In the exhibition of textiles from a New York private collection now on view in Galleries H 15 and H 16 there are many remarkable examples of woven and embroidered European fabrics from the sixteenth through the early years of the twentieth century. In this showing of exceptionally beautiful and luxurious textiles, the brocades made in Venice, probably during the first half of the eighteenth century, are particularly striking both in their originality of design and in their use of vibrant color.

There are in all twenty-two examples of these sumptuous materials, which may, in a general way, be divided into two groups. The larger group consists of typically baroque patterns with scroll, leaf, and floral motives. The smaller group, of which we illustrate four outstanding examples, differs so much from the familiar, typical designs of the period that it becomes of special interest to the designer and the student of textiles. The use of similar motives and color in these silks suggests that they may well have been the product of a single designer or at least of one workshop. Although, as we shall soon see, many of the elements of the designs are derived from those of other countries, the resulting patterns are completely individual. Nothing quite like them appears in any other European textiles.

Another design taken from the East, and clearly derived from Chinese sources, is exemplified in a pale blue damask with a pattern of abstract and floral forms upon which are brocaded golden vases holding lotus blossoms in two shades of pink, the leaves in gold, and various designs reminiscent of such Chinese symbols as the gourd, the sea shell, and the brocade ball. All the motives attest the oriental inspiration of the design, which was very probably derived from the Chinese ceramics so much admired in Europe at the time.

A third piece depends on both China and Persia for its inspiration. In it we find on a ground of pale gold and silver a fountain with a pool in which there are entwined dolphins. Fronting the opening in which the fountain stands is a Chinese balustrade with flowers drawn in the Persian manner growing over it.
Pale blue brocaded damask with Chinese motives, probably made in Venice in the first half of the XVIII century. This brocade and the others illustrated here are being shown in a current loan exhibition.
Brocade with background of pale gold and silver. The delicately colored motives are derived from those on Chinese and Persian fabrics. Probably made in Venice in the first half of the XVIII century.
Green damask brocaded with gold and silver. Probably made in Venice in the first half of the XVIII century

Above, conventionalized fruit trees alternate with huge jars spouting double streams of water.

The remaining two designs show further departure from past tradition. One is a brilliant green damask covered with abstract and leaf forms, brocaded with a diagonal decoration in gold and silver thread. The pattern shows a leaf scroll supporting a device resembling a building with a pointed steeple; above this, on a conventionalized wave, rides a swan with crest erect; small flowers in bright pink and white form secondary motives. Patterns with abrupt ascending diagonals such as this are
Cloth of gold and silver with motives outlined in terracotta and green. Probably made in Venice in the first half of the XVIII century

not uncommon in silks made in the seventeenth century, when there was a modified revival of Gothic forms. Since our silks are probably Venetian, one should not overlook the continuing influence of Turkish weaves, in which these same ascending motives are often present. The pattern has, however, an individuality completely independent of its derived motives.

The last brocade of the group is undeniably the most modern in feeling. Here the entire background is covered with crinkled gold and silver; the design is outlined in terracotta silk with details in lime green. A series of enor-
Portrait of Count G. B. Vailetti by Vittore Ghislandi of Bergamo. In the Academy, Venice. The costume is of brocade similar to those illustrated in this article.
mous jars, like those from which the genie appeared to the fisherman in the *Arabian Nights*, emit great swirls of smoke, forming a diagonal repeat. Fantastic ovals cluster about the bases of the jars and the sides are encircled with curiously patterned rings. Piercing the ends of the coils of smoke there are strange triangular trellised forms. Here the vivid imagination that made a new style by fusing earlier elements has broken free of all naturalistic representation and created something truly original. Nothing comparable to it in textile history appears until the second decade of the twentieth century brings us silks of so-called futuristic and modernistic design.

Having described these glowing brocades so that the reader may have some knowledge of their design, color, and texture, we may now consider where they were made. Silks like these must inevitably suggest to the student that they may have come from some great weaving center in which production was in the ascendant. For this reason, we find some writers on the subject assuring us that they were made in France, at Lyons, and others, in Spain, at Valencia. It is true that no documentary evidence has come to light to prove their Venetian origin. It is also true that by the early years of the eighteenth century many fashionable Venetians were beginning to wear French rather than Italian silks and that the Italian industry was declining. But there was still a demand for Venetian textiles in foreign countries, in spite of a decline in their popularity at home. Molmenti, in his history of Venice, says that as late as 1750 “Austria tempted to Trieste by promises of handsome payment, several Venetian weavers.” We know also that the Venetian republic spent large sums during the eighteenth century in an attempt to maintain the industry. Although this attempt did not stem the rising tide of French imports, it no doubt made it possible for some of the existing workshops to continue production.

Conclusive proof of their origin is not yet possible, but two facts in favor of their having been made in Venice should be considered. The first, and an important one, is that the great majority of these brocades have been found in Venice. The second is that the design and color of the silks make it very probable that they came from some workshop either in Venice itself or in some one of the neighboring cities on the mainland, such as Friuli, Vicenza, or Padua. As the port through which so many oriental wares entered Europe, Venice naturally absorbed the influences of both the Near and Far East. The design of Venetian weaves of the Gothic period was based largely on Far Eastern motives, and we know that at a slightly later period, during the Renaissance, Venice made fabrics for export to Turkey very like those made by the Turks. It is easy to understand that a predilection for Near and Far Eastern motives should continue into the baroque period, and that such brocades as ours should be made to satisfy it. If so, the shimmering hues of these silks with their grounds of brilliant color or cloth-of-gold must surely owe a debt to that radiant light in which Venice is bathed and which has lent its influence to all objects of Venetian handiwork.

A search through contemporary painting for examples showing the way these brocades were used has brought to light a picture in which a fabric comparable to ours is clearly shown. It is a portrait of Count G. B. Vailetti painted in 1710 by the Bergamask painter Vittore Ghislandi (1665–1743). Vailetti is shown in informal dress, wearing a long waistcoat of red and yellow brocade typically Venetian in pattern. Over this is a flowing dressing gown of brocaded silk, the pattern of which also suggests a Venetian origin. The use of these silks in church vestments is illustrated by several chasubles in the Antoniano Museum in neighboring Padua. Silks like ours must also have been used as wall and furniture coverings in the ornate palaces of the day. In any event, it would be difficult to imagine fabrics that might have had more varied and elegant uses. This is the largest and most spectacular group of such textiles that the Museum has ever shown. It defies description and must truly be seen to be believed.