

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Textile Society of America Symposium
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

1998

The Timelessness of Damask

Milton Sunday

National Design Museum in New York

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

Sunday, Milton, "The Timelessness of Damask" (1998). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 206.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/206>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Timelessness of Damask

By
Milton Sunday

The damask technique as we know it today is probably one of the oldest techniques (if not the oldest) for weaving figured patterns that has an unbroken tradition that continues today in forms that are commercially and artistically strong.

The origin of the technique can be placed in the Far East centuries before the opening of the Christian era. The specific loom mechanisms that are often used to define damask weaving were used in China before the Tang period (A.D. 618-907). A remarkable number of silks survive from early periods of development.

In addition to being defined as a specific technique, damask is also defined as a structure and generically as a type of luxury fabric. Silk and linen are the materials most often associated with it, but not exclusively.

The name itself – damask – is a reflection of how the fabric and the techniques for weaving it traveled from east to west, that is, via the port city of Damascus. While the spread of the technique cannot be traced in detail, it is important to note that the weaving of linen damask became an internationally important industry in the Flemish lowlands of northern Europe with magnificent examples of complex patterns dating from the 15th century.

The popularity of linen damask in this century can be documented in such books as *We Dine on Linen Damask* with a foreword by Emily Post, the “...famous author of *Etiquette...*” The technique was used by artists and designers in Scandinavia, such as Dora Jung in Finland, during the mid years of this century (Scandinavia being one of the few areas in which damask weaving methods were not broken) and is being explored by artists today. Contemporary interest in computer-aided shaft looms and the jacquard loom has given a new dimension to the technique thereby ensuring that its life will not end with embossed paper imitations.

Milton Sunday, Senior Researcher, Textiles at the Copper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York, has worked on technical and artistic aspects of damask for many years.