

Iranian-Chinese textiles impact on Italian peers depicted in some 14th-century Tuscan paintings

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Abstract

The influence of Chinese art, following the conquests of Mongols, is visible in other countries' arts, including Italian textiles and paintings of the 14th century. These influences can be approached from two perspectives: the exported Chinese products through the Silk Road. The following perspective is the Ilkhanid Dynasty's reign in Iran, who tried to expand their political and commercial relationships with the western countries, especially Italy, to confront Egyptian Mamelukes as their common enemy. Ilkhanid's main merchandise was silk textiles representing a combination of traditional Persian and Chinese iconography that were distinctive characters compared to the original Chinese works. The impact of these textiles on Italian fabrics could be examined using both preserved samples kept in museums and the fabrics illustrated in the paintings. The present article, using by descriptive-analytical method, shows the effect of Ilkhanid art on 14th century Italian fabrics using selected paintings of that era in Tuscany province. As a result, it can be said that the presence of oriental iconography had become a visual culture in Tuscan paintings in the 14th century.

Keywords: Iranian Textiles, Chinese Iconography, Italian Fabrics, Simone Martini, Spinello Arentino

Extended Abstract

Introduction: Silk production has ancient roots in China, and its history is back to the 3rd millennium BCE. Following the conquest of Mongolia in the 13th century, over a vast section of the world's political geography, the presence of Chinese motifs such as dragons, mythical animals, and plants on textiles woven in other countries became stronger. On the other hand, Iran, as an intermediary country between East Asia and Europe, in the 14th century, was ruled by Ilkhanid (r.1256-1335) and Timurid (r.1370-1507), both of them with Mongol roots; so, it can be seen the interaction between two iconographical culture which effected by the growing of intercultural exchanges and the new horizons of trading, arrived to European countries. Nowadays, surveying the iconography of some textile fragments produced in Lucca in the 14th century, some oriental roots can be seen. In these textiles, they can derivate Italian roots, Chinese roots, and Iranian ones. A more interesting point in this topic is the presence of these fabrics in paintings of the said century in Tuscan province, which was considered a turning point in western art. The presence of these motifs in western art is one of the attractive subjects in the field of art history. It has been more than a century since the valuable book "Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei" by Von Falke (1913). He surveyed historical textiles based on history and geography. Later, many researchers were attracted to the presence of oriental silk and, more important to that, oriental elements in western art because Von Falke, in surveying Italian fabrics, turned to "chinesischer Einfluss in Italian" and "sinopersischer Einfluss in Italian," which pointed to the relation between western textiles with Chinese ones in 13th and 14th centuries. Wardwell took another significant step in this respect at the end of the eighties and, aiming to categorize Asian textiles in the said centuries, brought a new vision to this topic (Wardwell, 1989). In their various research types, other scholars spoke about these foreign elements while studying the history of silk production in Lucca. Between the second half of 1800 and the first three decades of 1900, many catalogs were published regarding the growth of European collections of historic fabrics, and the topic of motifs presented in fabrics was increasingly under attention. By the beginning of the 1960s, Devoti (1974) developed a new method for surveying not only historical ones produced in Lucca but also, as her suggested methodology,

technical and artistic aspects of textile(s) to be studied all together. This prominent master is one of the most important connoisseurs of fabrics produced in Lucca, and her researches are still a significant source in this field. Around the end of this decade, Klesse (1967) published "Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei," in which she reiterated the importance of the issue. As an active researcher, Maria Ludovica Rosati believes that there can be no doubt about the presence of foreign elements in Italian fabrics during the 13th and 14th centuries (Rosati, 2010). This scholar, who has mentioned this subject in her different articles, published a book under the title of "Lucca una città di seta" with the cooperation of Del Punta in 2017 (Del Punta & Rosati, 2017). In this book, various historical, economic, cultural, and technical aspects of fabric production in Lucca are surveyed. In the first chapter, Rosati talked about different Oriental fabrics in Lucca, explaining their iconography. It is considered one of the credible sources for obtaining the Oriental models available in fabric weaving in this city in the Middle Ages.

Purpose and scope: This article aims to trace the iconography of fabrics produced in Italy in the 14th century. Aside from the fabrics left from this period, the presence of fabrics in paintings can be considered significant data, the fabrics of some of the most important paintings of this era are surveyed and rotted.

Method: The present research is based on theoretical research and based on the meta-synthesis method. This proficiency is a technique for examining qualitative research, so it is based on evidence from documentary studies, containing information and outcomes provided by previous authors and pioneers of this subject.

Findings and conclusion: One of the most important types of Iranian art of which the signs can be traced in other places is fabric weaving, which contains various iconography from different eras. In the 14th century, Mongol governments with Chinese roots ruled Iran, and their style of fabric weaving, including their unique iconography, influenced this industry in Iran. On the other hand, due to the presence of Italian merchants in Iran and the fame of the Raw silk produced in the East, a big part of this valuable material was transferred to Italy during this period. So, the marks of Iranian iconography are observable in Italian fabrics of that time. By the comparative study of this Italian art in the 14th century, it can be seen that the iconography of Italian fabrics combines of Chinese signs and Iranian composition under the influence of Italian art. Studying iconography in Italian fabrics in the 14th century, aside from the samples left in museums, is also possible by studying the painting illustrating these fabrics. Based on the surveys, it can be concluded that fabric was a phenomenon rather than a commercial item in that century and created a kind of cosmopolitanism. This means an Italian artist in work on the topic of Christian religion used a fabric with Oriental iconography. Generally, the artists active in this field are divided into three groups: artists such as Simone Martini and the followers of his style, who used fabrics with a concentration on a golden color and probably have encountered fabrics produced in central Asia; artists who used fabrics with green and blue background whose probable source of inspiration had been Iranian fabrics produced in Ilkanid period; and finally artists who used fabrics with a red or orange background, following Spinello Arentino's style.

Keywords: Iranian Textiles, Chinese Iconography, Italian Fabrics, Simone Martini, Spinello Arentino

INTRODUCTION

Historically, one of the arts under the direct influence of China art is fabric weaving. This country has been famous for its sericulture and silk production since to the 3rd millennium BCE (Daylan, 2019: 1-4). Silk products from China have always been welcomed in other countries. Following the conquest of Mongolia over a vast section of the world's political geography, the presence of Chinese motifs such as dragons, mythical animals, and plants on textiles woven in other countries became stronger. According to the available documents, during the 14th century, the governments derived from Mongol dynasties (Ilkhanid and Timurid) were ruling Iran (Schrato, 1959). Simultaneously, Italian Kings and merchants tried to expand commercial and political relations with the Oriental rulers like the states of the Levant -that is an approximate historical area in the Eastern Mediterranean, but it should be mentioned that Most Italian merchants were in Cairo- Byzantium, Iran and Central Asia (Jacoby, 2004: 233). As a result, the iconography of Iranian and Italian fabrics was impressed by Chinese art, which is traceable in fabrics left from that era. The noticeable point about Italian fabrics is their similarity in composition, color, and content to Iranian fabrics produced in the same era. In other words, Italian fabrics of the 14th century were a combination of the iconography of Chinese and Iranian origins influenced by artistic concepts. There are two main sources for studying about Italian fabrics: first, fabrics which are kept in museums all over the world; and the second, fabrics which are displayed by Gothic and Renaissance painters in their works. A comparison of the textiles in museums and the textiles painted by the Italian painters show that they were completely loyal to the original fabrics (Figure 5-7) and illustrated

them with exact details in the paintings. These artworks are valuable sources to examine the iconography of the fabrics of which the original ones are defunct.

METHOD

The present research is based on theoretical research and based on the meta-synthesis method. This proficiency is a technique for examining qualitative research (Jensen & Allen, 1996), so it is based on evidence from documentary studies, containing information and outcomes provided by previous authors and pioneers of this subject.

A brief introduction to the history of Iran and Italy in the 14th century

Iran in the 14th century was ruled by Ilkhanid (r.1256-1335) and Timurid (r.1370-1507), both with Mongol roots. The long-term relationship between Iran and China goes back to ancient times (around 200 BC); however, a strong influence of the Chinese style occurred during the Mongol invasion of Iran on 1 Jan. 1256 AD, the Mongol prince *Hulegu Khan* (r. 1256-1265), a grandson of *Genghis Khan* (r. 1158-1227), led his army into Iranian territory (Dashdondog, 2010: 127). They ruled Iran, after the assault, for 79 years, from 1256 to 1335 AD. The Mongols and their Persian administrators reinvigorated the idea of the political and cultural autonomy of Iran, renewed her ties with the central Asia world, and in so doing, prepared the ground for the realization of Iranian potential and talents (Kamaroff & Carboni, 2004: 25). Timurid was a dynasty of Turk-Mongol who ruled Iran for more than a century, from 1370 to 1507 (Pubblici, 2007: 35). With this kingdom, Iran's borders extended to Samarkand in this era, and this city was nominated as their capital. Soon the capital city became the gathering point of artists. In this era, Iranians developed a commercial relationship with Western Europe (Ni & Kaner, 2020: 502). At the same time in Italy, feudal governments-which started after Charles the Fat in 888 AD- was growing and expanding. These governments were in a military and political battle with Rome and tried to keep their independence. These events led to the formation of several states in Italy (Figure 1).

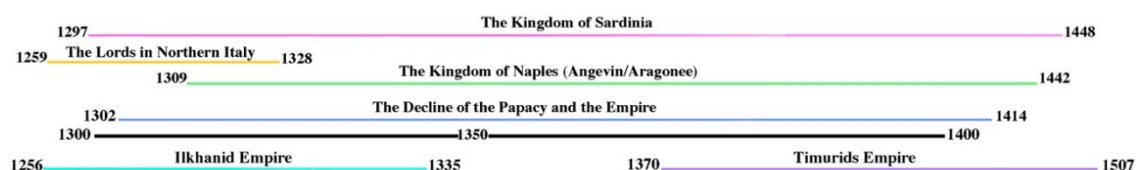


Figure 1. Italian governments at the time of Ilkhanid and Timurid

The common enemy, Egyptian Mamluks, caused the advent of political and commercial relations between Iranian governments (especially Ilkhanid) and Italian ones. During the 14th century, Italian culture underwent an explosion of cultural development, which lasted until the 16th century and involved ethical, doctrinal, literary, scientific, and technical subjects (Guarnieri & Del Negro, 2019). Today, there are several documents indicating the expansion of commercial activities of Venetian and Genoese businessmen in Ilkhanid territories. One of the most important aspects of these activities was related to silk. During the 14th century, the Raw silk imported from the Oriental territories to Italy in large volumes triggered a commercial silk race between Italy and Mongol territories. The new competition was intense, more egalitarian, and less hierarchical, and many small and medium-sized companies were linked together by a dense network of relationships (Poloni, 2017: 121-146). The presence of Mongol silks was so vast and effective in Italy that in Lucca, the important city of Tuscany, weavers produced different silk products under Mongol-Persian types.

Fabric weaving in Iran in the 14th century

The rule of the Mongols rule created an ethnographic change, with the region division into separate cultural areas. In the realm of culture, science and daily life, they brought in changes of all sorts – new foods, new plants, and new styles of art (Manz, 2007: 55). During the Mongol dynasty government in Iran, the textile industry progressed and annually a part of produced textiles was exported to other countries. As can be seen in historical documents like *Al-Morshed fi al-hisab* that is a book in Ilkhanid period to teach the calculation, these pieces of art were mostly exported to China (Vosoughi & Soleymani, 2013: 184). Due to the lack of

written documents, there is no detailed information about the texture of fabrics and more surveying can be placed on the iconographical aspects. However, based on the writings by explorers and the clothing of people pictured in paintings, it can be concluded that more open designs replaced thick and fully ornamented fabrics; and the skills of Iranian weavers grew in popularity. Mongols had a greedy interest in brocade, and gold was praised for its color and brilliance associated with the moon and the sun, which were important in their culture (Allsen, 1997: 110). Therefore, weaving various types of brocade, which had been already prevalent in Iran, continued in the Ilkhanid era. Weaving silk fabric became an important industry in *Guilan, Khurasan, Yazd, and Kerman*. The utilization of Iranian scientists and intellectuals in art and architecture indicates of Iranian cultural influence on Mongols (Ashrafi & Mirjafary, 2015: 12). This era was one of the most magnificent periods in Iran's cultural-artistic history. This attitude continued after Ilkhanid kings and Timur, who was famous for his assault, brutal murders in conquered cities, and as a world conqueror, was strangely known as the initiator of art (focusing on Iranian art) resuscitation and supported artists (La'1 Shateri & Rajabi, 2016: 80). For this reason, the presence of Iranian art, originated from Chinese art, continued for the whole century and it was not just limited to Ilkhanid epoch.

Fabric weaving in Italy in the 14th century

In the history of fabric weaving in Italy, the 14th century is considered a turning point in which fabric production witnessed noticeable progress in weaving and iconography. In this respect, two cities should be mentioned as the important centers of fabric production in this period: Venice in the north and Lucca in the center of Italy. By surveying the documents (commercial letters, lists, ledgers) left from that era in archives, it can be concluded that Lucca was the first fabric production center in Italy. The oldest document obtained about fabric production is date back to 1223, now kept in the city's archive (Del Punta, 2016: 16). Silk production was the heart of commercial activities of this city, and silk trade with the Middle East started in Lucca which was limited to raw silk and raw material for fabric dyeing in the beginning (Figure 2).

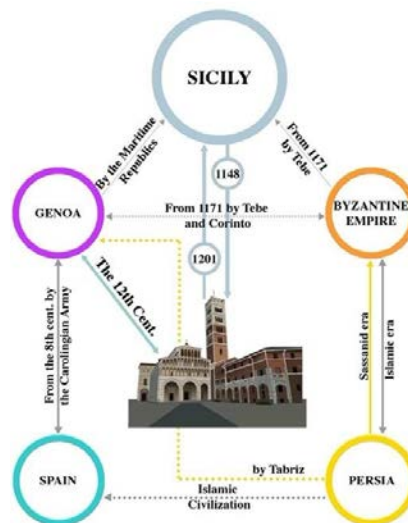


Figure 2. The various ways of trans-cultural exchanges in Lucca during 11th-14th centuries

Through indications of historical documents of that era, it is clear that some merchants purchased silk produced in eastern countries such as Iran and sold them in European cities such as Avignon, Antwerp, Bourgeois and London (Del Punta, 2016: 21). On the other hand, the emergence of commercial crisis in Italy in early 14th century brought about some commercial changes; so, from 1314 onwards, many weavers from Lucca started to immigrate to Florence, Bologna, Milan, and especially Venice (Degli Innocenti & Zupo, 2010: 27). Arrival of these immigrants, masters in fabric production, had a great effect in fabrics produced in Venice causing a type of cosmopolitan phenomenon in textile iconography. Nowadays, it is impossible to distinguish whether fabrics were produced in Venice or Lucca, unless there are documents to state clearly the place of production. The production of velvet in Venice was well-received in the early 14th century, and the weaving of silk with embossed flowers had great improvement in this century in Italy. These two types of fabrics (or a combination of them) are now considered as the most important types of Italian fabrics left from that century. The notable

point in these fabrics is the influence of the culture of the Far East, especially in China. Mongol Genghis Khan Conquests caused similar cultural confrontations in this century. On the other side, the Mongol empire was never ignorant of relations with western countries and was in contact with them under various titles. Marco Polo's Journey through the Silk Road and his stay in Genghis Khan Court approve the existence of such relations. Nowadays, Chinese fabric and Iranian fabrics containing Chinese iconography are kept in many churches in Italy, such as the Cathedral of Perugia in the north of Italy (Devoti, 1974: 41).

The effects of Chinese textile on Iranian and Italian fabrics

Following the conquest of Iran by Mongols, the artistic relationship between these two countries underwent major transformations. Ilkhanid art lover rulers such as *Ghazan Khan* (d. 1271-1304) and *Oljaitu Khan* (d. 1282-1316) and patrons of art in the administration such as *Rashid al-Din Fazullah* (d. 1247-1318) facilitated the prevalence of Chinese art styles in the iconographical part (Kadoi & Masuya, 2017: 636-665). There were cultural and commercial relations between Ilkhanid and their Chinese counterparts, the Yuan dynasty (r. 1271-1368). The immigration of Chinese weavers to Iran, expansion of commercial relations, and the demand for Chinese goods in Iran increased the effects of Chinese iconography in Iranian art. So, Chinese art directly influenced Iranian art, but concerning Italy, the situation was different. China never ruled this country, while the existence of commercial relations between the two countries is confirmed. After the fall of Acre by Muslims in 1291 and sanctions imposed by the Pope against Egyptian Mamluks, which remained effective until 1345, Italian merchants, staying in the Levant, were forced to expand the range of their business to other places in Asia. During Ilkhanid rule in Iran, Venetian merchants, due to conflicts with Egyptian rulers, transferred the center of their activities from Egypt to Iran, especially Tabriz city, in such a way that they operated as a commercial intermediary between Asia and Europe and exchanged Italian (or other European countries) artifacts with Chinese and Indian products including textiles produced in Iran (Mazaheri, 1994: 57). Aside from the presence of merchants from Piacenza, Venice, and Genoa, who's staying in Tabriz and Soltanieh- a city in northwestern Iran- are confirmed by the documents left from that period, Italian merchants moved toward China and by passing through present Beijing, resided in this country during the early 14th century (Petech, 1962: 563).

In addition, these influences had been expanded through the long relationships between Iran and China and the Silk Road that connected the East and the West. Chinese silk was very famous during the Mongol age, and the trade of this type of fabric was another reason for the transfer of Chinese designs and weaving principles. According to Von Falke in his book *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, the relation between Chinese and Western textiles, which was attributed to China, was based on visual relation and by utilization of similar iconography, started by Venetian and Lucian weavers in Italy (Wardwell, 1989: 128). A century after Falke, *Anne Wardwell*, by researching the type and color of threads used in Italian fabrics of the 14th century, recommended (suggested or coined) the term *Panni Tartarici* for Islamic silks woven with gold and silver produced in Central Asia, to describe this type of fabrics. Nowadays, it's clear that this term was merely used for Chinese textiles of the Yuan dynasty in western countries, which indicates the existence of Chinese fabrics in Western countries, including Italy.

Analytical comparison between Iranian and Italian textiles effected by Chinese Iconography in the 14th century

There is a common theme of motifs and composition in Iranian and Italian Textiles from the 14th century. These works were created under the effect of Chinese art and can be studied from the following viewpoints:

Content and concept: Most fabrics left from this era in Iran and Italy contain animal and plant motifs. Utilizing these motifs which had a very long history in the art of fabric weaving in both countries, was directly influenced by China art in the 14th century. About animal motifs which are illustrated on fabrics in naturalistic or symbolic ways, it can be claimed that using these motifs-especially combined animals- and displaying them in a symmetrical form is rooted in the Sasanian dynasty (224-651), who often combined them with old symbols from territories of the west, such as rosettes and dots, to create royal or religious emblems. Thus, the "original" animal style would remain a common Eurasian reference used widely to the end of the Mongol period. One of the most common symbolic animal motif stands out is the motif of *Simurgh* that is an Iranian mythical bird, a legendary bird that was created for the first time in Sasanian art (Figure 3) and transferred to Chinese culture.



Figure 3. The Silk fragment from the Sasanian period, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, Inv. 8579-1863

In the major part of the research, this legendary animal is mentioned as a bird. There is still a discussion among scholars about whether or not it is a bird. But after transference to China, Simurgh was generally displayed as a bird. This fictional animal found a new face in Chinese textiles as the flying birds with flowers and plants placed between them (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The presence of Simurgh in a Chinese silk fragment. Chinese fabric belonging to 13-14th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Inv. 1973.269



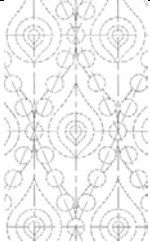





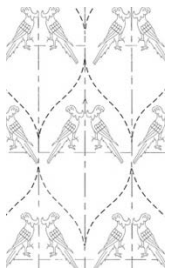


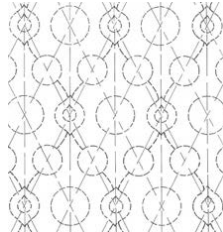
The Sasanid Simurgh is actually a legendary creature composed of several animal species, which most often includes a combination of a lion's head and legs and a bird's wings. Its tail is mostly like a volume saturated with geometric motifs, and it becomes more voluminous from the bottom to the top, and its top ends with a semicircle. This imaginary animal is shown in profile (side view) in Sasanid art, and as seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum fabric, there is a lot of empty space in the composition. Meanwhile, in the Ilkhanid period, Simurgh is a flexible and moving bird, it is shown more delicately and is mostly in different angles while flying. This new iconography was exported to Iran, Western Europe, and Italy (Figure 5). The image of this bird with open wings and tail is adopted from the textiles and culture of China (Talebpour, 2016: 135). Notably, these types of motifs were used for ornamental purposes or specific purposes (iconography). For instance, in the Islamic era, its extensive open tail is a symbol of the galaxy and universe; and it is said that its image symbolizes the incorruptibility and duality of the human soul and spirit (Alikhani et al., 2018: 61). But the use of this bird in some Italian fabrics was merely decorative.



Figure 5. Left: Iranian textile including the Chinese Simurgh, 14th century, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Inv. 41.495., Right: Italian fabric (woven in Lucca or Venice), including Chinese Simurgh, 14th century, Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Inv. 61.05

Composition and color: By surveying the available samples, it can be observed that animal and plant designs are moving freely on the fabrics, and they are released from the arid, predefined frames. Based on this structure, new and more modern compositions appeared. In the fabrics of this era, branches and flowers fill up fabric's surface, which originates in Chinese art. Moreover, in the field of coloring, the weavers mostly use contradictory colors for the designs and background of fabrics. In many cases, the designs are made from various colors; in rare cases, they are made of a single color in contradiction with the color of the background (See figure 4). It can be said that in this period, Italian textiles were the real transcultural exchange phenomenon. Simultaneously, in Iran and Italy, there were fabrics whose main theme was facing birds, geometric and plant patterns (Table 1). This caused this special composition to be used even in the merely decorative aspects in which no special iconography existed.

Table 1. Surveying the similarity in Iranian and Italian fabrics produced in 14th century

Number	Iranian Textiles	Italian Textiles	Similarity in content/color	Similarity in composition
1.	 London, V & A museum, Inv. 1996.286	 London, V & A museum, Inv. 7084.1860.	Animal-plant pattern. Using contrasting colors of the design and background. Same composition and simple repeating rhythm.	 Devoti, 1974, No. 40
2.	 Cleveland, Cleveland museum of art, Inv.1985.4	 Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Inv. 62.90.	Animal-plant pattern. Using contrasting colors for the design and background. The presence of movement in the designs and the use of mythical plants such as lotus.	 Devoti, 1974, No.34
3.	 Cleveland, Cleveland museum of art, Inv.1945.34.	 Florence, Museo di Bargello, Inv. 618.	Using geometric motifs to fill the background, showing birds in quarantine position. The use of plant motifs among birds. The contrasting colors of the background and the same simple design and rhythm.	 Devoti, 1974, No.39
4.	 London, Khalili collection, Inv. 245.	 Lyon, Musée des Tissus et des Arts Décoratifs, Inv. 28492.	The use of common geometric motifs, the use of common composition and simple fabric background. The Use of framing for plant motifs.	 Devoti, 1974, No.41

Fabrics with the oriental approach in Italian paintings of the 14th century focusing on Tuscany province

The fabric in Italian paintings is observable and searchable from the 13th century. Throughout the Medieval, silk production was related to church circumstances, and clergy members were among the major customers of silk products. It can be said that clergy members were practically the only customers after kings, princesses, and social high-rank personalities in the west Latin world. So, there is no wonder that in religious paintings, the presence of fabrics is abundant and noticeable. Italian art is a remarkable development, especially in Tuscany's painting in the second half of the 14th century. The common technics in that era were fresco and painting on wood. The topics are mainly religious from the Old and New Testaments, Saints' life, and in rare cases non-religious subjects. The painting passed by limited themes of Crucifix and *Maestà* and there were remarkable transformations in decorative motifs (De Vecchi & Cerchiari, 2015: 547). There are many paintings, including textiles, from this era. In Italian culture -similar to other countries- worthwhile fabrics with too many motifs were a mark of high and prestigious social level. In this era, fabrics entered into religious paintings and, in most cases, were used as a decorative element. The position of displaying these handicrafts indicates their high value. This subject was one of the appealing subjects that the writers from that age had to attract. One of the absorbing themes in this era was displaying fabrics in the painting by artists. This subject was surveyed by *Cennino Cennini* (c.1360- c.1472) who is an Italian painter in his "*The book of art*" for the first time. The most important part of this book regarding this subject is the *Sgraffito* which is notable in Tuscany (Hoeniger, 1991: 156). This decorative method involves scarping through a layer of white slip to reveal the darker clay body of the vessel beneath and, finally, covering the whole surface with a clear lead glaze. This technique was used for displaying brocades. In etymology, brocade is defined as "a rich silk fabric with raised patterns in gold and silver" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). In fact, in a piece of brocade, the fabric patterns have golden motifs (Figure 6). According to some written and historical documents, brocade weaving was highly fashionable in Iran from the Achaemenid Empire to the Sasanid dynasty in such a way that plenty of pieces were used to decorate palaces and churches over the world (Shayestehfar, 2015: 60).



Figure 6. The dalmatic of Benedetto XI imported from Central Asia; a brocade produced in the second half of 13th-first half of 14th century

The first appearances of sgraffito in paintings dated from the late Duecento and early Trecento and involved the use of the white metal leaf. Furthermore, right from the start of the painting, the technique was used to depict patterned luxury textiles. In his *Annunciation* of 1333 (Figure 7), Simone Martini transformed it.



Figure 7. Gabriel cloak fabric in *Annunciation* by Simone Martini with collaboration of Lippo Memmi, 1333, tempera and gold on panel, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Inv. 1890 nos. 451, 452, 453

He used gold for underlying metal, exposed larger areas of the gold, and textured these areas by granulating them (Hoeniger, 1991: 160). Brunori in her thesis believed that Simone was quite acquainted with Oriental textiles and performed accurately about them (Brunori, 1989: 304). This recognition was the consequence of his relations with *Santa Sede* and Avignon courts, where several textiles (and handicrafts) were received from Mongol ambassadors in the 14th century.

This new method enabled artists to imitate textiles' qualities with far greater veracity. It is quite acceptable if other active artists in Tuscany have used this technique in their paintings. One of the same province's artists, *Maestro di Carità*, used a fabric similar to Gabriel's clothing and was probably inspired by this clothing (Figure 8). This artist probably displayed the back part of the fabric, and the fabric background is golden. The designs are dark (Cf. Figure 4, right). This tradition was noted later in Renaissance art, and some artists have shown the back of the fabric in their works.



Figure 8. Maestro di Carità, *Madonna and Child between Angels and Saints*, tempera and gold on wood, first half of 14th century, Convento di St. Matthew, Pisa, National Museum, Inv. 1589

Another important artist, undoubtedly, is *Spinello Arentino*. He is one of the determinants of Florentine painting style at the end of the 14th century. His artistic life was formed in various cities of Tuscany province, such as Lucca, Pisa, Arezzo and Siena and due to that his style was formed by a compilation of Giotto, Lorenzetti and Andrea Pisano Works (Bresciani, 2021). In the works left from him, which are now kept in Pisa National Museum, displaying Oriental fabric using Sgraffito technic is quite obvious (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Spinello Arentino, *Incorination of Madonna*, tempera and gold on wood, the second half of 14th century, Pisa, Pisa, National Museum, Inv. S.N.

Unfortunately, except for a few cases, there is no access to the original fabrics from which the artists copied. However, similar cases can be found (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Comparison between the textile represented by Arentino and a textile fragment from Iran. Left: Spinello Arentino, *polyptych of St. John the Baptist, St. James the Great and St. Anthony the Great* (det.), tempera and gold on wood, the second half of 14th century, Pisa, National Museum, Inv. 1725., Right: Lampas with phoenixes amid undulating vines, late 1200s-1300s. Eastern Iran, Ilkhanid period, Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. 1985.4.

Arentino had two approaches toward color selection: choosing a color similar to the main color of the fabric and choosing a color based on present symbolism in Christianity. Red color bears various meanings in Christian art, but in most cases, it was used to point to Christ's material nature. This case multiplies the importance of brocades in the western world. It can be concluded that the texture of these fabrics is so attractive that artists have emphasized their presence even in paintings with religious themes. They have passed through mere imitation during the epoch under this research study and displayed fabrics with a new perspective. The same cosmopolitanism in Lucca fabric production was repeated for the painters of this period. *Agnolo Gaddi* was another artist who was contemporaneous with Arentino and was active in Tuscany. In his works, he has used golden motifs of a combination of birds and plants on a blue/green background (Figure 11) or a red/orange one (Figure 12). This point indicates that probably the artists of that era have either encountered these fabrics closely and displayed them in their works or were inspired by their contemporaneous artists.



Figure 11. Agnolo Gaddi, *Standing Madonna with Child* (det.), tempera and gold on wood, 1350-1354, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Inv. 68.41.7.



Figure 12. Presence of textiles in Gaddi's works. Left: *two elements of polyptych* (det.), tempera and gold on wood, the second half of 14th century, Pisa, National Museum, Inv. 1689/1692., Right: *Madonna of Cardinello* (det.), tempera and gold on wood, *Pieve di San Lorenzo*.

Nardo di Cione was an Italian painter, sculptor, and architect is another artist of this era who used a special textile, including determining iconography (Figure 13). This fabric contains a motif of birds facing each other and flowers and bushes between them, which can be seen abundantly in Iranian fabrics of this era also in some Italian ones (Table 1). He was an artist born in Florence (c.1320) and, according to historical documents, lived in this city all through his artistic life (Chiappelli, 1925: 567). Even though there is no information about this artist's inspiration from Italian or Iranian-Chinese fabric, the form of the birds and the fact that they are faced with each other indicates that this fabric has an Oriental origin.



Figure 13. The presence of facing birds in Nardo di Cione's works. Left: *Three Saints* (det.), London, National Gallery, Inv. NG. 581; Center: *Madonna and Child between St. Gregor and St. Hiob* (det.), tempera and gold on wood, 1365, Florence, Church of Santa Croce; Right: *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Zenobius John the Baptist Reparata and John the Evangelist* (det.), tempera and tooled gold on panel, New York, Brooklyn Museum, Inv. 1995.2.

The same fabric is used in another work by *Jacope di Cione* (Figure 14). He was Nardo's brother and both of them had studied in a common artistic ambiance.



Figure 14. Jacopo di Cione, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1372, tempera and gold on wood, 350×192.3 cm, Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia

However, by the beginning of the 14th century, the presence of fabrics in the clothing of religious characters, with extreme precision in displaying details, was very common. This point is a confirmation of their high value. In this respect, a textile, with observance of the same composition is pictured in a painting of *Andrea Orcagna* - the brother of Nardo and Jacopo- situated in Florence (Figure 15), inside the basilica *Santa Maria Novella* (Redeemer and Saints, 1357), in the clothing of Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Lorenzo.



Figure 15. Andrea Orcagna, *The Strozzi Altarpiece* (det.), 1354-1357, oil on wood, Florence, Basilica Santa Maria Novella

In a general sense, it can be said that using oriental iconography turned into a common visual culture among Tuscan painters of the 14th century. But their approach toward this topic divides them into two groups: The artists of the first half of the 14th century were quite faithful to Simone's style both in color and technic, and the artists in the second half of the same century used more diverse colors and technics, which were probably originated from Spinello's style. In fact, this type of fabric displaying style converted to a unified form that artists with various colors -which can be originated from color symbolism in religious topics- displayed it.

Motifs and identical compositions in Italy, Iran, and China were used with various colors and, in some cases, slight changes in details. In this era, facing birds was a common language among Chinese, Iranian, and Italian weavers, and due to its presence in Italian paintings, it became a common point between painting and fabric weaving. The significant point in this research is meeting the universal vision and transcultural view of Italian painters in this period. Their most important works, which included religious concepts, used fabrics with Oriental iconography.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important types of Oriental art of which the signs can be traced in other places in the world is fabric weaving which contains various iconography from different eras. In the 14th century, Mongol governments with Chinese roots ruled Iran, and their style of fabric weaving, including their special iconography, influenced this industry in Iran. On the other hand, due to the presence of Italian merchants in Iran and the fame of the Raw silk produced in the East, a big part of this valuable material was transferred to Italy during this period. So, the marks of Iranian iconography are observable in Italian fabrics of that time. By the comparative study of this Italian art in the 14th century, it can be seen that the iconography of Italian fabrics combines Chinese signs and Iranian composition under the influence of Italian art. Free strap composition, using mythical birds and geometric motifs with ancient origin from the Sasanian period, and using contradictory colors, are among them. So, this means the evolved and changed forms of Chinese textiles in Italy have traces of Iranian art and fabrics.

Due to the fact that textile was considered a valuable commodity in Italy, they attracted the attention of many painters of the Tuscany province - who were at the peak of their development at that time - and the display of fabric in painting became a kind of common tradition. So, studying iconography in Italian fabrics in the 14th century, aside from the samples left in museums, is also possible by studying the painting illustrating these fabrics. Based on the surveys, it can be concluded that fabric was a phenomenon rather than a commercial item in that century and created a kind of cosmopolitanism. This means an Italian artist in a work on the topic of Christian religion used a fabric with Oriental iconography. Generally, the artists active in this field are divided into three groups: First, artists such as Simone Martini, who probably have encountered brocades produced in Central Asia. Second, artists like Agnolo Gaddi used fabrics with green and blue backgrounds. Probably, they had seen fabrics produced during the Ilkanid in Iran and used them as their source of inspiration. Moreover

third, artists used fabrics with a red and orange background, following Spinello Arentino's style. Probably the third group did not deal with any fabric, and their source of inspiration was other artists' paintings.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Committee Declaration

This study does not require ethics committee approval.

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