Cahiers balkaniques

48 | 2021

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

From Constantinople to Vienna: On the Different Tendencies in Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical Embroidery (17th-18th Centuries)

*De Constantinople à Vienne: À propos de différentes écoles de broderie de
tradition religieuse orthodoxe grecque (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)*

*Από την Κωνσταντινούπολη στη Βιέννη: Διάφορες σχολές Ελληνορθόδοξου
κεντήματος (17^{ος} - 18^{ος} αιώνας)*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ceb/18619>

DOI: 10.4000/ceb.18619

ISSN: 2261-4184

Publisher

INALCO

Printed version

ISBN: 9782858313983

ISSN: 0290-7402

Electronic reference

Elena Papastavrou and Daphni Filiou, "From Constantinople to Vienna: On the Different Tendencies in Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical Embroidery (17th-18th Centuries)", *Cahiers balkaniques* [Online], 48 | 2021, Online since 24 December 2021, connection on 04 January 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ceb/18619> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ceb.18619>

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From Constantinople to Vienna: On the Different Tendencies in Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical Embroidery (17th-18th Centuries)

Abstract: The following article aims at providing an illustrative overview of the representative characteristics of three Schools of embroidery which are linked to Byzantine tradition. Our investigation will consider works of the 17th and 18th centuries produced in Constantinople, Vienna, and lands which used to belong to the eastern periphery of Byzantium, such as Georgia and the Pontus. Our interdisciplinary approach, based on technical art historical enquiry, effectively combines the analysis of iconography, style, and technique. In order to attribute the artifacts to specific workshops we focus on their construction as well as on different factors which characterise their cultural environment.

Keywords: Greek Orthodox embroidery, 17th and 18th centuries, embroidery Schools, Constantinople, Vienne, Georgia

De Constantinople à Vienne: À propos de différentes écoles de broderie de tradition religieuse orthodoxe grecque (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)

Résumé: la présente étude examine divers courants liés à la broderie de tradition byzantine durant les XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Plus particulièrement, nous allons considérer des œuvres d'art représentatives de broderies de l'École de Constantinople et de Vienne, où la communauté grecque était florissante, aussi bien que des broderies produites dans la partie orientale du monde où rayonne l'art byzantin, comme en Géorgie et au Pont. Il s'agit d'une étude fondée sur une approche interdisciplinaire liée à l'examen aussi bien de l'iconographie et du style que de la technique. En d'autres termes, afin de rendre les œuvres à leur contexte

culturel, notre recherche se penche sur la méthode de construction des broderies en combinaison avec l'étude des autres facteurs déterminant la création artistique.

Mots-clés : broderie de tradition orthodoxe grecque, Écoles de broderie, XVII-XVIIIe siècles, Constantinople, Vienne, Géorgie

Από την Κωνσταντινούπολη στη Βιέννη: Διάφορες σχολές Ελληνορθόδοξου κεντήματος (17^{ος} - 18^{ος} αιώνες)

Περίληψη : Σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης είναι η εξέταση κάποιων από τις τάσεις που επικρατούν στο Ελληνορθόδοξο κέντημα κατά τον 17^ο και 18^ο αιώνα, σε μια εποχή δηλαδή που συμπίπτει με την υλική, πνευματική και καλλιτεχνική ανάπτυξη του Ελληνισμού. Όπως είναι γνωστό, πολλά εργαστήρια ήταν ενεργά σε διάφορα κέντρα εντός ή εκτός της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας, καθώς οι Έλληνες δραστηριοποιούνταν όχι μόνον στη Μέση Ανατολή, αλλά και στη Ρωσία και την Κεντρική Ευρώπη, όπου δημιούργησαν ακμάζουσες παροικίες. Με στόχο την παρουσίαση στην επιστημονική κοινότητα των αποτελεσμάτων των τελευταίων ερευνών μας, υπό το πρίσμα μιας συγκριτικής οπτικής, η παρούσα μελέτη εστιάζει στα αντιπροσωπευτικά χαρακτηριστικά τριών «σχολών» κεντητικής, όπως της Κωνσταντινούπολης και της Βιέννης, καθώς και περιοχών της πρώην ανατολικής περιφέρειας του Βυζαντίου, όπως της Γεωργίας και του Πόντου. Η διεπιστημονική μας προσέγγιση αφορά τόσο στην εικονογραφική και τεχνοτροπική ανάλυση, όσο και στην τεχνική. Προκειμένου δηλαδή να αποδοθούν τα αντικείμενα στο καλλιτεχνικό τους πλαίσιο, γίνεται εις βάθος έρευνα του τρόπου κατασκευής τους σε συνδυασμό με τη μελέτη των διαφόρων παραγόντων που καθορίζουν το πολιτισμικό περιβάλλον τους.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά : ελληνορθόδοξο κέντημα, 17^{ος} και 18^{ος} αιώνες, Σχολές κεντήματος, Κωνσταντινούπολη, Βιέννη, Γεωργία, Πόντος

From Constantinople to Vienna: On the Different Tendencies in Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical Embroidery (17th-18th Centuries)

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Introduction

The Greek Orthodox embroidery of the 17th and the 18th centuries belongs to a period of material, intellectual, and spiritual growth of Hellenism. It is the moment of the ascent of the Fanariots in higher echelons of the Ottoman establishment, the growth of Greek communities in various financial centers in Europe and Russia, and the thriving of the Greek merchants in East and West. Nonetheless, at the same time, different spiritual tendencies were forged at the environment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate concerning the dogmatic expression of Orthodoxy, whereas Greek theologians engaged in dialogue with the other two Christian denominations, Catholics and Protestants on crucial dogmatic topics. Within this context the conditions occurred for Greek Orthodox culture and art to flourish; consequently many embroidery workshops became established and were active in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, as well as outside of it.

Constantinopolitan Workshops

During the 18th century, the Constantinopolitan embroidery workshops followed the trends known in post-Byzantine art, that were deeply influenced by the Byzantine tradition,¹ while at the same time drafted different artistic elements directly from the West as well as from the East. Therefore, the evident eclecticism led often to original creations. An example of this is the work of the well-known embroideress Eusebia, whose embroidery is characteristic of

FIGURE 1. *EPIGONATION* BXM 1711,
BY THE FEMALE EMBROIDERER
EUSEBIA

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

the Constantinopolitan artistry of that period.² The *epigonation* of the Byzantine and Christian Museum (BXM 1711) presents the Baptism of Christ (Fig. 1) and is signed on the left corner by Eusebia «χειρ Ευσεβείας» (“by the hand of Eusebia”). The garment is framed by a luxurious ornamental border. The main scene derives from the Byzantine tradition portraying Jesus standing in the middle of the River Jordan filled with fishes³. John the Baptist is on the left bank of the river, while the Holy Spirit descends like a dove. The fair colour of the eyes and hair, as well as the sweetened facial expression are Western traits, while the breeches⁴ in the garments

1. PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2016, p. 161-176; PAPASTAVROU, 2020, p. 205-230.

2. When Maria Theochari (see THEOCHARI, 1966-1967, p. 227-241) included Eusebia to the group of the Constantinopolitan female embroiders, there was no written evidence of her origin. Nevertheless, in the Nicosia Byzantine Museum is kept an *epigonation* with the representation of the Pantocrator in majesty belonging to the bishop of Cyprus Poiminos Philotheos bearing the inscription: “Eusebia started the work whereas Mariora completed it” («ΑΡΧΗ ΠΙΟΝΗΜΑ ΜΕΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΕΙΑΣ ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΔΕ ΜΑΡΙΩΡΑΣ»). This inscription brings Eusebia in relation to Mariora, whose tomb is found on the island of Chalki, near Constantinople, cf. KOUTLOUMOUSIANOS, 1846, p. 38.

3. In the river we see fishes, an element that occurs also in Byzantine cases, as f.i. in the gospelbook of 1125-1140, cod. 1, fol. 147b of the Monastery of Mega Spilacon in Kalavryta, ΓΑΛΑΒΑΡΗΣ, 1995, p. 137, or usually in the Palaeologan art, as well as in the Post-Byzantine art, see icon of the 17th century, BALTOGIANNI, 1986, pl. 87.

4. PAPASTAVROU & VRYZIDIS, 2018, p. 251-278, Fig. 11.

of the angel (Fig. 2) and John Baptist show an Ottoman influence. Furthermore, the floral ornament of the border exhibits influences that can be found in both European embroideries⁵ and Persian rugs.⁶

A significant particularity in the Baptism is that of Christ stepping on a dragon.⁷ This detail is unusual in Byzantine and post-Byzantine tradition, where more commonly four little snakes are seen under Jesus' feet in the Baptism. In the case of the *epigonation*, the choice of the dragon instead of the aforementioned snakes may be considered as an innovation in the art of Constantinople. It possibly corresponds to the patron's wish to emphasise a concrete dogmatic viewpoint related to the theological controversy about Anabaptism,⁸ a debate of great significance in Constantinople during the 18th century. In order to emphasise the fact that evil spirits can be defeated by the Orthodox sacrament of baptism, the person who

FIGURE 2. *EPIGONATION*
BXM 1711, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

5. DAVANZO, 1997, no. 13, no. 45.

6. TEZCAN & OKUMURA, 2007, 53, no. 8 and 54, no. 9.

7. In the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art scene of the Baptism, Christ steps on a multitude of little snakes according to an expression of the hymns related to the scene, cf. *Menaion*, 6 January. Instead, in the Chludov Psalter (9th c.), the illustration accompanying the ps. 74(73) related to the Baptism, shows the convoluted dragon on the right side of the Christ in the Jordan, whereas John the Baptist appears on the left side, SCHILLER, 1981 (3rd ed). vol. 1, p. 146, 147, Fig. 359. Since then, this correlation did not make fortune in Byzantine art, but in Armenian art, AKOPJAN KORCHMAJAN, 1984, Fig. 37; KEFALA, 2004, tome. B', p. 420-433, 426, Fig. 6.

8. This controversy mainly concerned Roman Catholic and Armenian converts to Greek Orthodox; the debate was about whether they should receive Orthodox baptism after the baptism they had already received, PODSKALSKY, 1988, p. 412-475, especially p. 416-417, 431, 482. In this controversy patriarchs also took part, as the defender of anabaptism Cyril v (1748-1751, 1752-1757) and his successor and opponent Kallinicos III (1757).

FIGURES 3 & 4. *EPIGONATION*
BXM 1711, DETAILS

Photos: Nikos Mylonas

conceived the scene used the form of a dragon inspired by Armenian iconography.⁹

As for the technique of the embroidery, the flesh (Fig. 3) is rendered with very fine silk thread in split stitch, following the facial features and the structure of the human body. In addition, silver and gilded wires are applied for the garments and for all other decorative details on a padded surface. Moreover, the border is constructed from materials that are slightly bulkier, therefore, giving the impression of a somewhat more raised appearance, which is not a characteristic in Byzantine embroidery. Furthermore, a combination of silk threads and metal wires are used, in order to give a realistic aspect to little details such as the angel's wings, the river's water and the dragon's skin (Fig. 4). Specifically, a blue or green silk thread is twisted with silver wires and then fixed on the surface, whilst additional silver wires are fixed loosely giving the impression of the flowing water. A similar combination of silk thread and gilded wires, twisted together, form the dragon's body while, an additional small group of gilded wires form the scales of the dragon's rough and harsh skin. Such material combinations, originating from Byzantine embroidery, are still very popular in 18th century Constantinopolitan workshops.

As previously discussed, Eusebia's work combines the main features of the Constantinopolitan embroidery of the 18th century. These features include the masterly execution of the flesh, made with

9. See above, note 7. Both Armenians and Greeks produced embroideries in Constantinople and shared iconographic types and drawings as well as technical features.

fine stitches of silk thread, the silver and gilded wires for all the other elements of the scene and of course the numerous combinations and applications of silk threads and metallic materials, in this case.

At the same time, Constantinopolitan embroidery seems to present more variation in its making. In the present state of research, the signed embroideries that could provide solid evidence on this variation in early modern Constantinople are failing. Nevertheless, in our attempt to give the full (a more complete) picture we will discuss a group of three 18th-century ecclesiastical veils¹⁰ (BXM 21103, 21116, 21145). All three artefacts display a united but different technical approach in their construction than we saw in Eusebia's work. Although they are unsigned, Constantinopolitan attribution is possible for two main reasons. First of all, their floral décor closely recalls a signed work by a Constantinopolitan embroideress, to be discussed in the following. Second, the confection of the flesh is found in an earlier work attributed to Constantinople because of a concordance of factors. On a red silk satin ground textile, the central scenes are surrounded by bunches of flowers. At the edge a green strip is covered with a floral motif. The first veil, an *aer* (BXM 21103) (Fig. 5) depicts the scene of Lamentation, where Christ is lying on the shrine, in front of the Cross, with two lamenting angels hovering above.¹¹ The second veil, a paten's veil (BXM 21116) (Fig. 6) shows Christ standing in the open tomb in front of the Cross, in the iconographic type of the Ultimate Humiliation (the King of Glory).¹² The inscription reads "Απόπλυνον Κύριε τας αμαρτίας του δούλου σου Ιωακείμ Ιερομονάχου τω αίματί σου τω τιμίω, 1757" (Oh Lord, wash the sins of your servant monk Joachim by your holy blood, 1757). The third veil, a chalice's veil (BXM 21145) (Fig. 7) pictures two scenes: the first being that of the Resurrection, where Christ is holding a labarum hovering above the open tomb,¹³ and the second being that of Christ in a chalice.¹⁴ The multicoloured decoration on the veils' edging, is embroidered with silk threads, metal threads,

10. The group consists of three liturgical veils used as covers; an *Άήρ* (*aer*: chalice and paten's veil), a *Ποτηροκάλυμμα* (chalice's veil) and a *Δισκοκάλυμμα* (paten's veil).

11. For the iconography of the composition see below, notes 31-35.

12. PALLAS, 1965; BELTING, 1981, figs. 53, 59-60, 70-74, 97, 101-103, 105; SCHILLER, 2, figs. 718, 720, 734, 735; CHATZIDAKIS, 1985, 88, no. 40, pl. 33, 101 (Man of Sorrow by Nicolaos Tzanfournaris).

13. SCHILLER, 3, figs. 235, 249.

14. Christ in the chalice is a Eucharistic theme known in Byzantine painting since the 14th c. (church of Evangelistria in Mystra) as well as in the West (SCHILLER, 2, Fig. 60); also, it is widely spread out in the Post-Byzantine painting, THEOCHARI, 1960, p. 9-15, particularly, 11 & 1982, no 201.

wires and strips (the latter often forming tiny spirals called *tirtir*) bearing very close resemblance to a veil kept in the Monastery of Patmos. The Patmos veil is signed by Sophia (1745), who is the daughter¹⁵ and disciple of another renowned Constantinopolitan embroideress, Mariora.¹⁶

FIGURE 5. LITURGICAL VEIL, *AER*,
BXM 21103

FIGURE 6. PATEN'S VEIL BXM 21116

FIGURE 7. CHALICE'S VEIL BXM 21145

Photos: Nikos Mylonas

15. See KOUTLOUMOUSIANOS, 1846, p. 38.

16. Patmos. Treasures of the Monastery, p. 200, Fig. 7.

Regarding the construction of the veils, they present a mixed technique of embroidery and painting. Even though typical Constantinopolitan stitches and materials are used for the embroidered section, the flesh is executed in different ways. For example, on the *aer* (BXM 21103) (Fig. 8), an off-white silk satin textile is used for the body of Christ (now missing in most parts), whereas the flesh on the other two covers (BXM 21116, and BXM 21145) is painted directly on the red silk satin ground textile. The technique of the flesh of the above-mentioned veils must not be an innovation of an 18th-century Constantinopolitan workshop, since it is distinguished on another artwork of the Byzantine & Christian Museum, the 17th-century *epigonation* with the Christ-Angel (BXM 1705). The flesh is confectioned with an off-white ground silk satin, while the details are stitched with silk thread linearly. As noticed above, no signed Constantinopolitan work conferring this flesh technique has been identified yet. Nevertheless, the other technical features could still sustain a Constantinopolitan attribution.¹⁷

FIGURE 8. LITURGICAL VEIL, *AER*,
BXM 21103, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

The afore presented analysis of the group of veils of the Byzantine & Christian Museum provides substantial evidence that in Constantinopolitan embroidery more techniques are applied, at least more than initially thought, a characteristic which fits to the character of a big and cosmopolitan city. Actually, during the 18th century, the City operated as an artistic centre,¹⁸ where a lot of

17. The technique of the flesh made on silk ground fabric while the details are stitched with thread linearly or painted is found in Western embroidery since the medieval period, but it may be rarely also used in Byzantine works; on the issue see PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2021 (forthcoming), entry no 9.

18. The Ottoman capital was an artistic centre, where the Topkapi's artistic cadre decided on those tendencies that would be promoted in the whole Empire, see BILGI & ZANBAK, 2012, p. 13.

different currents were present, giving the market and clients a great variety of alternatives. Options that possibly also influenced the price of the embroideries.¹⁹

Viennese Workshops

At the same time ecclesiastical embroideries made in Vienna became very popular to the Greek clientele.²⁰ Vienna was a crucial commercial centre and cultural hub, connected with the Ottoman Empire, where the Greeks established an important and wealthy community. There, chief Masters like Elizabeth Dorff,²¹ Marina Ruheland,²² Franz Filler, as well as the famous painter, engraver and embroiderer Christopher Zephar,²³ produced embroideries for the Greek Orthodox Church. Ecclesiastical veils and vestments were commissioned not only by Greeks of Vienna but also by Greeks from different regions of Greece and the Balkans, or even from other European centers like Budapest and Bucharest.²⁴

Viennese embroideries usually depict crowded compositions of Western iconography and feature particular techniques. They present similar traits with small variations throughout the 18th century (Fig. 9)²⁵. An example of this art, is the *Epitaphios* treasured in the church of Archimandreion in Ioannina and dated 1733 (Fig. 10), which is analysed in the following. The main scene depicts the

19. KRODY, 2000, p. 29.

20. On Viennese workshops see THEOCHARI, 1986, p. 13; VLACHOPOULOU-KARABINA, 2010, p. 2571, esp. 2740; eadem, 2014, p. 335-353; CHATZOULIS, 2019; PAPASTAVROU, 2019, p. 10 and 16-21.

21. A Mystery Great and Wondrous, p. 368.

22. See an *epitaphios* of 1796, made by Marina Ruheland today kept in the National Museum of History in Sofia, *National Museum of History*, no 145.

23. CHATZOULIS, 2019.

24. Archive of the Stavronikita Monastery. Compendium of documents 1533-1800, 2001, 128, no. 69: «Γράμμα του Γεωργίου Καστρισίου στο μητροπολίτη Σταυρουπόλεως Γρηγόριο στο Βουκουρέστι για τη μίτρα του επισκόπου Ριμνίκου» Letter of Georgios Kastrisios to the Metropolitan of Stavroupolis Gregory in Bucharest. The letter is addressed from Vienna by Kastrisios to the metropolitan Gregory in Bucharest, and is dated 27 March 1795. In this document we learn about the details of the materials to be used as well as of the shape and cost for the confection of the mitre of the bishop of Rimniko (in Wallachia). We are grateful to Nikolaos Vryzidis for pointing out this reference.

25. In the Byzantine & Christian Museum's Photographic Archive a photograph (Inv. Nr. XAE 3378) depicts an *epitaphios* from the Metropolitan Cathedral of Agioi Theodoroi in Serres on which the inscription confirms the place and date of confection as follows: VIENNE, 1774.

FIGURE 9. LITURGICAL
VEIL, *EPITAPHIOS*

Photo: Byzantine & Christian
Museum's Photographic Archive
(Inv. Nr. XAE 3378)

Lamentation over the dead body of Christ. Around Him, there is a group of people mourning his death; the Mother of God, women Myrrh-bearers, St John the disciple, Nicodemos, Joseph and the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Behind them is the cross, the crown of thorns, the sponge and the spear. In front of the shrine there are two kneeling angels, the washbowl and the vessel of myrrh. The landscape is depicted in the background. The church of the Holy Sepulcher and the hill Golgotha are to the left of the landscape, whereas, on the opposite side appear the city of Jerusalem and the enclosure containing the open tomb with the angel. Up in heaven there are soaring seraphs, oil-lamps, the sun, the moon and stars. On the four corners of the scene stand the Evangelists and their symbols enclosed in elaborate frames. The edging of the *Epitaphios* is covered by a wide gold floral decorative band in the Baroque style while, on the lower part of the veil, the remains of an inscription give the year 1733.

FIGURE 10.
LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS, CHURCH
OF ARCHIMANDREION
IN IOANNINA

Photo: Kostas Liougos

Regarding the technique used to construct the mentioned *Epitaphios*, there are some basic differences compared to the Constantinopolitan method. The ground textile is completely covered with embroidery, without padding underneath or with a very low relief. It is also noticeable that some areas of the embroidery are separately made, on a different ground textile, and then applied on the vestment (eg. the seraphs and the frames with the Evangelists) (Fig. 10). The flesh is rendered with fine silk thread in split stitch alternated with satin stitch for the facial features and the structure of the human body. Some facial characteristics (Fig. 11), such as the eyes or the lips, are marked linearly by the gaps created between the rows of satin stitches. The hair and beards are made with thicker and twisted silk threads in stem stitch. Furthermore, regular intervals metal threads horizontally aligned are fixed creating a shimmering surface (Fig.12). Additionally, the haloes are made with metal threads applied circularly and fixed in simple couching stitch that forms slightly curved lines. They are also decorated with sequins fixed with *tirtir*.²⁶ Moreover, the whole background of the scene is covered with lightly twisted metal threads using simple couching stitch. The border decoration (Fig. 13) is made with metal thread couched over a layer of cardboard that creates a relief.

FIGURE 11. LITURGICAL VEIL, *EPITAPHIOS*, DETAIL, CHURCH OF
ARCHIMANDREION IN IOANNINA.

Photo: Kostas Liougos

26. Tirtir is made of wire, strip or metal thread twisted in spiral.

FIGURE 12. LITURGICAL VEIL, *EPITAPHIOS*, CHURCH OF
ARCHIMANDREION IN IOANNINA, DETAIL

Photo: Kostas Liougos

FIGURE 13. LITURGICAL VEIL, *EPITAPHIOS*, CHURCH OF
ARCHIMANDREION, IOANNINA, DETAIL

Photo: Kostas Liougos

Two more vestments are attributed to the Viennese workshops. The first is an *Epitaphios* (Fig. 14) treasured in the Church of Perivleptos in Ioannina, dated 1780,²⁷ which bears similar iconographic and technical features as the above mentioned *Epitaphios*. The second is an *epitrachelion* (stole) (BXM 1710) (Fig. 15), from the Byzantine and Christian Museum's collection. This depicts typical iconography seen in Byzantine and post-Byzantine stoles.²⁸ The Apostles are depicted standing under arches within an elaborate gold embroidered frame (Fig. 16). In the lower part, the inscription gives the name of the Archbishop Philotheos Siphnios, of Varna Metropolis and the date 1796.²⁹

FIGURE 14. LITURGICAL VEIL, *EPITAPHIOS*,
CHURCH OF PERIVLEPTOS, IOANNINA

Photo: Kostas Liougos

27. The *Epitaphios*' inscription reads: "ΑΦΙΕΡΩΘΗ ΠΑΡΑ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΚΡΟΜΥΔΗ ΕΝ ΕΤΕΙ 1780" (DEDICATED BY GEORGE KROMMYDIS IN THE YEAR 1780). The commissioner, George Krommydis was a scholar and author from Ioannina, who emigrated to Russia and worked there as a trader. Adamantios Korais greatly appreciated the contribution of Krommydis to literature, see ΠΑΡΑΣΤΑΥΡΟΥ, 2019, p. 10 and 16-21.

28. CHATZOULIS in this volume « À propos d'un epitrachilion de 1664 de la Métropole de Trikkis et Stagon attribué à la broderie de l'École de Constantinople ».

29. The inscription reads "+ΚΤΗΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΟΥ ΒΑΡΝΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΘΕΟΥ ΣΙΦΝΙΟΥ ΑΥΓ΄" (POSSESSION OF THE HUMBLE BISHOP OF VARNA PHILOTHEOS SIFNIOS 1796).

FIGURE 15. STOLE
(EPITRACHELION)
BXM 1710

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

FIGURE 16. STOLE (EPITRACHELION)
BXM 1710, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

Regarding the technique used on the stole, it presents characteristic features noted in the Viennese embroideries. To begin, the embroidery is rather flat than raised. The *epitrachelion* is made on two different ground textiles; the main one is a light blue silk satin, whilst the second is an off-white silk taffetas. The elaborate frames and the arches are made of metal threads couched over a paperboard padding on the satin. The Apostles and their silver-coloured background are embroidered on the taffetas and then applied onto the main ground satin textile of the vestment. The edges of the above-mentioned applied taffetas are covered with curved sequins. Regarding the flesh and the hair, these are made with fine silk threads in satin stitch combined

with filling stem stitch and split stitch. The garments are mainly made with silk threads in pale colours, whilst in regular intervals, metal threads horizontally aligned are fixed creating a shimmering surface as in the previously mentioned veil. The haloes are made with metal threads applied circularly and fixed in simple couching stitch that forms slightly curved lines. These haloes are also decorated with curved embossed sequins fixed with *tirtir*. The terrain, where each Apostle stands is made of lightly twisted metal threads in various colours forming stripes.

As previously described, Greek ecclesiastical embroideries made in Vienna during the 18th century, in certain cases present a completely distinct western iconography showing the artist's preference for dense visual narrative (*horror vacui*) and a somehow realistic depiction of the details with naive facial expressions and soft colours for the garments and the landscape. In addition, the embroidery presents a rather low relief and a preference of silk threads in pale colours for the figures' garments, the details and the background of the scenes. Additionally, Viennese embroideries present a completely different approach regarding the making of the flesh compared to the Constantinopolitan embroideries. Finally, these embroideries are often constructed using two different ground textiles that are later united in one vestment as described above.

An *epitaphios* veil connected with Viennese/Western technique

Next, another *epitaphios* of the Byzantine and Christian Museum's collection will be discussed displaying traits that partly recall those of the above analysed works. The *epitaphios* (BXM 21381) (Fig. 17) presents Christ lying on the shrine, in front of the Cross, while two lamenting angels hover above. The embroidery has been cut off its original ground fabric and applied on a new burgundy silk velvet. At the same time of the embroidery's transfer, the decorated border with the inscriptions was created and the *polos* (roundel)³⁰ was probably applied in the upper right corner of the veil. Its iconography lies far from the crowded arrangements and densely embroidered work previously described in the Viennese workshops. It follows Cretan iconographic prototypes of the 16th-century. To be

30. This *polos* is an 18th century constantinopolitan embroidery. see Byzantine & Christian Museum, PAPASTAVROU, "Embroiderers, Embroideresses & Embroideries in Constantinople (17th-19th c.)", Diary 2018, (BXM 21381 and BXM 21078). PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU 2021 (forthcoming), entries no. 11 and 28.

more precise, Christ's iconography expanded widely in the Ionian Islands,³¹ in Constantinople³² and elsewhere,³³ whereas the angel's form and gesture recall both Byzantine³⁴ and Venetian works.³⁵ In style, though, certain facial features (eyes, eyebrows, nose) recall Viennese embroideries (Fig. 11).³⁶

Regarding the technique, the low relief embroidery is made on an off-white cotton tabby. The flesh (Fig. 18) is rendered with fine silk thread in a long, double stem stitch,³⁷ without following the facial features and the anatomic structure of the human body. The facial features and the body

structure are made with silk thread in couching stitch, while the hair is in split stitch in two shades of brown. The angels' wings are made in long and short stitch with silk threads of different colours that create a smooth chromatic transition. Additionally, metal threads are fixed in regular intervals, horizontally aligned, creating a shimmering surface. The long feathers on the edges are executed in fishbone stitch, using two colours of silk thread. The garments, the haloes, the shrine etc. are made on a low padding with metal threads in simple couching stitch.

FIGURE 17. LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS BXM 21381

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

31. MYLONA, 1998, p. 271, no. 111, icon with Christ lying on the stone of the tomb, and two kneeling angels on each side, dated to the beginning of the 16th c.

32. Vrachimis's *epitaphios* (end of the 17th century). The veil was bought in Constantinople by the Cypriot trader Vrachimis who was active in Venice; now it is kept in the church of St. Marina Analiondas, see PAPAGEORGIOU, 1995. Also the above mentioned aer BXM 21103, Fig. 8.

33. See the antimension BXM 20791 dated to 1801, KARAPLI & PAPASTAVROU, 2014, pp. 227-228, Fig. 11.

34. See the detail of the angel in the Thessaloniki epitaphios: Museum of Byzantine Culture (mbp.gr).

35. The angels in the Crucifixion, painter from the circle of Paolo Veneziano, Muraro, 1970, Fig. 43; *Byzantium: an Oecumenical Empire*, Nr 173.

36. PAPASTAVROU, 2019, photo on p. 21 and on the front cover.

37. The access to the reverse of the embroidery would be illuminating regarding the species of the stitch, but it has not been possible.

FIGURE 18. LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS BXM 21381, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

To sum up, the above mentioned technical details, i.e. the almost flat aspect of the embroidery, the stitches used for the silk threads, the applied materials for the shimmering surface, are features that prove a close relationship to western embroidery workshops. Even if the veil provides iconographical affinities with those that characterise the Eastern Mediterranean pictorial trends of the 17th-18th centuries (i.e., a mix of Byzantine and Venetian traits), there are stylistic and technical elements which seem closer to western European embroidery, using materials and methods of application similar to these of the Viennese workshops of the same period. However, the actual state of research and the fragmentary survival of the original composition do not permit a more precise attribution.

Workshops of the eastern border of the former Byzantine empire

Continuing the analysis and moving to another artistic environment, the eastern borders of the former Byzantine world, we shall face the veil BXM 21108 (Fig. 19) depicting the Lamentation and inscriptions in Georgian read: “The Lamentation” on the upper section and “The dignitary Joseph...” on the lower section.³⁸ The

38. The writers would like to cordially thank Dr. Aftandil Mikaberidze, Director of the Institute of Georgian Studies (Athens), for reading and translating the inscriptions of the veil. The second inscription refers to the liturgical poem (*kondakion*) read on Good Friday.

scene shows Christ lying on the shrine and a group of people mourning his death, following Byzantine iconography. The basic figures of the scene, the Virgin Mary at the side hugging her Son, Mary Magdalene, John the disciple, and Joseph lean over Christ in a semicircular scheme. Moreover, the display of some elements like the cross, the stick with the sponge, the spear, and the ladder held by Nicodemus, creates a focal point in the centre of the composition where Christ

FIGURE 19. LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS/AER BXM 21108

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

Amnos is situated. The rhythmic and harmonious arrangement of the composition shows a sophisticated synthesis. This goes in pair with the elongated, elegant faces, despite the fact that the linear facial characteristics confer a somewhat naïve character to the overall expression.

Concerning the technique, the low relief embroidery is made on a light blue silk satin. The flesh is made with silk thread in split stitch, while the features are created linearly in the same way (Fig. 20). The garments and other details are made with metal threads or silk thread twisted with metal threads in simple couching. The silk threads are in vivid colours giving a chromatic intensity. In contrast, the body of Christ is made of silver metal thread (Fig. 21), whilst the arms of the men in the scene are made of black or red silk thread twisted with silver metal thread. Examples of this practice are found on a much earlier Georgian 14th-century stole,³⁹ as well as on a belt⁴⁰ from the 17th century. This practice was initially a Byzantine trait, as found on the *epitaphios* of the Pantocrator Monastery,⁴¹ as well

39. *National Treasures of Georgia*, 1999, no. 135.

40. *National Treasures of Georgia*, 1999, no. 153.

41. MILLET, 1947, p. 87-89, fig. clxxvi.2; JOHNSTONE, 1967; Θεσσαυροί Αγίου Όρους, no. 11.19, 403-404; CHAZAL, ZYADE, 2009, no. 113, 226, Fig. p. 229.

as on the *Kantakouzenos' epitaphios* from the Vatopedi monastery⁴² on Mount Athos. However, in the present state of research we may assume that it appears rarely in Byzantine pieces of art. But it could be supported that this technique disseminated from Byzantium to its eastern periphery, where it developed until more recent times.

FIGURE 20. LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS/AER BXM 21108, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

The final vestment that will be presented is a composite work, a *petasma* (door-hanging) (BXM 21054) (Fig. 22) that depicts St. John the Baptist standing frontally. He appears winged,⁴³ blessing with his right hand and holding a tablet with his left. The inscription on the tablet reads: *METANOEITE HITIKEN TAP H BASILAEIA TON OYPANON* (Repent the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand). St. John the Baptist is depicted wearing a fleece ending in breeches and a *himation*. On the left there is a bush with an axe (Luke 3, 9) and on the right the saint's decapitated head, encircled by a halo, is placed in a gold basin on a stem. Other inscriptions read: *Ιωάννης ο Πρόδρομος* (John the Precursor) placed over saint John, *Θεοφάνους Ιερομονάχου, Μακαρίου Ιερομονάχου, Δέσις των δούλων του ΘΥ εκ χώρας*

42. *Hiera Megistē Monē Vatopaidiou: paradosē, historia, technē*, 1996, vol. 2, p. 421-424, Fig. 357.

43. On the winged Saint John the Baptist, see LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, 1983, vol. 53, no. 1, p. 78; VOCOTOPOULOS, 1990, p. 122-123; ACHEIMASTOUPOTAMIANOU, 1998, p. 104, no. 28; NICOLIA, 2018, p. 237-238, Fig. 134, with bibliography.

FIGURE 21. LITURGICAL VEIL,
EPITAPHIOS/AER BXM 21108,
DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

FIGURE 22. DOOR-HANGING,
PETASMA BXM 21054

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

Βροντούς (Orison of the God's servants, Hieromonks Theophanis and Makarios from the village of Vrontou) placed on the lower part of the composition.

The main scene on the green silk satin is framed on the three sides with metal thread bobbin lace, while the fourth, inferior side is covered by a long and embroidered piece of fabric. This piece of fabric has a typical Ottoman decoration with tulips and carnations and seems to have originally been a hieratic belt (*ζώνη*, *cintula*).⁴⁴ The wide border around the main scene is made of red silk satin textile and is decorated with metal embossed medals.

Concerning the technique, the embroidery is flat, the flesh of the standing saint John (face and neck) is made with an off-white, two-ply (S twist) silk thread in filling stem stitch that follows the facial structure, whereas the traits, the

44. Among the clergy, the belt (*ζώνη*, *cingulum*) became a symbol of purity and manliness. The higher clerical orders wore the belts over the *sticharion* and the *epitrachelion* symbolizing Aaron's holy belt, see KOURKOULAS, 1991 (2nd ed.), p. 54; PAPASTAVROU & VRYZIDIS, 2018, p. 259-286, especially, 271-273, 286. Regarding the technique, the belt is made of gilded wires on a cotton tabby.

hair and the beard show a detailed work in various stitches of silk thread.⁴⁵ An interesting detail is presented by the very fine cotton (?) tabby under the flesh (Fig. 23), a rather peculiar and unusual kind of padding.⁴⁶ In other parts of the embroidery, such as the hair and areas covered with metal threads, the padding is made of couched single-ply silk threads.

Moreover, Saint-John's limbs are made of wires or metal threads. The legs are covered with groups of gilded wires in basket stitch over a padding of couched silk threads. The arms are made with silver metal threads in basket stitch on a slightly thicker padded layer of couched silk threads. Gilded wires and silver metal threads, both in basket stitch, are used as well for all the other details of the composition (the halo, the *himation*, the fleece, the wings and the tablet). Smaller details are rendered with silk threads in stem stitch (the feathers, the vestments' "pleats",⁴⁷

FIGURE 23. DOOR-HANGING,
PETASMA BXM 21054, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

the bush) or with pearls (the halo, the feathers, the flowers).

The Baptist's head in the basin (Fig. 24) shows a different approach in construction. The face is made of an off-white silk satin, whilst the features are made of a dark brown two-ply silk thread in stem stitch linearly applied. Light and dark brown single-ply silk thread in couching stitch is used

45. The facial features, the hair and the beard are rendered in filling stem stitch with light brown, two-ply silk thread. As for the outlines and shadowing of the face a dark brown, two-ply silk thread in both couching stitch and stem stitch is used whilst, the lips and the cheeks are made of red, single-ply silk thread.

46. Also found on the 19th century *epigonation* (BXM 20834), attributed to a Constantinopolitan embroidery workshop belonging to the Byzantine and Christian Museum's Collection, see PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2021 (forthcoming), entry No 23.

47. The vivid and colourful outline of the garments' pleats is a feature widely used in the byzantine embroidery tradition that has been passed down to the Eastern workshops, see PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2015, figs. 7c, 8c.

for the hair and beard. The “blood stains” are made with a two-ply red silk thread in couching stitch. The stem and the interior section of the basin are made of gilded metal threads in zigzag and basket stitch. In contrast, the front part of the basin is made of a combination of a gilded metal thread twisted around a group of gilded wires applied in basket stitch.

To sum up, the facial and body construction of the St. John the Baptiste embroidered scene is rendered with attentiveness. The technical analysis shows a composite work with a variety in the application of the materials. For example, the construction of the flesh presents three different methods: silk thread embroidery, silk satin textile application and metal thread and wire embroidery. The low relief of the embroidery and the colourful outlines and the garments’ “pleats” show the continuity of the Byzantine tradition.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the silk threads are mostly two-ply and thicker than in the previously mentioned embroideries. Furthermore, the use of metal threads for the flesh relates this piece to the previously discussed Georgian veil. If we consider all the aforementioned characteristics together with the linearity and the somewhat anti-classical character of the forms, we may assume a relationship of this piece to the artistic tendencies of the Oriental periphery of the ex-Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, in the present state of the research we are not able to attribute the previously analysed sanctuary curtain to a more specific workshop.

Conclusions

The above examined art pieces testimony a few of many different currents existing in Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical embroidery of the Ottoman Empire,

FIGURE 24. DOOR-HANGING,
PETASMA BXM 21054, DETAIL

Photo: Nikos Mylonas

48. On Byzantine embroidery technique see PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2015, p. 164-166.

during the 17th and the 18th centuries. To begin, it has been shown so far that the Constantinopolitan workshops built up their specific character on the Byzantine tradition in compound of different elements from the East and West; at the same time local historical, religious, and spiritual factors contributed to the creation of new iconographic forms and techniques. To continue, another current is connected with embroideries of the Viennese workshops, in great demand within the Greek-Orthodox society, that apply a Western iconography, style and technique on ecclesiastical vestments. Lastly, in the example of a Georgian veil, it has been possible to distinguish partly the embroidery tendencies connected with the Eastern periphery of the previous Byzantine territories reflecting in great extend the Byzantine artistic tradition in combination with anti-classical traits.

In the course of this study, the manufacture of two pieces, the *epitaphios* BXM 21381 and the door-hanging BXM 21054, has not been attributed to precise workshops. The iconography and style of the first one are connected with the Eastern Mediterranean artistic trends of the 17th and the 18th centuries; technically, though, it recalls materials and applications of the Western embroidery tradition partly applied in the Viennese works. As for the second one, it demonstrates pictorial and technical affinities to the Georgian veil and hence to the currents of the previous Byzantine East. The open questions about the origin of the two afore mentioned pieces will be answered in the future, if the research continues to consider the iconographic and stylistic characteristics of the embroideries together with the documentation in depth of their technical and material features. This method will help to define the aspects of the different workshops and, of course, ongoing study will bring to light new facts.

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