

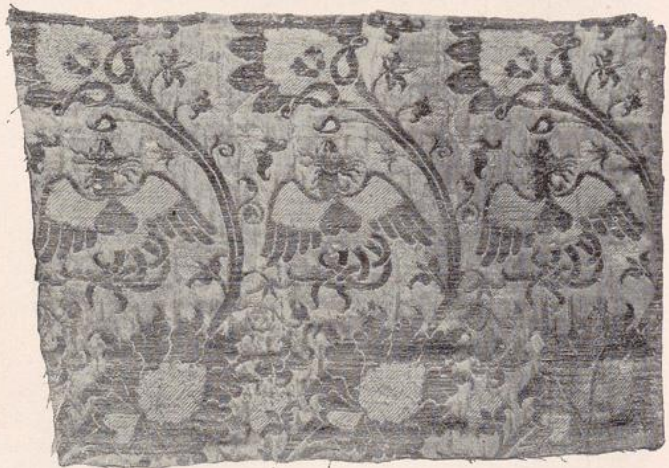


FIG. 6.—ITALIAN: SILK AND GOLD

XIV.—XV. CENTURY

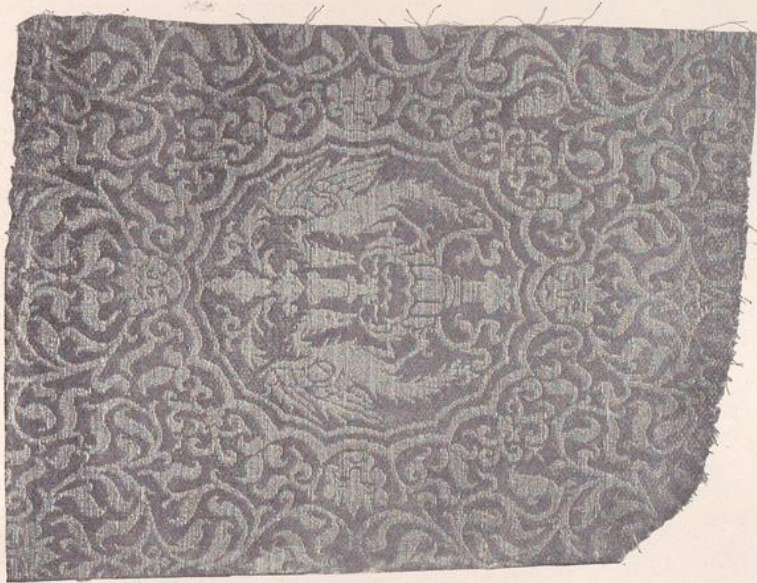


FIG. 7.—SICILIAN: SILK AND GOLD

XIV.-XV. CENTURY



FIG. 8.—FLORENTINE: LINEN, SILK AND GOLD

XV. CENTURY

The Ornamentation of Textiles

Fig. 2. The second example is a stout substance, in dark blue colour and well-preserved gold. The design has very little relief. We discover birds, *affrontés*, perched on a closed pomegranate and separated by palm-leaves, while above their wings are flowers of six petals. In the spaces are palm-leaves. The ornamentation is done in twisted gilt gold-beaters' skin.

Is this of Sicilian origin? Mme. Errera is of that opinion, which is also supported by Professor Freunberger, Conservator of the Düsseldorf Gallery, who says that materials of this sort, with exclusively metallic designs, come from Palermo, whence in the thirteenth century proceeded craftsmen to Lucca where they began to work in polychrome. Moreover, M. Forrer, of Strasburg, assures us that in Italy the textiles adorned with metals had but little relief, while in Spain the relief was very pronounced. M. F. Fischbach (in his work "Die Geschichte der Textilkunst," p. 184) holds that the material in question is either Saracen or Greek, or else proceeds from Asia Minor—a somewhat indefinite verdict! As to their period, it would be interesting to compare these designs with the mosaics in the chamber of King Roger in the palace of Palermo, which dates from Norman times—the twelfth century.



FIG. 9.—GERMAN: SILK AND GOLD XV. CENTURY
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Fig. 3. This piece of stuff, of which a reproduction is given, appears to bear a great similarity to No. 2, although it is, I believe, Spanish, and of the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

On a ground of dark blue we have a gold design in strong relief, representing foliage united by branches and surmounted by birds, *affrontés*, and separated by a palm leaf, above which is another palm leaf of smaller size.

Fig. 4. A pink silk piece, with design in gilt gold-beaters' skin in low relief. It represents a figure of a dog lying under the shade of the "Hom," or tree of life, while an eagle is swooping down on him. This particular tree is one of the old symbols in Oriental as in Occidental art.

Mme. Errera considers this to be Italian work of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The eagle is certainly drawn with a sure hand, and its wings are boldly marked and detailed. At an earlier period than that suggested here, wings were usually represented by solid masses without detail. The central flower on the tree is identical with the aster seen on the material shown on the central plate of page 16 in Dupont-Auberville's "L'Ornement du Tissu," and referred to by the author as being fourteenth-century work. Fischbach also mentions similar compositions, which he places in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Fig. 5. A piece of fine white silk ornamented with birds, closely *affrontés*, with averted heads and a leaf in the beak. There is a geometrical design on the breast. The birds are perched on a sort of palm leaf terminated by a smaller one. The palm leaf is decorated with vine leaves, and on the upper part of the handle is a cherub. The design is in gold for the most part, but the claws, the heads, and the medallion are in *beige*.

Is this Byzantine or Italian? The palm leaf is worked in relief, which inclines one to favour the Byzantine theory, but there is evidence on the other side such as to make one hesitate on that point. For example, M. Ch. de Linas, in his "Chasubles conservées à Saint-Rambert-sur-Loire" (Ancient priestly Vestments, Paris, 1862), arrives at the conclusion that the Eastern art workers avoided as far as possible the use of straight lines generally, and intersecting angles in particular. Now the tails of these birds are quite straight, as are the bands across their breasts. Fischbach, however, describes a piece of work almost exactly similar in every respect as Byzantine in origin and Saracen in

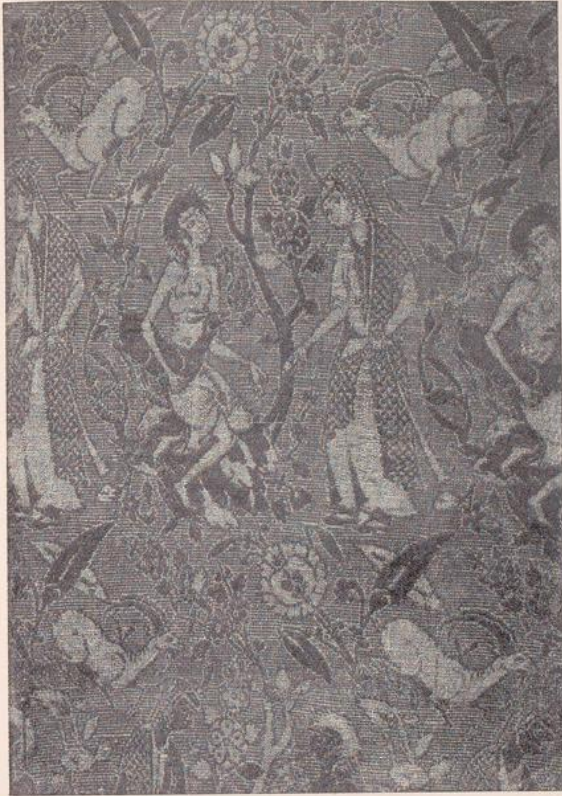


FIG. 10.—PERSIAN : SILK

XVI. CENTURY

style. Who shall decide? The period is almost indubitably thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Fig. 6. A specimen of unbleached silk. The design, in gold, represents palm trees of various sizes, with birds of paradise amid the branches. This would appear to be Chinese, particularly from the manner in which the birds' tails are treated, and in the method of their flight. Doubtless this is the composition of an Italian artist under the immediate influence of far Eastern models. Mme. Errera thinks this is fourteenth- or fifteenth-century work, because at that period palm trees in undulating lines often figured in textile designs.

Fig. 7. Here the design is in gilt gold-beaters' skin in high relief, the material being silk with a warp of *écru* thread. In concentric ovals are hippocamps, *affrontés*, slaking their thirst in a pool. The ovals are indented, and their exterior portion is ornamented by foliage, and by

grotesque heads or *mascarons*. This is probably Sicilian work of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

Fig. 8. The bands of which this is a specimen, were intended to serve as crosses on the chasubles, as shoulder-knots for the copes, and also to deck the upper and lower extremities of the dalmatica and the sleeves. The fragment now reproduced belonged to a dalmatica. It is composed of linen and silk of green foundation, and bears a design, in gilt gold-beaters' skin and white, representing the kneeling Virgin adoring the infant Jesus, while two angels bear on their heads a double baldaquin. The upper portion of the design contains the legend *Verbum caro factum est*. This is certainly Florentine work of the fifteenth century. In many Tuscan paintings of that date one finds the same style of grouping, even the same arrangement of garments. Dr. Bock attributes it to the School of Ghirlandajo.

Fig. 9. A band of pink silk. The design, in green and gilt gold-beaters' skin, represents Christ appearing to the kneeling Magdalen. The Saviour holds a banner in one hand, and with the other makes the sign of benediction. The figures

are separated by a tree, and above is a starry sky. This composition recalls the German or Flemish paintings of the fifteenth century, and it evidently belongs to the same period.

Fig. 10. This curious specimen of Persian work is of "Ottoman" style, in silk and gold, the ground being white, red and gold, and the design in alternated red and white. According to Geheimrath Lessing, conservator of the Berlin Gallery of Industrial Art, the white portions were formerly in gold. The subject of the design recalls the well-known Persian story of the Princess Leily and the poet Maynun. M. Lessing assigns this work to the sixteenth century. Persian it certainly is.

I might have multiplied examples of these works, for Madame Errera's collection contains a great number of remarkable "documents." I was of opinion, however, that a few specimens, chosen more or less at random, would suffice to give an idea of the special interest attaching to this textile

museum, and would inspire some of the readers of THE STUDIO with a desire to visit it, and examine its contents minutely.

OCTAVE MAUS.

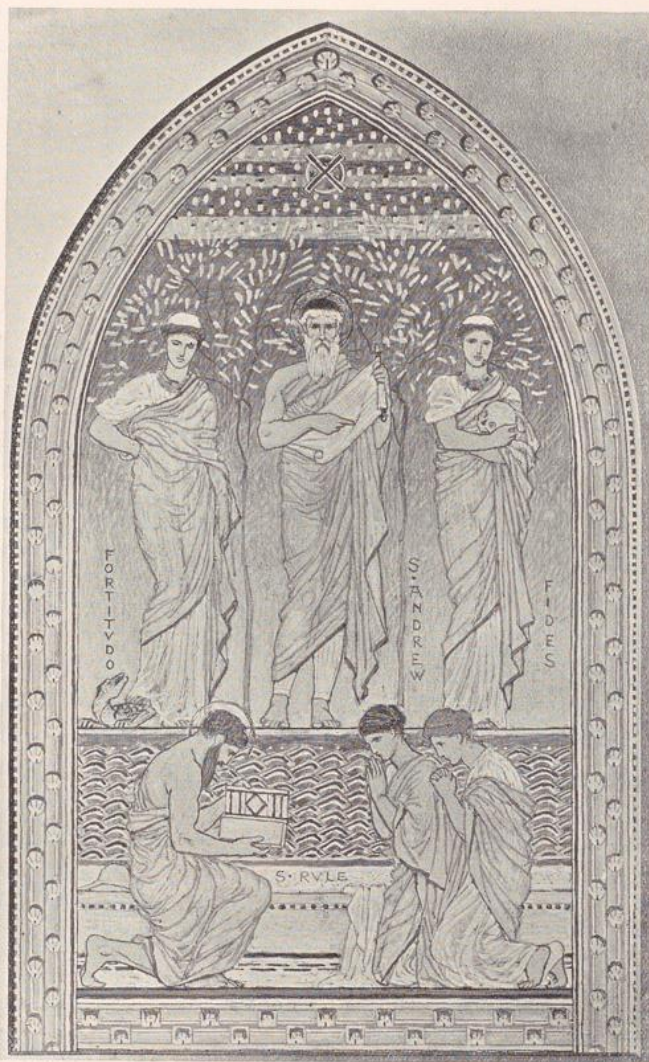
STUDIO-TALK.

(From our own Correspondents.)

LONDON.—It is the custom of our Government officials to struggle to make reasons for not doing things they obviously ought to do. When the particular thing they ought to do involves the encouragement of art, their struggles to shelve the whole matter become quite painful. As an illustration of this, the case of Albert Moore's designs for the mosaic panels in the Central Hall of the Houses of Parliament is worth noting. These designs were prepared by him some time in the sixties, and have been in the possession of the Board of Works ever since. Two or three years ago the suggestion was made that the completion of the panels was about due, so the officials have examined the drawings and have decided they would like a little more detail in them. Seven years ago Albert Moore died.

During the winter English artists have been put to a rude trial. They have been judged by a new and severe public, a public whose mind had been invigorated by the bracing stress and strain of a grave national crisis; and none can say with truth that their work as a whole has seemed anything but trivial in comparison with the stern manliness of temper called forth by the war and its anxieties. Indeed, many people now

perceive, for the first time, that artists seldom feel called upon to show a deep sympathy for the immense drama of actual life. Some, as though afraid of human realities, try to live fastidiously "in an isle of dreams"; while many of those who do profess to be realists seem much too sentimental, too boudoir-like and epicene, when their realism is contrasted with that, say, of Fielding's "Tom Jones." The truth is, they have for long been debilitated by their excessive fondness for



DESIGN FOR MOSAIC

BY ALBERT MOORE