



PLATE A
SILK FOUND IN A BURIAL MOUND IN KERCH.

NOTES ON CHINESE SILK
FOUND IN THE SOUTH OF RUSSIA

by N. P. TOLL

*Translated by Eugenia Tolmachoff from "Seminarium Kondakovianum."
Recueil d'Etudes. Prague, "Seminarium Kondakovianum," 1927, pp. 85-92*

Readers of the Bulletin will remember an article written by Mrs. Tolmachoff (Vol. 26, 1942, No. 2) on the subject of Ancient Greek Textiles found in South Russia, with a reference, made in a footnote, to an account written in Russian by N. P. Toll on a Chinese silk found in the same locality. The statement was made at the same time that a translation of this account would sometime be made and it is this English version that we are now able to present.

IN 1878 the Russian Academy of Science in St. Petersburg published in its Comptes Rendus a group of fabrics from the mounds of the Crimean Peninsula and Tanan. In that group is described a small piece of silk¹ with a design in yellowish-brown of overlapping rhombs* each containing two smaller rhombs, the whole forming a numeral 8 (see Fig. 1 and Plate A). This piece was found in 1842 near Kerch by M. Koreisha in the course of the excavation of a burial mound near the city park.² In this mound M. Koreisha found two tombs built of stone slabs in one of which was a small cypress bier with a tripod standing nearby, made of the same wood. The bier, which was covered with a piece of material partly disintegrated, contained an urn wrapped in a piece of heavy purple silk apparently lined with fur and in the urn were contained ashes of the dead preserved in the piece of silk with the pattern of rhombs referred to above.

In the same mound were found also thin gold plaques, a plain gold bracelet and an iron sword. These latter finds, unfortunately, have never been published in detail. The gold bracelet and the iron sword, published

¹ Comptes Rendus de la Commission Impériale Archéologique, 1898, SPB. p. 135. Atlas, Plate V, fig. 3.

* A lozenge-like shape with oblique angles. (Ed.)

² Les Antiquités du Bosphore Cimmérien, SPB, 1854. Introduction, p. LXX-LXXII.

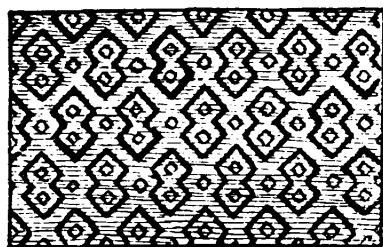


FIG. 1



FIG. 2

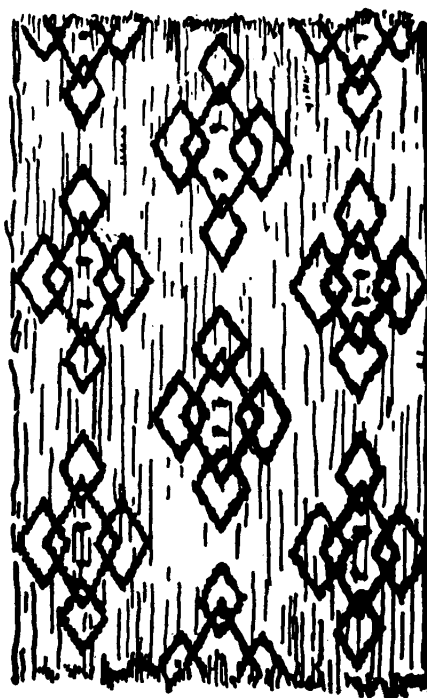


FIG. 3

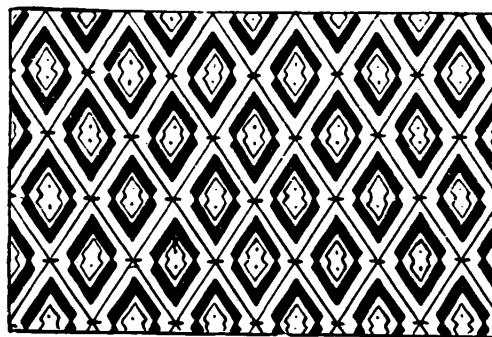


FIG. 4

FIG. 1. DESIGN OF SILK FABRIC FROM KERCH. FIG. 2. FOOT OF A CYPRESS TRIPOD FROM KERCH.
FIG. 3. CHINESE SILK FABRIC (DESIGN OF RHOMBS). FIG. 4. ORNAMENT OF A CHINESE
BRONZE VASE (DESIGN RATHER SIMILAR TO THE DESIGN OF THE KERCH PIECE).

in *Les Antiquités du Bosphore Cimmérien*, do not give any indication as to the date of the burial.³

The cypress tripod is more helpful. The feet, still in a good state of preservation, are carved with figures of dogs, the front paws reaching upward following the line of the foot. Their thin, elongated heads, also pointing upward, are made of a separate piece of wood. The body of each figure ends in an acanthus leaf which terminates in a lion's paw (see Fig. 2).⁴ Feet in the shape of animal paws variously elaborated are frequently seen on objects of Roman decorative art.⁵ Preserved in the British Museum is the replica of a foot carved with the figure of a dog which was found in Kerch.⁶ Another, similar to the Kerch example, was discovered in the ruins of a small town near Fayum.⁷ Roman coins and papyri found in these same ruins belong to the era of the last Ptolemies [first century B.C.] and the Roman emperors of whom the last was Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.).

C. Ransom attributes the Kerch tripod to the era of Augustus (Caius Octavius) (63 B.C.-14 A.D. Transl.). Considering, however, that the tripod may have been made long before the time of the burial, it would appear safer to attribute this latter to the first or second century A.D. with the consequence that the silk fabric should belong approximately to the same period.

Because of the miniature scale of its design the silk cannot be Roman or Egyptian. All fabrics known to be of Greco-Roman or Egyptian origin are distinguished by their more or less large-scale designs, due partly to contemporary taste and partly to the weaving technique of that time. A rhomb, on the other hand, as a basic ornamental motive, is common both to the figured fabrics of Egypt and to ancient Chinese decoration. The development of this motive proceeded independently. It can be traced in Egypt from the time of the Old Kingdom (2680-2280 B.C.). As to ancient China, however, the writer is unable to say how far back this motive may have existed. Purely geometric rhomb ornamentation can be seen on objects of art attributed to the dynasties of the Chou

³ A more detailed study of the inventory and of the reports of the excavation (if available) would probably give more information about the date of the burial.

⁴ *Antiquités du Bosphore Cimmérien*, Plate LXXXI.

⁵ *E. Pernice*. *Die Hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji*, 1925.

⁶ *C. Ransom*. *Reste Griechischer Holzmöbel in Berlin*, *Jahrb. d. Kais. deutsch. Archäol. Inst.* XVII, 1902, pp. 124-140.

⁷ *B. P. Grenfell, A. Hunt, and D. Hogarth*. *Fayum Towns and their Papyri*. L. 1900. Plate XVI, Fig. 1.

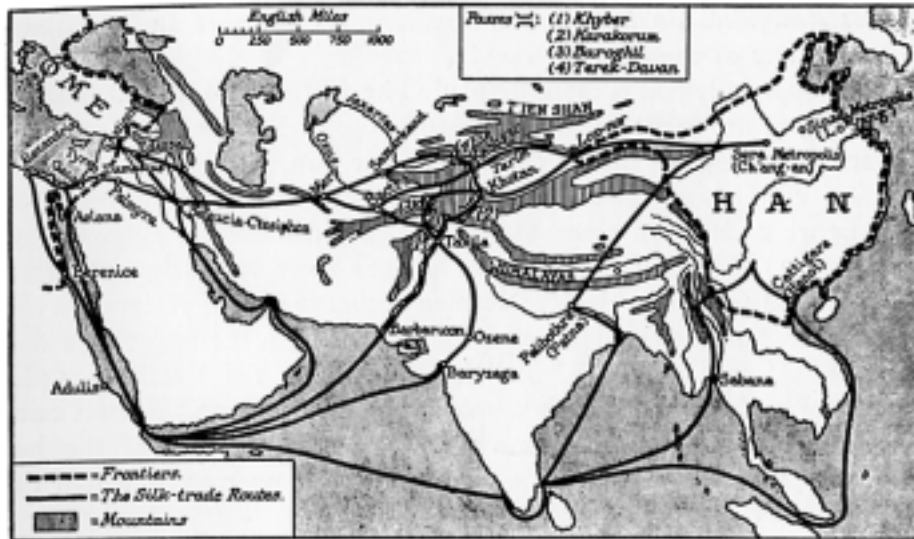
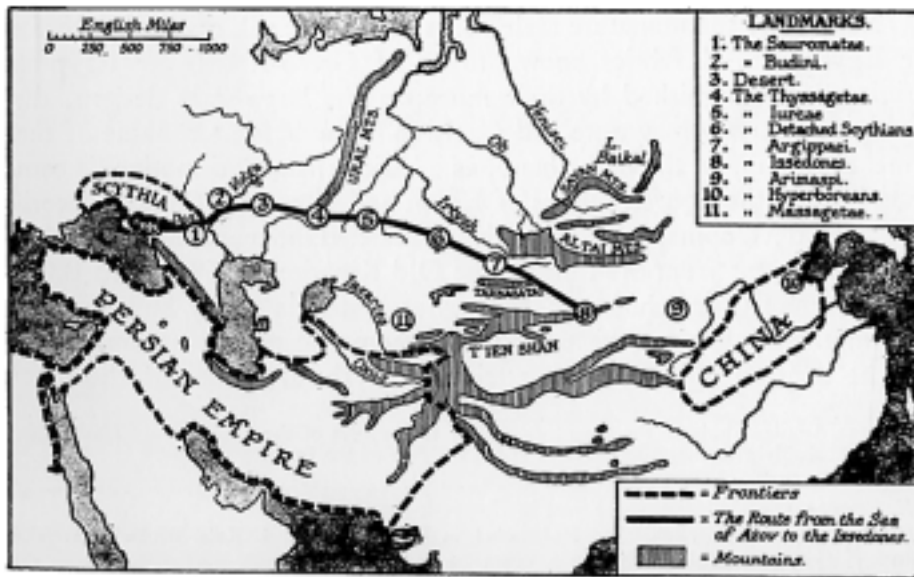


PLATE B



TRADE ROUTE FROM THE SEA OF AZOV TO THE ESHEDONES IN THE TIME OF HERODOTUS

PLATE C

(1122-249 B.C.), Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), and later periods.⁸ The fact that this same ornament appeared frequently in the textiles of Egypt and of China during the first millennium A.D. does not prove that it was China exclusively that influenced the ornament of Egypt and Byzantium.⁹

Among the Chinese textiles found by A. Stein in the ruins of ancient Lou-lan near Lob-nor dating from the first century B.C. to the third A.D. four pieces are ornamented with rhomb designs.¹⁰ The purely geometric pattern appearing in the fabric on Fig. 14 (see Fig. 3) consists of large rhombs with corners intersected by small rhombs.

Numerous examples of ancient Chinese silks with small rhomb designs are published in Vol. IV of A. Stein's *Serindia*.¹¹ Fabrics recently found by Kozlov in the mounds of northern Mongolia also show additional examples of Chinese silks with similar small geometric designs.¹² As a motive of textile design the rhomb occurs also on the frescoes of Buddhist temple-caves in Chinese Turkestan.¹³ A rather similar, but not identical, design appears on a bronze Chinese vessel published by Münsterberg and attributed to the time of the Chou dynasty (1122-249 B.C.).¹⁴ The outer surfaces of this vessel are covered with a mesh-like pattern made up of rhombs, each with an angular figure eight inside (Fig. 4). This detail of the ornament is particularly like the design of the silk.¹⁵

The fact that a piece of Chinese silk was found in a first or second century A.D. burial site in the Crimea is in no way surprising. It is known that during these two centuries trade relations between the Roman-Hellenistic world and China had already been established (Plate B).¹⁶ Silks [from China] reached the Mediterranean chiefly by two routes:

⁸ O. Münsterberg. *Chinesische Kunstgeschichte*. I, figs. 32, 60, II, figs. 90-96, 384. *Ars Asiatica* VII, "Docum. d'Art Chinois de la Collect. O. Sirén." Paris, 1925, édit. Van Oest. Plates XXVII, XLIII.

⁹ See *Strzygowski Seidenstoffe aus Aegypten im Kaiser Friedrich Museum Jahrb. d. Kgl. Preuss. Kunstm. 1903.*

¹⁰ See F. H. Andrews "Ancient Chinese figured silks excavated by Sir Aurel Stein." *The Burlington Magazine*. XXXVII, 1920. Figs. 9, 11, 12, and 14.

¹¹ I can not quote more exactly since the book is not available to me.

¹² W. Perceval Yetts. "Discoveries of the Kozlov expedition." *The Burlington Magazine*, April 1926. Tables I A and III F.

¹³ Grünwedel. *Alt Buddhistische Kultstädte in Chin. Turkistan*. Figs. 664, 665, 666.

¹⁴ O. Münsterberg. *Chinesische Kunstgeschichte*. II, fig. 189. f. Vase mit Deckel. Choustil. 1122-249 vor Chr.

¹⁵ The exact shape of the figure eight can not be perfectly distinguished in Münsterberg's small illustration.

For still other examples of lozenge-pattern Han silks, found in 1933 at Palmyra in Syria, see R. Pfister, *Textiles de Palmyre*, vol. I, pp. 6-51, pls. X & XI; vol. III, pp. 6-84, pls. XI & XII; and Pauline Simmons, *Chinese Patterned Silks*, pp. 8 & 9, pls. 8 & 9. (Ed.)

¹⁶ See M. Khvostov, *History of the Eastern Trade of Greco-Roman Egypt*. Kazan, 1907. p. 150 and following.

first, the land route, mentioned by Ptolemy and by Chinese chronicles, across Chinese Turkestan, Ferghana and Persia; and, second, by a sea route through India — which served as a connecting link between China and the West — to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and thence by caravan to the Mediterranean ports. From Syria and Egypt silk could easily be brought to the Crimea and southern Russia. But apart from these trade routes, definitely established by scientific knowledge, there was, as well, one other possible way by which silks and other Chinese products could make their way to southern Russia.

In Herodotus¹⁷ we find the first mention of a trade route from the steppes of the Black Sea region to Central Asia. In his account of the Sauromatae, the Budini, the Thyssagetæ, the Iyrcaæ, the Scythians and the Argippæi [migratory tribes], Herodotus adds that he had collected information about these people from Scythian and Greek merchants who traveled from the Black Sea towns to the Argippæi. "There is very precise information [says this writer] about the lands as far up as those of these bald people (Argippæi) and about the tribes that live on this side of them; from Scythians who go there it is easy to get information as well as from Greeks from Boristhenes and other Black Sea towns"¹⁸ (Plate C). A Greek, Aristæus from Prokonnis (650 B.C.), who had visited not only the Argippæi but also the Issedones, recounted his journey in a poem which has not reached us.¹⁹

The investigations of W. Tomaschek²⁰ establish the geographical location of the peoples mentioned by Herodotus as well as the general direction of the trade route which led from the Black Sea colonies, north to Kama into the region of the Thyssagetæ to the Argippæi. The Argippæi, in Tomaschek's opinion, were a Mongolian tribe that lived near Balkhash and the northern slopes of T'ien Shan and who formed the border beyond which the ordinary Black Sea trade caravans did not penetrate.

Minns, in his *Scythians and Greeks*, in agreement with Tomaschek's theories, writes that the trade route from the Black Sea to Asia was already in existence in the seventh and eighth centuries and that it led into the

¹⁷ V. B. Latyshev. Records of ancient authors about Scythia and Caucasus. I. SPB. 1890. Supplement to the Reports of the Imperial Russian Archeological Society V.

¹⁸ Herodotus. IV, 24. Latyshev. p. 18.

¹⁹ Herodotus. IV, 13. Latyshev. p. 15.

²⁰ W. Tomaschek. Kritik der ältesten Nachrichten über den Skythischen Norden. CXVI pp. 715-780. Die Nachrichten Herodot's über den Skythischen Karawanenweg nach Innerasien. CXVII, pp. 1-70. Sitzungsber. d. kk. Akad. zu Wien, 1888-89.

present Kuldja district and thence to the land of Herodotus' Argippaei. Along this route objects of Ionic art reached central Asia and Siberia.²¹

According to M. I. Rostovtzeff, however, caravans with Far Eastern products came from central Asia and western Siberia to the shores of the Black Sea.²²

The northern direction, unnecessarily so, of the route from Rušsia to central Asia leads to a suspicion that Herodotus may have confused the road that led north from the Black Sea colonies to the Kama region with that of the route that connected the Black Sea steppes with the steppes of western Siberia. According to Minns the route curved northward to avoid the barren plains of the Caspian sea region.

Strabo describes an extensive caravan trade in the land of the Aorsi, who lived to the north of the Caspian Sea.²³ Pliny in *Hist. Natur.* (book VI, chapter 20) vaguely mentions a route that led from the northern shores of the Caspian Sea east across desert lands inhabited only by wild beasts and Scyths-anthropophagi to the land of Seres.²⁴ Pliny's statement is of great value, despite its vagueness, since it establishes the existence of a trade in silk between China and the northern shores of the Caspian Sea.

Additional details about the eastern part of the trade route from Russia to China are given in Chinese sources. The Chinese account, *Wei Lio*, tells of three routes leading west from China.²⁵ The southern route led across Lou-lan and Khotan to Kashmir, Kabul and India.²⁶ The central route led across Karachar, Aksu, Uch Turfan to Ferghana, Bactria, Parthia and Syria.²⁷ The new, or northern, route was opened only in the second century A.D.²⁸ and led, according to Chavannes, north of T'ien Shan across Urumchi and Manas to the valley of the Ili river.²⁹

The Chinese text tells of the existence of a route which led from China to Lake Bor-Kul and farther to the northwest along T'ien Shan to the Osun nation in the valley of the Ili, hence through nomadic nations into the lands of the Alans and the Aorsi which were situated to the north of the Caspian Sea.

²¹ E. Minns. *Scythians and Greeks*. Cambridge, 1913, pp. 107, 108, 114, 264. M. Ebert. *Südrussland im Altertum*. Bonn u. Leipzig, 1921, p. 188.

²² M. Rostovtzeff. *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*. Oxford, 1922, p. 231.

²³ Strabo, XI, V, 8. Latyshev. p. 148.

²⁴ C. Plinius Secundus. *Natur. Hist.* Teubner, 1906. VI, 15; VI, 20.

²⁵ E. Chavannes. *Les pays d'Occident d'après le Wei Lio*. Toung Pao. 1905. Sér. II, vol. VI, pp. 519-571.

²⁶ E. Chavannes. *Les pays d'Occid. d'après le Wei Lio*, pp. 537-539.

²⁷ E. Chavannes. *Wei Lio*, pp. 552-556. Pelliot. "Note sur les anciens itinéraires chinois de l'Orient Romain." *Journ. Asiat.*, 1921.

²⁸ E. Chavannes. *Wei Lio*, p. 533, note 1.

²⁹ E. Chavannes. *Wei Lio*, p. 534, note 3.

The general direction of the western part of this route coincides with that of Herodotus. The eastern part, which probably in the time of Herodotus was in the hands of the Hiung-nu [a nomad tribe], did not pass into the possession of the Chinese until the beginning of our era after the weakening of the nomadic empire. Up to the time that this route came into the hands of the Chinese the middle road had been used to reach the Osun nation across Chinese Turkestan and Ferghana, where the way turned north.³⁰

The fact of a relationship between China and Osun is established by Chinese chronicles which tell of a marriage between a Chinese princess and an Osun prince, of growing diplomatic relations and a military alliance against the Hiung-hu between 110 and 70 B.C.³¹ If the silk robe found by V. V. Radlov in the mound at the River Katanda could be dated more exactly we would have a very convincing proof of the early penetration of Chinese silk into western Siberia.³²

It is quite probable that the Hiung-nu, who for a long time separated China from the West, acted as intermediaries in the trade between China and western Siberia. From 190 B.C., Chinese chronicles contain a great deal of information about the export of silk and other merchandise, sometimes in large quantities, from China to the Hiung-nu.³³

We can not be sure that even prior to this date the Hiung-nu did not know and receive Chinese silk. Under the Han dynasty the Hiung-nu's demands for silk became so great that it seems possible that this fabric may have served as an object of trade between the Hiung-nu and the neighboring nomadic tribes. Chapter 94 of Tashien Han chou says: "When he (the emperor of the Hiung-nu) came to court, he received 20,000 pieces of embroidery and unembroidered silk and 20,000 lbs. of unspun silk."³⁴ (27 B.C.)

"In the first century B.C. the number of costumes given to him was increased to 370, the number of pieces of brocade, embroidered and unembroidered silk to 30,000, the weight of unspun silk to 30,000 lbs."³⁵ Besides these enforced presents and tribute, the Hiung-nu received

³⁰ CXVIII chapter of Heou Han says, "plus à l'Ouest, la route du nord franchit les Ts'ongling (Pamirs) et débouche à Ta-yuan (Ura-tepe), dans le K'ang-Kiu (Samarkand) et chez les Yen-ts'ai (Alains). *Chavannes*, Heou Han chou, p. 170.

³¹ *J. J. M. de Groot*. Die Hunnen der vorchristl. Zeit. I.B.u L., 1921, p. 192 and following.

³² *Radlov*, Siberian Antiquities. (Aus Sibirien, trans. by Bobrinsky.) Reports of the Imp. Russ. Archeol. Soc. VII. 1894. p. 181 and following. *Dr. A. Zakharov*, Antiquities of Katanda (Altai). Journ. of the Royal Anthropol. Inst. LV, 1925.

³³ *de Groot*. pp. 69, 78, 87, 157, 185, 216, 220, 249, 261.

³⁴ *de Groot*. p. 249.

³⁵ *de Groot*. pp. 261, 262.

Chinese merchandise and silk through an active trade during periods of peace.³⁶

“I could not make use,” says the writer, “of archeological material to any great degree since Russian sources and material are not available to me. Naturally,” he continues, “in studying archeological material one must keep in mind the fact that Chinese objects could have come singly to western Siberia and Russia not only by way of trade, but also as a result of the periodic movements of nomadic tribes from east to west.”

The great route, which from the time of Herodotus had connected Russia with Central Asia and China, could not always be used for peaceful trade because of the constant movement and wars of the nomadic tribes. Minns suggests that the opportunity of using the route along its entire length always coincided with the appearance in the steppes of nomadic tribes allied in great numbers under a single leader. In any case the existence of the great trade route was known and remembered, both in the East and in the West, and it was used, whenever possible, to renew trade relations which had been interrupted.

³⁶ *de Groot*. pp. 97, 91 and 96.