Chapter 4

A Kinship of Images

Italian Colonies in the East and the Transmission of Asian Textiles to the West

Before the Mongols, the four Crusades had already given the four Italian Maritime Republics opportunity to establish their own colonies in Eastern territories, from which to trade textiles and other luxury objects. In the course of that trade, the original meanings of patterns and inscriptions were often lost in translation, transmission, and in the re-interpretation of textiles that entered the trans-Mediterranean area between the North African and South Italian coasts. Those items, when first acquired and reproduced, aroused astonishment in Italian society, where they were described as strange (*strani*) and marvelous (*meravigliosi*). The Royal Ṭirāz Workshop established in Palermo sometime around the twelfth century represented a major step in the development of Italian textile production. Only between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth (when, coincidentally, a few Italian merchants reached central China), did Lucca begin to produce the so-called Tartar patterns, which were reinterpreted as purely decorative or exotic motifs. These began to appear not only on textile grounds but also in paintings and as architectural elements.

Looking at Italian textile items produced from the end of the twelfth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century, it is clear that the woven graphic elements followed foreign models. The re-elaboration of models coming from the East became indisputably the prototypes for other ornamental surfaces, such as in architecture. The conditions that made this possible can be found in the political and social situations in the second Middle Ages, during which the presence of Italian colonies around the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea was strong enough to permit trade, transmission, and the reproduction of Asian models in the West. Not much about textiles of the period preceding the Mongols survives among written sources, but I will summarize

here the key historical factors that led to the creation of important weaving centers in Italy.

Three times in premodern history trade between the far East and far West had been pursued, despite very different historical conditions and the vast distances between them. They occurred during the Han dynasty, under the first *Pax Sinica,* during the Sui-Tang period, with the second *Pax Sinica;* and finally, during the Mongol period, with the establishment of the *Pax Mongolica.* In between these, different nomadic groups fought for supremacy across Central Asia. With the expansion of the Mongols, however, the boundaries of the Eurasian continent were blown open as never before. Interaction between East and West flourished in "periods in which given circumstances allowed for a reconfiguration of some parts internal of a previously existing network so that two separate systems were able to come into closer contact." This was made possible thanks to the configuration of relationships between the whole system and its parts.[1] The system was created by a combination of trade, exchange, diasporas, the creation of new territorial borders, and, most importantly, technological developments in the arts and engineering. Thus, the presence of Italian colonies in the Holy Land and between the Black and the Caspian seas early in the twelfth century created a receptive situation for the later enterprises of Italian merchants, like the most famous and debated Marco Polo, in Far Eastern territories.

In his *Storia delle Colonie Genovesi nel Mediterraneo* (History of Genoese Colonies on the Mediterranean Sea), Roberto S. Lopez (1910–1986) provided rich information about the commercial and economic situation in the Near East after the Crusades. At that point, the once flourishing production of silk and glass in Syria and Palestine began to slowly collapse. Nonetheless, agriculture and manufacturing continued to be entrusted to local people, while the Genoese collected taxes and profits. Between 1154 and 1164 the richest *viscontili* (from *vicecomites,* who, as agents of the marquees to whom they swore loyalty, were in charge of trading and finance) and *avvocatizie* (who had charge of legal matters) families were those that played a major role in the trade with the East and had invested about ten thousand Genoese lira in Syria.[2] Neither Syria nor Palestine produced an abundance of materials or goods, but their strategic geographic position provided excellent access to the East. Local elites, according to Lopez, "were completely replaced and reduced to a thoroughly passive function by the Italian colonists who knew how to do what even Rome was not able to do—deprive the Orientals of the commercial empire of *Mare Nostrum* [the Mediterranean]."[3]

Goods from the East were traded to Europe under the label "spices," even if they included raw materials, herbs, dyeing products, as well as textiles and other merchandise that enriched noble European families and churches.

But the Europeans did not have much to offer in exchange (mainly wool and linen), and for this reason they were later forced to pay with gold and silver that they had accumulated in the same territories during the Crusades. Most of those who had participated in the Holy Wars became colonial merchants, and they were the only persons to benefit from the political and economic changes, since whether as soldiers or merchants, they became the de facto mediators of East-West relationships. This they turned to the benefit of their own finances.

In 1247 Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, in his *Historia Mongalorum,* recorded the presence in Kiew (later Kiev) of a group of Italian merchants from Genoa, Pisa, and Venice.[4] In 1263 a Venetian merchant in Tabriz, Persia, Pietro Viglioni, with the help of two Pisani, dictated his last will (now in Venice), which is the earliest original written evidence of the presence of Italian merchants along the Silk Road.[5] After the Fall of Acre to the Muslims in 1291 and the establishment of a papal embargo in Egypt, the Genoese, Venetians, Cumans, and also the Piacentini extended their presence, especially to Caffa in Crimea, Tana on the Sea of Azov (a section of the Black Sea), and Trabzon, Turkey (on the Black Sea).

With the exception of Marco Polo, who was of Venetian origin and who had an enormous impact on the history of Eurasian relationships—despite the controversial scholarship by Frances Wood who doubts the truthfulness of his account—the Genoese seem to have been among the most consistently active traders in Eurasia from the end of the eleventh century until the end of the fifteenth century.[6] By the fourteenth century, indeed, they had established a small colony in a town recorded by the Arabic name of Zayton—present-day Quangzhou in coastal Fujian Province.[7] Records mention Jacopo and Ansaldo de Oliviero, likely two Genoese merchants active around 1330, trading in textiles; Andalò da Savignone, who in one decade conducted three journeys to Cathay; and, most importantly, Caterina and Antonio di Domenico de Ilionis (or Vilioni), siblings who died in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, in 1342 and 1344, respectively. Their tombstone inscriptions are in Latin-gothic form and framed by a Chinese-style decoration, probably made by a Chinese artisan.[8] To date, this remains the only evidence of an Italian woman in China at the time. Caterina and Antonio were the children of Domenico de Ilionis, a rich merchant who with his family established himself in the city where Marco Polo claimed in *Il Miliione* to have served for three years as a high-ranking officer of the court of Kublai Khan (1215–1294).[9]

Of the four Italian Maritime Republics, Genoa, Venice, and Pisa played a predominant role in the trade with the East; Amalfi did not reach the same level. Sources are few and vague regarding Amalfi's presence in the Holy Land and around the Black Sea. The initial period of expansion of the southern

Italian city-state is often overestimated in academic scholarship because it was the "collective operation of a small town," which, notwithstanding the small ships of its fleet, was able to find a place in the commerce with the East.[10] Amalfi was definitely more important in trans Mediterranean activity and for the major role it played at the service of the Norman court in South Italy and Egypt than for its small colonies in the East.

As the first important Italian weaving center renewed in the twelfth century, the Royal Ṭirāz Workshop established in Palermo was one result of the flourishing East-West trade. Already in a *crisobolla* dated to 992, Byzantium prohibited Venetian merchants from taking Amalfi or other southern Italian people on their ships from Constantinople (only Greeks were allowed), possibly because of the illegal trade in luxury Byzantine textiles that the Amalfitans conducted in southern Italy and in Rome.[11] Most likely, trade in slaves and agricultural products with Egypt supplied Amalfi with the gold necessary for purchasing Byzantine textiles.[12] Although Amalfi played no great role in the East, its trans-Mediterranean activity was crucial to the transmission of textiles and other goods. Trade entanglements between North Africa, South Italy, and the East in the eleventh century made possible the promulgation of the first and most important Italian maritime code, *Capitula et Ordinationes Curiae Maritimae Nobilis Civitatis Amalphe* (Texts and Rules of the Maritime Court of the Noble City of Amalfi), better known as *Tabula Amalfitana* (Amalfi's Rules), which remained in use until the sixteenth century.

The Crusades were key in the establishment of Italian colonies in the East, and Amalfi's failure to participate in the First Crusade (1096–1099) was most likely one of the reasons its significance was limited compared to that of the other city-states. Amalfi, like Venice, rapidly enlarged its trade to the East in the ninth and tenth centuries. But by the twelfth century it could not compete with the other Italian city-states, which enjoyed special privileges that Amalfi only partly obtained in the latter half of the twelfth century. There is no evidence of a special and autonomous administration established by the Amalfitans, and the urban areas where they lived were small compared to those where other merchants lived, or were shared with other merchants.[13] In Antioch, Syria, the *Ruga Malfetanorum* (Street of the Amalfitans) was noted from the beginning of the eleventh century as an urban area that provided accommodation to pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land, but had no special commercial benefits.[14] After 1203, when local people in Constantinople destroyed the Amalfi and Pisa neighborhoods with their *ergasteria* (small workshops), the Amalfitans joined the Fourth Crusade. After 1208, however, no evidence remains of Amalfi ships visiting the port of the Byzantine city; only Amalfi ecclesiastical institutions continue to be mentioned until the end of the thirteenth century.[15]

One of the most important factors in this new trade between East and West was the establishment of *fondaci*, a type of developed caravanserai in each colony where merchants could rest and store their goods.[16] Although the Arab word *funduq* appears in Muslim sources from the tenth century and was used to indicate lodging places for merchants and pilgrims in the twelfth century, it referred to an institutionalized building developed to host Christian merchants and diplomats. Today we can recognize three types of *fanādiq* or *fondaci:* a *funduq,* an inexpensive lodging place for Jewish and Muslim people, whose lodging fee was used to support religious and educational institutions; a *fondaco,* first established in Alexandria specifically for Christian merchants who had special privileges granted by the Muslim government; and the type of *fondaco* established in the Holy Land.[17] This third type was most likely an adaptation of the original lodging institution for western needs, which, like the ones established in Egypt, was dedicated to a particular community of merchants with their own culture and their own rights.[18] Pisa established one of the first *fondaci* in Egypt, but Venice had the longest-lasting one, in Alexandria, which housed twelve elected merchants, eight administrators, one consul, and one translator.[19] The later *Fondaco dei Turchi* (*Fondaco* of Turks), built in the fourteenth century and first used as a guesthouse for dignitaries, by the seventeenth century became a storehouse for Turkish goods. It still stands in Venice today.

The type of *fondaco* established in Eastern territories was probably built earlier than its Egyptian equivalent and had a larger urban structure acquired and administrated by one of the foreign communities *in loco.*[20] After the Fall of Acre, the *fondaci* were converted to *ḵānāt* (charitable foundations; pl. of *ḵān*), which although present since the rise of the Islam, predominated during the Mongol period and sometimes acquired a commercial function.[21] While the *fondaci* were a consequence of the western colonies established via the Crusades, and the *ḵānāt* flourished during the *Pax Mongolica,* medieval sources often use the two terms interchangeably. There is no doubt that the institution of the *fondaci* promoted the introduction of goods from Eurasia to the Mediterranean Basin, but due to the nature of their organization, they also limited direct human contact among people of different ethnicities or cultures. The *ḵānāt* by contrast were strategically established along ancient nomadic routes and originally created to host Muslim people of varying origins, which sometimes gave rise to commerce.

In the thirteenth century, trade with territories farther east, if not conducted in *fondaci* like those established in big cities such as Khanbaliq (Beijing), was more a form of silent barter than commercial negotiation. According to Marco Polo, in 1274 a *fondaco* established a mile outside the capital was assigned to distinct groups of foreign merchants according to their place of

origin. By 1260, Brunetto Latini (1210–1295) in *Il Tesoro* (The Treasure) referred to the Chinese as "Scir, or Seres, who, with leaves and tree bark, and the help of water, ma[de] a type of wool that they use[d] to cover their bodies." These people refused the company of foreigners and conducted trade without talking, by establishing between one another, only with their eyes, the value of the goods. They left their high-quality goods in a specific place without any sort of interaction with western merchants, from whom they (the Chinese) did not want or require much.[22]

Pliny the Elder in Book VI of his *Naturalis Historiae* had already told us that the Seres (Chinese), who are listed as the first among Scythian groups, were peaceful people who refused human interaction, and therefore preferred to be asked for trade rather than themselves seek an occasion for trade.[23] By the thirteenth century, after centuries of migration and cultural transmission between East and West, we would expect a different description of human interaction and a different commercial approach. But Far Eastern culture was unfamiliar to western eyes, and evidently the Chinese were not yet confident about the presence of far western people in their territories. Therefore, the exchange of goods was rather casual, and price was not negotiated the way it was in West Asian territories.

In addition to the difficulties of negotiation in the Far East, the selection of goods that eventually arrived in the West was mediated through Central and West Asian areas: the more distant the territories, the less of what was originally sent or exported actually arrived. This occurred in both directions. Because goods were often resold during the journey, many others were taken on, and still others were lost and might well end up as prototypes for local production along the way. This is especially obvious among the Asian textiles preserved in Europe: We can count only a few examples produced in China; the majority are of Central Asian or West Asian manufacture.

Pax Mongolica offered an opportunity to expand trade between the East and West and for European interests to shift from West Asia to East Asia, and so avoid the Arab middlemen who had, before the Mongols, brokered trade and relationships between Eurasian territories. In the fourteenth century, a journey to Cathay was safe for any merchant who desired to go from Italy to Khanbaliq. In *La Pratica della mercatura* (The Practice of Trading), compiled between 1335 and 1340, Francesco Balducci Pegoletti (1310–1347) describes in detail what was required for an Italian merchant to successfully undertake such a journey.[24] He had to make a stop in Tana on the Black Sea to hire good *Turcimanni* (Türks or Turks) as guides and translators; most important, he had to carry linens from Genoa and Venice to Urgench on the lower Amu Darya, with which to purchase *sommi* of silver. All forms of silver were then taken to the lord of Cathay, who gave him local paper money (*bali-*

shi) with which to buy silk and local merchandise. If the merchant died during the journey, his belongings were left to the local lord, unless a family member was with him and could rescue his property. Pegoletti tells us that the merchant could buy "from nineteen to twenty pounds of Cathay silk, according to Genoese measure, for one silver *sommo*... from three to three and a half cloths of *cammocca* of silk for one *sommo,* and from three and a half to five cloths of *nachetti* (*nasīj*) of silk and gold, again for one *sommo* of silver."[25]

From the description and the values of goods provided by Pergoletti, a few things seem clear: the impossibility of conducting a direct journey without cultural interchange; the necessity of hiring a guide and translator familiar with Central Asian and Chinese territories who could mediate the interactions of the foreign merchant; and the need for foreign goods of interest to local lords and that provided access to local merchandise.[26] Most important, the circulation of local currency in Chinese territories precluded the use of foreign goods and foreign currency among local people. This created an internal circulation of goods that was strictly administrated by the Chinese government, which, although a feature of *Pax Mongolica,* in its easternmost iteration as the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) maintained its own local Sinocentric vision.

The few early textiles of Chinese origin preserved in Italy confirm the lack of a fulsome trade between the far western and far eastern regions of Eurasia, which finally took off in the modern period with the notable European fashion of *chinoiserie.* During the Middle Ages, the trade of weavings between East and West was mostly limited to Central Asia as the farthest Eurasian contact zone. West Asia continued to function as a filter between East and West in the transmission of products and images often created for Buddhist or Islamic environments. Those images were copied or decoded and recoded in a new Christian imagery that finally reached the Mediterranean Basin, where they were further recontextualized in a mix with ancient Hellenistic and Romanic elements.

Those Asian textiles that reached Europe's noble and ecclesiastic courts carried unknown foreign patterns or scripts in gold that were seen simply as decorative yet generated astonishment and curiosity about Eastern lands. They were used for lavish clothing and also as prototypes for local production, which might incorporate local materials to created new surfaces, such as the *mezzaseta* (half silk) made in cotton/linen and silk, which became one of the most popular Italian textiles during the Middle Ages. There is no doubt that the origin of the Italian weaving industry is firmly linked to the Italian colonies established in West Asia and North Africa during the Crusades. If few examples have survived from the earliest Italian production site, namely, the Royal Ṭirāz Workshops of Palermo, great quantities can be found of later types produced in Lucca (and in Venice), which are sometimes found or combined with

those of foreign provenance. Among these are textiles used in papal clothing, which today are stored in cathedrals and museums or described in ecclesiastic documents as *panni lucani.*

The Question of Tartar Textiles

In *The Divine Comedy,* Hell, Canto XVII, the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) describes Geryon, the monster of fraud, as having a human face, leonine paws, a snake's body, and a scorpion's tail. He then, by denial, connects this depiction with textile imagery:

> With colors more, groundwork or broidery
> never in cloths did Tartars make nor Turk;
> nor were such tissues by Arachne laid.[27]

The poet clearly refers to a fine colorful textile production made by Tartar or Turk people that also included the use of embroidery.[28] The comparison here with the monster's skin underlines not only the high quality of the textile structures known in the late Middle Ages, but also distinguishes between West and East Asian "tissues." (Dante's description of the monster moreover recalls the *makara,* or dragon-fish, woven on earlier Liao and coeval Mongol textiles.) The word "Tartar" was applied to textile compounds, especially those produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, without a clear definition of the typology or the material used in the weaving. Tartar has been used to refer to all people living in the Mongol empire from China to West Asia. In terms of textiles, however, it referred to most weavings from the East, with the exception of those of Islamic Mediterranean origin, which were called *panni sarceni* (Saracen cloths) or *saracinati.* Some of these weavings have more recently been identified with lightweight plain silks, sometimes woven in a twill-tabby structure.[29]

In 1989, on the basis of a detailed technical and stylistic analysis, Anne Wardwell divided a body of one hundred thirteenth- to fourteenth-century Tartar textiles into eight categories.[30] This scholarship remains important for relocating often misunderstood or mistranslated ornamental motifs; however, it does not answer the question of what is "Tartar" about Tartar textiles.[31] Terms such as "Oriental," "Tartar," or "primitive or medieval *chinoiserie*" should be carefully clarified when we use them for the analysis of textiles produced in the Mongol period.[32] Even Giorgio Sangiorgi (1886–1960), in his detailed and important work published in 1926, wrongly stated that "we received from the Islamic Orient the idea of a true primitive *chinoiserie,* [a phenomenon] like [the one] that [would] spread four centuries later all over Europe."[33]

Such terminology, created between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has only added confusion to the vocabulary used in textile studies, which is already very misleading. It has also created multiple deceptive images of an invented or romanticized "East." This exotic place was often identified as a single great empire, whether Chinese, Iranian, or Roman-Byzantine, without considering the true porousness of boundaries and the ongoing nature of nomadic movement. It demonstrates how little attention has been given until recently to Central Asia, specifically the Sogdian-Turfanese area, that during the Mongol period was part of the Chagatai Khanate, ruled by Genghis Khan's second son, Chagatai Khan (1183–1241).

It is still unclear whether the term "Tartar" has some connection to the Scottish tartan, a textile with perpendicular crossing bands (plaid) identical to types found on the Tarim mummies and among the fragments in the Turfan Textile Collection in Berlin. A similar connection might be asserted in relation to the mantle of the angel in *Annunciation with Saint Margaret and Saint Ansanus* by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi in Florence (Plate 16). This mantle might be a representation of one of the types described by the *argentier* of the French king Philippe V (1293–1322) in the list of the cloths in gold and silk in the Palace of the Louvre. Those include *tartaires apelez taphetaz* (tartar in taffeta), *tartaires d'or* (golden tartar), and the *tartaires changeans de Luques* (iridescent tartar of Lucca). These are distinct from the *samiz* (samit), *nachis* (*nasīj?*), *camoquas* (*kīmkhā*), and other gold cloths or cloth with gold decorations, like the textile of the angel's robe, most likely made of Central Asian golden lampas or tabby structures, that are listed in the French inventory:[34]

> Item, two purple *camoccati.* Item, sixteen pieces of satin, with works in gold of different types. Item, seventeen cloths of Lucca in blue ground and worked with flowers of golden lilies. Item, thirteen tartar spreads of gold. Item, forty-three samits of Lucca, vermillion. Item, six *nachis* of Lucca in gold. Item, seven *nachis* of Lucca, six of which with no gold and the other with golden rosettes. Item, seven diapers of gold. Item, six cloths of Lucca of gold. Item, six tartars of Lucca, iridescent. Item, thirty-six cloths of gold called *naques.* Item, four *naques,* with white ground. Item, thirteen small golden *nacques.* Item, a piece of *nachis* of Lucca made of two pieces worked with foliage. Item, forty-five pieces of other tartar.[35]

And again:

> Total *nachis* of Lucca and Venice, of a type and another [type], twenty-three pieces. Total golden cloths called *nacques,* of a type and another, big and

small, fifty-four pieces. . . . Total tartars called taffetas, one hundred fifty-three pieces.[36]

The Tartar called taffeta suggests a further development of the simple tabby structure used during the Mongol period. In undyed cotton or other fibers of poorer quality, the tabby was originally used for monastic robes, as observed in images from the Kizil Caves, or to provide a surface for religious subjects dyed or painted on items to be offered in caves and temples. Later, when polychrome threads, and eventually twisted silk threads, were refined and employed in that structure it became known in the West as taffeta. The lining of a sleeve-end in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London made in tabby and twill is similarly patterned.

In Europe, during the Mongol period the term "Tartar" referred to all textiles from the East, without clear distinction. Still, in the 1735 work *Description geographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*, Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743) refers to all the territories beyond the Great Wall of China as Tartar, and, more precisely, he describes the "Great Tartary" as a large territory divided into eastern and western territories from Japan to Turkey, establishing a separate section for those areas related to Muslim people.[37] So the third realm of Tartary was that of the Muslim Tartars, among whom the most important were the Uzbeks, who were better known in Europe than in China.[38]

Most importantly, Du Halde confirms the production of fine textiles, embroidered or brocaded with threads made of gilded paper strips, like the Tang type, and identifies this as a peculiar East Asian technique that had not changed over the centuries and was not practiced in Europe. They were real textiles of gold, not made with *filé* (gold twists with fiber yarns) such as were in use in Europe, and, although very beautiful, they were not made to last and could not be used for clothing because air and humidity soon would have oxidized the gold. They were rarely suitable for ecclesiastic display.[39]

Not only is the difference between Tartar and Turkish textiles mentioned in *The Divine Comedy,* it is also confirmed in the inventory of the king of France. Both categories of textiles, Tartar and *nasīj,* were produced in Europe, and the terms were often used interchangeably or to name structures that originated in other countries, such as the "*nacques* called *Turquie*," literally "Turkish *nacques*." Still the king's treasury inventory reads:

First, [from] the Bailiff to our lord the King in escrow, on the 20th October 1327, twelve cloths of Turkey, of which six are big and six small.[40] Item, two *nacques* called Turkish, of which she [unspecified person] gave one to

Santiago de Campostela in Galicia and the other to Marguerite de Lambris.[41]

The inventory of the treasury of Boniface VIII (1230–1303), who was pope from 1294 until his death, lists silk manufactured in "Asia Minor," often referred to as "tars," which appeared in northern European courts around the fourteenth century.[42] In the thirteenth century, Marco Polo had already mentioned that the Armenians and Greeks produced Tartar silks under Turkish rule, and, as showed in the texts above, *nacchi* were also produced by the Turks. "Turk" possibly implied a general West Asian and Greek production, where terms such as *nacchi* or Tartar circulated and were adopted according to personal knowledge of local artisans or the person who compiled trade and gift lists.[43]

In the chronicles of his thirty years of journeying, the traveler Ibn Baṭṭuṭa (1304–1369) sometimes uses both terms *nach* (*nakh*) and *nassic* (*nasīj*) for a similar type of cloth in golden silk or brocaded in gold. He mentions a piece of *nakh* (a type of cloth with golden embroideries) that he received as a gift from the Emir of Ephesus in Turkey, and he also describes the clothing of the *khatun,* wife of Moḥammad Özbeg Khan of the Golden Horde (1312–1341) as a dress of golden silk called *nakh* with a cape of *nakh* cloth also called *nasīj.* But according to the *Codex Cumanicum*, the trilingual glossary of Latin, Persian, and Cuman (or Turkic) words dated to 1324–1325, these terms refer to two different types of silk produced in the thirteenth century, which only became popular a century later. They were also produced in West Asian territories and transmitted from there into Europe.[44] In *La Pratica della Mercatura,* Pegoletti, also differentiates the two. He records that the types of textile sold in Constantinople by the piece are "velvets of silk and *camuccha* and *marmati* and cloths of gold from every region and *nachetti* from every region, and similarly cloths of gold and silk except for the *zendadi*."[45]

Slowly the lozenge structure of Asian weavings was introduced to Europe and replaced the orthogonal structure preferred in the thirteenth century; this transformed pattern compositions, including those in gold. From the textual and material sources I have analyzed, I can lay out the different factors leading to the conclusion that *nacchi* and *nachetti,* as well as *zendadi* produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were mostly of Iranian-Central Asian origins. During the Yuan dynasty, the Chinese word *nashishi* 納石失 (which has no literal meaning) was the transliteration of the Persian word *nasīj* (from the Arabic verb *nasaja,* "to weave," a short form of *nasīj al-dhahab al-ḥarīr*). It referred to "cloths of gold and silk." Three types of gold weavings were produced at the same time, but despite their similar appearance, they all had different structures.[46]

The first, *jinduanzi* 金段子 (gilded silk), refers to tabby or twill grounds with constantly repeating gold patterns of different sizes and shapes that became popular during the Liao dynasty. The patterns were made with golden brocading or a *lancé* supplementary decorative weft of gilded paper threads. These types could also include a tabby with supplementary weft dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, like a sample in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The structure of this textile, which is decorated with a repetition of ogives very popular in this period, has a basic warp and weft in pairs of yarns and a golden supplementary weft bound in pairs of threads on the verso, which float on the recto of the ground. This was a typical Eastern Iranian technique imported to China during the Liao and Jin periods and used to create brocades (Plate 17).

The second, the one known as *nasḥishi,* was a fully decorated lampas in gold (a warp and a weft for the main structure, and a supplementary warp binding a supplementary patterning gilded weft), which, unlike the *jinduanzi,* could have the weft in cotton rather than in silk threads. The gold threads were made of leather as in the Islamic territories (which employed membrane also), or were golden twisted threads, sometimes also employed together in the same structure. The style and motifs were generally of Central Asian inspiration.

The third typology includes a series of gold weft-faced compound *jin* weaves developed from Tang types. One of the features of the new structures was an inner double warp, while the weft system could have a set of two or three types of threads also brocading. Apart from the golden set of threads, either twisted or flat, the other threads were in yellow or brown, in order to create a full golden visual effect.[47]

In addition to these three, a fourth type of polychrome weaving, classified as *sadalaqi* (a possible Chinese transliteration of the term *zandanījī*) preserved the classical Central Asian patterned register of animals depicted in roundels, sometimes with wings and in pairs. Most likely it was developed from the original weft-faced compound twill of the eighth century into a complex lampas. An example of *sadalaqi* might be a piece excavated in the Jininglu site, Inner Mongolia, and dated to the fourteenth century. It has a repetition of roundels enclosing a pair of back-to-back griffins, a typical pattern of the Mongol period on various Eurasian surfaces, and similar to the one held in the Metropolitan Museum (Plate 14).

Apparently it was the Persian scientist Jamāl-al-Dīn who in 1287 first led the weavers of a workshop in Khanbaliq (Beijing) in the production of *sadalaqi*.[48] This clarifies not only why most of the Mongol structures that arrived and were reproduced in Europe were not of Chinese origins, but also that *zandanījī* (or *sadalaqi*) was the name used to categorize complex structures

of double or triple sets of warp and weft that most likely originated in Iranian Central Asian territories. Most important, the textiles called *nacchi* and *nachetti* were not often mentioned in Italian inventories before the fourteenth century and are clearly distinct from the types called *camcha*, *camoca,* or *cammucha* and *maramati, maramanti,* or *marimanti*.

The transliteration of Asian terms into Latin or other medieval European languages has generated the notion that they all referred to the same category of textile, whether tartar or *nachetti*. Among these the *camcha*, *camoca*, or *cammucha* (derived from the Persian *kīmkhā*) originally referred to textiles produced from Herat to Damask and Alexandria and possibly included other types such as the Chinese golden brocade *jinhua* 錦花. And again, textiles called *maramati, maramanti* or *marimanti* (a possible transliteration of the Arabic word *mahremah*), perhaps referred to a golden brocaded ground.[49]

Evidence in Papal Documents from the Vatican Library

The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome includes a lengthy list of medieval sources that can help us differentiate those Asian textile structures and patterns imported to and reproduced in Italy from those inspired and developed in Europe. An interesting manuscript titled *Modo di conservare le stoffe 1301–1400* (How to Preserve Fabrics, 1301–1400) (Ur. Lat. 1013), which can be read as an Italian account of Eastern lands very similar to *Il Milione* and *La pratica della mercatura,* provides us with information regarding the culture of the Grand Khan and Tibet (chapters 34–45). Although not much is explained about the preservation of textiles, the title makes it clear that the textiles and related methodologies that are mentioned are the most important parts of this account. Goods, tools, landscapes, and fashions are described as strange (*strani*) and marvelous (*meravigliosi*).

In a hunting scene illustration that accompanies the text, the khan is depicted with western features and a crown, seated beneath a baldachin mounted on two elephants. The scene is far from a realistic image of Cathay and evidently relied more on oral description than direct visual evidence. In the same way, descriptions of goods and animals are often exaggerated or interpreted in accordance with personal ideas related to that specific area and culture; this should remind us that in the process of transmission from place to place, transliteration or transcription, oral accounts, words, and images of exotic places assumed different meanings and "strange and marvelous" connotations in medieval Europe.

Papal inventories, cardinal wills, and clerical treasure lists are among the documents that preserve the richest descriptions of luxurious medieval textiles; they can also be studied as a point of comparison with the Buddhist

reception and use of textiles along the Northern Silk Road. Parallel to Buddhist practices still evident at Dunhuang and in Turfan, Christian treasuries were also enriched by gifts from believers offered in exchange for indulgences. In the twelfth century Pietro Mallio wrote about sacred vestments (*planetas*, *pianete* or chasubles, shirts, dalmatics, tunics, dresses, stoles, maniples, belts) and precious ornaments (a cross, a cup, a golden ring, books, and other vessels) offered to the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome during the pontificate of Alexander III (1159–1181), of which three-quarters belonged to the pope and the fourth part to the canon (clergy).[50]

The inventory of Pope Boniface VIII represents one of the most valuable documents regarding papal treasures. Records on part of the treasure, which was offered to the Cathedral of Anagni, provides an overview of another part, given to St. Peter's.[51] Although the treasure of Basilica of St. Peter has been lost or looted over the centuries, a few items, like the *Polittico Stefaneschi* (1320) made by Giotto for the main altar of the Basilica, have survived.[52] The papal treasure and the Basilica's treasure were, indeed, of two separate types. The inventories of Pope Boniface VIII and of his successor, Pope Benedict XI (1240–1304, who became pope in 1303), refer to the treasure of the Holy See, rather than to the Chapter (*capitulum,* the ecclesiastic body). This explains why papal treasures were often moved while others remained in the Basilica of St. Peter where they were looted or enriched with all kinds of items.

According to the *Libro dei benefattori* (Book of Benefactors), during the period of the papacy in Avignon, France (1309–1377), the papal treasure was enriched only by luxurious textiles that were offered as gifts.[53] Around 1367, before the reestablishment of the papacy in Rome, a new inventory was drawn up of the gifts received between 1294 and 1303. At this point, Tartar textiles began to be listed, especially those patterned with roundels and animals. It reads, for instance:

> Item, two *pluvialia* (capes) of diasper and Tartar cloth (*panno tartarico*) (*Folio* 144-v°) . . . Item, a *planeta* of white Tartar cloth lined with red muslin, fully decorated with refined small work in gold with undecorated orifices, with roundels of polychrome silk on the verso and the recto, and a cross on the breast. . . .[54] Item, a small tunic and a dalmatic of Tartar cloth worked with refined small gold patterns, and the hem down to the feet [made] of red cloth [patterned] with lions and golden grape leaves. On the sleeves the hem is decorated with a golden cloth patterned with griffins, parrots, peacocks, and eagles included in roundels of grape leaves in polychrome silk (*Folio* 50-v°).

Some fragments with the patterns described above—especially the grape leaves—are held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, including a set of three

fragments with only leaves (or tiny birds) and another with leaves surrounding small animals, all dated to between 1300 and 1350.[55] The fragments might be identified as the *camucha/i* described in *Lo Statuto della Corte dei Mercanti in Lucca del 1376* (The Regulation of Merchants in Lucca of 1376). The *Statuto* describes different types of *camuchi: camucha di du fila in dente in una seta* (*camucha* of two threads per dent [of a reed] in one silk), *camucha di una et di du sete* (*camucha* of one or two silk colors), and *camuca acolorati* (polychrome *camucha*). These were generally sold at the same price as the baudekins, *diaspini,* and gold cloths; they are woven with small patterns, often foliage, or small animals and birds.[56]

Two other types, called *cigattoni* and *diaspinecti,* which most likely have supplementary golden or silver brocading weft but are lighter in weight, were also related to the *camucha.* Nevertheless, the first type of *camucha* listed (*camucha di du fila in dente in una seta*), had two main warps in paired threads (36 cm), a binding warp (18 cm), and a single weft, while the second type (*camucha di una et di du sete*), had a set of three main warps in paired threads (45 cm), a binding warp (15 cm), and a single weft. Both were forbidden to be brocaded (with metal threads often made with an animal membrane) in any way ("*non si possono broccare in neuno modo*"). Because of their structures—generally a tabby ground with tabby patterns, which differentiated them from the baudekins generally produced in Baghdad in twill—*camuchas* can be included in the category of lampas.[57]

Regarding the baudekins, in 1852 Francisque X. Michel (1809–1887) wrote:

> There is no doubt that this canopy was not already known by such name, which came from Baghdad, where this fabric was originally made. *Baldeuno* was found in a document from 1197. . . . There is no doubt it was made of pure silk baudekins, but generally that word refers to high-priced textile . . . the textile under discussion is called precious, very precious, and it is at first indicated as enhanced gold.

Referring to the *camuchas* he added, "The camuchas came not only from the island of Cyprus, as we saw before, but apparently from the whole of Greece; from here [we get] the term *camoucas,* which refers to a cloth of silk and cotton made like a damask."[58]

The style of these textiles closely recalls a type of lampas with satin ground and a brocading golden weft produced in Iran in the same period. It is possible that the Italian type was an economical version based on the original luxurious eastern one listed as Tartar (rather than *camucha* or other names) that was generally brocaded and thus heavier in weight. Despite the structure,

the design of grape leaves as well as other small types of foliage can with little doubt be dated to the fourteenth century. The panels on the thrones depicted by Bernardo Daddi in the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels and Saints* (1334) in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, or in the *Triptych* in Lindenau Museum, Altenburg, Germany, for instance, provide visual evidence that such luxurious compounds woven were used not only for clothing (of angels, saints, the Madonna, a pope, etc.) but also for decorating sacred and religious spaces.

Among the many textiles listed in medieval sources, a type called *catas-samito* or *cataxamito* also appears. The etymology of this term can only be speculated upon: It might have referred to a type of samit from Cathay, from which the name *cata-samito* derived. Although little information has survived about the structure of these textiles, samit and cata-samit are differentiated from one another and listed separately in the inventories. In the inventory of Pope Boniface VIII, we can find a heterogeneous list of these and many other types of textiles, some of which can be related to not only surviving pieces preserved in Anagni but also later fragments in museums worldwide. Included below are a few inventory excerpts that provide us with information that can be associated with surviving textile fragments even if the colors and patterns are not identical:

> *Entry #1096,* Two sandals with pairs of parrots on purple samit (*xamito*).
> *Entry #1097,* Two sandals [made] in purple cata-samit (*cathaxamito*) with roses in golden *filé* and pearls and bulls.[59]

A comparable fragment dated closer to the second half of the fourteenth century and made in Lucca might be a lampas *lancé.* It also has parrots, but they are depicted in the flying position of the phoenixes on Mongol textiles, representing a possible Italian adaptation of eastern textile patterns.

> *Entry #812,* Two *dorsalia* (lavish silk saddle cloths) of which one is [made] of green and red baudekins with [patterns of] waves like fishbone and various images of figures and animals, and is hemmed with green samit (*xamito*); the other is checkered with silver threads and red silk, on all the checks there are lions.[60]

Although dated to a later period, two identical fragments—one held in Dumbarton Oaks and the other in the Museo del Bargello—display the patterns of both *dorsalia* described above in a unique composite scheme of similar color palette (the red is faded and looks white). The basic ground is woven in a grid of small geometric motifs filled with a sort of wave-fishbone motif alternating with an animal (more like a small dragon) and a flower or rosette

at the intersections. Symmetrical lobed medallions framing a brocaded or *lancé* lion chained to a tree are prominent in the background (Fig. 4.1). Not only does the composition recall the red banner in the Turfan Textile Collection (identified as *hongjin*), but it also carries both East and West Asian graphic elements (Fig. I.1).[61] The rosette at each intersection is identical to those on the banner and the small dragon is the type we find on Chinese bronzes and jades from the Warring States period or on Han weavings from Luolan and Niya. Here the lobed medallions that are woven with the rest of the ground but appear as separate patterns confirm the fourteenth century as a possible period of production; indeed, similar composite schemes can be found on many weavings produced in Central Asia and China during the Mongol period, such as the previously mentioned *sadalaqi*.

> *Entry #862,* A *repositorium* (a casual robe) for the body in red cata-samit (*cathaxamito*) with the image of the Majesty sitting on one side and on the other a Crucifix and the Holy Mary and John [embroidered or woven] in Thracian gold.[62]

Figure 4.1. Textile fragment with a grid filled with rosettes, fish-bone motif, dragons, and brocaded lions in lobed roundels. 14th c. Silk. Lampas with *lancé* and brocading gilded weft (lions). © Dumbarton Oaks (inv. #1933.45).

> *Entry #891,* A cape of red (*examito*) samit embroidered in "Cyprus works" (*cyprensi*), with roundels in which are griffins and two-headed eagles, with a frieze featuring half images (human busts) worked in thread of gold *filé* set into tabernacles made of pearls; it has a string of pearls with simple friezes, is lined in yellow *zendato,* and had an English-style narrow frieze at the foot.[63]

Although not always clear, the two excerpts above suggest that *cataxamito* and *examito* are two different weaves, both used for sacred vestments of different types. Unlike the *dorsalia,* of which no example has survived and that can be only compared to later examples, the *pluviale* (pope's cloak for special occasions) as described in the second excerpt (save for the pearls) is preserved in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Anagni. Anagni also holds the *pianeta* of St. Nicholas with its frieze finished in the English style (rhombus motifs, generally embroidered). The *repositorium* was an informal vestment and was perhaps embroidered similarly to the *pluviale,* but rather in Thracian gold.

The Cyprus work (*opus cyprense*) was a specific style of embroidery adopted in Italy. In the papal inventory, more than thirty entries list embroidery in the Cyprus style, which are clearly distinguished from more than fifteen other types listed as work in the Byzantine style or made with cloth from Byzantium (*de opera Romanie* and *de panno de Romania*). Two entries mention the gold of Cyprus (*aurum cyprense*) and golden threads of Cyprus (*aurum cyprense filatum*).[64] Although it is possible that the pope's *pluviale* was made in Rome—perhaps with gold of Cyprus imported for local works in the Holy City—the Royal Ṭirāz Workshops of Palermo should not be excluded as a possible source.[65] The Sicilian workshop was the first to introduce the manufacture of complex weavings and embroideries to the Italian peninsula. The coronation mantle of the Norman King Roger II (1095–1154) of Sicily, completed in 1134, was indeed embroidered in gold and decorated with pearls, like the *pluviale* of Pope Boniface VIII, as was the coronation alb worn by the Norman King William II, dated to 1181, which has a golden frieze down to the foot, like the types described in the papal inventory.

Although the inventory lists a variety of textiles—*xamiti/examiti* (samit) and *cataxamiti* (cata-samit), *zendadi* (zandanījī?), *panni tartarici* (Tartar cloths), and *panni de Romania* (Byzantine cloths), all of various colors and patterns, as well as a *diaspro de Antiochia* (diaspro of Antioch), *canceo* (transliteration of the Islamic *kandj*), and a *tunicam de panno venetico albo laborato ad grifones, leones et vites ad aurum ornatum ornamentis in quibus sunt reges sedentes in duabus avibus* (a tunic of Venetian cloth worked with griffins, lions, and grape leaves in gold as decorative ornaments in which a pair of birds are regally sitting), *attabi* or *panni hispanici* (Spanish cloths), and *panni Lucani* (cloths from Lucca), there is no doubt that the combination of red (Tartar) cloth and gold decoration was

one of the favorites for sacred and imperial vestments. One of the entries in fact reads:

> *Entry # 897,* A cape of Tartar red cloth and gold with a frieze of Alamannia and a breastplate in a similar big frieze, with skirts down to the foot [made] of silk of different colors, lined in green *zendato.*[66]

If it were not for the specification of the item, this description could almost be identified with the Eagle Dalmatic created in the second half of the fourteenth century in southern Germany for the coronation of various emperors of the Holy Roman Empire. It is now held in the Kunsthistoriscisches Museum, Weltliche Schatzkammer, in Vienna, along with the other two coronation garments mentioned above. The dalmatic is made of a red Chinese self-patterned compound with lozenges, serpentine motifs and clouds, embroidered German medallions containing eagles sewn on the surface, and a large frieze in gold with human figures around the yoke, sleeves, and skirt of the robe. A later example of Italian manufacture, held in the same museum, is a stole made of a textile identical to the robe of the angel depicted in *Annunciation with Saint Margaret and Saint Ansanus* by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, of which original Central Asian examples have survived. This example has medallions with eagles in the fashion of the dalmatic, surrounded by pearls.[67]

The circulation and recycling of weavings between monasteries and the laic world in the West was also very similar to what occurred in Dunhuang during the early Middle Ages. However, the portion of silk weaving left as offerings to religious institutions depended on the quantity produced and circulated among devotees. In the Tang period, silk (in any form, from raw to the final product) was used as money in Chinese territories and so reached lower-class people, while in Italy it remained a luxury material that only began to circulate in the twelfth century among elites whose access depended mostly on dispensation of the pope or the sovereign.

High-quality textiles appear also in the last wills of cardinals who, since the twelfth century, had been granted the *licentia testandi* (license to make a will) from the pope. The first of these grants was made by Pope Celestine III (1106–1198, papacy 1191–1198) to Cardinal Peter of Piacenza. Originally, the *licentia testandi* was meant to protect the cardinals (who generally came from high-class families) from the laic sovereign, who had the right to collect patrimonies (*ius spolii*). But when, during the papacy of Innocenzo IV (1195–1254, papacy 1243–1254), the *ius spolii* became a right of the pope, the *licentia testandi* was extended to the whole church and to all religious officers.[68] Patrimony was divided into money, goods and chattel, property, books, and *resid-*

uum (remnants), which was distributed among the poor, or to small churches and religious institutions. Among the most important cardinal wills, those of Raniero Capocci (1216–1250), dated to 1244, Stefano Ungaro (1251/52–1270), dated to 1270, Ottobone Fieschi (1251/52–1276), dated to 1275, Ugo Aycelin (1288–1297), dated to 1297, and Niccoló da Prato (1303–1321), dated to 1321, listed most of the textiles that also appear in the papal inventories.

Although *diasper, zendati, xamiti,* and baudakins had already appeared in the thirteenth century, *nacchi* and *nachetti* were listed only a century later, as in the will of Niccoló da Prato, which, in Entry 37, records two sheets to set on the altar, one in green *naccho* and the other in purple.[69] There is no doubt that *naccho* and *nachetti* had a particular structure (or two structures) and had arrived in Europe with the Mongols and was recognized as such. With their arrival, Italian textile production moved from Sicily to Lucca (and Venice), grew, and its products gained popularity. In the same period a new painting movement, which had begun with Giotto and produced icons in gold on wood panels, flourished in Tuscany and produced our principal and definitive visual evidence of Mongol material culture in Italy.

Two-Dimensional and Three-Dimensional Surfaces

Royal and religious powers were distinguished in similar (if not identical) ways that had to be clearly recognizable. At Dunhuang and Kizil, Buddha and bodhisattva sculptures as well as ceilings and walls were covered with textiles recalling those used by emperors and high-ranking people. In the West, saints and nobles were also depicted in identical textiles, often in the same fashion, and the churches were decorated with ornaments and motifs most likely reproduced from textile surfaces. In the East as in the West, human beings tried to create a "humanized" image of heaven (or the extramundane) on earth. As discussed in the first chapter, similar or identical motifs and patterns on textile grounds can be found painted on walls in various medieval Central Asian sites. Similarly, a process of imagery transfer occurred in late medieval Italy, between two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces, usually associated with royalty (or the nobility) and religious institutions and personages. The aversion of Islam to figurative art, especially sculpture, was due mainly to the lack of a theatrical tradition, such as had characterized Greek culture, as a form of human representation. Nonetheless, in the early Islamic period, rejection of the figurative was only theoretical, and images and ornaments were widely employed to decorate private spaces, just as books of miniatures and patterned textiles circulated among aristocrats for personal use.

Islam came to cultivate a type of ornament that was decorative and deprived of any possible narrative; Islamic art was oriented to stylized forms

based on plants and flowers, geometry, and epigraphy. While the last two would later become its primary features, the first developed more as a form of "Islamized Eurasian imagery," which varied from place to place according to local preferences.[70] Arabic epigraphy (in pseudo-Kufic script) on textiles appeared in Greece around the tenth century and those cloths were used as a model for weavings that featured Greek or Roman letters.[71] It is not a coincidence, then, that Italian medieval architecture or media are sometimes categorized as Byzantine or as Islamic forms of art.[72]

The closer relationship of Italy with Egypt, Byzantium, and West Asia made possible access to a variegated eastern imagery that predated the Mongol period, imagery that was incorporated in local architecture and combined with Roman and Hellenistic styles already present on the peninsula. Byzantine silk production from state factories was studied in private workshops that began to weave secular and religious images on textiles like those preserved in the Museo Sacro at the Vatican. It was the Byzantine imperial workshops that dictated the images to be woven in accordance with the imperial dress code and ritual, many of those images included Sasanian and Hellenistic motifs.[73] The chariot with the god Helios, like the types discovered in Dulan and in Turfan on fragments dated to the ninth century, appeared simultaneously with western features, for example, in personification of the emperor on the shroud of Charlemagne in Aachen, Germany. The sun and the moon, which generally appear on each side of the figure, were humanized on the Byzantine fragment, and the composition seems more like a secular image than one with an eschatological meaning.

From the ninth to the twelfth century, an iconographic change took place that substituted animals and foliage patterns for religious subjects. In the twelfth century, probably due to historical events like the Crusades, this form of iconoclasm, already begun two centuries earlier, prepared the way for the later Mongol weavings that combined Chinese, Islamic, and Byzantine patterns in a unique style. "Within the church, they were viewed as a material 'fitting of God,' with which to adorn cults, and through which to embellish worship and to enrich liturgical practices."[74] From the images of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I and Empress Theodora (500–548), as they appear in the sixth-century mosaics at San Vitale in Ravenna, to the eleventh- and the twelfth-century frescoes of saints and archangels in Southern Italy such as Saint Angel in Formis, in Capua, fashion and textiles seem not to have changed much. The details of the patterns show the prevalence of geometric forms over animals enclosed in roundels, which over the centuries were never really replaced so much as stylized according to the Islamic preference for geometric lattice work.

Zoomorphic figures were preserved, though, in twelfth-century archi-

tectural spaces that evolved in the Italian Gothic style, which grew out of Romanesque architecture in vogue since at least the ninth century. Graphic elements that most likely arrived on two-dimensional surfaces like textiles, ceramics, and metal wares were given three dimensions in architecture. Apart from the previously mentioned winged horse from the Cathedral of Sorrento, three other major examples survive of this artistic de-codification and transformation. First is the unique marble *pluteo* (parapet), dated to the ninth or tenth century, in the Chapel of Saint Aspreno at the Port in Naples, whose rhomboidal grid encloses images of griffins, horses, and ducks with ribbons in the "Sasanian" style, as well as various plants or trees (Fig. 4.2). The second is images of *makara*/whale that appear among the cosmatesque (decorative inlaid stonework) on the Ambon in the Church of Saint Pantaleone in Ravello, dated to the eleventh or twelfth century. Third is the image of a *melusina,* a double-tailed mermaid, which was widespread in Italy, appearing on many different surfaces, including as column ornamentation, especially in the twelfth century.

All these zoomorphic figures appear on textile fragments and items of the early and later Middle Ages, where they are often combined with the figure of a dog (but on Italian compounds only). The *pluteo* in Naples, although unique in its composition, contains figures that were often employed for this

Figure 4.2. Marble *pluteo* in the Chapel of Sant Aspreno al Porto. 9th–10th c. Naples. Photograph by Mariachiara Gasparini.

type of ecclesiastic architecture at the time and are visible on similar pieces from the Church of Saint Giovanni Maggiore in Naples, from the Chapel of Saint Peter in the Basilica of Aquileia, and from the Basilica of Saint Mary in Pula, just to mention a few examples. Winged horses, Sasanian ducks, and griffins with a head like the creature known as *sēnmurw,* were preferred figures commonly incorporated into the Italian Byzantine style. Nor was it unusual to find composite creatures with aquatic, aerial, and terrestrial features. That such features are commonly combined indicates they were widely available to be reinterpreted and re-contextualized.

While the duck (with or without a ribbon) was one of the primary popular patterns depicted in the Sogdian and Sasanian context and then used as a decorative motif on textiles from Xinjiang and Qinghai, other creatures also appear together or are composited in miscellaneous combinations.[75] Serpentine fish tails and wings might be combined with various heads and bodies as in the Zhou tombs in China, where such tails appear on the winged horse; they also appear on a creature, possibly meant to convey the idea of a Chinese dragon, under a boat transporting a Chinese courtesan, a composition on the northern wall in the Hall of Ambassadors in Afrāsiāb. A composite creature is also depicted in front of Rostam and behind a Sogdian merchant in the wall painting from Panjikant. In the Byzantine context, the composite tended to have a canine head like that of the *sēnmurw* woven on textiles and assumed the appearance of a sea monster associated with the biblical whale that swallowed the prophet Jonah. That formulation of the monster had been around since the second century BCE.[76] Early examples of this composite can be found in different variations, for instance, schist trays from Gandhara depict cherubs, gods, or a goddess riding a sea monster, evidence of a first form of Hellenized Central Asian art. It appears on a South Arabian pediment where the image of a goddess is surrounded by a monster with a canine-leonine head, wings, and a serpentine fish tail; and again in the Indian world, it assumed the shape of a *makara* with elephant's head, often swallowing dwarf figures (*gana*) or animals.

These body elements were hardly new in the world of art, but each culture combined them in its own way, according to historical period and local religion. While the canine head and wings frequently appear on textile grounds, the serpentine fish tail is an unusual element that can be found mainly on wall paintings or bas reliefs, and even along the handles of Chinese Longquan celadon vases from the tenth century. In the late Middle Ages, a doubled fish tail was associated only with mermaid figures that were common in architecture but rare on textile. Examples of textiles with this figure were used to make two Sicilian miters that most likely were produced in one of the *ṭirāz* workshops in Palermo.

The double-tailed mermaid, a very popular figure in South Italy, can be traced back to the Greek period; if looked at closely, it recalls Skylla, the female sea monster living by the Strait of Messina, described by Homer (ca. 800–750 BCE) in the *Odyssey*. Generally depicted with a female torso, fish tail, and three canine heads emerging from her waist, the Skylla figure is sometimes seen with two tails and lacking the canine heads from the waist. Without the human female torso, however, one of the dogs would resemble something like a *sēnmurw*-whale. Such recoded images can be found on medallions and coins especially from the Hellenistic period, but an earlier example on terracotta from Himera, Sicily, proves that the figure had already been modified from a simple serpentine monster. This figure had political and religious implications: It was used on coins to demonstrate dominion over the sea, and it appeared on altars and funerary vases as a talisman of protection and regeneration.[77]

A full study of the *melusina* figure and its appearances cannot be undertaken here. Nonetheless, the transmission and incorporation of Eurasian zoomorphic elements in "the lady of the sea" is certainly worth mentioning. An important example survives in the mosaic floor of the Cathedral of Saint Maria Annunziata in Otranto. Founded in the eleventh century, the cathedral was embellished a century later (1163–1165) with a mosaic composition that covers the whole nave up to the apse; it was created by a group of Greek-Italian artists led by the monk Pantaleone from the Monastery of Saint Nicholas of Casole (Fig. 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Melusina. Detail of the mosaic floor of the Cathedral of Saint Maria Annunziata, Otranto. 12th c. Photograph by Mariachiara Gasparini.

This composition has been interpreted as a cabbalistic representation of Old Testament given its esoteric Eastern images that do not seem in line with the "typical" Christian Church.[78] The whole composition presents the entanglement of three distinct mystical systems—Christian, Jewish, and Hindu—based on the representation of the Hebrew-Kabbalist tree of life that divides the mosaic in two sections. Images from the Old Testament, medieval zoomorphic creatures, scenes from medieval literary epics, and, most interestingly, symbols of an Indian mystical system linked to the Greek Hermeneutic philosophy, are all carefully incorporated into the composition to introduce two methods of ascesis. Even today most of the patterns remain difficult to interpret. At the top of the tree (under the dome), Adam and Eve are separated by the snake; they are followed by a sequence of the twelve zodiac signs, a scene of the Deluge, and the tower of Babel. On the right is the flight of Alexander the Great with two griffins that recalls the previously mentioned Afghan "Lord of the Dragons" pendant (chapter 2), and on the left a leonine head is linked to bodies arranged clockwise, which recalls the hares joined by their ears from Dunhuang and Alchi (chapter 3).

The tree has no roots but is supported by two elephants. A separate group of zoomorphic figures in the presbytery are enclosed in roundels surrounded by geometric motifs, weaves, and inscriptions in roman and devanagari-like script possibly copied from the Sanskrit text that is particularly visible around the *melusina* (and the elephants). This group seems to represent the cosmogonic cycle based on the mystical doctrine of Hesychasm practiced by Basilian monks. Saint Basil, who restored monastic life to the Orthodox Church of the East, included Tantric techniques in Hesychastic prayer, changing the final ascetic aim. This might be why Hindu Tantric elements are visible in the mosaics. With the *melusina,* we find in another roundel the image of a *makara* swallowing a small animal that might be compared to the *svādhiṣṭhāna* chakra, or sacred chakra, the second energy node in the human subtle body, which contains unconscious desires.

Otranto, a Jewish colony since the ninth century, was part of the Norman South Italian kingdom. In 1095 twelve thousand Crusaders were sent from there to Jerusalem. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the mosaic floor of the cathedral we find elements most likely depicted in sacred texts brought back from the East, which were incorporated in the representation of *gnosis* (knowledge) as interpreted by various Eurasian cultures. Furthermore, the cathedral was built on a previous *domus romana* (Roman house) and a succeeding Paleo-Christian church that might already have incorporated esoteric and mythological graphic elements that inspired the later medieval floors. Ancient figures and motifs were common in South Italy. One need only think of the late second–early third century mosaic floor depicting a *triskelion* (three legs/

spirals) in the Roman bath at Tyndaris, Sicily, which is now the official symbol of the island and appears on the regional flag. An even earlier mosaic recently discovered in the ancient city of Kaulon in Calabria includes an image of a long spiral-tailed dragon and dolphins of various sizes; it dates to the fourth or the third century BCE.[79]

The mosaic floor of Otranto, with its Jewish, Christian, and Hindu symbology, remains an enigma. It and other medieval figures can only be contextualized according to historical facts, and to the common mythological and mystical experience in all cultures. The evidence presents us with multiple combinations of figures and patterns that have been decoded and re-interpreted many times. The seed that produced medieval two- and three-dimensional surfaces was planted and replanted in Eurasia at various historical moments, first for pagan purposes and then for the establishment of religious and political institutions that shared costumes and spaces.

Thus, it seems clear that the early Royal Ṭirāz Workshop in Palermo, from which rare fragments of similar compositions survive today, was one of the main gateways through which two-dimensional images and compositions on textile grounds were transmitted to be reproduced on other two-dimensional and three-dimensional surfaces across Italy and then Europe.

A Case Study: The Ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo

In 1995 Giovanni M. D'Erme (1935–2011) opened his provocative article on the Palatine Chapel in Palermo with these words:

> In the field of human sciences, but not only there, it is common to see the surprising fortune of some definitions that, once established, seem to acquire their own life, always renewable, despite [other] available contrary information. A famous case regarding this condition of things is the title "Fatimid" applied to the art (style) of the wooden ceiling in the Palatine Chapel of the Norman Palace in Palermo.[80]

This study contested the earlier "Fatimid thesis" proposed by Alexis Pavlovsky in 1893 and later supported and "made official" by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881–1954). D'Erme undertook a deep analysis based on four main points: the building of the Palatine Chapel as a whole; the iconographic repertoire of the ceiling, which goes beyond North Africa to the East; the interpretation of the central nave ceiling in terms of the whole architectural structure; and the historical context that explains the transmission of the unusual iconographic repertoire. He brought to light the Iranian aspect of some of the depictions on the *muqarnas* (ornamented vaulting) and of the chapel's mosaics; these were later

re-discussed by Ernst J. Grube (1932–2011), who is the only scholar to acknowledge the pre-Islamic Central Asian nature of the style adopted for those compositions.[81] According to D'Erme, Monneret de Villard, *faute de mieux,* affirmed that not much survives of Muslim painting datable to the Fatimid period, except for the pictorial cycle in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo.[82]

The ceiling of the Palatine Chapel—commissioned by King Roger II in 1132 and completed in 1143—remains one of the most fascinating examples of intercultural collaboration and makes visually apparent the sure linkage between eastern and western art. Two styles practiced in Egypt during the Fatimid period (909–1171) were most likely transmitted to Sicily and included in the register of the *muqarnas* ceiling in the chapel. "The first might be called late-[H]ellenistic and 'impressionistic,' clearly inspired by local late-classical traditions; the second is based on what has been called the [E]astern classical style that was first practiced in [H]ellenized Central Asia and carried westwards by the Central Asian T[ü]rks."[83]

Not coincidentally, as already noted, the first textile workshop to produce complex silk weavings and embroidery in Italy was the Royal Ṭirāz Workshop established in the same period near the Norman Palace. Between the eighth and ninth centuries, Iranian populations are recorded in North Africa, Sicily, and the Iberian Peninsula. In 827, Iranian people and Berbers of the Huwwarah tribe formed the Muslim army that was sent to fight against Sicily, and in the tenth century, Iranians had become so influential on the island as to move local people against the central Fatimid power and declare independence.[84] The so-called Saracens from North Africa actually included Muslim people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and they introduced the art of weaving to Sicily around the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century. But it was only under Roger II that Byzantine weavers from West Asia and Greece were brought in to train local people in golden embroidery.

It is plausible, therefore, that collaboration among Christian, Muslim, and Jewish artisans created the magnificent ceiling of the Palatine Chapel, which today remains the only wooden architectural example that, like Central Asian textiles, displays multicultural imagery—archaic and contemporary forms possibly, but not exclusively, from the Iranian (and Turkic) matrix. D' Erme refers to Nikolaos Mesarites (1163–1216), who recorded a twelfth-century building near the Chrysotriklinos in Costantinople called Mouchroutas, which had a ceiling (unclear if it was wooden) similar to the one in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo. Mesarites clearly states that it was a work of "Persian hand and contained images of the Persians."[85] According to Grube, other closer examples could be the ceilings of two Fatimid buildings in Cairo, of which only a few parts survive today. These, however, are tech-

nically different, since the wooden beams were covered with gesso before being decorated.[86]

The forms seen on the ceiling are often seen as distinctive (*motivi di differenziazione*) rather than assimilated forms (*assimilazione*) or co-present (*compresenti*) in the Palace. The ceiling requires a transcultural and transmedia approach to be fully comprehended, since many depictions on the *muqarnas* are common to both Byzantine and Sasanian art, and appear similar (if not identical) to the textile patterns analyzed so far.[87]

For the sake of clarity, I will distinguish two main categories: narrative scenes that include realistic and mythological episodes, and zoomorphic patterns, that is, images that have no focal point or a narratively sequential program.[88] Although the analysis of each pattern depicted on the Palatine Chapel *muqaranas* exceeds the scope of this work, there are major elements that link the ceiling to Central Asia. The row of white beads that frames each image is a clear sign of Iranian transmission, since this echoes a similar treatment in the caves of Kizil and Dunhuang and on most of the textiles studied here. But there are other elements that require our attention.

First, the characters depicted on the *muqaranas* have features very similar to those in the wall paintings from Miran, Xinjiang, (Southern Silk Road) and Balalyk-tepe; they also recall figures on vessels from Merv, present-day Turkmenistan, and Samarra in Iraq, all datable to the pre-Islamic period in Central Asia. The prominent eyes and the line of the noses, as well as the position of their arms—holding an object clutched at the chest, held away from the body with the elbow bent at ninety degrees, both arms bent across the chest, one slightly higher than the other, or holding a vessel, a dish, a scepter, or a flower in each hand (like the royal characters depicted on the Ladakh wall paintings)—are graphic elements of a recognizable artistic repertoire. In terms of textiles, these are particularly common in Coptic tapestry, which was produced and has been found in great quantities in Egypt.

The clothing entails a robe with a circular collar and a gold armband on each sleeve that matches the band that trims the lower part of the robe, the wrists, and the collar. The headdresses in vogue appear to be of three main types: turbans, bands, and a type of veil. Some of the figures appear with a halo, and one identified as the king wears a possible crown of boat-like shape. Most of the clothing depicted is decorated in a serpentine motif, like the type used by the Uighurs or the Seljuks, which includes floral and faunal elements along with geometric motifs, all of which have been found on textile fragments dating to between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Some rare samples of weavings with serpentine motifs from Palermo—made on tablet looms, an ancient technology of possible Italian or Egyptian origin used to make trim for sacred vestments especially during the Middle Ages—have survived to today.[89]

By contrast, the second common graphic element associated with earlier forms of Islamic art is a square device with a lobe or a point on each side. This was often used in painted and woven surfaces as a divisional element between the main subjects of the composition. If not used as a simple form to frame other images, the points on the square may appear to be part of upside-down hearts included in the square itself, like types depicted on Central Asian costumes and appearing on a fragment in the Turfan Textile Collection; it also survives on one of the very rare silk fragments discovered in Jericho Cave 38, at Qarantal Cliff in Israel. That fragment comes from a group of seven hundred and sixty-eight textiles in linen, cotton, wool, and silk, discovered in 1993 on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority in the Judean Desert. It is dated to between the tenth and thirteenth centuries and has been compared to fragments discovered in Caesarea and in Judean caves, both in Israel and in Qasr Al Yahud, Jordan, finds that were not as richly varied as the pieces discovered in the Jericho cave.[90]

The complexity of the fragment, made in weft-faced compound tabby and similar in design and structure to one from Turfan, confirms the transmission of this technique (and the use of the drawloom) and style from East to West. Clearly, the silk fragments discovered in Jericho were not locally produced but rather imported from Iranian territories, or possibly Syria or even Egypt.[91] Silk was not a local material, and the rare samples discovered in Cave 38 were probably remnants of imported cloth being stored for later use.[92] Although different in color, the fragments from Turfan and Jericho, and also the piece from Sens, confirm the circulation of similar patterns on Eurasian cloths around the tenth and eleventh centuries. The evident gold threads in the Jericho fragment, which seems more sophisticated and lavish than the one from Turfan, recalls patterns on some of the robes worn by *muqaranas* figures in the Palatine Chapel, which clearly show significant use of gold. A further development of this lobed/pointed square frame is the interlocked geometric form, the so-called Arabesque, which also appears on a few of the robes in the chapel. This pattern, with a few zoomorphic decorations, has clear equivalents in Spanish weavings.

The figures on the ceiling are depicted solo, in pairs, or in relation to animals and zoomorphic creatures, a few of which, as previously said, can be linked to Central Asian artistic heritage. Camels or caravans of camels, for instance, recall a votive tablet discovered in Dandan-oilik, at the Khotan oasis in Xinjiang (Southern Silk Road). The camel is one the most depicted animals on the crafts produced in this period in South Italy and in North Africa; not coincidentally, it is the animal that succumbs to the lion on the embroidered coronation mantle of Roger II, which symbolizes the conquest of southern Italian and parts of northern African territories by the Normans.[93] The lion

was the heraldic charge of the Norman Altavilla family, and is repeated in many forms on the ceiling of the chapel, where it shows consistent facial features with those found in Byzantine and Iranian art media. The lions in the chapel are often depicted in pairs, sometimes dark, sometimes white, and sometimes back to back with wings and one head or fighting with a snake (Fig.4.4).

These along with other images—a falcon grabbing a deer, a fight between a black man and a white man, a knight on horseback fighting a feline-

Figure 4.4. Addorsed lions with a single head on the *muqarnas* ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, Sicily. 12th c. Photograph by Mariachiara Gasparini.

headed dragon (which recalls the heroic Rostam fighting the dragon on the Panjikant wall painting), and a man holding two lions by the neck—are seen as representations of the battle between good and evil, widely expressed in Iranian culture and Zoroastrian religion, but of course also common to many other religions, including Christianity.[94] Many of these motifs appear on Central Asian and West Asian textile compounds from the eighth century to the end of the Mongol period.

Among the earlier references worth mentioning is the sudarium of Saint Victor from the Cathedral of Sens, which was brought there by the Abbot Willicarius of St. Maurice d'Augaune, Switzerland, in 769. It has the same register as the piece with elephants held in Dumbarton Oaks, and it is woven by the same technique used for the ribbon with Pahlavi inscription discovered in Dulan. The piece is a complex weft-faced twill with four wefts of different colors "*à retour*" (point repeat), which means that the sequence of the colors is an alternate and reverse repeat (1–2–3–4 / 4–3–2–1). Two other textiles, datable to the later Mongol period are, first, a golden lampas with similar back-to-back winged lions enclosed in roundels and a pair of back-to-back griffins as a secondary divisional element, and second, a similar composition with a pair of felines in roundels and eternal double-headed eagles, both in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Plate 18).

The *muqarnas* ceiling of the Palatine Chapel also significant for tracing the transmission of Central Asian imagery because a few of the paintings prove to be similar and coeval to previously discussed depictions from Ladakh and textiles from Qinghai. One of the best examples is the image of the god Helios on a six-horse chariot found on a fragment (discovered in Turfan); the god is similarly depicted in a couple of the *muqarnas* in Palermo and on a Byzantine textile fragment with a *quadriga* and a horseman, like that on the shroud of Charlemagne. Similarly, this image can be seen on a silver plate, dated to the sixth or seventh century, from Eastern Iran and owned by the Hermitage Museum. It shows a man on a chariot towered over by a crescent; this piece was perhaps originally paired with a second that had the image of a sun. This figure appears to be half of the motif associated with the Iranian goddess Nana who is often represented sitting on a lion, a *makara,* or a throne (also with *sēnmurw*), holding a moon and sun to each side. She was the Iranian image of universal sovereignty over time and space and appears on Sogdian wall paintings between the sixth and the eighth centuries. Not only does this confirm a different imagery transmission along the southern branches of the Silk Road, from which certain patterns reached Himalayan areas and the Mediterranean Basin, it also points to a prevalent central Turko-Iranian matrix in Eurasia that was assimilated and reshaped East and West, especially during the Seljuk period. Most importantly, this common imagery reveals the political and reli-

gious power held by local rulers and a culture that believed rulership to be connected to heaven (or the *cosmos*).

In the case of the Palatine Chapel, for instance, the plan of the building has two distinct sections, the *aula regis* (hall of the king) and the *aula dei* (hall of God), which were used for public audiences and for private royal religious functions, respectively.[95] Like the Ladakh temples, the Palatine Chapel not only preserves these political and religious connections, clearly visible in Alchi and Mangyu (where narrative royal scenes appear alongside Buddhist images), but also combines archaic patterns in the Turko-Iranian fashion, which, as mentioned, was assimilated by the later Mongol Ilkhanate of Persia, and is visible on textile datable to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Three of the Palatine figures share key features that can be compared with figures elsewhere: their seated position (including the position of the arms), the armbands, and the headdresses. The turban, the band, and the boat-like hat all appear in the wall paintings in Alchi (and Mangyu) and confirm the common Turko-Iranian nature of both. The band worn by the Ladakh king and his entourage is worn in the Palatine Chapel by musicians (who are depicted with a *pipa* [lute] and a bi-conical drum, both of Iranian origin). The king, as mentioned, wears a boat-like crown, and is sometimes surrounded by two persons with haloes, or by people wearing a simple band as a headdress. Turbans seem to be associated with other North African people, perhaps of Arab origin.

Another key element is the constant representation of lions. In Palermo they are not depicted on the robes of figures as they are in Ladakh, but rather are dissociated from clothing and used as decorative elements or linked to a character or to another animal figure, some of undisclosed symbolism. Not only do the back-to-back lions recall the pattern on the robe of the *ḍākiṇī* on the main entrance wall in the Sumtsek, the Sasanian vessel with a crossed pair of lions, and the crossed felines on a robe in Hangzhou, the pattern also links to the Maitreya's *dhotī* in Mangyu, on which four winged felines form a rhomboid that frames *Jataka* scenes. Two of the four feline bodies share a common head from which begins a new rhomboid, while their elongated figures evoke the feline-headed dragon-snake depicted on other *muqarnas,* and also the famous bronze door-knockers at the Cizre-Great Mosque.

The snake in the Palatine Chapel represents a further evolution of the archaic dragon-snake, which is common to many cultures and embodies a double nature: on the one hand, it commits evil deeds against humankind; on the other, it can protect humankind from evil forces. Thus, two serpentine bodies with *makara* heads (or sometimes a feminine upper torso and head) appear at the side of Garuda—a bird-like creature and eternal enemy of the *nāga* (snakes)—in Indian and Tibetan iconography, and widely represented in Ladakh.

The sinuous outline of this mutable and dualistic archaic figure is rendered as a stylized endless knot on architectural and textile surfaces during the Mongol period. Textiles woven in Sicily in the twelfth century, during the later Hohenstaufen dynasty (1138 to 1254), already used an intricate serpentine-knot motif as a divisional element in a composition that recalls some of the *muqarnas.* Similar compositions of tight roundels and animals or intricate knots also appear on other earlier and coeval media produced in South Italy. The figure of the "leonine dragon" might be linked "to the invisible eighth and ninth planets known as the 'Dragon's Head' and 'Dragon's Tail' which accounted for the effects of the nodes of the moon's orbit."[96] This figure, like the *melusina,* was understood to be a talisman for long life and protection.

This decorative strategy—using figures as both graphic and talismanic devices—might also explain the unique configuration of three lions sharing one head, depicted on the octagonal junction section between the *muqarnas.* Most obviously it recalls the three hares depicted in Dunhuang and Alchi, but the image should not be seen as merely decorative but rather as "a symbolic representation of the cosmogonic and anthropogonic cycle according to models that could conveniently be defined as 'zurvanist.'" This might explain all the other dualistic images in the chapel. The "zurvanist" concept was brought to light by Geo Widengren (1907–1996) as he was researching Iranian texts and found similar dualistic ideas in Judaic texts, including the *Book of Enoch,* an apocryphal text of Judaeo-Christian heritage dated to the first century BCE. Fragments of this book were found among the Dead Sea scrolls in the caves of Qumran, not far from the caves in Jericho.[97]

It is not news that many Islamic images and patterns were gleaned from the earlier Iranian imagery. But because the Palatine Chapel is unique today for its wooden ceiling showing patterns and motifs of a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multireligious medieval society, it is obviously difficult to state that only a Fatimid artistic background could have composed the ceiling, or that the composition of its mosaic floor can only be judged in terms of Byzantine style. Although the ceiling as a whole presents interpretive problems, it also shows a remarkable link to an iconography partly developed in Iran and Central Asia, and established in Italy before the Mongols, possibly during the Seljuk period. What I have discussed here are just some of the patterns that best represent the Turko-Iranian artistic matrix visible in the costumes and their representation, or patterns that compose the weavings. Islamic and Byzantine elements were, no doubt, juxtaposed with Turkic images and motifs already adapted to the Iranian context. These all were deployed in accordance with twelfth-century Sicilian taste and made the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel a peculiar compendium of that South Italian cultural mix.

Marco Polo, Cangrande della Scala, and Other Cases

The development of term *zandanījī* is still largely a puzzle. Originally it most likely referred to cotton textiles woven in Bukhara that, over time, became silk compounds that went by the same name. It is likely that this same phenomenon also occurred around *ṭirāz* and *nasīj* productions in old Central Asian workshops; in Central Asia, these terms, originally used for plain weavings with a long Arabic inscription, also got applied to other kinds of compounds that carried images of animals or other patterns combined with Arabic inscriptions.

It is hard to overlook that the term *zandanījī* recalls the Italian term *zendado,* which appears often in medieval sources. Apart from the papal inventories dated to 1295, one of the most important documents to mention it is the last will of Marco Polo. Although the presence of the Venetian merchant in China has been questioned, the document held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice lists textiles gathered during his residence in Asia that were imported to Italy. Among these are three pieces of *camoch* and *zendadi* worked in Tartar style, two pieces of white *zendadi,* and one yellow *zendado* from Cathay.[98] As one can see, the *zendado* clearly was a distinct weaving—different from the *camoch*—that was woven in Tartar territories as well as in China. Apparently, the Tartar and the Chinese styles were quite different from one another. These few bits of information gathered from medieval inventories, however, do not really clarify the type of weaving structure that Lisa Monnas has identified with a light-weight plain silk used for linings or embroidered decorations, but that, if recorded as *cendal,* also seemed similar to a samit (weft-faced compound twill).[99] As Michel wrote in 1852:

A silk fabric employed mostly with samit during the second half of the Middle Ages is the *cendal, cenday, cendé, cendex,* or *cendel,* as writers of low Latin called it, and from the ninth century [it was known] by even more names. The *cendal,* if not the same as the samit, differs little from it, so that the two fabrics can be confused. . . . We can say that the *cendal* was a type of taffeta . . . the *cendal* was especially from other territories. . . . And not only did the *cendal* come from the Orient through the Mediterranean Sea, it also arrived through the Black Sea: hence the name *cendal* of Russia. . . . This *cendal* came from China and India, where its manufacture was widespread, as was recorded by Marco Polo.[100]

While the *zendado* is recorded as a monochrome weaving, other textiles listed in the last will of Marco Polo featured roses, strange animals, or checked patterns. These can be found among the weavings that have survived today, especially those used for liturgical vestments or ones we can see depicted in

Italian paintings, such as the *Annunciation with Saint Margaret and Saint Ansanus,* by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi.

Most textiles in Italian (or European) collections that come from Asia and are datable to between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are Central Asian or West Asian; nevertheless, the style or manufacture of just a few can be identified as possibly Chinese. Among these is a *lancé* lampas of green ground with flowers in yellow and metal threads, which was used as the lining of the miter of Bishop Oddone da Colonna (1369–1431), now held in the Museo Diocesano Albani in Urbino, Italy. This floral pattern also recalls the type used for the dalmatics found in St. Nicholas Church in Stralsund and in the Brandenburg Cathedral, both in Germany.

Although these were all used for clothing dated to between the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the textiles themselves belong to an earlier period. The flower types (all very similar), the color palette, and the foliage on serpentine branches that run around the flowers can be attributed to the Yuan period in China; this pattern can also been seen on the underglaze red ceramics of that period.[101] It became one of the most popular patterns of the later Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and shows up especially on blue or yellow-gold grounds used for robes the nobility wore. The miter of the Bishop of Colonna, however, has an Asian green lampas with flowers that was combined with an embroidered composition of half-bust saints framed in lobed roundels, which recall the "tabernacles" mentioned in the description of the *pluviale* (cloak) worked in threads of gold *filé* in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Anagni. It is most likely that the miter was created at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when these kinds of embroidered patterns were widely produced in central Italy. The miter's design followed that used on the pope's cloak and other liturgical vestments: the roundels are set along a vertical axis from the top (the point) of the miter down to the edge (*titulo*), and around the edge itself (*circulo*).[102]

It is not unusual to find earlier compounds employed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century clothing or combined with other weavings datable to a different period or traceable to a different production. Many entries in the papal inventory of 1295 correspond to surviving textile fragments that are generally dated to a later period. An exception that can explain this phenomenon is the regalia preserved in the Church of Saint Domenic in Perugia, attributed to Pope Benedict XI (1240–1304), who during his papacy (only one year, from 1303 until his death) donated it to the Church. Today the dalmatic of the pope appears to be a patch-work construction made over time in a cut-and-paste process that saw the substitution of smaller pieces of different weavings of Asian origin for parts of the original compounds, most likely *panni tartarici* and local embroideries. Many other items were also added to the original

regalia in the following centuries. Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, liturgical vestments (including those belonging to Pope Benedict XI) were cut into smaller pieces to make sacred relics for worship by the devout. This explains the large number of textile fragments preserved in museums worldwide, and also the recycling process of old and new weavings in the recreation of liturgical vestments, like the regalia held in Perugia that most likely was originally made with textiles from the papal treasury, which at that time was stored between Perugia and Assisi.[103]

The regalia of Cangrande I della Scala (1291–1329), by contrast, was discovered in his tomb in Verona in 1921. For structure and style, it appears quite similar to the compounds that compose the dalmatic of Benedict XI, but this set was found intact, as originally assembled. This remains one of the most important discoveries of the last century in Italy; it was studied and presented to the public only in 1983, when the City of Verona organized an exhibition in the Sala Boggian di Castelvecchio for the sixth centenary of Dante Alighieri's death. In 2004 Verona decided to reopen the Ark of Cangrande to re-analyze his body, textiles, and other materials; the new data was compared with that previously gathered, which had not been completely reliable.

The compounds from the Ark of Cangrande are of particular interest because they were found cut in the shape of funerary clothing (a cape, a dress, and a long-sleeved tunic) arrayed on the body of the deceased, without being sewn. This has not only permitted the reconstruction of the compositions as a whole (which is sometimes very difficult to achieve from fragments), but has also suggested the unexpected death of Cangrande and the presence of Asian textiles in the Scala family treasury that were used for the occasion, but not finished and ready for his passing.[104] The collection of *panni tartarici* at the court of the Scala family demonstrated its power among the most important noble families in the Italian Middle Ages and the possibility of acquiring the best luxury compounds in circulation at the time.

Due to the lack of written documents, I must confine myself here to the ornamental data of the compounds themselves and the technical analysis undertaken by the CIETA in Lyons in 1983 as well as some data added in 2004. While visual comparison with Chinese and Iranian coeval media always provides great support for the analysis of a weaving, this is also the technique by which we gain better information about a compound's possible provenance. Images, to become visible, must be embodied in material created with specific instruments and a human engine; here, they are embedded in the geometric structure of the weaving that is not visible to the eye. A comparison with structures found in Chinese territories or, at very least, a comparison with the terminology in Asian sources can help identify the types of textiles found in Cangrande that are not comparable to more local textiles.[105]

It seems evident, in fact, that most of the weavings cannot be identified as Islamic, which means they cannot be ascribed to workshops in West Asia or Egypt. They seem to have come from further east, from Chinese workshops or more likely Central Asian (and Eastern Iranian) workshops that would have been familiar with the techniques that characterize the compounds of Cangrande.[106] But the question is actually more complex. The roots of the ornamental data analyzed in related exhibition catalogues are generally attributed to the Han or Tang China but in fact can be found in archaic Central Asian and Mongol imagery that has not been considered to date. *Nashishi* and *jin* techniques can provide answers to some of the questions regarding the type of structure employed in the majority of the Cangrande textiles.

The textiles used in most of the funerary clothing have two series of warps (main and binding) and two or more series of wefts (with a maximum of four); all are said to be brocaded with metallic membrane threads.[107] Three main terms were deemed the most appropriate for these compounds: diasper, samit, and lampas (what today we call "brocatel," a weaving that belongs to the family of lampas). The second of these (samit) seems to be the structure that best explains the combination and the sequence of warps and wefts of the textiles under examination.

The term "diasper," which was used to classify the dalmatic of Benedict XI and other textiles in Perugia that show a heterogeneous variety of structures and motifs, refers more to the effect of the textile surfaces—generally with a white ground (from the Latinization of the Greek [*d*]*-iaspros/-iaspris,* referring to the color or a quartz)—than to the technique. For this reason, it cannot be used for the textiles of Cangrande. The samit, a weft-faced compound twill, differs from the diasper in the work of the wefts, which create larger and more complex patterns. Finally, the lampas, a later compound possibly developed from the samit and very popular in the thirteenth century, required at least two warps and a minimum of three wefts. The effects on the verso and recto made it seem different from the samit structure because the main warp was often interwoven in the patterning wefts, creating a complex interlocked recto that usually does not characterize *lancé* and brocade structures.

This explanation is based mainly on Italian medieval terminology that often refers to the general effects of the compounds, most of which were produced based on Asian prototypes in local materials. The classification of unknown weaves that appear similar to others already classified under terms that technically define most varieties of *panni tartarici*—diasper, samit, and lampas can be problematic. Because the technique and colors of the Italian diasper and lampas differed slightly from the Asian types, the textiles of the Scala family have simply been classified as samit. So these textiles have not

found a proper technical term in the Italian context. However, in my opinion they seem to correspond to the *nashishi* and *jin* in use during the Yuan period in China, which had similar technical features that created a golden surface effect and which have not heretofore been considered as possible categories.

Elements of ancient Eurasian imagery, which had been constructed and deconstructed multiple times over the centuries, were adapted to the new golden compounds that had developed from earlier techniques and become emblematic of *Pax Mongolica*. Even though it is not possible to point with certainty to the origin of the textiles of Cangrande, the technique employed can most likely be attributed to western China or Central Asia. The use of membrane for golden threads that characterize these compounds has not yet been documented in China, nor have similar textiles been discovered in Iran. Therefore, the weavings can be attributed only to the former Sogdian-Turfanese area where cultural, technical, and artistic movements from east, west, north, and south had always intertwined.

Technical and stylistic developments that had occurred in Central Asia over more than seven centuries can also be seen as prototypes for most Italian weavings where parts of the original patterns were reproduced or reset in new personal typologies. They form a sort of *lingua franca* that characterized the production of the Mongol period.[108] More than a form of hybridism, which suggests merely a mish-mash, the use of textile imagery arriving in Italy in that period involved decoding and personal interpretation as well as translation via local materials in accordance with local standards.[109] The textiles of Cangrande cannot be easily identified, but the register of their patterns reflects the cultural osmosis that had already occurred across Central Asia as well as other multicultural Eurasian areas. Among the textiles discovered in the Ark of Cangrande, four in particular illustrate this process.

One of the four is a compound recalling the angel's robe in the *Annunciation* by Martini and Memmi, which has a white ground with golden floral motifs and small animals (Plate 16). The metallic membrane threads, which today have completely blackened, were originally made in silver; however there are surviving textiles similar to the type under examination here that have gold membrane threads.[110] A few other comparable fragments with a supplementary golden thread, identified as lampas and tabby, were all most likely produced in Central Asia between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Plate 19).[111] These, unlike the type from the Ark of Cangrande, show no images of animals, but the identification of each individual pattern in the composition is difficult to achieve. The reconstruction of the composition on the textile discovered in the Ark of Cangrande was, in fact, possible thanks to the de-coding of all the elements that at first glance seem to be small parts of a big foliage composition, but that eventually were sorted out as a sequential

row of repeated ducks (or geese) and a row of alternating lions and hares, all enclosed in a grid of leaves.

Similar small animals are also depicted in a second well-preserved textile discovered on the bottom of the ark. It recalls the sequence of animals on the Scythian *phalera* dated to the fifth century BCE (Plate 2). The cloth, which in 2004 was identified as being of Azerbaijan manufacture, has a green ground with a sequence of lobed rhombi enclosing four different types of golden palmettoes or lotus flowers on a silver ground. All are joined by roundels framing the endless knot motif typical of Chinese and Tibetan cultures, and surrounded by mirrored and ascending hares and lions (in front of a crescent), and descending fish and crowns (Plate 20).[112] This complex composition, like the *phalera,* seems a cosmogonic interpretation of the four seasons that not only links each animal to one of the four elements—fire-lion, earth-hare, water-fish, and air-crown—but also suggests the passage of time through the use of gold and silver as possibly symbolic of the sun and moon. The composition reads as a "volumetric construction for considerations about time and space, of which representations appear like didactic layers."[113]

Small animals, palmettos or lotus flowers, foliage, and geometric devices are all graphic elements constantly used in various combinations in the textiles of Cangrande. The cloth that covered his body in the ark is not only the most damaged, but probably the most representative of the funerary goods as a sort of program, which pulls together the many other fragments with at least one of the patterns woven on its ground or developed from there. Divided into sequential longitudinal rows, the composition includes Arabic inscriptions, six-pointed stars, archaic Chinese dragons, flying geese, a *badayun* motif, *vajra,* and an abstract foliage motif that recalls the type on the rock relief of Ṭāq-e Bostān. Although not easy to identify (due to damage), these patterns and structures were deduced through comparison with well-preserved dalmatics and tunics held in Regensburg, Germany, which show very similar compositions, including the endless knot motif.

This textile also features two Chinese-Tibetan-type snow lions playing with a ball in the shape of a Chinese *wushu* coin. The image is one of those developed in Chinese territories during the Liao and Song period, and it has been linked to the image of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, who is often depicted sitting on a blue or white lion. In fact, a similar lion playing with a ball appears on the Liao robe held in the Abegg Stiftung, as well as on one of the pieces that composes a tunic held in Stralsund, dated to the fifteenth century. The tunic thus seems to include a textile reused a full century later in the cut-and-paste process I mentioned above.

Ogives or palmettos regularly appear as single or repeated frames for animals in pairs, as foliage, or as dividers to fill gaps in the composition. The

funerary clothing of Cangrande includes this element combined with others in many variations, but the remaining textile that was supposed to be the external dress shows a unique composition. It is a red ground with a repetition of palmettos surrounded by foliage, which in Italian medieval inventories is known as *ad pineas* (pine cone).[114] The pine cone motif woven on this textile encloses a kind of flower similar to one of the types depicted in Plate 20, which are also similar to those on a surviving shoe of Pope Benedict XI. On this item it frames a pair of back-facing hares, a motif commonly reproduced in Lucca. The ogive motif or pine-cone seems a stylized version of the Buddhist *bindu* (a sacred drop or dot on the forehead in Hinduism) that also appears on the crowns of certain bodhisattvas. It is one of those shapes that was later used as a basic form in the creation of a lattice work containing small patterns and foliage that characterized Iranian and Italian weavings.

Snow lions, ogives, dragons, crescents, Arabic script, and Chinese characters were all incorporated into the Italian weaving heritage where they became the foundations of Italian "tradition." The process of image reduction, which characterized Italian compositions, diminished the focus on the meaning of the images hidden in the foliage. Sinuous Chinese forms combined with Islamic geometric elements were all incorporated in Mongol-era productions as a common form of communication. The artistic osmosis that occurred during the Mongol period in territories already familiar with ornamentation and motifs from both East Asia and West Asia, gave artisans the opportunity to elaborate ancient imagery on lavish compounds.

We do not know what material evidence can be related to the will of Marco Polo, and the treasure of Cangrande I della Scala leaves unanswered questions that even advanced methodologies and investigation have not been able to solve. But based on the historical data, the visual comparison of the ornamental data between textiles and paintings, and the technical comparison of material and techniques, we cannot deny the great impact that Central Asian textile imagery had on Europe and in particular on Italian art. More than transcultural adoption, this was a real process of incorporation by which all the graphic elements discussed here became so well assimilated into the local Italian patrimony as to become indistinguishable from truly local ones. The production of paintings from the twelfth to the fifteenth century (especially in Siena and Florence) reproduced the entire Asian textile patrimony that, because it was employed mostly for local Christian images, had become Italian.

Symbols and forms moved beyond their original territories permitted the creation of a new artistic and stylistic patrimony. Sometimes a static setup was erased with time and sometimes motifs were repurposed in a new form, as

occurred during the Mongol period and in earlier Italian textile production. The original meaning was often completely subverted to create a new visual code. The recreation of preferred patterns on complex weavings was a project that required a working plan, special looms, manpower, and technical knowledge that could be saved and transmitted among the weavers.

The complex art of silk weaving was (and still is) not only a practice of making but also a conceptual practice that weavers in the Western Regions of China had mastered centuries before those in any other part of Eurasia. The original geometric structure of textile and its three-dimensionality (with the warps and wefts) did not limit the creation of new ornamentation but transformed older patterns into many variations. In this way, the orthogonal structure preferred in Europe in the thirteenth century was replaced by the lozenge structure of most grounds that arrived from the East, which had mainly been developed during the Han period into *qi* and then *ling* damask structures. These were later embroidered or woven by the Uighurs, who after the An Lushan Rebellion were also deported to Baghdad.[115] The type of embroidery that in medieval sources is listed as *de opere anglicano* (of English work) became very popular for ecclesiastic clothing; it also looks similar to the Uighur composition on a fragment in the Turfan Textile Collection and to textile patterns depicted on cave and tomb walls. Once again, it was the "Turkic diaspora" that carried such graphic elements of the Sino-Iranian matrix across Eurasia to be recontextualized multiple times up until the Mongols created an Islamic-sinicized ornamentation that was transmitted and adapted for use within western Christianity.

"When a source can be positively identified for a fabric in a painting, it is occasionally possible to point to the existence of this textile (or group of textiles) well beyond its initial appearance."[116] We can see that when and if this occurs it facilitates the study of imagery transmission across both similar surfaces and different media. Although early medieval Asian wall paintings and later medieval Italian paintings can be fruitfully compared, they cannot provide information on the origins and provenance of textiles and patterns or even the original names of these, but they can provide a clear overview of textile production and styles that circulated among various social levels in Eurasia.

From the sources studied at the Vatican, it seems clear that the popular "Tartar" textiles referred to a variety of weaving structures (especially those in gold) produced in the vast Eurasian area. Textiles from Central Asia to Italy were sometimes similar, if not identical, to each other. Only Chinese products remained unique in style. China and Italy had their own textile terminologies, which sometimes referred to common structures, but patterns were often adapted to indigenous materials that changed the ground or the weaving pro-

cess slightly, and consequently created new forms and new terms. The decoding of a large amount of data cannot be univocal but necessitates a linguistic, semantic, technical, and visual analysis that can help to at least differentiate Tartar from Saracen and Chinese textiles. Thanks to visual records left by Giotto, Jacopo di Cione, Simone Martini, Lippo Memmi, and Bernardo Daddi—to mention just a few among the Italian painters taken into account here—we can see that textile imagery developed in various areas of Eurasia, and in particular on Tartar cloths produced in Central Asia, proved universally appealing and were secularized in the Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian worlds.