

From Curiosities to Objects of Art

MODERN RECEPTION OF LATE ANTIQUE EGYPTIAN TEXTILES AS REFLECTED IN DIKRAN KELEKIAN'S TEXTILE ALBUM OF CA. 1910

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It seems appropriate to present the results of this historiographic project in a volume celebrating the work of Thomas F. Mathews, who, as my teacher and mentor, set me on the path of an intellectual adventure that never fails to surprise.¹

At the center of this study is a set of Late Antique Egyptian textiles assembled in an album for Dikran Garabed Kelekian (1868–1951), an influential collector and art dealer who was a source of historic and archaeological textiles for a number of important museum and private collections in Europe and America.² At various times throughout his career, Kelekian operated galleries in Constantinople, Paris, London, and New York. Kelekian's advertised interests crossed a wide range of periods and fields, including Middle Eastern, Asian, and European "Objects of Art," rugs and other textiles, and "curios" for the gallery in New York City that bore his name and, during the early years of the period under discussion, the evocative title "Le Musée de Bosphore" (fig. 1).³



Fig. 1 Le Musée de Bosphore, New York City, ca. 1899. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Onassis Library, Kelekian Archives

Most significant of Kelekian's fields of collecting were Persian art of all periods and modern painting, each of which played a part in his responses to Late Antique Egyptian textiles.

The album is comprised of ten portfolios labeled "COLLECTION de TISSUS. Européens, Persans & Orientaux." Each portfolio contains fifty plates on which were laid out some one thousand textiles. Originally, sixty-five Late Antique Egyptian pieces constituted a small fraction of the album's contents. In 2002, when Nanette Rodney Kelekian donated the album to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of the 968 textiles remaining in the album, sixty-three were Late Antique Egyptian textiles.⁴

Kelekian's textile album of c. 1910 has preserved evidence of what could be called his own distinctive "pe-

¹ I began this project in 2003–4 as a J. Clawson Mills Senior Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I thank Helen C. Evans, Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator for Byzantine Art in the Department of Medieval Art, and Giovanna Fiorino-Iannace, collections manager in the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, for their generous assistance with this project. Special thanks are due to Nanette Kelekian for her kindness and patient assistance.

² Marianna Shreve Simpson, "A Gallant Era: Henry Walters, Islamic Art, and the Kelekian Connection," *Ars Orientalis* 30, *Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art* (2000), 108n3.

³ The identity of the gentleman posing in front of the gallery is not known: see *ibid.*, 109n21.

⁴ The donation was made in honor of the curatorial career of Olga Raggio in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession numbers for the Late Antique Egyptian textiles: 2002.494.823-85. Nanette Kelekian donated many of Dikran Kelekian's papers and publications to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Mark C. Santangelo of the Museum's Onassis Library for Hellenic and Roman Art in the Department of Greek and Roman Art, where the archive is housed, organized the material and produced the indispensable guide, *The Kelekian Archive Finding Aid*, in 2004.

riod eye." The period under discussion, comprising the decades just before and after the turn of the century, was crucial for the generation of modern notions of Late Antique art. Consequently, the album presents an opportunity for exploration of the reception of Late Antique Egyptian textiles during a significant phase in the emergence of art historical scholarship, when the earliest characterizations of Late Antique art as inclusive of a wide range of culturally determined artistic traditions came into conflict with characterizations distinguishing a particularly Hellenistic stylistic core from an art of the "Orient." Kelekian developed his understanding of this material and promoted his views within the particular circumstances of the art market, which played a crucial role at the turn of the twentieth century in shaping the corpus of Late Antique Egyptian textiles available for art historical study. I approach these developments through the modern afterlives of the artifactual material, focusing first on key features of the textiles arranged in the album, then turning to the reception of these features within current practices of dealing and collecting Late Antique Egyptian textiles, including the assembly of textiles on plates for storage, display, and viewing.

All of the pieces in the album were sewn to paper boards (now discolored, brittle, and flaking around the edges) of twenty-four by fifty-four inches, creating large plates of textiles. The Late Antique Egyptian textiles are gathered into two main groups of eleven plates, beginning in portfolio V with plates 204 to 207 (fig. 2). Erratic distribution of textiles throughout the album points to an only intermittently successful organization of the pieces into subsets by attribution: plate 205, at bottom right, for example, includes a tapestry that is apparently of early modern French origin. Similarly, in portfolio VIII, on plate 397 there is only one Egyptian textile and it is combined with an early modern Italian piece (fig. 3). The second main group in portfolio IX is composed of the six plates from 441 to 446 (fig. 4 and 5; color plate). Two pieces were removed in recent years from plate 443 and from plate 446.⁵

The Late Antique Egyptian textiles are fragments – typically with cleanly cut edges – unremarkable for their size, quality of execution, or, for that matter, the rarity of their motifs or materials. Technique is a noteworthy characteristic insofar as the pieces all feature weft-faced tapestry ornamentation woven of dyed wools. The tapestries are sewn to or woven into neutral backgrounds of solid, light-colored plain weave (also known as tabby weave) of linen or wool. Kelekian apparently had little interest in weaving techniques other

than tapestry when he compiled the album, as there are no examples of twills or compound weaves, no knitting or sprang, no embroidery or resist-dyed patterning. Those techniques were represented among some of the earliest excavations from the 1880s and 1890s, which were available for acquisition and known from contemporary publications. (Additional techniques are represented among the other textiles in the album.) Moreover, few technical details such as selvages are preserved among these pieces, although selvages may in some cases function as diagnostics for reconstructing the original size or shape of a complete piece. Object type is also strikingly limited for the Late Antique Egyptian textiles; the tapestry fragments are patterned ornaments, belonging to conventional decorative sets from garments or hangings. The ornaments preserve clear, sometimes vibrant colors, and there is variation among color schemes.

The pieces are placed on each plate so as to make economical use of available space in simple compositions loosely based on color scheme, type of decoration, motif, and patterning. There are examples of the type of band from a tunic called a *clavi*, including some *clavi* with pendants. Most bands would have been too long to present in their entirety on the plates, yet usually enough is preserved of each piece to show how patterns repeat. *Clavi*, square *segmenta*, medallions, rectangular cuff bands, and neckpieces are decorated with variations on common motifs and compositions, including interlaced designs and vine *rinceaux*, flowers, baskets of fruit, heads and busts, running animals, hunters, warriors, and Dionysiac figures. Although the pieces functioned originally as ornaments, they are not arranged on

⁵ I am thankful to Nanette Kelekian for her generosity in bringing so much of this kind of information to my attention, including the fate of the two Egyptian textiles that were removed from the album in recent years. The piece missing from plate 443 entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art also in 2002 (accession number 2002.239.13) through her donation of another group of sixty-three "Coptic textiles" in honor of Nobuko Kajitani, then head of Textile Conservation: each textile was matted and framed to receive singular attention. The other item removed from plate 446 was sold in Paris at the Hotel Drouot in 2001 when there were two sales of numerous single fragments of Egyptian textiles, each thoughtfully presented by Annie Kevorkian in two sale catalogs: *Arts d'Orient. Collection Kélékian et à divers amateurs, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 18 Juin 2001* (Paris, 2001); and *Collection Kélékian: Deuxième Vente, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 22 Octobre 2001* (Paris, 2001). As collections amassed long ago are still being sold, practices current when the album was compiled continue to shape today's market.

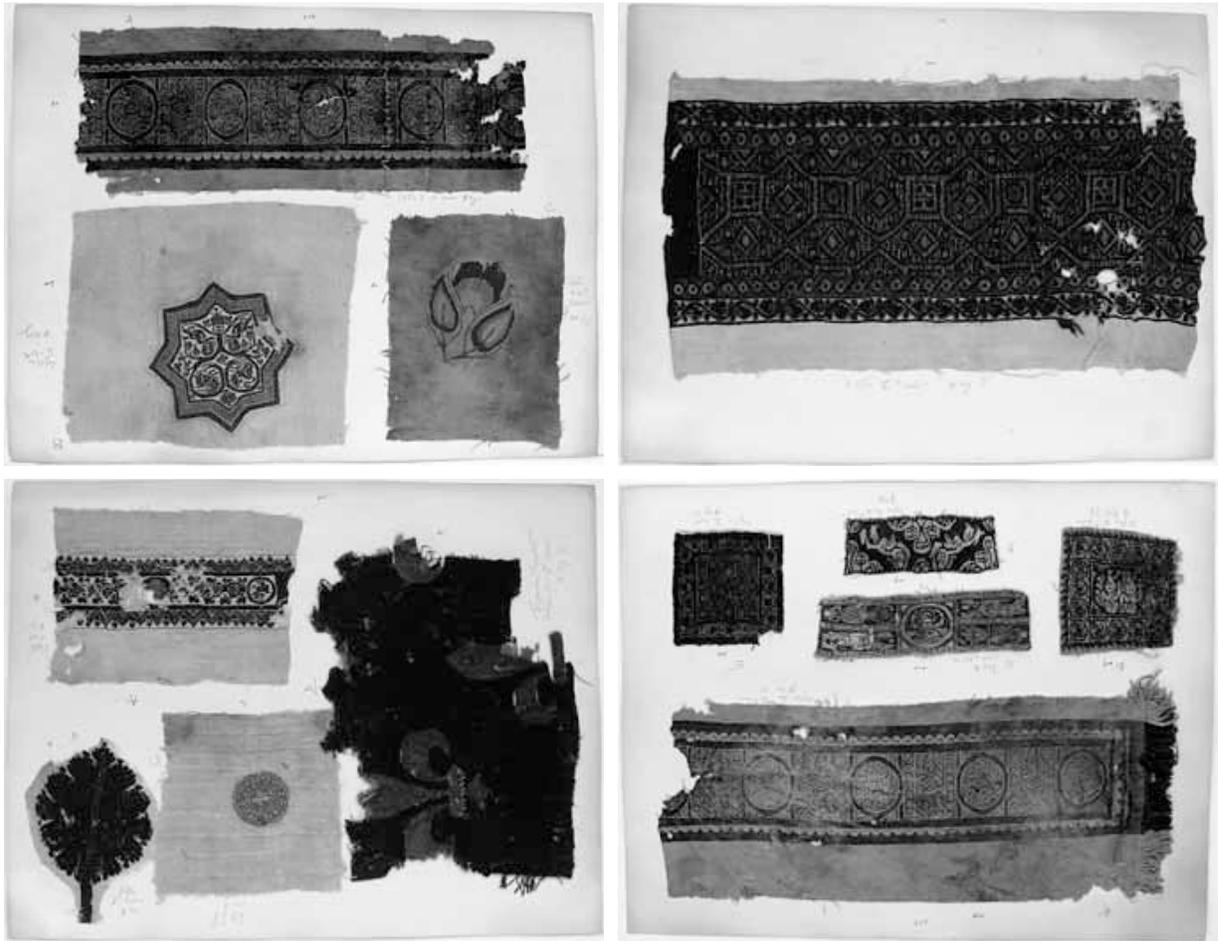


Fig. 2 Dikran Kelekian's textile album of ca. 1910, plates 204 to 207. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

the plates to simulate their original placement on tunics or hangings. Some plates contain ornaments from the same fabric (as, for example, on plates 441–44). Pieces from the same fabric also show up on different plates (as on 204 and 207, and throughout plates 441–46).

The date of the album's creation is not exact, however the range of dates during which it could have been compiled can be narrowed to the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, perhaps as early as 1890 or 1900, and probably not after 1920.⁶ The plates are annotated, but these notes were not all written at the same time. Dating to the compilation of the album are annotations written in ink in a compact, spiky cursive script, providing plate numbers, the number of pieces on a plate, and lettered price codes. The album portfolios remained together as a set in the New York gallery, surviving a move to a different building and a change in ownership, when, after Dikran Kelekian's death in 1951, the busi-

ness was carried on by his son, Charles (1900–1982). In the mid-1970s, the album portfolios were still stored together, in a closet, when Nanette Kelekian persuaded her stepfather to open them, apparently for the first time

⁶ Kelekian's publications reflect his growing interest in these textiles. No Late Antique Egyptian textiles are included in the pamphlet by W. R. Davis, *Notes from the Musée de Bosphore* (1898); they appear to have been included first in Dikran G. Kelekian, *La Collection Kélékian: Etoffes et Tapis d'Orient et de Venise* (Paris, 1908). Kelekian's acquisition of Late Antique Egyptian textiles is documented only from 1919 in the papers donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1920, Kelekian's records began to list the sources of the textiles as where acquired or from whom. Nanette Kelekian has indicated in conversation (2003–4, and 2006) that Dikran Kelekian's mother, Marian, who died around 1921, may have organized the textiles into the groupings for the plates. It is not known who stitched the textiles to the boards.

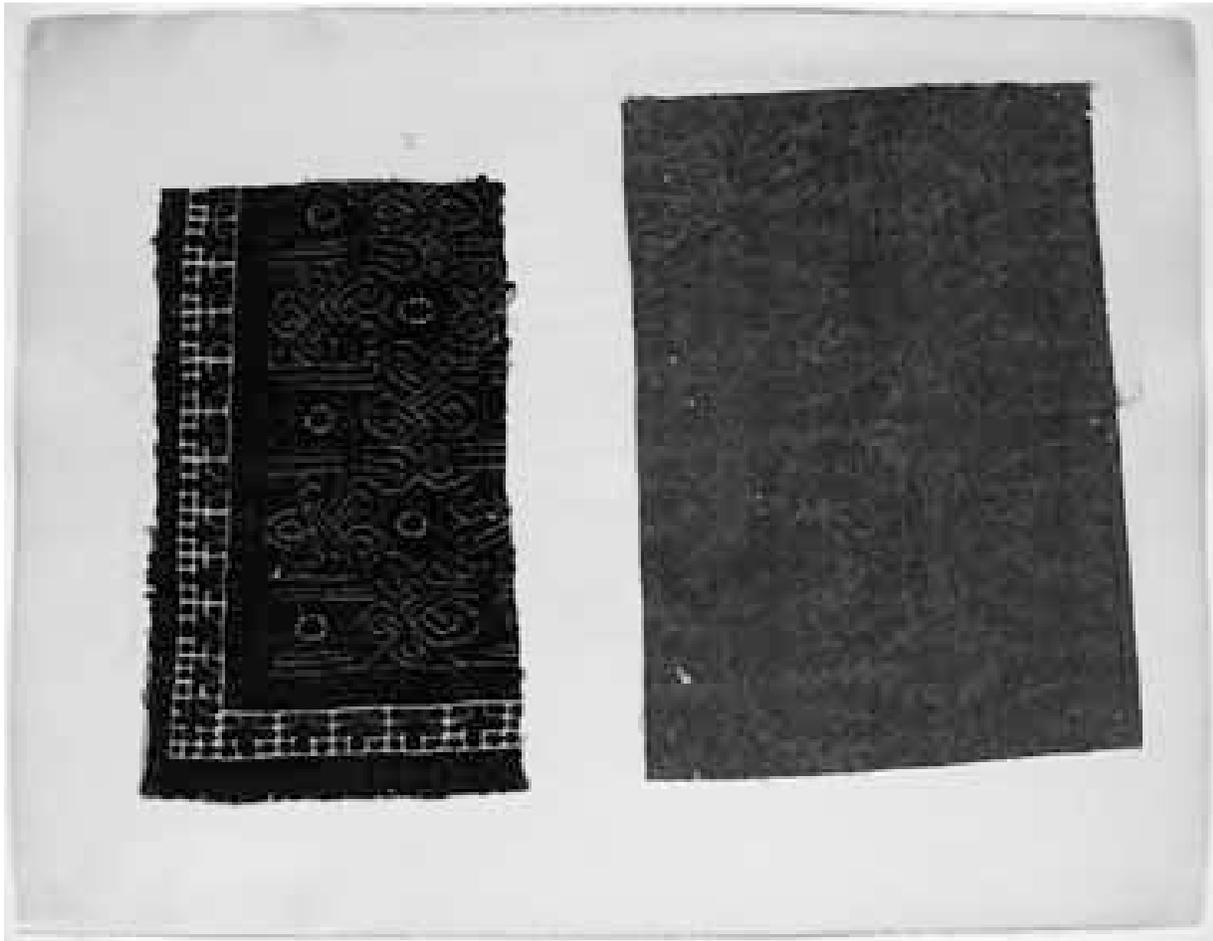


Fig. 3 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

in many years. Annotations in pencil, adding attributions such as “Coptic,” are from this period.⁷

The fragmentary textiles in the album of c. 1910, by arrangements featuring motifs, patterns, and color schemes, reflect prime desiderata for collecting such textiles at around the turn of the century, when these items began to be seen as worthy of both aesthetic appreciation and what was emerging as systematic art-historical study, when individuals and museums began to collect these textiles through sponsored excavations, donations, and purchases. Not so very long before the assemblage of this album, however, from the mid to late nineteenth century, these textiles had been deemed scarcely more than curiosities. Typically, they were unearthed during decidedly unsystematic excavations of cemeteries and without benefit of study.⁸

The situation began to change in the 1880s and 1890s as scholars, explorers, and scholar-explorer-entre-

preneurs began to exhume well-wrapped corpses and harvest great quantities of textiles from Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic cemeteries in Egypt. The two richest find sites were Antinoe (also known as Antinoopolis in Greek, the modern village called Sheik Ibada in Arabic), excavated by Albert Gayet (1856–1916), and Panoopolis (in Greek; Achmim or Akhmim in Arabic), excavated by Robert Forrer (1866–1947). At Antinoe, from the 1880s into the 1910s, Albert Gayet unearthed many hundreds of burials, yielding an as yet unnumbered

⁷ According to Nanette Kelekian in several conversations during 2003–4, and 2006, *Finding Aid*, 2. It is not known who wrote the annotations in ink.

⁸ T. K. Thomas, “Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt: Corpora, Collections, and Scholarly Perspectives,” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge, 2007), 137–42.

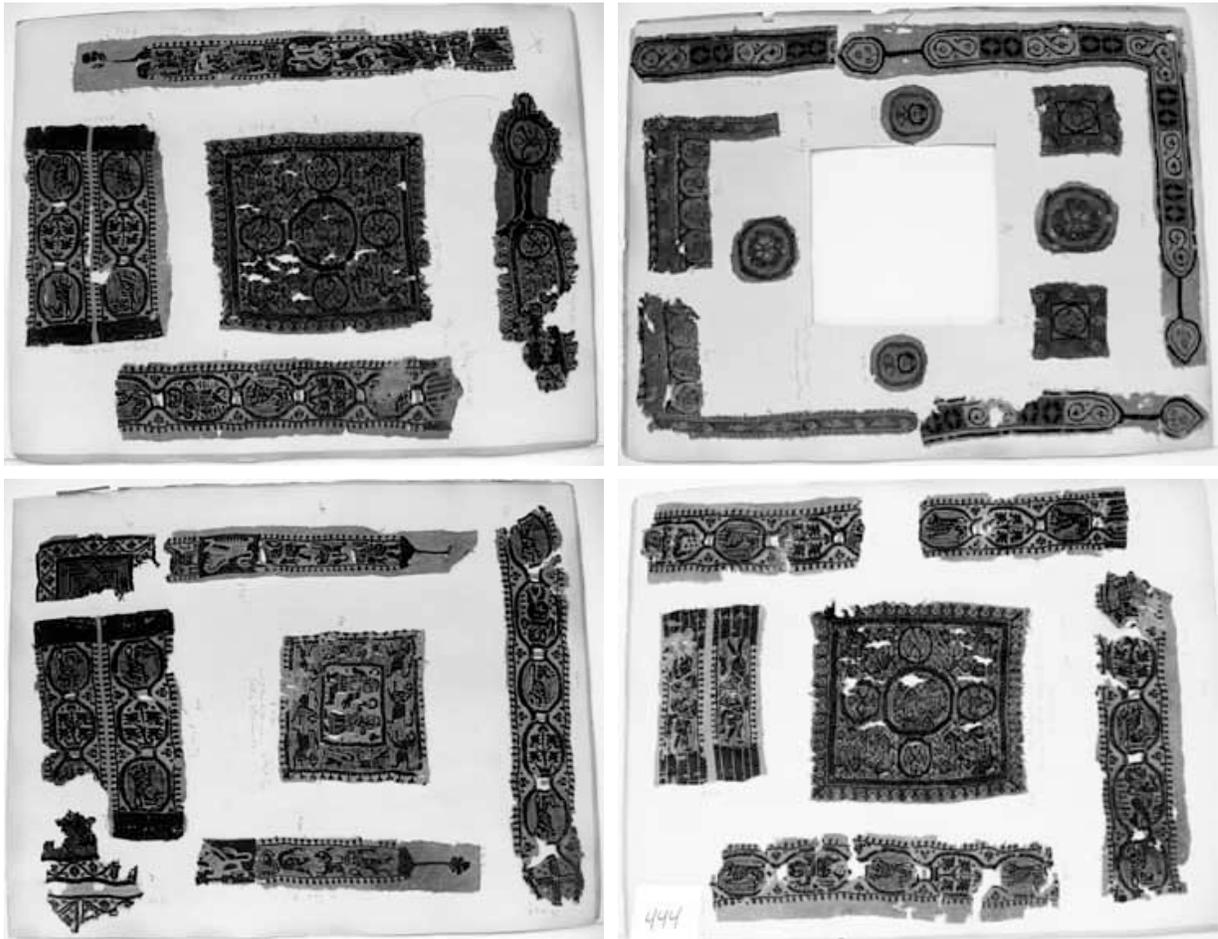


Fig. 4 Dikran Kelekian's textile album of ca. 1910, plates 441 to 444. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

quantity of textiles as well as other categories of artifacts. Many of the textiles from Antinoe were acquired by Émile Guimet (1836–1918), an industrialist with a deep interest in religions of Antiquity and the Orient, who financed much of Gayet's expedition for his new Museum of Religions, the Musée Guimet, of which he was the first director. Many other museums in Europe and America acquired textiles from the Antinoe excavations.⁹ Forrer was a more careful excavator, and his letters speak of his attempts to stop workers from tearing apart the "mummies" in search of precious objects, so that he could take notes and make photographs and sketches. Most of Forrer's finds are fragmentary as well (fig. 6); these textiles were removed from the bodies he disinterred. Forrer's finds were sold in large lots by advertisement in *Antiquitäten-Zeitschrift* (1889–1903) to museum and private collectors, as well as textile manufacturers in Europe, notably Germany and Austria, as well as East-

ern Europe and America.¹⁰ Documentation is scarce for what occurred after the archaeologists concluded their excavations, documented their finds, and secured those allotted to them, but it is clear that many other pieces

⁹ Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*, trans. A. Stephenson (Paris, 1990), 16, quoting Émile Guimet: "All the museums of Europe and America have been supplied." See also Florence Calament, "Antinoë: Histoire d'une collection dispersée," *Revue du Louvre* 5/6 (1989): 336–42; Loretta del Francia Barocas, *Antinoe. Cent'Anni Dopo*, exhib. cat., Palazzo Medici Riccardi (Florence, 1998); and the more detailed accounting of Gayet's explorations and his finds by Florence Calament, *La révélation d'Antinoë par Albert Gayet: Histoire, archéologie, muséographie* (Cairo, 2005).

¹⁰ Bernadette Schnitzler, *Robert Forrer (1866–1947): Archéologue, écrivain et antiquaire* (Strasbourg, 1999), 49; Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*, 17. Edouard Gerspach (1833–1906), a director of the French national tapestry factory, Les Gobelins, identified

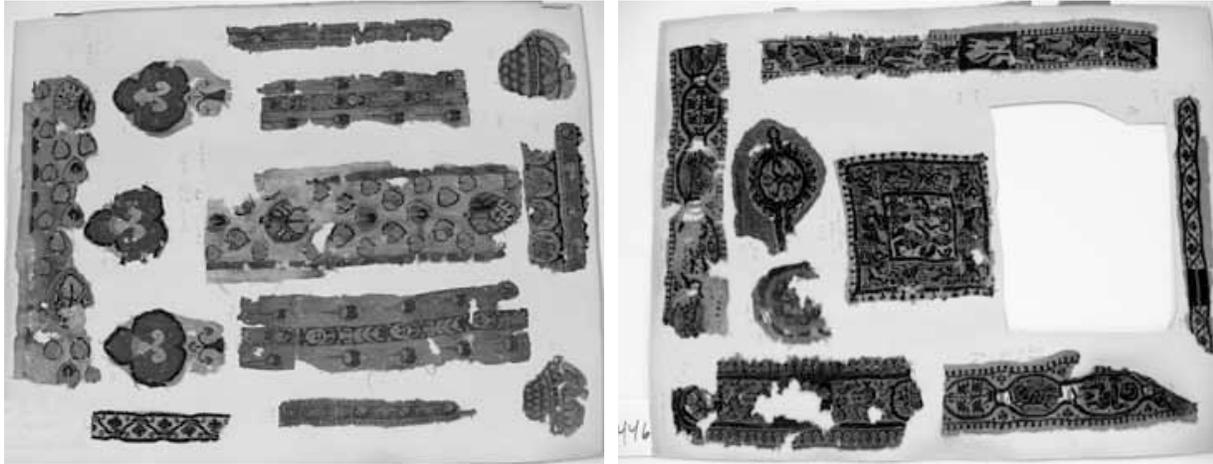


Fig. 5 Dikran Kelekian's textile album of ca. 1910, plates 445 to 446. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

made their way into a local market supplied by Egyptian dealers, who found their material at the sites.¹¹

Kelekian did not run excavations in Egypt. His collections of Egyptian antiquities were acquired through the gallery he established in Cairo for the sole purpose of purchasing antiquities. He knew of the discoveries of Forrer and Gayet, and it is possible that some of the fragments in the album of c. 1910 may have come from these sites. Kelekian participated in the growing secondary markets in Europe and America, where, through his high-profile galleries, he sold his collections, including items purchased in Egypt.

Early purchases for museum, industry and private collections were acquired both in lots and individually, sometimes from European expedition leaders, sometimes from local Egyptian dealers, and sometimes from cosmopolitan dealers like Kelekian. Kelekian would have been well aware that prominent collectors in New York City, many of whom were his friends and clients, were also purchasing large numbers of these textiles in Egypt: in 1890 the extremely wealthy financier, George F. Baker (1840–1931), donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art a large collection of Egyptian textiles, including numerous items said to be from Panopolis; the Pratt Institute, founded to train skilled workers by the self-made oil man and philanthropist, Charles Pratt (1830–91), donated Coptic textiles to the Brooklyn Museum; and J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) made a large gift of textiles, including “Coptic” textiles, to Cooper Union, the first American school of higher education devoted to the training of artisans.¹²

The pieces were usually acquired with only the briefest comment on or perhaps suggestion of where they had

been found (e.g., “said to be from Panopolis”), typically without documentation as to where within a site they had been excavated. While some textiles were already fragmentary when discovered, due to burial conditions, others were pulled apart the moment they were unearthed and, as has been noted since the turn of the century, some pieces were cut into smaller pieces before they were sold. The advanced deterioration of many finds required trimming to make them palatable to collectors. This part of the textiles' history, what happened

these Egyptian tapestries as similar in technique to those produced in Les Gobelins. He recounted how his students copied Coptic “Gobelins” in Gerspach, *Les tapisseries coptes* (Paris, 1890), 17.

¹¹ One Egyptian “Antiquar” is pictured in Robert Forrer, *Mein Besuch in el-Achmim. Reisebriefe aus Aegypten* (Strasbourg, 1895), plate IX; reproduced in Thomas, “Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt,” fig. 7.1.

¹² The use of such collections for the betterment of industry may be more well known in the European and British contexts of, for example, two museums with collections of Late Antique Egyptian textiles acquired during the period under discussion, the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna (now the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, the MAK) and the South Kensington Museum in London (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). On the founding of professional schools in centers of the textile industry, making public museum collections of textiles available to craftsmen as well as the general public, and the related tradition of aristocratic collecting of fine textiles, see the fine contextualizing essay by Chiara Buss, “The Antonio Ratti Collection,” in Qibti, *The Coptic Textiles of the Antonio Ratti Collection*, ed. Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri (Collezione Antonio Ratti, vol. 2, Como, 1993), 11–13.



Fig. 6 Robert Forrer, *Mein Besuch in el-Achmim. Reisebriefe aus Ägypten* (Strasbourg, 1895), plate XI

to them immediately after their discovery and before their acquisition, is very rarely known, yet it is clear that the nature of the textiles has been altered through the processes of acquisition and collection. The loss of archaeological documentation for the retrieval and treatment of textiles acquired at this time has often impeded contextual analysis as these early acquisitions still constitute the majority works accessible in museum and private collections, however, useful information about their early reception is available from the way they were stored.

Organizing collections into sample books and portfolios had long been a practice in industry and commerce for the presentation of varieties of cloth materials, fabric structures, colors and ornamental options; the use of sample books for these same purposes continues to this day.¹³ At the turn of the century, the commercial exam-

¹³ See, e.g., Mary Schoeser, *Silk* (2007), 78, 118, and 122, illustrating examples spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; typically these are discussed in the contexts of industry and commerce, and often preserved in company archives.

ple of attaching textile samples to plates in albums and to pages in bound books was a traditional, useful, safe mode of storage. The practice was adopted in archaeology; for example, many of Gayet's textiles from Antinoe were stored on plates, as were Forrer's. Kelekian's storage of textiles on plates in portfolios was another adaptation of this established practice, in this instance for a private collection of archaeological textiles. The album is very much a creation of its time, the habit of which mediated the reception of the textiles, directing attention to motif, pattern, and color.

Publications and archival documentation confirm Kelekian's interest at this moment in time in motif, pattern, and color. Among the records at the Metropolitan Museum of Art are inventories for Kelekian's New York galleries beginning in 1919, in which each relevant entry in the inventories is identified carefully, by country and/or culture of origin, so the textiles under discussion are identified as "Egyptian" or "Coptic," and by color and motif. Kelekian's earlier purchases of Egyptian textiles were likely based on these same criteria as is evident in publication of a collection of finely executed textiles, which, much like the closely contemporary album of c. 1910, included Egyptian textiles as a small part of a much larger set of patterned pieces described in the title as Eastern and Venetian.¹⁴ The preface was written by Jules Guiffrey (1840–1918), an art historian and author of a history of tapestry, and published in 1908, during Guiffrey's last year as director of the French national manufacturer of tapestries, Les Gobelins. Lending the collection the imprimatur of his professional expertise, he rhapsodized about the patterning of all the textiles, as offering "a rare reunion of decorative motives, a unique series of colorings at once brilliant and of an exquisite harmony ... How ingeniously certain combinations renew repeatedly the design! What inexhaustible imagination had the inventors of these decorations! They knew how to group very adroitly, under a certain number of repeats of composition, this infinite multitude of forms."¹⁵ This brief text, which can certainly be understood to speak for Kelekian, addressed the multiple interests and concerns of historical scholarship more directly than had his early publications.¹⁶ Guiffrey's preface constitutes the text for this limited edition folio volume with photographic plates of extraordinarily high quality photographic reproductions both in black and white and in color, labeled by terse captions.

Organization of plates of textile fragments around ornament also reflects the intense interest of industry and the academy in ornament as an element of design during the second half of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. Owen Jones's *The*

Grammar of Ornament had been tremendously influential from the moment of its publication in 1856 both for its spectacular color plates, the first instance of chromolithography in art publishing (fig. 7), and for his propositions of the laws or grammar of ornament.¹⁷ Contemporary interest in ornament on the part of the textile industry, textile scholars, and collectors may well have played a part in the breaking up of textiles into ornamental fragments, if only to allow for their arrangement on plates. The stunning color plates in *The Grammar of Ornament* and the use of plates for textile sample books may have affected the ornamental presentation of textiles in Kelekian's 1908 volume as well as, for example, Mary Houston's presentation of the ornament of Late Antique Egyptian dress.¹⁸

One of the first scholars to subject these textiles to close and systematic art historical scrutiny was Alois Riegl, whose work as curator of textiles at the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna from 1887 until 1897, helped lay the groundwork for his *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament* of 1893. In dialogue with his predecessor, Gottfried Semper, who emphasized the foundational importance of materials and techniques for formal developments, especially in textiles, Riegl emphasized structural study of ornament in its cultural context. In his 1889 catalog of a diverse group of textiles excavated at Sakkara, as well as a small group of textiles from Panopolis, Riegl offered brief descriptions,

¹⁴ Kelekian, *La Collection Kélékian*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 4, referring to the increasing number of publications, and 5, mentioning Robert Forrer. Page 3 reports, "The history of fabrics offers the most complete and faithful picture of the vicissitudes of civilisation throughout the ages, of its progress, of its decline. Textiles furnish documents of the very highest value on the tastes, the fashions, the habits, the trades, the arts of the past. Many learned scholars have devoted themselves to studying the manufacture and the decoration of the fabrics of all ages, from the remotest times until today. The task has been difficult. Perhaps no one who has attempted these researches has fully mastered the subject. There exist still too many gaps, too much obscurity and uncertainty on essential points, for the investigator to proceed far without exposing himself to miscalculations and errors of judgement while he attempts to follow methodically the development of this industry which occupies still one of the first places in the life of all nations."

¹⁷ Nicholas Frankel, "The Ecstasy of Decoration: The Grammar of Ornament as Embodied Experience," *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, Winter 2003, 1–32, available at 19thc-artworldwide.org/winter_03/articles/fran_print.html.

¹⁸ Mary G. Houston, *Ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Costume and Decoration* (London, 1931); see, e.g., plate IV.

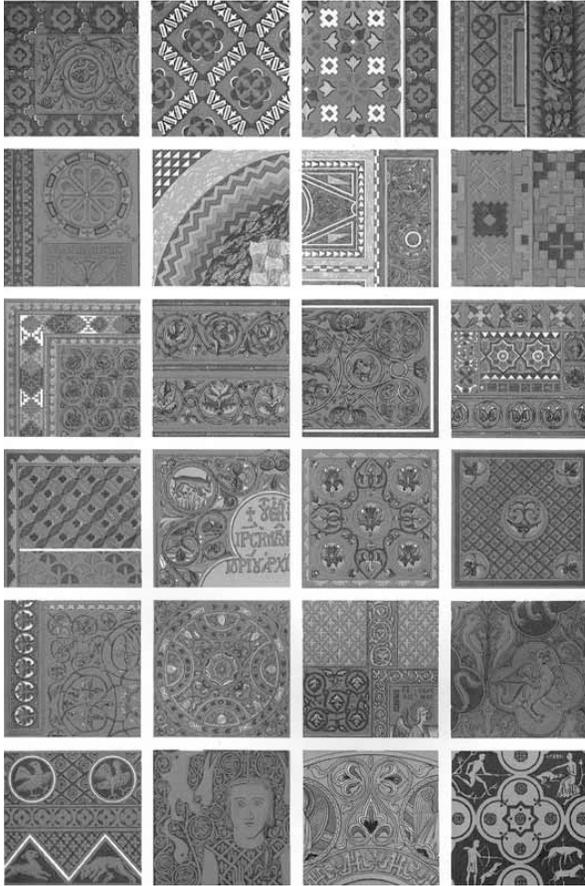


Fig. 7 Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London, 1856), plate XXXIX

beginning with type of textile, color, materials and technique, then the style of rendering motifs.¹⁹ Riegl illustrated close photographic details that suited his own mode of sustained visual attention, which could be described as myopic meditation on formal minutiae; he expected his readers to look as closely as he did.²⁰ He grouped pieces by technique to showcase ornamental variety within a technique and represent variation in decorative sets, but he did not compose plates of numerous pieces as, for example, Forrer had done for his illustrations, or as Kelekian was to do later.

In this material Riegl saw evidence of the formal transformation he was to discuss more fully in his *Late Roman Art Industry* of 1901, in which he focused on monumental remains and small-scale artifacts, primarily from Roman Italy. In describing a transformation from a haptic or tactile manner of representation to optical plays of light and dark over space-filling, planar patterns, Riegl developed the formalistic language still

employed in characterizations of Late Antique art.²¹ Interestingly, we have yet to develop a descriptive language for Late Antique textile compositions including spatial dimensions within interlace or optical effects of multiple juxtaposed planes (color plate).

In *Problems of Style*, Riegl took a long and broad view of the cultural lives of ornamental motifs, notably referring to the Late Antique Egyptian material to chart a transitional Byzantine moment in the development of the Graeco-Roman vine scroll to Sassanian Persian art into the arabesque of Islamic art. Describing and diagramming his analytical results in meticulous detail, Riegl's structural formalism was "effectively a transmutation of the object into his own code and a metamorphosis of it towards his own specific ends."²² For Riegl, the transformation in Egypt was generated by the *Kunstwollen*, that is, the artistic will or pervasive stylistic desire of Late Antiquity, particularly the late Roman and Early Byzantine culture of the eastern Mediterranean, and so the ornamental forms of Late Antique Egyptian textiles were representative of developments spanning the Mediterranean and Near East—a view upheld by later textile discoveries in Syria.²³

Although Riegl used the terms Coptic and Egyptian as subsets of larger, culturally diverse units, other scholars had differing interpretations of the cultural founda-

¹⁹ Alois Riegl, *Die Ägyptischen Textilfunde in K.K. Österreich. Museum. Allgemeine Charakteristik und Katalog* (Vienna, 1889); see 5–7 on find sites; on ornament, see 17–24.

²⁰ Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain, introduction by David Castriota (Princeton, N.J., 1991), translator's note, xix–xx: "Riegl meant *Stilfragen* to be read closely, at a pace essentially slower than what is used today. He expected the reader to sit back and share his delight in observing minute detail and in unraveling its dazzling complexity. One enters, so to speak, on a kind of fantastic journey through the very bloodstream of ornamental existence. Reading *Stilfragen* is, therefore, a kind of myopic experience." On Riegl's central place in the modern study of ornament, see James Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective* (Seattle, 2003), 55.

²¹ Jas Elsner, "The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901," *Art History* 25, no. 3 (2002): 358–79, esp. 363. See also László Török, "Strzygowski's Coptic Art," *Acta Historiae Artium* 47 (2006): 305–11.

²² *Ibid.*, 367.

²³ Rudolf Pfister, *Textiles de Halabiyeh (Zenobia)* (Paris, 1951); Rudolf Pfister, *Textiles de Palmyre* (Paris, 1940); Rudolf Pfister, *Nouveaux Textiles de Palmyre* (Paris, 1937); Rudolf Pfister and Louisa Bellinger, *The Excavations at Dura Europos* (New Haven, 1945); see also Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, Annamarie Stauffer with Khaled Al-As'ad, *Die Textilien aus Palmyra. Neue und alte Funde. Damaszener Forschungen* 8 (Mainz am Rhein, 2000).

tions of the artistic dynamism of the age. For example, Riegl wrote explicitly against a notion put forward by Albert Gayet that Roman or Byzantine elements in Egyptian art should be seen as foreign to their native Egyptian, non-Hellenistic essence. So, In *Problems of Style*, Riegl argued:

Those of us who do not find any justification for Gayet's differentiation between Byzantine and indigenous Egyptian art in the sixth and seventh centuries will have no trouble assigning this [piece] an Egyptian origin. However, even if Gayet were right, it would not essentially alter our thesis: we have already established that the tendency leading up to the incorporation of the profile leaf within the tendril, characteristic of Islamic art ... was already present on any number of monuments from the Eastern Roman Empire, including those originating in Constantinople.²⁴

Certainly, scholarly issues and debates circulated outside of the academy as well, including at the point of sale, and some of the academic concerns expressed by Riegl, Gayet, Forrer, and others are reflected in Kelekian's public appreciation of this material. For example, in the catalog of a 1903 sale of one of his collections, which did not include Late Antique Egyptian textiles, the preface written by Roger Riordan, an illustrator and art critic, presented a restatement of the kind of ornamental development Riegl was charting, but with emphasis on Persian art of all periods, Kelekian's particular area of interest and expertise: "It was in Persia, or at the hands of Persian artists, that the decaying art of the old Byzantine provinces took on the form which we call 'Arab.' ... It was their taste and skill that gave new life and character to the stiff Byzantine forms."²⁵ Elsewhere, as Riegl had done, Kelekian (and his authors) used the terms *Coptic* and *Egyptian* alternately well into the 1920s, but increasingly favoring *Coptic*. His understanding of *Coptic* as a cultural designation changed as well. By 1929 he had come to rely exclusively upon the designation *Coptic*, much as Gayet had done in his 1904 survey of Coptic art, to indicate an Oriental visual sensibility appreciative of formal abstractions in patterning, and evocative of a reaction against a Hellenistic naturalism.²⁶ Moreover, Kelekian's insistence upon tapestries in the album of c. 1910 may reflect a conception of Coptic textiles first elaborated by Forrer in which the compound-woven silks he had found at Panopolis were seen as Byzantine in origin, perhaps from the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, whereas the wool tapestries were local Egyptian – that is, Coptic – products.²⁷

The borders between scholarship, collecting, and the art market were porous. Although Kelekian's selection and presentation of patterned tapestries is consistent with central scholarly conceptions of Late Antique or Byzantine Egyptian and Coptic textiles, he was by no means a follower or student of Riegl, or Gayet, or Forrer. His views shifted along a spectrum of conceptualizations of these textiles from Egypt as, on one end, belonging to a wide world of Late Antiquity and, on the other, Oriental, essentially Egyptian, "Coptic," textiles. Nor did his authority as a knowledgeable expert rest upon academic credentials. Kelekian's influence as a tastemaker was built on his ability as a teacher to persuade.²⁸ During this period in his career he very successfully taught collectors such as Henry Walters about antiquities and Islamic, especially Persian art; items acquired from Kelekian form the core of the Walters Art Museum's holdings of Middle Eastern art.²⁹

Kelekian employed albums composed of plates to teach as occurred in a range of current practices, which exploited the format that was so effective for storage for study and display.³⁰ A textile study room that opened in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1910 presented plates of ornamental pieces that could be displayed on walls or pulled out from their built-in storage, an arrangement still in use in a number of museums, as, for example, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.³¹ Forrer employed study displays in his home in a small gallery where intact mummies were surrounded by artifacts categorized by medium, including fragmentary textiles displayed in framed plates. Artifacts were displayed in another room in Forrer's home, where in a variation on "Oriental Rooms" popular during the pe-

²⁴ Riegl, "Problems of Style," 260.

²⁵ *The Collection of Dikran Khan Kelekian* (1903), unnumbered first page of the preface. See also Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, "Collecting the 'Orient' at the Met: Early Tastemakers in America," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 75.

²⁶ A. Gayet, *L'Art Copte* (Paris, 1904), 255.

²⁷ R. Forrer, *Römische und byzantinische Seiden-Textilien aus die Gräberfeld von Achmim-Panopolis* (Strasbourg, 1891).

²⁸ Nanette Kelekian noted in conversations (2003–4) that Dikran Kelekian favored forming collections that reflected his own interests. His sale catalogs, for example, often framed offerings as from his collections (see, e.g., the 1903 catalog, a tradition continued in recent sales at the Hôtel Drouot (2001)).

²⁹ Simpson, "A Gallant Era," 93; Jenkins-Madina, "Collecting the 'Orient' at the Met," 69–89.

³⁰ Interestingly, Kelekian assembled a series of photographic albums for Walters between the years of 1911 and 1917: Simpson, "A Gallant Era," 99–100, and n. 40.

³¹ *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 5, 12 (December 1910) 289.

riod, large textiles were hung and draped, along with other furnishings to replicate an Egyptian setting and evoke a romantic mood, creating an Orientalism of participation as much as spectacle.³² Arguably, “Le Musée de Bosphore” created such an evocative atmosphere as appropriate to a place for the study of Oriental art.³³

Kelekian showed his Coptic collections in museums as well as in his own galleries, exhibiting his collections in, for example, exhibitions of 1895, 1898, and 1911 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1907, and in London at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1910 until 1951.³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, as concerns the early high status of Late Antique Egyptian textiles in Byzantine art history, Kelekian also displayed examples in the important 1931 exhibition of Byzantine art in Paris, where larger, more impressive pieces were given pride of place, and smaller decorative fragments were exhibited on framed plates. It was at this exhibition that the young Werner Abegg, later founder of the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg, made his first purchase of a Coptic textile from Dikran Kelekian.³⁵ Interestingly, in 1931, Egyptian textiles were integral to describing the cultural range of Byzantine art, as they had been in the very first exhibition of Byzantine art in 1901 at Grottaferrata.³⁶

A less academic, less connoisseurial, more sensational mode of viewing of these textiles was famously promoted by Gayet’s expositions, some of which were fabulously evocative scenarios that inventively rearranged archaeological assemblages for theatrically dramatic effect, and even gave several intact corpses legendary names. “Thaïs,” for example, had been inspired partly by Jules Massenet’s 1894 opera, *Thaïs*, and by the serial novel by Anatole France of the same title (published as a novel in 1890). Massenet’s opera was still in production when, following his lecture at the Musée Guimet in Paris, Gayet went so far as to “reanimate” Thaïs in something very much like a stage show. As described by Émile Guimet, this was an enormously successful strategy: [Gayet] “reconstructed her preparation for burial before an enraptured audience: The audience cheered and applauded the brilliant lecturer who was about to return to Egypt. Before leaving the Musée Guimet most people went upstairs to see the real mummy from Antinoë. I noted in many of their gazes a curious expression that seemed to say: Thaïs, Thaïs, what was your life really like?”³⁷

In Gayet’s displays of necrophiliac romance, the textiles were very much curiosities in the tradition of World’s Fair museum displays and midway showmanship.³⁸ These aspects of Gayet’s exhibitions have been

³² Schnitzler (1990) 54 illustrates both rooms. See below, notes 38–39 and 42.

³³ Large oriental rugs filled the plate glass windows (figure 1). Wellesley Reid Davis certainly described the gallery as an experience of the East in the opening pages of the brief sale pamphlet *Notes on Le Musée de Bosphore 1898–99* (New York, 1898), 3 (in blue-green ink): “On a tempestuous day in November when winds were bitter and the driving snow swished and swirled, the turning of a brass handle on a modest door suddenly opened to the stinging eyes of the wayfarer, the glowing heart of the Far East.” The introduction ends on p. 4, first with brief, yet fulsome descriptions of textiles, then “the gate is unlatched and a welcoming hand held forth to those, who with cultured taste would traverse paths of beauty, opened by the Ancient Arts in the sunrise lands of the world.” I thank Jonathan Hay for bringing this pamphlet to my attention. See also Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met,” 73–74.

³⁴ Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met,” 74–76. Kelekian reproduced a letter of commendation from Dr. Julius Lessing, written following his visit to the 1907 exhibition at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris (*La Collection Kélékian*, 7). Lessing was director of the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Industrial Arts) in Berlin and author of numerous scholarly works, including the earliest studies of Oriental carpets, such as *Altorientalische Teppichmuster nach Bildern und Originalen des XV–XVIII* (Berlin, 1877); and *Orientalische Teppiche*, Königliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorbilder-Hefte aus dem kgl. Kunstgewer-

bemuseum, Heft 13 (Berlin, 1891), as well as his monumental folios, *Gewebesammlung des königlichen Kunstgewerbemuseums zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1900).

³⁵ Sabine Schrenk, *Textilien des Mittelmeerraumes aus spätantiker bis frühislamischer Zeit* (Riggisberg, 2004), 9–10; her figure 1 reproduces a photograph of this piece (her Kat. Nr. 6) in its place of honor within a vitrine and framed plates of textiles on display in the 1931 exhibition of Byzantine art at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

³⁶ The first printed page of the catalog for this exhibition, *Exposition d’Art Byzantin, 28 Mai–9 Juillet, 1931* (Paris, 1931), presents an advertisement for Kelekian’s New York and Paris galleries, listing his specialties as “art égyptien, grec, persan.” Section II of the catalog, “Tissus, tapisseries,” 89–114, includes tapestries from Antinoë lent by the Musée Guimet, and tissues (silks), including examples from Panopolis lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum.

³⁷ Neil Cox, “La Mort Posthume: Maurice Heine and the Poetics of Decay,” *Art History* 23 (2000): 449 and n. 54. See also Albert Gayet, *Antinoë et les sépultures de Thaïs et Sérapio* (Paris, 1902).

³⁸ Albert Gayet, *Exposition universelle de 1900. Palais du Costume. Le Costume en Egypte du IIIe au XIIIe siècle d’après les fouilles d’Al. Gayet* (Paris, 1900). In regard to Kelekian’s activities, see Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met,” 70–72; more generally, Meg Armstrong, “Novelties and Curiosities: ‘A Jumble of Foreignness’: The Sublime Musayms of Nineteenth-Century Fairs and Exhibitions,” *Cultural Critique* 23 (1992): 199–250.

addressed by several scholars, but especially relevant here is the work of Neil Cox, who noted the remarkable influence of these displays of dead personalities toward a “poetics of decay” in poems by Maurice Heine, as well as in works by other poets and painters.³⁹ Textile artifacts, too, were used in other creative efforts, including a surreal homage to Gayet’s discoveries, merging what might be called the studious and *mise-en-scène* modes of display: a two-volume album composed in 1913, of textiles and artifacts from Antinoe, commissioned in Paris by Henry Bryon, who dedicated it to Albert Gayet.⁴⁰ The first volume binds together booklets and letters related to Gayet’s expositions. Ornamental snippets from textiles were carefully cut out and glued onto the covers of both volumes, perhaps by the binder or by a professional restorer. The second volume contains plates of fragments and textile pastiches, as well as more substantial thematic “shadow box” collages.⁴¹ Kelekian probably never saw Bryon’s Antinoe album, which seems to have been intended for the eyes of Bryon and Gayet only, but Kelekian was aware of Gayet’s discoveries, of Gayet’s participation in World’s Fairs, which he participated in as well, and would have been aware of Gayet’s extravagant displays, which were antithetical to Kelekian’s promotion of reflection on aesthetic correspondences.⁴²

Kelekian wrote quite eloquently about his attempts to teach those in his circle – including collectors and modern painters – to look closely in order to perceive connections between the styles of disparate periods.⁴³ Kelekian’s mediations between collectors, artists, and archaeologists are mentioned as well by Roger Fry, in an article on a Kelekian collection of modern painting in *Burlington Magazine* in 1920:

It is in part due to the archaeological and scientific attitude that the way was prepared for the modernist movement. Already in fact the citadel of “Beauty” had been justly undermined by archaeologists before the creative artists made their overt attack. The collector’s omnivorous acquisitiveness had helped. Even while Greek and High Renaissance art were considered to be the only serious and complete aesthetic expressions, the collector had begun to amass Byzantine enamels and Coptic textiles. There was no need for these to establish their claim as high art; they were curiosities and they were of precious quality and workmanship.⁴⁴

Clearly indicative of Kelekian’s intent to bring together the two worlds of modern painting and Coptic textiles is one instance of his use of a practice of decorating the

cloth covers of books with compositions based on the content found within. The portfolio publication in 1920 of Kelekian’s collection of modern French painting slyly reproduced “Coptic” textile motifs on its back cover and along the spine.⁴⁵ To Kelekian, the aesthetic of Coptic

³⁹ Cox, “La Mort Posthume,” 440–45, includes an appendix of Heine’s Antinoite poems. On Gayet’s Thaïs, see also Dominic Montserrat, *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London, 1998), 186–93. Cox understands the display, around the turn of the twentieth century, of mummies and other corpses in museums of anthropology and archaeology (including the Musée Guimet, where Thaïs and Serapion were displayed) as aestheticizing death (see, e.g., 438–39). Throughout the article he describes imaginative, creative responses within the overlapping circles of Orientalism and Surrealism to viewing and remembering such displays.

⁴⁰ Henry Art Gallery #83.7-62, meticulously published by Nancy Arthur Hoskins, *The Coptic Tapestry Albums and the Archaeologist of Antinoë, Albert Gayet* (Seattle, 2004). I thank Nancy Hoskins for her fascinating introduction to this pair of albums.

⁴¹ “The Portrait Collage,” “The Cap and Sandal Collage,” and “The Boxed Collage,” in Hoskins, *The Coptic Tapestry Albums*, 124–33 and plates 40–43.

⁴² Like Gayet (above, n. 38), Kelekian participated in several World’s Fairs (1893, 1904), even serving on a jury of the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris. On Kelekian’s involvement in World’s Fairs, see Simpson, “A Gallant Era,” 95–97, and 109n22; and Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met,” 71–72, 74–75. Again, the boundaries between industry, scholarship, and the art market were porous. On Oriental rooms in World’s Fairs: Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met,” 72. Consider, in contrast to the intellectual and aesthetic authority of museums, the “symbolic order” of what might be called the sham Orientalism and exoticism displayed on “midways”; see Armstrong, “Novelties and Curiosities,” 207–10. Contributing to the narratives of progress achieved in the Western world that were promoted at World’s Fairs, the modern textile industry of Britain, Europe, and America was represented by private and national manufacturers. Links between World’s Fairs and design museums are strong: the first design museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, was founded in 1852 based on the displays of the Museum of Manufactures of the first World’s Fair, the Great Exhibition of 1851, also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition.

⁴³ D. Kelekian, *Art News Annual*, “Four Memoires of the Growth of Taste in America: The Dealer, the Old and the New,” *Art News Annual* (1939): 67–68 and 153–54. On Riegl’s example of close, sustained (and, ultimately, creative) observation, see n. 20 above.

⁴⁴ Roger Fry, “Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, December, 1920, 304.

⁴⁵ Dikran G. Kelekian, *Collection Kélékian: Tableaux de l’école française moderne* (Paris, 1920). Nanette Kelekian brought the pairing of Dikran Kelekian’s interests in Coptic textiles and modern painting to my attention.

textiles was closely, ideally, linked to the aims of modern painting, and he encouraged painters to study them. He was instrumental in introducing these textiles to such contemporary artists as Milton Avery and Marsden Hartley, and he sold to many others, including Henri Matisse. Matisse, who had probably been introduced to Coptic textiles at the 1900 Paris exposition,⁴⁶ later enjoyed them with his son-in-law, Georges Duthuit, who divided his scholarly attentions between two main fields of study, modern painting and Coptic art, publishing from the 1920s well into the 1950s.⁴⁷ Milton Avery, in a 1943 painting for the exhibition "Dikran Kelekian as the Artist Sees Him," portrayed Kelekian seated before a background montage of enlarged Coptic textile motifs based on objects displayed in his gallery.⁴⁸ Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) remembered:

I must not forget to speak of the Coptic embroideries [sic], which, for me are classics of great painting ... I think I was never more completely bowled over than when I saw the amazing collection of these embroideries which were recently shown by my friend Mr. Dikran Kelekian, who after possessing them for nearly 40 years, decided to show them off at last, of which I am now the possessor of five examples, and when I want to know about great tonality, I get them out like a pack of cards and play solitaire.⁴⁹

Hartley's appreciation was not, however, limited by the static arrangement of pieces attached to large plates. His Coptic textiles, included in a larger donation of artwork, ephemera, and personal possessions to the Bates College Museum of Art, twenty-three tapestry-woven fragments were associated with tags, which had been cut from discolored paper boards on which were written inventory numbers and price codes in ink in a cursive script very similar to that on the plates of the album of c. 1910.⁵⁰ It is not known whether Hartley cut up the plates for the way he wanted to view the textiles or whether Kelekian did because he wanted to exhibit them singly. It is clear, however, that the aesthetic status of these decorative fragments rose in tandem with mod-

ernist appreciation of them, which was partly responsible for the emancipation of ornamental fragments from plates, where they had been consigned at the turn of the century by the archaeological adaptation of industrial and commercial practice for close private study and viewing in public exhibitions. The placement of fragmentary textiles, colorful ornaments, on plates by archaeologists, collectors, and dealers echoed the chromolithographic and photographic plates of scholarly and art market publications and enabled close attention to the formal qualities of ornaments, the stylistic foundation of these textiles' art historical legacy. Kelekian's textile album of c. 1910 preserves evidence of the varied perspectives of the academy and museum world, the art market, the modern textile industry, and the artist's studio on Late Antique Egyptian textiles, and it opens a window onto the collecting and viewing practices of Kelekian and his peers, reflecting their entangled roles in the creation of these fragmentary ornaments as artworks.

Books on Coptic textiles played similar design games: e.g., Forrer's *Mein Besuch in el-Achmim* used an ornamental textile motif on the back cover, and on the front cover, the title was written on a textile; ornamental motifs adapted from Coptic textiles grace the cloth covers of Gerspach, *Les tapisseries coptes*, and Maurice S. Dimand, *Die Ornamentik der Ägyptischen Wollwirkereien: Stilprobleme der Spätantiken und koptischen Kunst* (Leipzig, 1924).

⁴⁶ Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*, 20.

⁴⁷ Georges Duthuit, *Les Fauves* (Paris, 1949); Georges Duthuit, *La sculpture copte: Statues, bas reliefs, masques* (Paris, 1931).

⁴⁸ Oil on canvas, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1998.400.1), Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian. The Coptic artifacts are documented in Dikran Kelekian's sale catalog: *Additional Documents of Coptic Art* (New York, 1941).

⁴⁹ Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*, 21.

⁵⁰ These textiles are in the Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection of the Bates College Museum of Art and are believed to have been purchased from Kelekian. The donation also included black and white photographs of Coptic textiles from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I thank Liz Sheehan, Curator of Academic and Exhibition Initiatives, for bringing this material to my attention in 2006.