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"Grape Picking" Silk from Palmyra : a Han Dynasty Chinese Textile with a Hellenistic Decoration Motif

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“GRAPE PICKING” SILK FROM PALMYRA. A HAN DYNASTY CHINESE TEXTILE WITH A HELLENISTIC DECORATION MOTIF

Keywords: Chinese silk, Chinese weaving, Han dynasty, Palmyra, Silk Road

Introduction

Among textile finds from Palmyra one calls for special attention. It is Chinese polychrome silk with decoration representing human figures picking grapes, and animals: camels and tigers. The weaving technique suggests that this fabric must have been produced in China, but the motif is definitely uncommon in Chinese iconography and until now the find from Palmyra is the only evidence of such representation on *jin* silk dated to the reign of the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220). The aim of this paper is to discuss issues connected to the place of this particular object in the cultural context of Chinese textile production in the early 1st millennium.

Textile finds from Palmyra

Due to its remote location in the middle of the Syrian Desert and dry climate which prevented decomposition of organic materials, the site of Palmyra conserved multiple artefacts rarely to be found in archaeological sites of the Roman Period. Many textiles have been collected in tombs located in the Western Necropolis. Finds from earlier excavations were published by Rudolf Pfister (1934; 1937; 1940), while more recent work of Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, Annemarie Stauffer and Khaled al As’ad (2000) presents effects of studies on the old and new material, including analyses of fibres and pigments.

According to this research, among textiles found in the graves were linen, cotton, wool, and silk fabrics. In the analysed group of over 500 objects, 96 were woven of silk warp and weft. There were also a few mixed fabrics with silk warp and weft made of wool, cotton or linen (Table 1). The group of silk fabrics is not homogenous – fibre analyses have shown that some were made of non-mulberry Tussah silk obtained of *Antheraea* species, broadly used in southern China and especially India. However, most of fabrics are woven of unspun silk which may come only from domesticated species *Bombyx mori* L., used only in China, Korea and Japan in the early 1st millennium AD (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS’AD 2000: 12–13, pl. 102:g; VARADARAJAN 1988: 563–565; ZHAO 2005a: 2–6). Of those, some could be produced out of China, using imported yarn, and two pieces of damask weave are probably early

examples of Mediterranean, perhaps Syrian production (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS’AD 2000: 53). Thirteen fragments are undoubtedly of Chinese origin, since they represent typical Chinese types of weaving: so-called Han damask – warp-faced tabby with warp floats [*qi* 綺] and so-called Han brocade – warp-faced compound tabby [*jin* 錦].

Table 1. Types of textiles found at Palmyra (M. Żuchowska, based on SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS’AD 2000).

Tab. 1. Rodzaje tkanin znalezionych w Palmyrze.

Material	Number of finds
Silk	96
Wool	265
Cotton	36
Linen	121
Goat hair	2
Linen + Cotton	1
Linen + Wool	1
Silk + Cotton	2
Silk + Wool	6
Silk + Linen	1

Textile finds from the Western Necropolis can be roughly dated to the 1st–3rd c. AD. The earliest dated grave in this area – a tower tomb of Athenatan was erected in 9 BC, according to an Aramaic inscription (GAWLIKOWSKI 1970: 47; HILLERS, CUSSINI 1996: 92, cat. no. 0457) and the necropolis was not in use after the fall of Palmyra in AD 273. Taking into consideration that the trade power of Palmyra declined even a few decades earlier, we may assume that silks found in the tombs should be considered as the Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25–220) or perhaps early post-Han products. This chronology also corresponds with technical and stylistic features of most of these textiles, but the decoration pattern of “grape picking” *jin* silk is definitely uncommon for Chinese production of this period.

“Grape picking” silk

The “grape picking” fabric was the only silk textile found in Tower Tomb 65 located north of the Wadi al-Qubur, in the Western Necropolis also called the “Valley of Tombs.” There was unfortunately no regular excavation in this tomb which was plundered several times and all

textile finds were collected close to the entrance where they were abandoned by robbers (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS'AD 2000: 2–4). The silk is quite poorly preserved – only three small pieces measuring respectively 71×109, 63×77 and 59×68 mm survived, but the iconographical composition can be recognised. In the smallest piece right selvedge is preserved.

The “grape picking” silk is a typical example of Chinese *jin* [錦] fabric – polychrome warp-faced compound tabby. Warp was made of silk without any traces of spinning – blue, rust-red and golden-yellow (156–162 ends/cm), while the weft was composed of reddish blue silk, also without traces of spinning (23–24 lats/cm) (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS'AD 2000: 145–146, cat. no. 240).

On the dark blue background with visible rust-red strips, relatively small motifs are represented in golden-yellow and rust-red. Decoration is disposed quite densely and, as far as we can recognise it on the preserved small pieces, the pattern repeats every 45 mm in warp direction. On the largest fragment, parts of two rows of pattern are visible (Figs. 1, 4:a). Looking from the left the human figure turn-

ed right is represented, holding the bunch of grapes in the right hand and collecting the other bunch from the vine with the left hand. Further right we can see a camel. Left and right of the camel identical items are represented, which are probably two tripod vessels or baskets arranged one behind another. All this group is placed under the vine, growing out from the small shrub to the right. Then, the next human figure collecting grapes appears. On the second fragment a similar scene is represented, but instead of a camel, between two groups of vessels we see a feline beast, supposedly a tiger, with the vessels placed only on its right side (Figs. 2, 4:b). The smallest fragment is the worst preserved but important, since it is a part of the right edge of the textile. Here again we can see a human figure collecting grapes and a camel, with a row of vessels on the left. Right from the camel a golden-yellow vertical strip ends the decoration and divides it from the selvedge (Figs. 3, 4:c).

On the border between the pattern and the selvedge a few threads of yellow wool are preserved, suggesting that the piece has been attached to the other cloth, probably as edging (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS'AD 2000: 145–146, cat. no. 240).



Fig. 1. Fragment of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra (71×109 mm) (Photo K. Juchniewicz).

Ryc. 1. Fragment jedwabiu z przedstawieniem winobrania znaleziony w Palmyrze (wymiary: 71×109 mm).



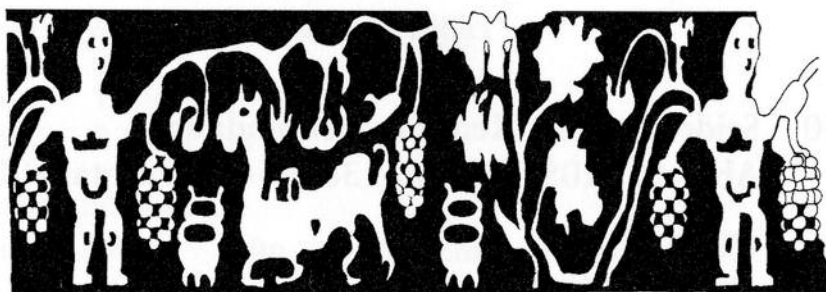
Fig. 2. Fragment of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra (63×77 mm) (Photo K. Juchniewicz).

Ryc. 2. Fragment jedwabiu z przedstawieniem winobrania znaleziony w Palmyrze (wymiar: 63×77 mm).



Fig. 3. Fragment of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra (59×68 mm) (Photo K. Juchniewicz).

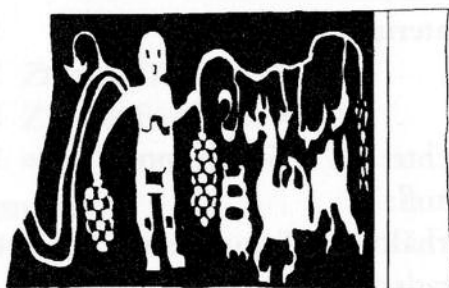
Ryc. 3. Fragment jedwabiu z przedstawieniem winobrania znaleziony w Palmyrze (wymiar: 59×68 mm).



a



b



c

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the decorative motifs of all three preserved fragments of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra (SCHMIDT-COLINET, STAUFFER, AL AS’AD 2000: fig. 105).

Ryc. 4. Rekonstrukcja motywów dekoracyjnych wszystkich trzech zachowanych fragmentów jedwabiu z przedstawieniem winobrania z Palmyry.

Weaving technique

Warp-faced compound tabby [*pingwen jingjin* 平紋經錦] is the most elaborate achievement of the Han dynasty Chinese weaving technique. This type of textile is often called simply *jin* or “Chinese brocade.” The last term is actually confusing, since the technique has nothing to do with real brocades manufactured in China in later periods (LI 2012: 120). The most important technological feature of this type of fabric is that patterns were made by alterations of two or more warps in diverse colours, while weft was invisible on the surface and one for both functions – binding weft in tabby and pattern weft dividing colours. The most popular were two- or three-coloured fabrics but up to six colours could be used, although such examples are quite rare (KUHN 1995: 84–86; BECKER 2009: 56–57). Using more than five series of warp made all weaving process technically difficult and time-consuming, thus rather rarely used.

Jin silks were manufactured on large and complex looms and the process was long and difficult. Only the most skilful weavers were able to produce such a fabric. Moreover the best quality, well degummed silk was needed as a raw material, since it had to be dyed before weaving.

Thus, multicoloured patterned silks were the most expensive ones (LI 2012: 120). Chinese character *jin* [錦] is composed of two parts meaning respectively *jin* [金] – “metal (gold),” and *bo* [帛] – “silks” what reflects the precious character of such a textile.

It is possible that for the first time this technique was applied in China during the reign of the Western Zhou dynasty (11th–8th c. BC). The earliest known fabric of this type was found in a tomb in the Chaoyang [朝陽] region, Liaoning [遼寧] Province. Although the colours are faded, the structure of this textile suggests that it was two-colour warp-faced compound tabby made of good quality degummed silk (ZHAO 2005a: 63–64). Most of early finds come however from the area of the Chu [楚] Kingdom, from the present Hubei [湖北], Hunan [湖南] and southern Henan [河南] Provinces and are dated to the Warring States Period (5th–3rd c. BC) (KUHN 1995: 85). The height of such a production falls to the reign of the Han (206 BC – AD 220) and Jin (AD 265–420) dynasties.

According to Kuhn, patterned textiles could be produced during the Han dynasty on three types of looms. The best known and well evidenced was a loom combining multiple movable healds with many treadles [*duozong duonie zhiji* 多綜多躡織機], which was used for *jin* silk production continuously from the Eastern Han dynasty up to the period of Northern and Southern dynasties (AD 420–589) (KUHN 1995: 90–92). Its use at the end of the 1st millennium BC, known to date only from the written sources, has been recently proven by the find of a wooden model in a tomb dated to the Western Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 9) at Laoguanshan [老官山], Chengdu [成都], Sichuan [四川] Province (Zhao Feng: personal communication; *SICHUAN...* 2014). The same effect could be obtained using a loom with lifting pattern rods [*tihuazong zhiji* 提花綜織機] (KUHN 1995: 93). As Kuhn (1995: 94–102) suggests, although there is no material evidence of use of a drawloom [*shuzong tihuaji* 束綜提花機] in that time, written sources suggest that it developed in China already in the Eastern Han dynasty period and could be used in official governmental and large private workshops.



Fig. 5. Weft-faced compound tabby (*taqueté*) found in Tomb 131 at the Zaganluk necropolis, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (WANG 2008: fig. 13:1).

Ryc. 5. Wzorzysta tkanina jedwabna o splocie wątkowym (*taqueté*) znaleziona w grobie nr 131 w Zaganluk, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

There were multiple production centres and workshops, among them three official ones, supplying the court: the Weaving Chamber [*Zhi Shi* 織室] in the capital city of Chang'an [長安], the Three Seasons Tailoring Workshop [*San Fu Guan* 三服官] in the present area of Shandong [山東] Province and the Office for *Jin* Weaving [*Jin Guan* 錦官] in Chengdu [成都], Sichuan [四川] (ZHAO 2004: 67; KUHN 1995: 103).

During the reign of the Han dynasty *jin* silks were often exported to the so-called Western Regions [Xiyu 西域] (the present day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region [新疆維吾爾自治區]) and finally influenced local production in this area in the 4th and 5th c. AD (ZHAO 2005b: 54; 2008: 78–79). It would be very tempting to see “grape picking” silk from Palmyra as a very early Xinjiang production, regarding its decoration motifs related rather to the Hellenised Central Asian culture than the Chinese ornaments repertoire. However there are multiple differences between Chinese silks and the Xinjiang production.

First of all, Chinese weavers were using good quality reeled, unspun silk, while in Xinjiang visibly Z-twisted threads are used, probably obtained by spinning waste yarn. Documents from Turpan from the 5th c. AD attest production of silk made of twisted threads in the Gaochang [高昌] Kingdom located in this area (WANG 2008: 39). Another question is the technique of weaving. Most of the polychrome silks produced in Xinjiang are *taquetés* – weft-faced compound tabbies [*pingwen weijin* 平紋緯錦], while Chinese *jin* silks are warp-faced (WANG 2008; YOKOHARI 1992: 167). Most of such finds come from the Yingpan [營盤] necropolis in the Yuli [尉犁] County, the Zaganluk [扎滾魯克] necropolis in the Qiemo [且末] County and the Astana [阿斯塔那] necropolis, close to

Turpan [吐魯番], all located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Their distribution must have reached as far east as the Gansu [甘肅] Province, where weft-faced compound tabby fabric similar to those from Yingpan and Zaganluk have been found in the Huahai [花海] necropolis (ZHAO 2005b).

A typical example of such a production is a fragment of *taqueté* found in Tomb 131 in the Zaganluk necropolis, decorated with a hunting scene. The weave is 1:2 weft-faced compound tabby, with warp and weft made of Z-twisted silk. On the red background yellow and white motifs represent horse archers and animals between geometrised scrolls. Additional decoration is formed by geometric patterns, symbols resembling Chinese characters 目 [*mu* – “eye”] and 市 [*shi* – “market”], and swastikas (WANG 2008: 31) (Fig. 5). This decoration visibly presents a mixture of a local pattern theme and the Chinese style, including imitations of Chinese characters.

A small group of warp-faced compound tabbies made of Z-spun silk, probably also of Xinjiang production, dated to the Jin dynasty period were found in the necropolis of Yingpan, but they are narrow ribbons, only a few centimetres wide (ZHAO 2002: 65; 2008: 78–79). It should be also pointed out that Xinjiang production started not earlier than in the late 3rd–4th c. AD and became popular in the 5th–6th c. AD (LI 2003: 324), while the fragment from Palmyra cannot be dated to the period later than the mid-3rd c. AD.

According to the present state of research polychrome warp-faced compound tabbies made of unspun silk were in this period manufactured only in China and the technological features of the “grape picking” silk define it without doubt as a Chinese product.

Pattern composition

Typical Chinese *jin* weaves had relatively small patterns, recognisable only after a closer look. They were in most of the cases organised quite densely and repeated every few centimetres in warp direction. It has been observed that pattern repeats in *jin* silks are between 20 and 90 mm in warp direction, but actually rarely exceed 60 mm (KUHN 1995: 87). The “grape picking” silk from Palmyra where the pattern repetition is every 45 mm falls easily into the most typical group. In weft direction the pattern could be larger, up to the whole width of the bolt.

There were standards for measures of the bolt, introduced probably as unification for taxation purposes. They were varying in different periods – during the reign of the Western Han dynasty standard bolts were usually 1.8 *chi* [尺] (about 41.58 cm), although *HAN SHU* [漢書], *Book of Han*, the official history of the Western Han dynasty states that one bolt should be 2 *chi* 2 *cun* [寸] (50.82 cm) (*HAN SHU* 24.2). This measure however started to be widely used and became a standard during the reign of the Eastern Han dynasty (KUHN 2012: 21). Also starting from the Han dynasty period the length of the bolt was standardised to 4 *zhang* [丈] (9.24 m)¹ (BECKER 2009: 56).

If we assume that the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra was a fragment of such a typical, 2 *chi* 2 *cun* wide bolt, the whole pattern could be reconstructed as repeating scenes alternately with camels and tigers, or camels, tigers and a third animal which did not survive on the preserved fragments.

The general idea of this composition is well placed within the Han dynasty polychrome silk pattern tradition – scrolls and animals. Although two-coloured fabrics with geometrical decoration or repetition of a simple animal motif are known from this period, the largest group of multicoloured silks are decorated with scrolls. This decoration derives from embroidered motifs called *longevity* [*changshou* 長壽], *abiding faith* [*xinqi* 信其] and *riding the clouds* [*chengyun* 乘雲] composed of swirling clouds and additional stylised floral or animal patterns. The names are known from documents buried together with the fabrics in a tomb in Mawangdui [馬王堆], Changsha [長沙], Hunan [湖南] Province. Technological development during the period of the late Western Han and early Eastern Han dynasty allowed for transposition of embroidered motifs into weaving patterns, which however have their own original style (KUHN 1995: 106; LI 2012: 134–142).



Fig. 6. Arm-guard made of *jin* silk decorated with scrolls, animals, birds and Chinese characters, found in Tomb 8 at Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (WENWU 2000: fig. 49).

Ryc. 6. Karwasz luczniczy wykonany z jedwabiu *jin* z dekoracją skomponowaną z wici, zwierząt, ptaków i chińskich znaków. Znaleziony w grobie nr 8 w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

¹ 1 *chi* during the reign of the Han dynasty was equal to 231 mm. 1 *zhang* 丈 = 10 *chi* 尺 = 100 *cun* 寸.

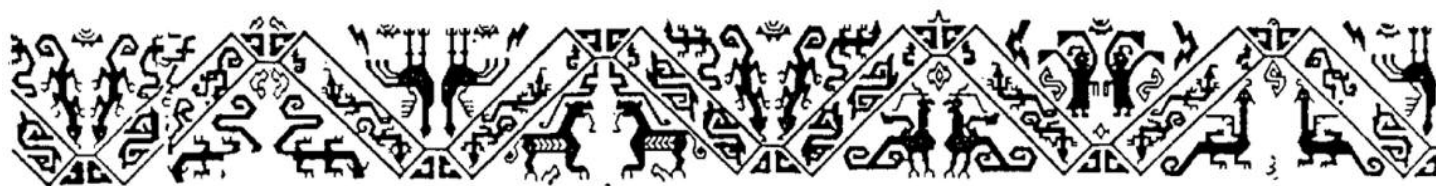


Fig. 7. *Jin* silk decorated with the motifs of dancers and fabulous beasts from Tomb 1 at Mashan, Jiangling, Hunan Province (KUH 1995: fig. 7).

Ryc. 7. Jedwab *jin* z przedstawieniem tancerek i baśniowych zwierząt z grobu nr 1 w Mashan, Jiangling, prowincja Hunan.

In *jin* weaving, cloud scrolls were sometimes used as the only pattern – *cloud pattern* [*yun wen* 雲紋], but definitely more often there were animals represented in between, forming *animal and cloud pattern* [*yunqi dongwu wen* 雲氣動物紋]. A good example of high quality, multi-coloured silk with such a decoration is an arm-guard found in Tomb 8 in Niya [尼雅], Minfeng [民豐] County, Xinjiang. A small fragment of *jin* fabric used for this item, probably having only funerary purpose, is made of 1:4 warp-faced compound tabby with yellow, white, green and red patterns representing auspicious animals – tigers and winged unicorns, birds and Chinese characters between cloud scrolls on the dark blue background. The inscription, being a citation from the *HAN SHU* says: *Five planets rise in the east bringing benefits to China* [*wu xing chu dong fang li zhong guo* 五星出東方利中国] (WENWU 2000: 28; ZHAO, YU 2000: 62) (Fig. 6).

Human representations

On the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra human figures, probably male, are represented roughly, but there is a visible effort to show them naked – chest, abdomen muscles and knees are emphasized, and no elements may be interpreted as clothes. This feature is important as definitely untypical in Chinese art.

A general analysis of human representations in Han iconography goes far beyond the scope of this paper, we can however trace the most characteristic themes and features. Generally in Han iconography, human figures appear in representations of everyday life scenes, such as field works or court scenes showing dancers and musicians – the most popular themes of funerary reliefs (WU CENGDE 1984: 19–30, 63–104), or in the heavenly context, showing the life of immortals, who also appear in funerary context on reliefs, paintings and coffin decorations (WU CENGDE 1984: 114–118; WU HUNG 2010: 48). Mythical figures, of which one of the most popular was Queen Mother of the West [*Xi Wang Mu* 西王母] appear as a quite often used topic (WU CENGDE 1984: 110–114; HONG 2006: 132–139; HUANG 2008: 62–64). Definitely less popular, but appearing on reliefs, lacquerware and paintings were narrative story-telling representations, connected with popular beliefs or legends (WU CENGDE 1984: 132–152; HONG 2006: 131–137; HUANG 2008: 210–213). Terracotta figurines often placed in elite

tombs represented mainly servants, soldiers and entertainers. Represented figures always wear dresses appropriate for their position and performed work, showing typical features of Han dynasty period cloth.

Human representations are generally not very common on *jin* silks. The earliest known example is the fabric excavated in Tomb 1 at Mashan [馬山], Jiangling [江陵], Hunan Province – a grave of a noble of the Chu [楚] Kingdom dated to the Warring States Period. It represents a composition organised around diagonally arranged fields with clouds and animals inside. Triangle spaces between them are filled by heraldic pairs of tigers, phoenixes [*feng* 鳳], dragons [*long* 龍], and dancers, wearing typical long sleeves costumes (CHEN, ZHANG 1982; ZHAO 2005a: 51; YUAN, ZHAO 2009: 34–35; PENG 2012: 90–93) (Fig. 7).

In Han times, when human figures appear on *jin* silks, they usually constitute a part of a composition where diverse creatures are represented between cloud-scrolls. In some rare cases riders, sometimes winged, are represented on the back of a horse or another winged creature, but from the Han period only a few such examples are known. A fragment from Kurgan 12 in Noyon Uul, Mongolia represents flying deer and winged riders mounting flying horses (LUBO-LESNICENKO 1961: 47–48, table 40), while on a piece found by Stein in Loulan [樓蘭], Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, we could recognise a horse rider among other motifs (STEIN 1928: 251, 253, table 34, now in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi). A rider on a winged creature can be also recognized on a *jin* silk edging a woollen caftan found in Tomb 8 in Niya [尼雅], Minfeng [民豐] County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This piece of extraordinary beautiful textile represents scrolls and winged beasts on the red background. Between scrolls and beasts we can read two characters meaning: *big ornament* [*wen da* 文大] (Fig. 8).

A cap from the same tomb was made of *jin* silk with clouds pattern. Between them two types of very schematic figures are represented, together with characters forming an incompletely preserved inscription. Two fragments can be read as: *may sons live on by virtue* [*de yi zi sheng* 德宜字生] and *peace on rivers and mountains* [*he sheng shan nei an* 河生山內安] (ZHAO, YU 2000: 60, cat. no. 22; YU 2003: 39; LI 2012: 143). One of these figures, with a characteristic pin in the hair is probably Queen Mother of the West, while the other could be her attendant.



Fig. 8. *Jin* silk edging of the woollen caftan found in Tomb 8 in Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (ZHAO, YU 2000: fig. 01-1-3).

Ryc. 8. Jedwabne obszycie wełnianego kaftana znalezione w grobie nr 8 w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

The first three examples follow clearly Chinese traditional style and decorative patterns, while the fourth is extremely schematic, almost ideographic and composed together with inscription which constitute probably a complex message, difficult in interpretation.

The human figures on the silk from Palmyra clearly differ from the examples described above, both in the subject of figural scene and stylistic features of human body representation.

Grapevine

The most interesting feature of the pattern represented on the silk from Palmyra is the grapevine, which is definitely uncommon in the Chinese iconography of the Han period.

According to the *Records of Grand Historian* [*SHI Ji* 史記] viticulture was first introduced to China by Zhang Qian [張騫], a special envoy of the Han court who travelled with the mission of finding allies against Xiongnu tribes in the second half of the 2nd c. BC. He observed the process of wine production in Ferghana [*Da Yuan* 大宛] and probably brought the plant, which, according to the Chinese text, eventually started to be cultivated in the capital city, Chang'an:

The regions around Dayuan make wine out of grapes, the wealthier inhabitants keeping as much as 10 000 or more piculs stored away. It can be kept for as long as twenty or thirty years without spoiling. The people love their wine and the horses love their alfalfa. The Han envoys brought back

grape and alfalfa seeds to China and the emperor for the first time tried growing these plants in areas of rich soil. Later, when the Han acquired large numbers of the 'heavenly horses' and the envoys from foreign states began to arrive with their retinues, the lands on all sides of the emperor's summer palaces and pleasure towers were planted with grapes and alfalfa for as far as the eye could see (Records of Grand Historian 123, Account on Ferghana [SHI Ji 123: Da Yuan Lie Zhuan 大宛列傳]).

It seems however, that this attempt was not successful or the custom did not spread far from the palace, and finally must have vanished, because we find no traces of vine or grapes motifs in any type of Chinese art and craft of this period. Vine scrolls were adapted to the repertoire of decorative motifs in China not earlier than in the 5th–6th c. AD and became quite popular, especially as decoration of bronze mirrors' reverses during the reign of the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907) (THOMPSON 1967). We also find them on fabrics in this period. An elaborate composition of vine scroll is known for example from a twill damask silk [*ling* 綾] found at the Dulan [都蘭] burial ground, in the Chaidamu Basin [柴達木盆地] area, Qinghai [青海] Province (ZHAO 2002: 107).

The viticulture and vine scroll motif seem to be known a little bit earlier in the present Xinjiang area, which had closer contacts with other Central Asian countries, but the evidence of early local cultivation and use of grapes is still very weak. A research on plant relics from a tomb located in Yanghai [洋海], Tuyuq [吐峪沟] township, at the foot of the famous Flaming Mountains [火焰山] proved

that, among other species of wood, also a piece of *Vitis vinifera* L. was used here for one of the tomb’s arrangements. ¹⁴C analysis dated this find to around 300 BC (JIANG ET AL. 2009). Although it is rather not plausible that one stick of vine was brought from another region only to be used in the grave construction, this unique evidence cannot be used as a prove of a wide distribution of viticulture in the area.

It is also hard to find grape decoration among local ornamental motifs. A woollen textile decorated with pattern interpreted as grapes was found in the necropolis of Sampula [山普拉] (JIANG ET AL. 2009: fig. 2) but the decoration is very rough and actually does not represent characteristic vine leaves, but only bunches of rounded fruits (Fig. 9). A piece of woollen fabric with silk embroidery representing more accurate vine grape design was found by Stein in the Loulan necropolis (STEIN 1928: 249, cat. no. LC033).

Besides the *jin* silk from Palmyra, only one example of Chinese silk textile with vine scroll representation dated to the 1st–4th c. AD is known to the author. According to the publication it was found in one of graves excavated in 1959–1960 by the team of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum at the site of Niya. On the contrary to most of the fabrics described above, it was Chinese weave named *qi* [綺], sometimes called Han damask. This type of monochrome silk can be described as warp-faced tabby with warp floats (usually 1:3 in the Han times) which are used to create decoration motifs or as warp-faced twill-patterned tabby. The *qi* fabric from Niya is a typical warp-faced tabby with 1:3 floats, with 66 ends of warp per cm and 26–36 lats of weft per cm. The width of the bolt measured about 45 cm, so it was close to the

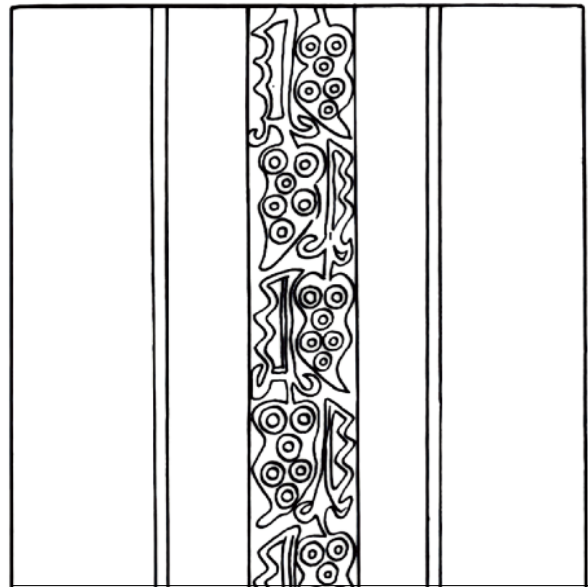


Fig. 9. Woollen fabric with decoration interpreted as grapes from the Sampula necropolis, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (JIANG ET AL. 2009: fig. 2).

Ryc. 9. Wełniana tkanina z przedstawieniem winogron z nekropoli Sampula, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

Han dynasty standards (WU MIN 1962: 67–68). The decoration motif is quite uncommon however, representing vine scrolls with very rough human figures keeping hanging bundles of grapes in each hand and animals – difficult to recognise winged creatures, probably does and kneeling horses. The composition follows a Han dynasty trend in textile decoration, especially visible in *jin* fabrics, to repeat the same motif every few centimetres, so the pattern is organised in horizontal rows (Fig. 10).²

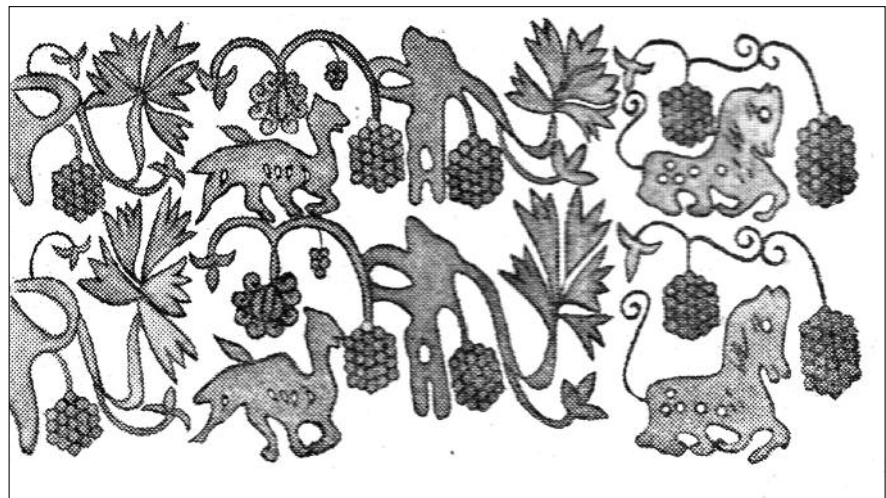


Fig. 10. Drawing of *qi* silk with grapevine decoration excavated in Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (WU MIN 1962: fig. 4).

Ryc. 10. Przerys dekoracji jedwabiu *qi* z przedstawieniem winorośli znalezionej w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

² I did not have an occasion to see the original textile. It was published only once in: WU MIN 1962: 67–68. There is neither a photo

of the fabric nor any information about the size of the preserved fragment.

The fact that grapevine and grapes are virtually absent in the iconography of Han dynasty textiles can hardly be explained by the incidence of the finds. It seems rather that this pattern was exotic in the repertoire of decorative motifs of that time and appeared only on special occasions, perhaps on textiles which were aimed as gifts, especially for foreigners more familiar with such a decoration.

Animals

The choice of animals represented between the vine scrolls is also far from being typical. The tiger is among the most commonly represented animals on *jin* silks. It was considered the most powerful of land animals, symbolising dignity, courage and fierceness. It appeared usually together with other auspicious animals, such as the deer, bringing longevity, or ducks symbolising eternal love and fidelity (WILLIAMS 2006: 132–133, 158–159, 377–379), as well as mythical beasts such as the dragon [*long* 龍], the unicorn [*qilin* 麒麟] and the phoenix [*feng* 鳳] or the winged horse. A good example of such pattern is represented on female trousers found in Tomb 3 at Niya, representing horse riders, tigers and fabulous beasts in scrolls on a dark blue background. Preserved characters wish: *Long lasting*

great pleasure, brightening light [*chang le da ming guang* 長樂大明光] (ZHAO, YU 2000: 59) (Fig. 11).

The motif of camels, on the contrary, is quite uncommon. These animals rarely appear in the repertoire of decorative patterns of Chinese art before the 5th–6th c. AD. One of the rare pieces of *jin* silks from the Han-Jin period decorated with narrative scenes were found in Tomb 4 at Niya. The original textile was used for bordering a garment made of another material, so that only thin bands survived, but we can recognise a hunting scene with two horse riders and chasing camels (ZHAO 2005a: 171; LI 2012: 164–165) (Fig. 12). Due to the poor state of preservation it is difficult to reconstruct the whole pattern of this fabric, though the narrative character of composition as well as its theme are not typical for the Chinese textile production and were probably influenced by Persian art. In later times camels, together with exotic animals, such as elephants or lions became more popular in the repertoire of textile decoration motifs. A good example of such a late fabric is a famous *jin* silk with decoration arranged in medallions of which some contain a representation of a man holding a camel and two characters' inscription 胡王 [*hu wang* – “foreign king”] found in a tomb in Gaochang [高昌], Turpan [吐魯番] region, Xinjiang, dated to AD 558 – the reign of the Northern Zhou dynasty (WU MIN 1984: 70–71).



Fig. 11. Detail of female trousers found in Tomb 3 at Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, made of *jin* silk with representation of horse riders, tigers and fabulous beasts (ZHAO, YU 2000: 59).

Ryc. 11. Detal damskich spodni z grobu nr 3 w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang, wykonanych z jedwabiu *jin* z przedstawieniem jeźdźców, tygrysów i baśniowych zwierząt.

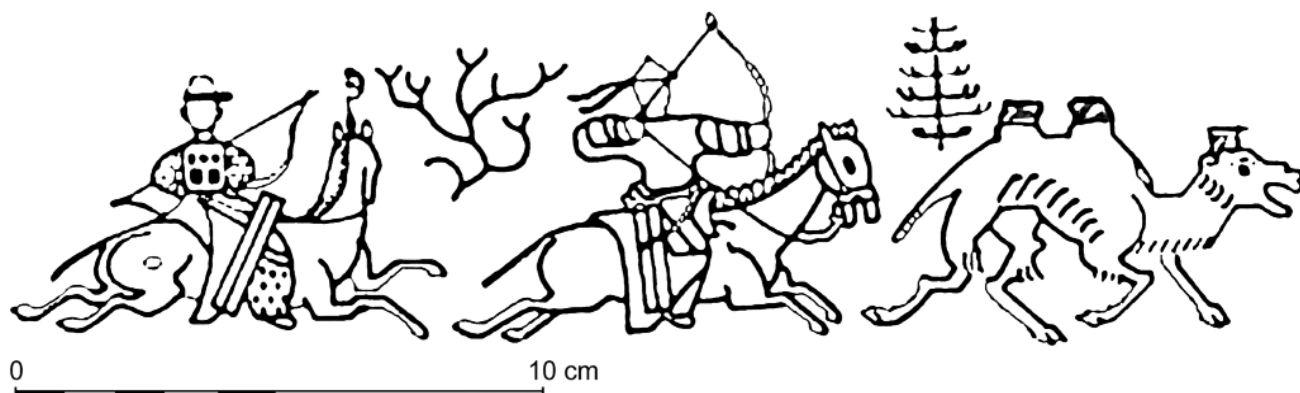


Fig. 12. Drawing of hunting scene on the *jin* silk fragment from Tomb 4 at Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (ZHAO 2005a: fig. 3:4:11).

Ryc. 12. Rysunek sceny polowania na fragmencie jedwabiu *jin* z grobu nr 4 w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

Discussion

The above study shows clearly that the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra is a rare example of typically Chinese polychrome weave which uses a definitely exotic motif as a theme of decoration. The rarity of human representations in Chinese polychrome silks patterns and their different style as well as the use of grapevine motif indicate clearly that the decoration of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra follows rather a foreign tradition and imitates scenes popular in Hellenised art. This consideration however, raises multiple questions concerning a cultural and social context of this artefact.

The most intriguing questions concern the source of the motif and the reasons of its adaptation as well as the eventual consumer for whom such a textile was produced.

The issue of foreign influence in decorative patterns of Han dynasty weaving art is a complex problem, since we have to make a distinction between adaptation of single motifs into the stylistically traditional ornament and use of an unfamiliar, definitely foreign theme of decoration.

The first case seems to be a long used and common practice. Although on the first sight the style of Han dynasty textiles seems to be fully connected with local tradition and well embedded in Chinese art and beliefs, a closer look shows that foreign motifs were slowly adapted and imperceptibly merged into a classical repertoire of patterns. The animals represented between the scrolls are sometimes not only typical birds, tigers or dragons, but also other composite beasts which might be adapted from foreign cultures. Among them, horned horses or winged ungulates, often described as unicorns, might be a transposition of motifs popular on the steppes and often called “beasts of the North” in Chinese writings (MILLER, BROSEDER 2013). Also winged felines seem to be foreign to the Chinese tradition and the question of their origin and possible interpretation has been recently raised by Zhang Wén, Xu Chunzhong, Wu Zhuo and Qiu Yiping (2013) who would like to see them as winged lions, similar to gryphons, which could be adapted into Chinese weaving from western iconography through contacts with steppe cultures.

These examples show that exotic motifs were abundantly adapted to traditional Chinese patterns during the reign of the Eastern Han dynasty. However, they still adapt to the local style and result in just enriching the world of supernatural beasts which are often considered auspicious.

On the contrary, the grape picking scene only slightly bowed to the Chinese taste by the addition of more familiar tripod vessels. Therefore, it must be considered as a subject totally exotic for Chinese weavers and the local consumer alike. Since this scene has no parallels in the Chinese art and craft, it must have been observed on a foreign product and then copied or imitated in the *jin* pattern.

Only two categories of goods with Hellenistic ornamentation are known to have been imported to China: metal vessels and textiles. In both cases we have very scarce evidence, mostly from later periods. A representative group of metal vessels of Central Asian origin, including Iranian, Bactrian and Sogdian products were found in China, but most of them are dated to the period between the 3rd and 7th c. AD (MARSHAK 2004: 47–48). The only earlier, gilded silver plate was found at Beitan [北灘], Jingyuan [靖遠] County, Gansu [甘肅] Province (CHU 1990: 1). It is decorated with a central medallion with a representation of Dionysos on the back of a panther, encircled by busts of twelve Olympic gods. The whole interior surface around the medallion is covered by an elaborate vine scroll inhabited by small creatures, such as birds and lizards and was probably produced in the Eastern Roman provinces around the 2nd–3rd c. AD (Fig. 13). Two inscriptions added later give us however evidence that the vessel had been used by a Sogdian owner between the 5th and 7th c. and later perhaps in Bactria, before it arrived in China, probably around the 7th–8th c. (WATT ET AL. 2004: 184–185, cat. no. 90). Thus, although we may hypothesize about earlier import of such vessels to China from the Roman Empire or less remote territories of Hellenised Central Asian states, there is no material evidence of such trade before the 4th c. AD.

The actual evidence of textiles’ import is not much better. We do not know of any example of imported

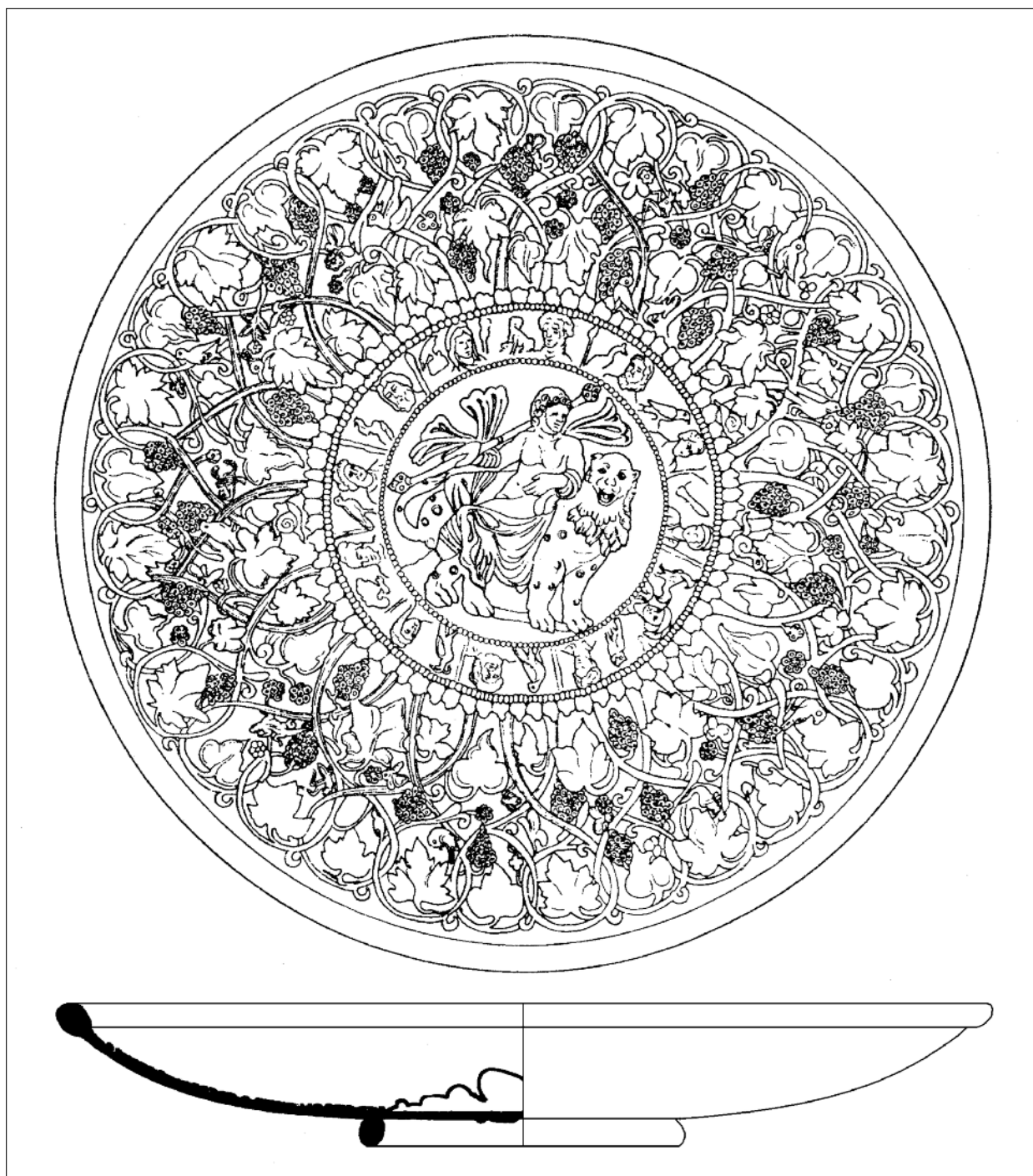


Fig. 13. Silver plate found at Beitan, Jingyuan County, Gansu Province (CHU 1990: fig. 5).

Ryc. 13. Srebrny talerz znaleziony w Beitan, Jingyuan, prowincja Gansu.

polychrome patterned textile found in central and eastern China, dated to the reign of the Han dynasty. Nevertheless, finds from northern and western bordering areas may give us some hints. The inflow of western textiles into areas close to the Chinese borders, Xinjiang and northern steppes can be traced up to the last centuries of the 1st millennium AD.

A pair of trousers made of woollen tapestry with decoration representing a warrior in steppe nomadic cloth

and a centaur playing flute were found in a mass grave at Sampula [山普拉], Luopu [洛浦] County. The original cloth was probably produced in Bactria in the 3rd-2nd c. BC and must have been used first as a wall hanging, as suggested by its size, reconstructed as 2.31×4.8 m, perhaps in a large residence or palace. Then it was looted and cut into pieces, one of which was used to make the trousers. The last owner of the trousers died in the 1st c. BC (WAGNER ET AL. 2009: 1073).

Fig. 14. Details of caftan made of double-faced woollen patterned fabric with a Hellenistic pattern found in Tomb 15 at Yingpan, Yuli, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (WENWU 1999: colour plate 2).

Ryc. 14. Detale kaftana wykonanego z wełnianej tkaniny dwustronnej łączonej o hellenistycznym wzorze, znalezionej w grobie nr 15 w Yingpan, Yuli, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.



Western textiles were also found in the steppe area controlled by the Xiongnu [匈奴] people, northern enemies of Han China. Among these textiles there were Bactrian embroideries representing sacrificial or ceremonial scenes and the scene of filtering wine, with personages wearing typical Saka-Yuezhi costumes, from Barrows 20 and 31 in Noyon Uul, Mongolia (YATSENKO 2012; FRANCFORT 2013: 1559–1565). In the same area in Barrows 6 and 25 pieces of textile representing a wide range of Hellenistic motifs similar to Gandharan art, such as fighting putti, winged lions or palmettes were found (FRANCFORT 2013: 1571).

Taking into consideration vivid political relations of China with the Xiongnu from the 2nd c. BC till the 3rd c. AD, including marriages and frequent exchange of gifts, which involved mainly large quantity of goods offered by the Chinese court to the Xiongnu *shanyu* (chieftains), but also some tribute from Xiongnu presented to Chinese

emperors (YU 1967; KEAY 2008: 132–133, 205), it is possible that some western textiles could be transferred to China from Bactria and other Central Asian regions through contacts with the steppe peoples already during the reign of the Western Han dynasty.

The closest parallels for the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra are of a little bit later date. One of fabrics bearing undoubtedly Hellenistic decoration was found in Tomb 15 in Yingpan [營盤], Yuli [尉犁] County. It is a caftan made of double-faced woollen tabby, with yellow patterns on the red background (this face was used as the exterior of the caftan). It was made of S-spun warp and Z-spun weft, with 28 ends in warp and 88 lats in weft per cm² (WENWU 1999: 7–8; LI 2008: 56–61). The decorative motif is deeply connected with Hellenised art – it represents a stylised scene of paired armed male figures and animals – goats and bulls disposed between pomegranate trees (Fig. 14).

Although this fabric is definitely one of the most spectacular examples of textiles decorated with Hellenistic motifs found in the Xinjiang area, its chronology and origin are a subject of vivid discussion among scholars. The excavation report suggests that the date of the burial should fall within the period of rule of the Eastern Han or maybe the early Jin dynasty³ (WENWU 1999: 13, 15). However, Angela Sheng proposes a much later chronology – the 5th–7th c. AD, based on similarities to a piece of the fabric excavated in another grave located at the same site and dated with calibrated ¹⁴C to the period between AD 430 and 631 (SHENG 2010: 40). The origin of this piece is also difficult to determine – Robert Jones points to many similarities to Hellenised art and suggests that it was a product of one of the eastern Hellenised kingdoms (JONES 2009: 29), while Wu Min proposes to interpret it as a product imported from the area of the Kushan Empire (WU MIN 2006: 215). Sheng, following Emma Bunker, thinks that this piece was produced in a local workshop located in one of the production centres in the present Xinjiang area (SHENG 2010: 40; BUNKER 2004: 36). It seems thus that without more advanced scientific methods of textile analyses it is impossible to determine whether this particular piece of textile should be considered as an early imported item which could influence local production, or a late local production influenced by foreign motifs.

For present research, another woollen textile, found at the site of Niya, in location 10, and constituting a strikingly close parallel to the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra is much more interesting (Fig. 15). It is also a double cloth, composed of green warp and two wefts – blue and yellow, with 20 warp ends and 60 lats of weft on cm (GU 1980: 79). The textile was in a very poor condition at the moment of finding. Only thin straps have been preserved, but the decoration can be reconstructed in some parts. It is composed of a vine scroll with beautifully detailed representation of leaves and grapes. Between them, but for some reason perpendicularly to the direction of the vine scrolls, there are human figures with curly hair and long noses, walking in both directions. They are half-naked, those turned to the right have their hips covered by a simple piece of cloth, while those turned to the left seem to wear a scarfs across the chest, with a large bundles on their necks, or a kind of a small mantles. Some of them keep in one hand an object which should be probably interpreted as a necklace. Between the human figures and vine scrolls

we can see animals – tigers are well recognisable, and there were also probably does, but only one fragment of a head is preserved.

The artistic value of the decoration is unquestionable, but, what is more important, this woollen textile reflects a very high technical skill of the craftsman which visibly differs from local Xinjiang production of the early 1st millennium AD. According to the archaeological evidence and historical records Niya was abandoned in the very beginning of the 5th c. AD (BERTRAND 2012: 2–4). The woollen fabric with grape vine representation must be thus dated not later than to the 4th c. AD, and might be even earlier. Since the weft-faced double-cloths were not produced in China in this period and the human representations, as well as the whole decoration, refers rather to the Hellenistic tradition, it could be probably imported from Central Asia and constitutes a rare evidence of imported textile with Hellenistic decoration which travelled so close to the borders of China.

As this short survey shows, we have a small, but representative group of Central Asian textiles imported to the Chinese frontier zone constituting a possible source of foreign motifs adapted to the Chinese art, in the periods earlier and later than the supposed production of the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra. The find from Palmyra is thus one of the very rare pieces of evidence of the continuity of this long-lasting process of exchange of textile decorative patterns between the East and the West.

Although foreigners were rare guests in China, during the reign of the Han dynasty, it is not impossible that the Chinese could see Central Asian textiles, imported to the Chinese market, or, more possibly, worn by the foreign envoys and imitated them in local workshops.

It should be pointed out that, although the “grape picking” silk from Palmyra is the most striking example of the use of a foreign motif in Chinese weaving of this period, it is not the only one. The above mentioned silk with representation of the camel hunting scene from Tomb 4 at Niya should be also considered as such imitation of a foreign, Central Asiatic or Persian motif, while the *qi* silk representing grapevine and winged creatures, also found in Niya, follows probably the same tradition that the fabric from Palmyra. Although rarely, foreign motifs were adapted in the Chinese weaving from western patterns and were used not only in relatively simple *qi* monochrome fabrics, but also in the most precious *jin* brocades.

³ The English summary suggests the late Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25–220), while the Chinese text proposes a more general

dating of the Eastern Han – the Western Jin (AD 25–316).

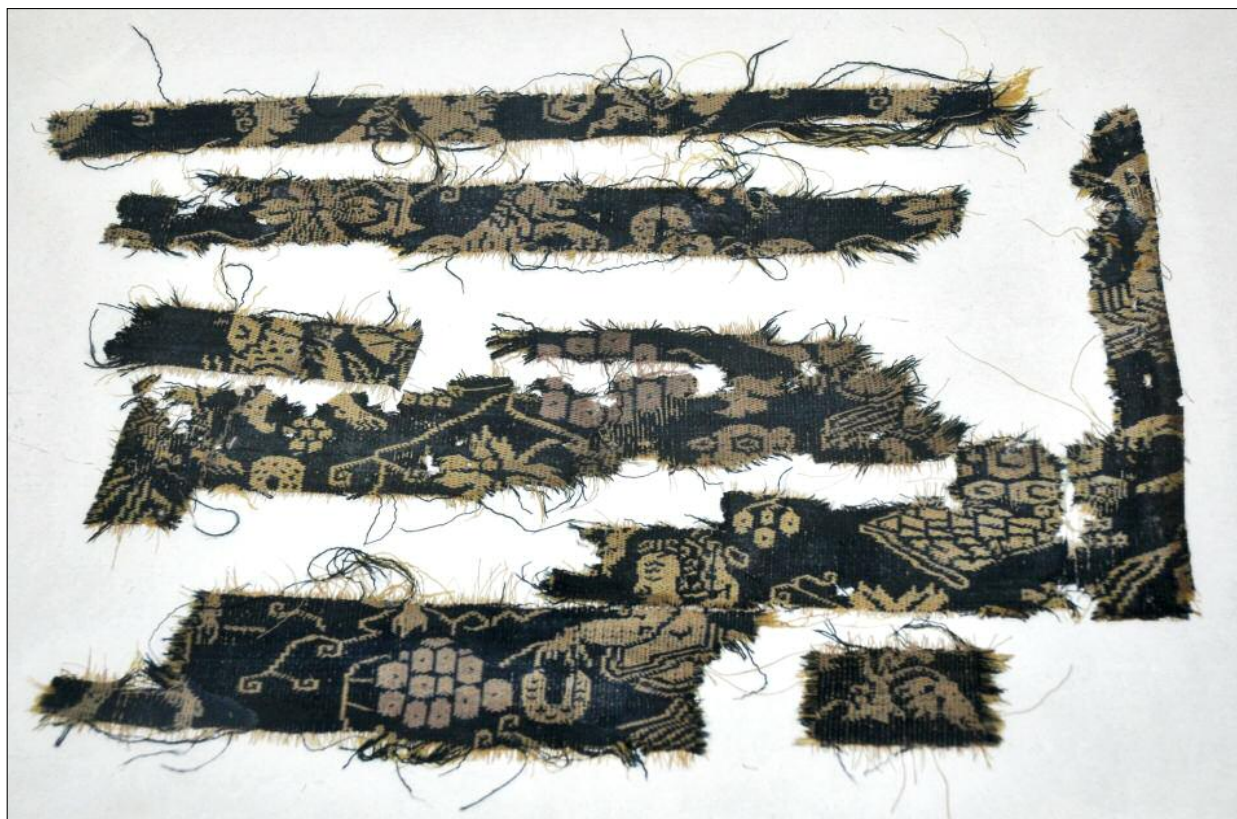


Fig. 15. Woollen fabric found at Niya, Minfeng County, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Photo R. Żukowski).

Ryc. 15. Wełniana tkanina znaleziona w Niya, Minfeng, Ujgurski Region Autonomiczny Xinjiang.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, very few silk fabrics from this period survived in the aristocratic tombs in the area within the borders of the Han Empire. It is thus impossible to determine, whether textiles decorated with foreign motifs were used by the Chinese aristocracy. It seems however, that at the traditional Han court such innovations were not very popular.

An interesting piece of evidence can be found in the text of *Diverse Notes on the Western Capital* [*Xijing Zaji* 西京雜記] – a collection of anecdotes about the Western Han period. In a passage describing precious gifts offered by a wife of a high official Huo Guang to the court lady Chunyu Yan we can read: 霍光妻遺淳于衍蒲桃錦二十四匹、散花綾二十五匹. *Huo Guang's wife offered to Chunyu Yan twenty four bolts of jin [silk] with grape [patterns] and twenty five bolts of ling [fabric decorated with] scattered flowers* (XIJING ZAJI 1.17). In the following paragraphs we can find an information that the *ling* damasks were of highest quality, worth ten thousand coins each and that these gifts were going along with other precious items, including gold and cash. The text itself poses multiple problems concerning its authorship and date – although it describes the events occurring during the Western Han period (206 BC – AD 9) it was probably

composed not earlier than during the Northern and Southern dynasties (AD 420–589) (KNECHTGES, CHANG 2014: 1648–1652). Taking into consideration the evidence of the Palmyrene “grape picking” silk this passage might be however a reflection of the process of adaptation of foreign motifs into Chinese weaving art. Without any doubts *jin* silks with grape ornaments were produced in China already in the 3rd c. AD and in later periods they eventually became popular also among Chinese elite.

The limited number of finds makes any discussion on the scale of this production rather pointless. Nevertheless, a simple comparison with the number of known textiles decorated with traditional Chinese motifs allows us to suppose that the use of foreign patterns was rather occasional and we need to look for a special purpose for weaving such textiles.

Chinese foreign relations were often built on the procedure of luxurious gifts sent to the neighbours on multiple occasions, usually to buy peace, but also to create political contacts. This was well known in form of *heqin* [和親] and tributary policy of the Han period (YÜ 1967; KEAY 2008: 132-133; ŻUCHOWSKA 2014), but repeated also in later times, for example when the Northern Zhou dynasty (557–581) had to send 100 000 pieces of silk a year to the Turks, obtaining horses of much lower value in exchange – both sides considered the obtained gifts as

a tribute (KEAY 2008: 235–236). It is possible that some fabrics were produced according to the foreign taste to please the receiver not familiar with Chinese ornaments. Similar patterns could be used also for items aimed for exchange with foreigners. The “grape picking” silk from Palmyra travelled further than it could be expected by the producer, but fitted surprisingly well to the Palmyrene taste.

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JEDWAB Z PRZEDSTAWIENIEM SCENY WINOBRANIA ZNALEZIONY W PALMYRZE. CHIŃSKA TKANINA Z EPOKI HAN Z HELLENISTYCZNYM MOTYWEM DEKORACYJNYM

Wśród tkanin znalezionych w Palmyrze na szczególną uwagę zasługuje jedwab z dekoracją przedstawiającą winorośl, postacie zbierające winogrona oraz zwierzęta – tygrysy i wielbłądy, znaleziony w wieży grobowej nr 65 na Nekropoli Zachodniej (Ryc. 1–4). Tkanina ta zachowała się w trzech niewielkich fragmentach o wymiarach 71×109, 63×77 i 59×68 mm. Jest typowym przykładem chińskiego brokatu *jin* [錦] o splocie wzorzystym osnowowym. Trzy serie osnowy wykonano z jedwabiu bez śladów przędzenia w kolorach niebieskim, rdzawoczerwonym i złotożółtym, zaś wątek z jedwabiu niebieskiego, również bez śladów przędzenia. Na niebieskim tle przedstawiono wzory w kolorach żółtym i czerwonym. Biorąc pod uwagę datowanie Nekropoli Zachodniej, jedwab datuje się na I–II wiek n.e., czyli czasy panowania Wschodniej Dynastii Han (25–220 n.e.).

Technika produkcji tkanin o splocie wzorzystym osnowowym była powszechnie stosowana w Chinach już od drugiej połowy I tysiąclecia p.n.e., a swój największy rozkwit osiągnęła za czasów panowania dynastii Han (206 p.n.e.–220 n.e.) i Jin (265–420 n.e.). Jest ona charakterystyczna dla produkcji chińskiej, podczas gdy w tradycji zachodniej stosowano z reguły sploty wzorzyste wątkowe.

Jakkolwiek pod względem technologii tkackiej jedwab znaleziony w Palmyrze jest typowym przykładem tkaniny chińskiej, jego dekoracja jest pod wieloma względami nietypowa i musiała zostać zapożyczona z repertuaru motywów hellenistycznych.

Przedstawiona scena winobrania zarówno pod względem tematyki, jak i poszczególnych jej elementów nie wpisuje się w kanon przedstawień ikonografii okresu Han. Winorośl, jakkolwiek według *Zapisków Historyka* [SHI 史記] została sprowadzona do Chin w połowie II wieku p.n.e., nie zyskała popularności, a jako motyw dekoracyjny nie pojawia się na zabytkach sprzed V–VI wieku. Za czasów dynastii Tang (618–907 n.e.) stała się dość częstym elementem, zwłaszcza w ornamentyce luster, w tym okresie niekiedy pojawia się też na tkaninach. Jedyny znany przykład wykorzystania motywu winorośli w chińskim tkactwie z okresu Han, poza jedwabiem z Palmyry, to jednobarwna tkanina o splocie diagonalnym *qi* [綺] znaleziona w Niya [尼雅], Minfeng [民豐] w Xinjiangu.

Postacie ludzkie wyobrażone na jedwabiu z Palmyry różnią się również znacznie od typowych w chińskiej ikonografii przedstawień, znajdując raczej analogie w typowych dla sztuki hellenistycznej scenach ukazujących nagich mężczyzn z zaznaczoną muskulaturą lub kompozycjach z putti.

Kolejnym nietypowym dla chińskiej sztuki elementem jest wielbłąd, którego przedstawienia stają się popularne w Chinach dopiero około VI wieku n.e., również na tkaninach.

Scena przedstawiona na jedwabiu z Palmyry musiała zostać zapożyczona z repertuaru motywów zachodnich za pośrednictwem przedmiotów dekorowanych podobnymi motywami i wykonanych zapewne w hellenistycznych państwach Azji Środkowej, lub, co mniej prawdopodobne, we wschodnich prowincjach rzymskich. Znane są dwie kategorie tego typu przedmiotów importowanych na wschód – metalowe naczynia i tkaniny. Wśród naczyni znalezionych na terenie Chin niektóre zdobione są podobnymi motywami, większość jednak została wyprodukowana w późniejszym okresie, między III a VII wiekiem n.e.

Jeśli chodzi o tkaniny, wszystkie przykłady importów z zachodu znalezione zostały na terenie Xinjiangu, regionu położonego na skrzyżowaniu głównych szlaków komunikacyjnych między Wschodem a Zachodem, który w tym okresie był silnie związany z Chinami, a jego duża część była okresowo kontrolowana przez dynastię Han. Należy jednak podkreślić, że taki rozrzut znalezisk może być efektem szczególnie sprzyjających warunków klimatycznych, umożliwiających przetrwanie materiałów organicznych, które w innych rejonach uległy całkowitej degradacji. Ze stanowiska Niya pochodzi wełniana tkanina dekorowana motywem winobrania, zbliżonym do sceny wyobrażonej na jedwabiu z Palmyry, wykonana w splocie podwójnym łączonym, najprawdopodobniej w rejonie Azji Środkowej. Podobny produkt, który zawędrował do Chin jako towar, dar, lub element odzienia cudzoziemca mógł stać się wzorem dla omawianego tutaj jedwabiu.

Nieliczne znaleziska chińskich tkanin o zdecydowanie zachodnich motywach, zapożyczonych z estetyki hellenistycznej lub irańskiej, znalezione na terenie Xinjiangu wskazują, że tego typu przedmioty były produkowane w warsztatach chińskich. Znikoma liczba znalezisk i brak potwierdzenia ich użytkowania w kręgach elity chińskiej utrudniają wyciągnięcie jakichkolwiek wniosków na temat rozmiaru produkcji i jej rozpowszechnienia. Wydaje się możliwe, że tkaniny o egzotycznej z punktu widzenia mieszkańców Chin dekoracji mogły być produkowane specjalnie w celu dostosowania ich do zachodniego gustu, jako podarunki dla zagranicznych władców lub towary będące przedmiotem wymiany z cudzoziemcami.