



## RELIC CLOTHS

Byzantium, central Asia, China, Spain (?)

9–12th century

Silk, gold foil

The large Essen Silver Cross (also known as the Cathedral Chapter's Cross) was used to contain relics, which were wrapped in precious early medieval silk fabrics.

Each of the larger relic cloths held several bundles of relics. The woven patterns of the first relic cloth are all in shades of a single colour: it can be hard to make out the pattern of gryphons enclosed in quatrefoils, except in indirect lighting. By contrast, the second relic cloth has been inwoven with gold-wrapped thread, forming a vertical stripe pattern.

Some of the smaller silk fragments display particularly bright colours and elaborate patterning. The specific nature of their weave has allowed us to ascribe the origin of individual fragments to regions where silk production had already been mastered, including Byzantium and China.

We still do not know the journeys that brought these precious silks to the treasury of the abbey at Essen. That they were used to wrap relics is a sign of the great esteem in which silk was held by the abbey and its canonesses. contained within the wooden casket.