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L'évolution de la broderie de tradition byzantine en
Méditerranée orientale et dans le monde slave
(1200-1800)

Byzantine Artistic Traditions in Moldavian Church Embroideries

Traditions artistiques byzantines dans les broderies moldaves à usage religieux

Tradiții artistice bizantine în broderiile bisericești moldovenești

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Byzantine Artistic Traditions in Moldavian Church Embroideries

Abstract: This article examines the range of religious embroideries produced in Moldavia during the fifteenth century, and especially in the decades after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. These church embroideries offer iconographies, styles, and techniques that both continued and adapted Byzantine artistic traditions and image types. The objects under consideration consist of liturgical vestments and veils, as well as tomb covers that reveal through their iconography, style, and execution the sophistication of late medieval Moldavian workshops and the aspirations and concerns of the royal patrons who commissioned them. Through visual and technical analyses of select Moldavian religious embroideries from the fifteenth century, this study exposes some of the ways in which Byzantine artistic and iconographic traditions of church embroidery were perpetuated and transformed at the Moldavian court in the crucible of the post-1453 world.

Keywords: byzantine artistic traditions, Moldavian Church Embroideries, fifteenth century.

Traditions artistiques byzantines dans les broderies moldaves à usage religieux

Résumé : cet article examine la gamme des broderies produites en Moldavie durant le quinzième siècle, et particulièrement la décennie après la chute de Constantinople en 1453. Ces broderies à usage religieux révèlent des iconographies, des styles et des techniques qui attestent de la continuité et de la réutilisation des traditions artistiques byzantines et de ses images typiques. Les objets soumis à l'étude comprennent des voiles liturgiques et des vêtements sacerdotaux, ainsi que des couvertures de tombes qui montrent par leur iconographie, leur style et leur exécution, le raffinement des ateliers du haut Moyen Âge en Moldavie indiquant les aspirations et le souci des commanditaires royaux. À travers des analyses visuelles et techniques d'une sélection

de broderies religieuses moldaves du quinzième siècle, cette étude révèle certaines pratiques par lesquelles les traditions byzantines artistiques et iconographiques ont été préservées et transformées à la cour moldave dans le creuset du monde post-1453.

Mots-clefs : broderies moldaves à usage religieux, traditions artistiques byzantines, XVe siècle.

Tradiții artistice bizantine în broderiile bisericești moldovenești

Resumat: Acest articol analizează gama de broderii religioase produse în Moldova în timpul secolului al xvlea și mai ales în urma căderii Constantinopolului în 1453. Aceste broderii bisericești dezvăluie iconografia, stiluri și tehnici care au continuat și au adaptat tradiții artistice și tipuri de imagini bizantine. Obiectele de cult luate în considerare sunt veșmintele și voalurile liturgice și acoperămintele de mormânt care demonstrează prin iconografia, stilul și executarea lor sofisticația atelierelor medievale moldovenești și aspirațiile și preocupările patronilor regali care le-au comandat. Prin analize vizuale și tehnice ale unor broderii religioase moldovenești din secolul al xvlea, acest studiu dezvăluie câteva dintre modalitățile prin care tradițiile artistice și iconografice bizantine ale broderiei bisericești au fost perpetuate și transformate în Moldova în deceniile după evenimentele din 1453.

Cuvinte cheie: broderii bisericești moldovenești, tradiții artistice bizantine, secolul al XVlea

Byzantine Artistic Traditions in Moldavian Church Embroideries

Alice Isabella Sullivan
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Introduction¹

For much of the fifteenth century, and especially after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the principality of Moldavia – situated within the borders of north-eastern modern Romania and the Republic of Moldova – took on a central role in the continuation and refashioning of Byzantine culture and artistic traditions alongside forms developed locally (Fig. 1).

1. The initial research and writing phases of this project unfolded during the 2017-2018 academic year. The revisions and final stages of production were undertaken while on a Getty/ACLS Postdoctoral Fellowship in the History of Art from the American Council of Learned Societies, generously supported by the Getty Foundation (2019-2020), and later with support from the VolkswagenStiftung and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I thank the editors, Joëlle Dalègre, Elena Papastavrou and Marielle Martiniani-Reber, as well as Cedric Raoul and the anonymous reviewer for their thoughtful comments that helped me revise and much improve this contribution. I also wish to thank my dear friend Valerian Benazeth for his assistance with the French translations. Finally, I am grateful to the monastic community at Putna Monastery and the staff at the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest for making available for publication high-quality images of objects from their collections. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own, as are any remaining errors.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES
BETWEEN 1457 AND 1504

Source: historymaps.ro

Under the patronage of Stephen III “the Great” (r. 1457-1504), the sacred landscape and artistic styles of Moldavia were gradually transformed, taking on new spatial and visual dimensions. Numerous Orthodox churches, chapels, and monasteries were built throughout the region, and many were subsequently endowed with precious manuscripts and icons, as well as liturgical objects and textiles created in local and international workshops. Extant church embroideries from the treasuries of the monasteries at Putna, Moldovița, Sucevița, Secu, Dragomirna, and The Three Hierarchs, for example, as well as those preserved in the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest and other comparable institutions throughout the world, reveal the range of techniques and iconographies employed by local and Byzantine trained artists working in Moldavia during the fifteenth century, and especially in the aftermath of

Byzantium's collapse.² This essay centers on the extant material evidence in the form of church embroideries gifted to the Moldavian court and produced in local workshops that illuminate the technical mastery and innovative iconographies of Moldavian church embroideries of the fifteenth century, rooted in both local models and others adapted from elsewhere, including, most notably, the Byzantine embroidery tradition.

During Stephen III's reign, Putna Monastery fostered a particularly impressive atelier with a recognizable precious metal embroidery style.³ Moreover, Stephen III's second wife, Maria Asanina Palaiologina of Mangup (Theodoro) (d. 19 December 1477), contributed to the development of these workrooms by nurturing Byzantine embroidery practices in Moldavia. Following her marriage to Stephen III on 14 September 1472, she likely brought with her to the new court objects that served as models for local artists, as well as craftsmen trained in Byzantine workshops who executed in Moldavia lavish embroideries (and other kinds of objects) for secular and ecclesiastical use.⁴ Maria, supposedly, was also an embroideress herself, although evidence to sustain this assertion remains elusive.⁵ Her burial cloth, discussed at the end of this study, is one noteworthy example of an embroidery executed in a style characteristic of the Palaiologan era yet reinvigorated in the Moldavian cultural sphere in the crucible of the post-1453 world.

The pages that follow examine the range of religious embroideries produced and preserved in Moldavia during the fifteenth century, and especially after the fall of Constantinople, which exhibit styles, techniques, and iconographies that continued and adapted in a local context Byzantine artistic traditions and image types. The objects under consideration range from liturgical and decorative veils, to liturgical vestments and burial covers that reveal through their iconography, style, and execution the sophistication of late medieval Moldavian embroidery workshops and the aspirations and concerns of the royal patrons who commissioned them. Through visual and technical analyses of select church embroideries, this study discusses some of the ways in which Byzantine artistic and iconographic models,

2. For a general overview of the topic related to the Romanian principalities, including Moldavia, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, see JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 82-90. Most recently, see CERNEA & DAMIAN, 2019, p. 20-25.

3. *Holy Putna Monastery*, 2016, p. 307-373; COJOCARU, 2016. In general, the precious metal or gold embroidery style is known as chrysokentema, χρυσοκέντημα, "goldstitching."

4. JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 84-85.

5. EVANS, 2004, p. 59.

as well as embroidery styles and techniques, were perpetuated and transformed in the Moldavian context alongside local forms during the fifteenth century.

Byzantine Liturgical Embroideries

Byzantium's spiritual power in the Orthodox lands beyond the empire's borders, Moldavia included, provided the initial models for the development of local styles in art and architecture. Theological, cultural, and artistic ideas and forms reached the Moldavian lands during the fifteenth century via objects, gifted or exchanged, and individuals who helped facilitate the transfer of ideas, techniques, and visual motifs. Indeed, Byzantine embroideries of the highest quality reached Moldavia, and individuals trained in Byzantine cultural centers imparted their knowledge directly on local craftsmen. As such, the Moldavian style of embroidery, while deeply rooted in Byzantine models studied both directly and indirectly through trained individuals and actual objects, emerged as a unique local expression that both advanced and translated earlier forms alongside local traditions. Although the activities of individuals are difficult to reconstruct, the extant material evidence offers concrete examples of the kinds of exquisite objects that circulated in the Moldavian cultural context during the fifteenth century, gifted or produced in local workshops.

The treasury of Putna Monastery in Moldavia preserves a remarkable *epigonation* displaying the Dormition of the Virgin (or *Koimesis*) (Figs. 2a-2b).⁶ This rhombic embroidery – a type of liturgical vestment in use from about the eighth or ninth century – was worn by bishops (and some priests) on the right hip as part of the liturgical ensemble.⁷ On the Putna object, the Theotokos reclines on her death bier while Christ accompanied by angels lifts her soul, represented as a baby, up to the heavens shown in the upper portions of the composition. The apostles, who frame the central scene in two groups of six, mourn the body of the Virgin and stand witness to the events. The balanced composition is so designed for the rhombic representational field of the embroidery that both the horizontal and the vertical axes that connect the corners of the square converge on the figure Christ at the center. Inscriptions in Greek along the margins of the upper half of the object identify the scene represented.

6. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 65, pl. CXXXII; BERZA, 1958, p. 314-315; ȘTEFĂNESCU, 1964, p. 491; MUSICESCU, 1969, p. 29; VĂTĂȘIANU, 1959, p. 470-471.

7. COJOCARU, 2016, p. 9.

With origins in the Byzantine cultural sphere – possibly a Constantinopolitan or Thessalonikian atelier⁸ – this liturgical vestment is iconographically rich yet modest in size, measuring 0.42 meters square. It is a relatively flat embroidery, ornately executed on a red silk ground with gold and silver thread, as well as colored silks used mainly for the facial features, hair, hands, and feet of the figures, as well as the inscriptions. Rows of delicate pearls accentuate the contours of the figures and occasionally the folds in their garments, their halos, as well as key objects and architectural elements in the composition. The framing border of the central arrangement displays alternating vegetal and circular motifs similarly delineated with white pearls. The rows of pearls obscure the embroidery work but also add richness, contrast, and visual interest to the object, allowing for the iconography to be legible from a distance.⁹

FIGURE 2A AND 2B. *EPIGONATION*, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND COLORED SILK ON A RED SILK FOUNDATION, 0.42 M X 0.42 M, FOURTEENTH CENTURY CONSTANTINOPLE OR THESSALONIKI

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

8. VĂTĂȘIANU, 1959, p. 470-471.

9. JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 73.

Like the *epigonation* from the treasury at Putna (Figs. 2a-2b), the famous *Thessaloniki Epitaphios* of ca. 1300 reveals several key technical and stylistic features of Byzantine liturgical embroideries from the later centuries of the empire (Fig. 3).¹⁰

FIGURE 3. *THESSALONIKI EPITAPHIOS*. EMBROIDERY WITH SILK, GOLD, AND SILVER THREAD ON A LINEN FOUNDATION, 0.72 M X 2.00 M, CA. 1300

Source: Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki / BYΦ 57

As one of the examples that supposedly demonstrates “the pinnacle of the art of embroidery in Byzantium,”¹¹ the *Thessaloniki Epitaphios* is a work of great technical mastery. This rectangular liturgical embroidery (both a veil and a vestment, in this case) displays in the center panel a representation of the dead Christ surrounded by angels and the symbols of the Four Evangelists in the corners identified by *tituli* in Greek: Luke, John, Mark, and Matthew (clockwise from the bottom left). To either side, square visual fields show the Communion of the Apostles: on the left with the wine, and on the right with the bread.¹² A decorative border with Greek crosses and stylized vegetal forms frames and unites the three compositions. This embroidery, too, is richly executed with gold and silver thread, in addition to linen, on a red silk ground. Remarkable color contrasts, the use of split stitches, and a variety of metal wires and undyed silk threads model and outline the forms, offering visual expressions of how, for

10. EVANS, 2004, p. 312-313; BETANCOURT, 2015, p. 489-535; BOURAS, 1987, p. 211-231.

11. Characterized as such by Warren T. Woodfin, together with the Vatican Sakkos. EVANS, 2004, p. 300.

12. On this iconography, see most recently SULLIVAN, 2018, p. 136-141.

example, “the embroiderers’ needle rivaled the painters’ brush.”¹³ It is possible that various figures and motifs in the composition were originally also accentuated by rows of pearls, as exemplified by the Putna *epigonation*, which are known to have been used in Byzantine embroideries, but these unfortunately no longer survive.¹⁴

These two Byzantine embroideries – the Putna *epigonation* and the *Thessaloniki Epitaphios* – share several key stylistic and technical features. In both examples, gold and silver thread dominates the densely-packed compositions. Aside from the facial features, hair, hands, and select objects, often worked in different colored silks, the holy figures and their surroundings are rendered in rich metal thread using a variety of stitches.¹⁵ Pauline Johnstone has noted:

With the exception of the beige used for flesh parts and the brown or white and blue used for hair, the Byzantines never used coloured silk to cover a surface, and so avoided the criticism, if criticism it is held to be, that they tried to emulate painting in a medium which should rely on its own technique for its effects. In this it may be that they were influenced by the impressionistic methods of their own mosaicists in handling colour and mass...¹⁶

Indeed, as Johnstone continued, “Mosaicists curved their plaster beds and laid their tesserae at minutely different angles. Embroiders altered, if only by a few degrees, the direction of their laid threads in adjacent areas to achieve the same effect.”¹⁷ The foundation material – in both cases red silk – also follows Byzantine practices. Together with dark blue and purple silks, these colors were favored in part due to their close associations to the imperial purple and because they helped “throw the gold into relief.”¹⁸ It is known that purple silk from Damascus was specifically chosen for, and became characteristic of, Byzantine liturgical

13. PAPAstravrou & Filiou, 2015, p. 165, and Figs. 8b-8d (macro-details).

14. Johnstone, 1967, p. 73. Other noteworthy examples are the *Major Sakkos of Photios* from ca. 1414-1417, and the *Epitrachelion of Metropolitan Photios* from the late fourteenth century – both in the State Historical and Cultural Museum, Moscow. Woodfin, 2012, plates 8-10; Evans, 2004, p. 299 and 307-308.

15. Johnstone, 1967, p. 65.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 65, 68.

embroideries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was emulated in later examples.¹⁹

Byzantine embroideries are characterized by rich visual fields dominated by gold and silver thread, but also by clear compositional structures and an architectural organization of the space.²⁰ Moreover, certain embroidery techniques are distinguishable, such as the so-called "Byzantine Stitch." Created using metal thread wires couched with silk thread, this technique forms the stepped pattern generally used to cover larger surfaces of the background, as well as the halos and garments of the figures represented. Other stitches generate linear, square, rhombic, and stellar patterns either smooth or slightly embossed. By and large, metal thread dominates the compositions and fine colored silk thread is used to define the features of the figures and smaller details, as well as accentuate the outlines of their garments. The surviving material evidence reveals that these embroidery techniques rooted in Byzantine traditions were later also employed and reinvigorated in the Moldavian cultural context.

Byzantium in Moldavia

The *epigonation* from Putna was not produced in Moldavia but arrived in the principality likely as a gift sometime during the fifteenth century. It is possible that this occurred during the rule of Alexander I "the Good" (r. 1400-1432) who, toward the beginning of his reign, put an end to the conflict between the Moldavian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople – a conflict that began in the second half of the fourteenth century and ended on 26 July 1401 when the Moldavian Orthodox Church became a Metropolitanate in its own right. Although the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Matthew I (1397-1410), intended initially to appoint a Greek as the metropolitan bishop in Moldavia, in the end he accepted a Moldavian, Bishop Joseph Mușat (Iosif Mușat I) of Cetatea Albă, the leading bishop of the province and an individual related to Alexander I. The official charter from Constantinople acknowledging the appointment of Joseph I as metropolitan bishop of this north-Danubian principality arrived in Moldavia in the hands of the envoy Gregory Tsamblak (ca. 1365-1420), originally from Tarnovo, Bulgaria. The Moldavian Church thus further established its autonomy. What is more, this appointment of a Moldavian metropolitan bishop facilitated through the efforts of Alexander I strengthened the relationship between the political and religious

19. LĂZĂRESCU, 1999, p. 140; PAPAȘTRAVROU & FILIOU, 2015, p. 165-166.

20. LĂZĂRESCU, 1999, p. 136.

spheres in the principality and confirmed the ties between the Moldavian Church and the Byzantine Patriarchate.

Byzantium provided the initial models – in style, iconography, and technique – for artistic developments in Moldavia during the fifteenth century. This was especially true for church embroideries – liturgical and decorative veils as well as liturgical vestments – required for the celebrations of the Orthodox liturgy and other religious rituals. Several church embroideries with Greek inscriptions, like those found on the Putna *epigonation*, were either brought to Moldavia or produced in local workshops at the monasteries of Neamț or Bistrița during the reign of Alexander I, either by local or traveling artists. These include:

- An *epitrachelion*, or stole, from Neamț Monastery with the Great Feasts and the portraits and names of the patrons Alexander I and his third wife, Marina (ca. 1427-1431).²¹
- An *epitrachelion* from Bistrița Monastery also displaying the Great Feasts, and very similar in its layout and decorative features to the one from Neamț.²²
- The *epitaphios* of Metropolitan Makarios, dated to 1428, and carrying the name of Alexander I in Greek but in the Romanian form of “Alexandru” and not in the Greek version of “Alexandros.”²³
- The *epitaphios* of Silvan, abbot of Neamț Monastery, completed in 1436.²⁴

These few examples – along with others that unfortunately no longer survive due to devastating fires and pillages at local sites over the centuries²⁵ – offer a glimpse of the kinds of church textiles with roots in Byzantine models that existed in Moldavia during the first half of the fifteenth century. It should be noted, moreover, that the extant objects produced in local workshops were princely commissions and, in some cases, also paid for by leading church officials. The iconographies, styles, and techniques of such church embroideries were further developed in the second half of the fifteenth century during the illustrious reign

21. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 613, pl. VIII ; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 22, 24, Fig. 7.

22. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 613, pl. XIII-XIII-XVII.

23. IORGA & BALȘ, 1922, p. 49; JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 83; SCHILB, 2014, p. 61-62.

24. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 105-106, pl. CLXXXVIII; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 61-63.

25. COJOCARU, 2016, p. 7.

of Stephen III “the Great” (r. 1457-1504), under whose leadership the art and architecture of Moldavia flourished.

Epitrachelia from Putna Monastery

Putna Monastery in Moldavia fostered an important atelier of embroidery during the reign of Stephen III. Although to date no textual sources have been uncovered that speak to the Byzantine influence on the workshop at Putna, the material evidence is illuminating in this regard. Liturgical vestments, and in particular *epitrachelia* or stole – long rectangular vestments worn by bishops and priests around their necks – offer insight into the interpretation of Byzantine embroidery traditions in the Moldavian context.

The treasury at Putna preserves two types of *epitrachelia* bearing only Greek inscriptions and iconographies derived from Byzantine models. One type centers on Christ and shows full-length saintly figures under arcades and facing one another. An example of this type focuses on the *Deësis* with standing figures of the twelve apostles framed by rounded arcades (Fig. 4).²⁶

FIGURE 4. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND COLORED SILK ON A CLOTH FOUNDATION (MISSING ORIGINAL SILK FOUNDATION), 1.40 M X 0.23 M, CA. FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 101-102 / Inv. 35

26. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 43-47, pl. XCIV(3), XVVI(2); BERZA, 1958, p. 319.

Another example displays Christ at the center with framing archangels in roundels, then standing figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, then Sts. Peter and Paul in the register below, followed by four Great Fathers of the Eastern Church (John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus), and ending with Sts. Demetrius and George in the lowest register (Fig. 5a).²⁷

Precious metal wire in a variety of stitches delineates the figures and their garments, as well as their surroundings, and colored silks define facial features and outline the borders of the figures. The interwoven ornamental patterns along the lower edge reveal intricate designs rendered in gold thread interspersed with designs in red, blue, and yellow silk thread (Fig. 5b).

FIGURE 5A. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND RED, GREEN, AND BLUE SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION, 1.44 M X 0.23 M, FOURTEENTH/FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 99

27. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 29-31, pl. LVI(1), LVII(1), LVIII(1), LIX(1), LX; BERZA, 1958, p. 326. A comparable example is now preserved in the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade (inv. no. T/1147). Originating in the Patriarchate of Peć sometime during the fifteenth century, this epitachelion displays a similar iconography, style, and technique as the Putna example, and is comparable to other examples from Constantinople and Thessaloniki. KOSTIĆ, 2017, p. 138-139.

FIGURE 5B. *EPITRACHELION* (DETAIL), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND RED, GREEN, AND BLUE SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION, 1.44 M X 0.23 M, FOURTEENTH-FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 99

What is more, the ornamental richness of this embroidery and the presence of lionheads in the capitals may situate this object in the second half of the fourteenth century and in the Byzantine-Serbian cultural sphere. Similar lionheads appear on the embroidered belt of sebastokrator Branko Mladenović, son of Prince Mladen, the governor of Ohrid under Stafan Uroš IV Dušan (r. 1331-1355),²⁸ and on an *epitrachelion* from The Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Patmos, Greece, also dated to the second half of the fourteenth century.²⁹ A comparable example, dated to the sixteenth century, is preserved in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁰ These silk textiles embroidered with silver, silver-gilt, and colored thread reveal similar color palettes and stitching techniques as evident in the Putna *epitrachelion*. Moreover, the Putna example and the *epitrachelia* from Patmos and the Met both terminate in registers dominated by decorative motifs in place of dedicatory inscriptions.

Although it is possible that the motif of the lionhead could have been copied in a later object without reference to the symbolic meaning of the prototype, I am more inclined to propose that these embroideries, including the Putna example, may have had a similar provenance, and, given the mobility of such objects, exchanged hands and traveled over long distances during the course of time. Iconographic detail alone cannot confirm the date and place of execution of these rich textiles, including the Putna *epitrachelion*, but the visual and technical

28. EVANS, 2004, p. 310.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 308-309.

30. *Epitrachelion*, Metropolitan Museum of Art (28.80.1).

parallels offer compelling evidence and solid points of departure that could expose aspects of the shared origins and divergent afterlives of these embroideries.

The other type of *epitrachelion* from the Putna treasury shows Christ with two archangels at the center, then busts of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, fourteen saints represented bust-length in alternating rectangular and circular frames, and, in the lowest register, the figures of St. George and St. Demetrios standing frontally (Fig. 6).³¹

No additional register with decorative ornamental forms or an inscription survives on this example. This embroidery, dated to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century and with the *tituli* all in Greek, originated in the Byzantine cultural sphere and arrived in Moldavia as a gift sometime during the fifteenth century (likely during Stephen III's time, if not during one of the reigns of his predecessors).³² It is possible that it was gifted directly to Putna Monastery because it served as a model for another *epitrachelion* executed in the local workshop.

Gabriel Millet has identified a later fifteenth century example as an "identical copy" of the earlier one, just discussed, which reveals how the Putna embroidery atelier during the second half of the fifteenth century developed in part from direct study and copy of embroideries produced in the Byzantine context (Fig. 7).³³

FIGURE 6. *EPITRACHELION*,
EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND
SILVER THREAD AND SILK ON A RED
SILK FOUNDATION, 1.40 M X 0.23 M,
CA. FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 94

31. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 42-43, pl. LXXXVI, LXXXVIII-XC, XCII; BERZA, 1958, p. 319 (with errors).

32. See SULLIVAN, 2019, p. 146.

33. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 43 : « copie identique ».

FIGURE 7. EPITRACHELION,
EMBROIDERY WITH
GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND
SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION
APPLIED TO CLOTH,
1.38 M X 0.24 M,
SECOND HALF OF FIFTEENTH
CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury /
Putna 95

This later example, however, is in a much poorer state of preservation and is missing the figure of Christ at the center of the *Deësis* scene, around the neck.³⁴ Fourteen busts of saints and Evangelists alternate in circular and rectilinear frames along the length of the object, and the martyr saints George and Demetrios stand full-length at the bottom. Alongside the Greek *tituli* of the figures, a dedicatory inscription in Church Slavonic concludes the composition. Situated in the lowest register, the text reads:³⁵

Стефанъ воевѣда сътвори съ епетрахиль манастигоу
своемоу ѡт Поутна и Марїѣ, госпѣжда его.

Stephen voivode made this epitrachelion for his monastery at
Putna, and [with] Maria, his wife.

The collection of Putna Monastery holds another relevant *epitrachelion*, in this case with a dedicatory inscription similar to the one presented

34. *Ibid.*, p. 42-43, pl. LXXXVII, XCI; BERZA, 1958, p. 322, 325 (with errors).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 325 (Church Slavonic and Romanian).

above (Fig. 8a).³⁶ Located again at the bottom of the embroidery, the Church Slavonic text makes clear:³⁷

Стефанъ воевѣда сътвори съ епитрахиль
мѣнастигоу своемуу ѡт Поутна и Маріѣ,
госпож(д)а его. Богдан(ъ) воевод(а).

Stephen voivode made this epitrachelion for
his monastery at Putna, and [with] Maria, his wife.
Bogdan voivode.

FIGURE 8A. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH
GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND GREEN, VIOLET,
AND CREAM SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION,
1.32 M X 0.23 M, SECOND HALF
OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 97

It is evident from close scrutiny of the dedicatory inscription, as other scholars have also observed, that the last words mentioning “Bogdan voivode” were added subsequently and squeezed in to fit at the end of the text. It is possible that Bogdan III (r. 1504-1517) who succeeded his father, Stephen III, to Moldavia’s throne, paid for the restoration of this *epitrachelion*, or just wished to have his name alongside those of his parents. Iconographically, like the other examples, this embroidery also centers on the *Deësis*, around the neck. The rest of the imagery, however, displays twelve Old Testament Prophets standing full-length under arcades (from top to bottom): Moses across from Aaron,

36. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 31-32, pl. LXVII (3), LXVIII-LXXI; BERZA, 1958, p. 331; COJOCARU, 2016b, p. 61-94; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, 43.

37. BERZA, 1958, p. 331 (Church Slavonic and Romanian); COJOCARU, 2016b, p. 69 (Church Slavonic and Romanian); *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 43 (Church Slavonic and French).

FIGURE 8B. *EPITRACHELION* (DETAIL), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND GREEN, VIOLET, AND CREAM SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION, 1.32 M X 0.23 M, SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 97

David and Solomon, Gideon next to Jacob, Isaiah and Ezekiel, Zachariah facing Malachi, and Micah next to Daniel.³⁸ They are identified by their initials offered in Church Slavonic.³⁹ This image cycle, as Father Alexie Cojocaru recently demonstrated, renders this particular *epitrachelion* as “the oldest embroidery in the Orthodox world with this iconographic plan.”⁴⁰ But its technique is also noteworthy. This relatively smooth embroidery is created on a red foundation with mainly gold and silver wire couched with silk thread and forming a variety of contrasting patterns that define the figures, their foliated framing arches, and the background (Fig. 8b).

Silk threads define not only the facial features, hair, and extremities of the figures, but large sections of their garments as well, offering more variety and contrast to the visual forms represented. Moreover, silk thread demarcates the borders of the figures and their voluminous garments, and certain features are further accentuated by being set in slight relief, with

padding threads underneath the silver and gold wire. This is particularly evident in the folds of the figures' mantles and the rounded arches.

Two other *epitrachelia* from the second half of the fifteenth century related to the first type of such liturgical vestments from Putna bear only Greek inscriptions

38. COJOCARU, 2016b, p. 62-68.

39. *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 43.

40. COJOCARU, 2016b, p. 68.

and display full-length figures of saints and the Church Fathers under arcades. In these later examples, dedicatory inscriptions in Church Slavonic were added. One *epitrachelion* reveals the names of Stephen III and his wife Maria – “Іѡ(анна) Стефанъ воевода и г(оспо)ж(д)а Марїѡ” – along the lowest edge of the object, below the figures of St. Demetrius and St. George (Fig. 9a).⁴¹

FIGURE 9A. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND COLORED SILK ON A RED SILK FOUNDATION, 1.40 M X 0.24 M, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 100

It appears that these inscriptions were subsequently added to an object that may or may not have originated in the workshop at Putna. The inclusion of these princely names, nevertheless, connects this liturgical vestment with the royal figures – in this case Stephen III and his wife – who likely gifted this precious object to the monastery. Although the embroidery technique of this *epitrachelion* is similar to that of the previous example, the execution is more precise and the details more intricate (Fig. 9b).

First, the *tituli* in Greek appear in full, and additional decorative borders of foliate motifs separate the registers with figures. Gold and silver wire in various stitches dominates the visual field of the composition, but once again colored silks are used to cover other large areas. For example, silks of different colors distinguish the undergarments of the figures from their mantles or overgarments, which are modeled using gold wire couched in a horizontal alternating pattern.

41. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 24-25, pl. XLV-XLVII, XLIX; BERZA, 1958, p. 325 (Church Slavonic and Romanian).

FIGURE 9B. *EPITRACHELION* (DETAIL), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND COLORED SILK ON A RED SILK FOUNDATION, 1.40 M X 0.24 M, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 100

The columns supporting the arches are also more carefully defined, displaying a three-tier base and a Doric-style capital. Finally, the mainly smooth embroidered surface is accentuated by slightly embossed sections, as evident in the folds of the mantle, the arch, and even the marginal inscriptions. Although the exact provenance of this embroidery remains cloaked in mystery, its elegant technique and rich materials suggest that it could

have originated in the Putna workshop or another atelier that fostered Byzantine traditions of church embroidery.

The other *epitrachelion* of the same type carries a lengthier inscription along the bottom (Fig. 10a).⁴² Written in Church Slavonic, and contemporary with the execution of the object, the dedication reads:⁴³

Івань Стефанъ воевода, господарь земли Молдавской,
свъръши сѣи (е)патрахил к лѣт(о) *ѡѡѡ, м(ѣ)с(е)ца юнѣ,
ѣї д(ѣ)нь.

John Stephen voivode, prince of the land of Moldavia, completed this *epitrachelion* in the year 6977 [1469], the month of June, on the 15th day.

42. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 24-25, pl. XLIV, XLVI-XLVIII ; BERZA, 1958, p. 285.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 285 (Church Slavonic and Romanian).

FIGURE 10A. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH
GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND RED, GREEN, AND
BLUE SILK ON A LINEN AND SILK FOUNDATION,
1.6 M X 1.22 M, 1469

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 98

FIGURE 10B. *EPITRACHELION* (DETAIL),
EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER
THREAD AND RED, GREEN, AND BLUE SILK
ON A LINEN AND SILK FOUNDATION,
1.6 M X 1.22 M, 1469

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury / Putna 98

This liturgical vestment was modeled on one of the fourteenth-century *epitrachelia* already in the Putna collection (Fig. 5a). It is also strikingly similar in terms of materials and technique to the *epitrachelion* preserved in the collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens,⁴⁴ and to the liturgical garment of the same type that Stephen III gifted to Pătrăuți Monastery in 1493.⁴⁵ The iconography and technique resemble those of the earlier example, but the representations are much richer in detail in the latter (Fig. 10b). Not only the colored silk thread appears in larger portions of the composition, but it is also used in various colors to accentuate the perimeter of the figures. The details of the figure of the Virgin Mary, for example, are outlined in red, blue, and black silk thread. Other portions are highlighted using silk thread wound with silver or gold wire, as is the case in the Virgin's undergarment and the underside of her mantle. These details add visual interest to the composition, as do the foliate motifs that frame the individual arches in the upper corners and the alternating geometric and more sinuous patterns that separate the distinct registers. Moreover, the lionhead motif appears again (slightly modified in design) in the capitals framing each saintly figure. Here, however, the meaning of these motifs is likely different than in the earlier example. Whereas in the former the lionhead served in part a symbolic function (arguably related to sebastokrator Branko Mladenović), it is possible that in the later *epitrachelion* produced in the Moldavian cultural context, and quite likely in the Putna workshop given its sophisticated technique, they were included as an allusion to the earlier "prototype" but serving as decorative and framing elements for the compositions.

A similar intricate and varied technique is found in a Moldavian *epitrachelion* from the last decades of the fifteenth century, which offers an intriguing parallel with an embroidery of the same type from the reign of Alexander I. The textile shows sixteen Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church in medallions with *tituli* in Greek (Figs. 11a-11b).⁴⁶

44. COTOVANU, 2019, p. 135-148.

45. GOROVEI, 2005, p. 35-46.

46. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 6-13, pl. XVIII-XXII; BERZA, 1958, p. 290-291; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 40-41.

FIGURE 11A. *EPITRACHELION*, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD, SILVER AND COLORED SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION, 2.86 M X 0.12 M, BEFORE 1496

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

FIGURE 11B. *EPITRACHELION* (DETAIL), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD, SILVER AND COLORED SILK ON A SILK FOUNDATION, 2.86 M X 0.12 M, BEFORE 1496

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

The end of the garment displays the portraits of Stephen III and his first son Alexander (d. 1496) with inscriptions in Church Slavonic: (left) “Алѣксандръ с(ѣ)нь Стефана воевод(ѣ)” / “Alexander, son of Stephen voivode” and (right) “Стефанъ воевода” / “Stephen voivode.”⁴⁷ It is possible that this object was commissioned by Alexander after his father had made him co-ruler around 1490, reflecting thus the joint authority after that moment. But it could also have been commissioned by Stephen III himself to commemorate this event, or by both rulers together. Moreover, in its iconographic repertoire, this *epitrachelion* echoes the one from the reign of Alexander I from Neamț Monastery, in which, in addition to showing the Great Feasts in roundels, the full-length portraits of the patron and his wife Marina appear in the lowest register.⁴⁸ As such, in addition to its liturgical functions, the later *epitrachelion* also serves as a symbol of legitimacy for Moldavia's rulers in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Moldavian *Epitaphioi*

Moldavian *epitaphioi* are also stylistically and iconographically linked with examples from the Byzantine cultural sphere, but also exhibit certain local developments first introduced in the principality during the first half of the fifteenth century and transformed thereafter. The *epitaphios* completed at the order of Stephen III and his immediate family members in the workshop at Putna Monastery was finished in 1489/1490 (Fig. 12a).⁴⁹ This large liturgical veil was executed with gold and silver thread, as well as colored silk, on a foundation of blue silk. It displays at the center the dead body of Christ reclining on a red and green burial cloth surrounded by angels and mourning figures identified by inscriptions. The Virgin Mary cradles her son's head on the left with Mary Magdalene standing behind her with her arms raised in a gesture of mourning. At Christ's feet, Joseph and Nicodemus lament his body with two additional female figures behind them, the myrrh bearers. Above, Saint John bends over and reaches out to hold Christ's left hand. The upper and lower registers both show four angels each surrounded by stars, represented standing and kneeling, respectively. In both cases, the two angels in the center exhibit gestures of mourning or point to the mourning figures nearby, while the lateral ones hold liturgical fans (or *rhypidia*).

47. BERZA, 1958, p. 291 (Church Slavonic and Romanian); *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 40 (Church Slavonic and French).

48. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 6-13, pl. VIII; COJOCARU, 2016a, p. 20.

49. VOINESCU & MUSICESCU, 1958, p. 280; BERZA, 1958, p. 298-299; SCHILB, 2014, esp. p. 53-57.

FIGURE 12A. *EPITAPHIOS* OF STEPHEN III, EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD, SILVER AND COLORED SILK ON A LIGHT BLUE SILK FOUNDATION, 2.52 M X 1.66 M, 1489/1490

FIGURE 12B-E. *EPITAPHIOS* OF STEPHEN III (DETAILS), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD, SILVER AND COLORED SILK ON A LIGHT BLUE SILK FOUNDATION, 2.52 M X 1.66 M, 1489/1490

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

† Изволенієм w(т)ца и съ пwсвѣщенієм с(ъ)на и
свършенієм с(ве)т(a)gw д(oу)ха Іw(анна) Стефан воевода,
б(o)жією м(и)л(o)стію г(oc)п(o)д(a)рь земли Mwлдавской,
с(ъ)н Богдана воеводи, и съ бл(a)гочестивою г(oc)п(o)жди
его Марїи и съ възлюбленними дѣти Алеѡандра и Бwгдана-
Ваада сѣтъврisha сѣи аерь въ монастири wt Поутной, идеже
ест оуспеніе прѣс(ве)τια б(огороди)ци и пр(ис)нод(ѣ)ви
Марїѣ, в л(ѣ)tw *щ҃чй.

With the will of the Father, the help of the Son, and the action of the Holy Spirit, John Stephen voivode, through God's grace prince of the land of Moldavia, son of Bogdan voivode, and with his devout wife Maria and with their beloved sons, Alexander and Bogdan-Vlad, had this aër made in Putna Monastery, dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God and pure virgin Mary, in the year 6998 [1489/1490].

The dedication makes clear that this *epitaphios* was executed in the workshop at Putna, demonstrating the degree of refinement and skill the atelier had accomplished by the end of the fifteenth century. Subsequently, the veil was endowed to the monastery by Stephen III and his family. It is such a prized possession of Putna that even up to the beginning of the twentieth century it was displayed in a wooden frame in the katholikon next to Stephen III's tomb.⁵² What is more, the inscription appears to have been so carefully designed for the shape and iconography of this liturgical veil that Stephen III's name – Iw(анна) Стефан воевода – appears at the beginning of

50. *Book of Revelation*, 4:68.

51. BERZA, 1958, p. 298-299 (Church Slavonic and Romanian).

52. COJOCARU, 2016a, p. 11, n° 85.

the top line and directly above the symbol of the Evangelist John, also a name saint for the Moldavian prince.

Émil Turdeanu has noted that Byzantine and Moldavian *epitaphioi* display the symbols of the Evangelists in the four corners of such liturgical embroidered veils.⁵³ This is true of the Putna *epitaphios* of 1489/1490 and the *Thessaloniki Epitaphios*, for example. But whereas the Evangelist symbols are present in the four quadrants of the compositions in both examples, in the Putna veil the symbols for Luke and Mark were switched. Moreover, the Moldavian embroidery shows the symbols of the Evangelists further framed by inscriptions in the arcs surrounding them. The material evidence reveals that this is a particular Moldavian development of this iconography.

Certainly, the Putna veil recalls the iconography of the famous *Thessaloniki Epitaphios*. Both examples focus on the dead body of Christ surrounded by mourning figures and angels holding liturgical objects above, as well as the symbols of the four Evangelists in the corners. There are, however, further transformations of this image type in the later iteration. The Putna *epitaphios*, for example, offers equal space for the three horizontal registers of the composition, thus centralizing the body of Christ in the scene. It also includes additional historical figures that render the representation historical, symbolic, and iconic in character.

The earliest extant iteration of this iconography in Moldavia appears in the *epitaphios* of Silvan, abbot of Neamț Monastery, completed likely in the local workshop at Neamț on 1 September 1436 and gifted to the monastery shortly thereafter (Fig. 13).⁵⁴ Executed in the finest materials, this embroidery follows the style and technique of Byzantine *epitaphioi* of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, such as the one from The Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration, Meteora, Kalambaka, Greece, dating to the last quarter of the fourteenth century,⁵⁵ the *Epitaphios of the Shepherd of the Bulgarians* executed in Constantinople and gifted by Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282-1328) to the Cathedral Church of St. Sofia in Ohrid,⁵⁶ and the *epitaphios* of Nicholas Eudaimonoioannes completed in 1406-1407.⁵⁷ But the example from Neamț introduces, arguably for the first time, the words from the Liturgy – “singing, crying, shouting, and

53. TURDEANU, 1941, p. 201; see also SCHILB, 2020, p. 233-236.

54. Now in the National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest (Inv. 15827 / B 182). MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 105-106, pl. CLXXXVIII; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 61-63.

55. EVANS, 2004, p. 313-314.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 314-315; MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 89-94, pl. CLXXXVIII.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 316-317. Related to this topic, see also WOODFIN, 2012, p. 124-128.

saying” – in the arcs surrounding the Evangelists, which subsequently became a characteristic features of Moldavian *epitaphioi* of the fifteenth century and later.⁵⁸

FIGURE 13. *EPITAPHIOS* OF SILVAN, EMBROIDERY WITH SILVERGILT

THREAD ON A SATIN FOUNDATION, 2.4 M X 1.56 M, 1436

Source: National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest/Inv. 15827/B 182

A Unique Embroidered Tomb Cover

The extant Moldavian gravestones of the fifteenth century are relatively formulaic in their decorative and epigraphic schemes. The slabs were carved out of marble, limestone, or sandstone, and likely produced in local workshops. Following a tradition with deep roots in Byzantine practices,⁵⁹ the graves of significant individuals would have also been covered by lavish textiles – known as tomb covers (гробникъ). Although few in number, the extant Moldavian tomb covers, except for one, display non-figural brocaded designs and dedicatory inscriptions. The exception deserves special mention here for its distinct iconography, technique, and style. It is the embroidery for the grave of Maria Asanina Palaiologina, or

58. JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 83; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 61.

59. MANGO, 1986, p. 220.

Maria of Mangup,⁶⁰ Stephen III's second wife, now found in the monastic collection at Putna (Fig. 14a).⁶¹ This object – the only embroidered tomb cover in the Putna collection, alongside others made of brocade – features a richly worked funerary portrait of the Moldavian princess. The cover was executed in colored silks embroidered with polychrome silks and gold threads, with the now mainly damaged background consisting of couched gold threads arranged vertically (Fig. 14b). Stephen III likely commissioned the grave cover for her tomb located in the burial chamber (now naos) of the church at Putna Monastery, opposite his burial site, and under a baldachin similarly elaborate to his.

The cloth shows Maria full-length and in a recumbent pose, like a *gisant*, with her arms folded across her chest and her hands gently clasped.⁶² Her oval face with its small mouth, long thin nose, and arched eyebrows provides a glimpse of her countenance (Fig. 14b). Her hair, parted down the middle, is mostly concealed by her elaborate headdress, the Byzantine *propoloma*, in this case finely worked with precious stones and pearl hangings, reminiscent of the crown worn by Empress Theodora

FIGURE 14A. BURIAL COVER OF
MARIA OF MANGUP, EMBROIDERY
WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD
AND COLORED SILK
ON A RED SATIN FOUNDATION,
1.88 M X 1.02 M, CA. 1477

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

60. GOROVEI & SZÉKELY, 2006; SULLIVAN, 2020.

61. EVANS, 2004, p. 59-60; COJOCARU, 2016a, p. 14-16; DIEZ, 1928, p. 377-385, esp. 377; JOHNSTONE, 1967, p. 112-113; BERZA, 1958, p. 288-290; SZÉKELY, 2004, p. 73-99; *Broderies de tradition byzantine en Roumanie*, p. 68-72.

62. ĆURČIĆ, 1991, p. 251-261, esp. 253; SEMOGLU, 1995, p. 4-11, esp. 8; GRABAR, 1980-1981, p. 143-156, esp. 149-154.

FIGURE 14B. BURIAL COVER OF MARIA OF MANGUP (DETAIL), EMBROIDERY WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREAD AND COLORED SILK ON A RED SATIN FOUNDATION, 1.88 M X 1.02 M, CA. 1477

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

executed this burial cover spared no expense and carefully crafted for posterity the image of this Byzantine princess on the Moldavian throne.

Maria is reposing underneath a cusped trefoil arch that delineates her figure and balances the composition. The presence of the arcature is also suggestive of her royal status. It is decorated with the monogram of the Palaiologan Dynasty,⁶³ and a repertoire of decorative and vegetal motifs found on other contemporary embroideries from the Putna workshop. One example in particular offers striking parallels. This is the *aër* from ca. 1477 that displays an image of the Second

(ca. 500-548) in the famous mosaics in the apse at San Vitale in Ravenna and characteristic of Byzantine regalia. Jewels also adorn Maria's ears, neck, and fingers. A bluegreen *granatza* of a Perso-Assyrian origin – a sumptuously brocaded dress and caftan-like mantle with red lining and long sleeves reaching to the ankles – completes Maria's regal attire.

The technique is varied and sophisticated and derives from Byzantine embroidery traditions. Gold thread once covered the entirety of the red silk background, but unfortunately now survives only in select areas. Gold and silver wire with colored silks in various configurations and stitches provide the variety of detail in Maria's appearance and the structure of her surroundings. Although relatively smooth, certain features of the composition are slightly raised with padding threads underneath, as is evident in the outline of her headdress and various jewels, as well as in the framing arch and accompanying symbols. The designers and those who

63. This same monogram appears on the vestments of members of the Palaiologan Dynasty. See, for example, the frescoes and tombs in Kariye Djami in Istanbul, discussed in UNDERWOOD, 1966, esp. p. 284-292.

Coming with Christ at the center, angels, seraphim, and the four symbols of the Evangelists in medallion in the corners (Figs. 15a-15b) – an iconography related to that of the *epitaphioi*.⁶⁴ This embroidery was later repurposed to serve as an *epigonation*, but its size, iconography, and orientation of the composition suggest that it originally functioned as a liturgical veil.⁶⁵ A very similar example, likely its pair, is preserved in The Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.⁶⁶ Both of these veils were richly embroidered on red silk, and their decorative borders show the same alternating patterns of symbols and vegetal forms as those found on the arcature framing Maria's visage on her burial cover.

FIGURE 15A. *AĖR*, EMBROIDERY
WITH SILVER, GILTSILVER,
AND COLORED SILK ON A SILK
FOUNDATION,
0.47 M X 0.40 M, CA. 1477

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

FIGURE 15B. *AĖR* (DETAIL),
EMBROIDERY WITH SILVER,
GILTSILVER, AND COLORED SILK
ON A SILK FOUNDATION,
0.47 M X 0.40 M, CA. 1477

Source: Putna Monastery Treasury

64. *Arta din Moldova de la Ștefan cel Mare la Movilești*, p. 152-153.

65. On another example of liturgical veils that have been repurposed to serve as liturgical vestments, see SULLIVAN, 2018, p. 136-141.

66. STOJANOVIĆ, 1959, cat. 31, Fig. 20.

In place of a decorative border around the perimeter, Maria's grave cover displays a dedicatory inscription in Church Slavonic that reads:⁶⁷

† Съ есть покровъ гроба рабы бжѣа благочѣстивои
 и Христолюбивои госпожди Іw(анна) Стефана воеводы,
 господара земли Молдавскои, Марїи, иже и прѣстави са къ
 вѣчнымъ обитѣлемъ в лѣт(о) ѡбщѣе, м(ѣсе)ца дек(е)врїа бѣ въ
 пѣт(ѣ)к, час ѣ д(ѣ)не.

This is the tomb cover of the servant of God, the pious and devout to Christ, wife of John Stephen voivode, prince of the land of Moldavia, Maria, who passed to the eternal dwelling in the year 6985 [1476], the month of December 19, at five o'clock during the day.

While formulaic, the inscription is unusual in that it is interrupted in the corners by four emblems: in the upper left and lower right are the double-headed eagles, the imperial symbols of Byzantium; the lower left corner shows the famous and wide-spread monogram of the Palaiologan Dynasty, which appears again in a correct and a reverse position in the decorations of the trefoil arch in the central register of the embroidery (in the correct orientation on the left roundel and in a reverse position in the right roundel);⁶⁸ and the upper right corner shows the initials for Maria's other family name, Asanina.⁶⁹ Symbolically weighty, these important dynastic emblems represent the earliest known identifiers of this kind on any extant embroidered work in Moldavia.

A veil of mystery still shrouds the actual display of these burial covers and their functions. These embroideries were certainly designed for particular tombs because their measurements often match exactly the dimensions of their respective gravestones. This is certainly true of the cover for the burial of Maria of Mangup. It is possible that they were placed on top of the tombs during particular celebrations or on special feast days. What is peculiar, however, is the direction of the text of the surrounding dedicatory inscription on the grave cover. On Maria's embroidery, the text begins in the upper right corner and continues around her image in a counterclockwise fashion, with the letters facing away from the center.

67. BERZA, 1958, p. 290 (Church Slavonic and Romanian).

68. GOROVEI & SZÉKELY, 2006, p. 157.

69. MILLET, 1939-1947, II, p. 79; GOROVEI & SZÉKELY, 2006, p. 158.

This inscription would have been easily read if the embroidery had been placed over the gravestone and the edges with the text draped around the tomb. Although some of the functions of these grave markers are lost to us today, it is clear that these sumptuous objects and the tombs they were designed for functioned in the economy of salvation and also that of remembrance.

Maria's embroidered burial cover, moreover, offers "an expression of the medieval conception about the perpetuation of the monarchical institution," as Maria Magdalena Székely has noted, "through its characteristics that emulate western artistic traditions and those specific to Byzantine art."⁷⁰ Indeed, in its iconographic composition, the tomb cover of Maria of Mangup engages with a long tradition of medieval aristocratic funerary portraits in western Europe.⁷¹ Incised in stone or carved in various degrees of relief, these grave markers show the deceased in frontal and full-length pose, often richly dressed, and framed within an architectural structure reminiscent of a church or baldachin. A dedicatory inscription running around the perimeter of the slab and/or a coat of arms identifies in part the individual(s) represented. The Moldavian tomb cover, however, is also deeply indebted to Byzantine models and reflects "the greatest phase of magnificence in Moldavian-style embroidery, during an era of internal political, social, and cultural stability in Moldavian society" during the second half of the fifteenth century.⁷²

Conclusion

During the fifteenth century – when Byzantium was declining and in the aftermath of its collapse – Moldavian workshops transformed Byzantine traditions of church embroidery both through direct contact with actual objects and individuals trained in Byzantine cultural centers. Local craftsmen mastered the laborious and complicated craft of embroidery in monastic workshops at Neamț, Bistrița, and later at Putna, revealing through their many creations (although few surviving today) great technical virtuosity and ingenious iconographies and decorative motifs adapted from earlier models and local examples.⁷³ Moldavia's relations with the Byzantine Empire and its sphere of influence, initially fostered during the reign of Alexander I during the first decades of the fifteenth century and later

70. SZÉKELY, 2004, p. 79.

71. BAUCH, 1976; KÖRNER, 1997 (with bibliography).

72. EVANS, 2004, p. 59.

73. It has been suggested that certain ornamental motifs could have been appropriated from local "popular" workshops. VOINESCU & MUSICESCU, 1958, p. 283.

invigorated during the reign of Stephen III, contributed to the development of a Moldavian style in art and architecture that revived and advanced Byzantine traditions alongside local forms and others adopted from other neighboring traditions. Stephen III's marriage to Maria of Mangup served as another moment of direct contact with Byzantine artistic forms that bolstered the embroidery workshops at Putna Monastery and elsewhere, among other changes initiated in the principality and in the princely ideology of its ruler.

Moldavian church embroideries remain a rich topic of inquiry. Further studies could explore how the Moldavian embroidery tradition as it evolved by the end of the fifteenth century contributed to the technical, stylistic, and iconographical developments of the centuries that followed; or how the Moldavian works relate to those of other neighboring regions around the Carpathian Mountains and the Balkan Peninsula that also established their rich artistic vocabularies at the crossroads of the Greek, Latin, and Slavic cultural spheres;⁷⁴ or how the style and iconography of the Moldavian embroideries compare to other local art forms, such as mural cycles, for example. It has been suggested that perhaps similar *anthivola* or preparatory drawings were used for both the execution of mural decorations and embroidery works.⁷⁵ But this topic deserves systematic and thorough study so that the richness of these "icons painted with a needle"⁷⁶ could be further unveiled.

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74. See ROSSI & SULLIVAN, 2020, and also the work accomplished in the context of the *North of Byzantium* initiative: www.northofbyzantium.org.

75. VOINESCU & MUSICESCU, 1958, p. 281.

76. COJOCARU, 2016a, p. 23.

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