

EGYPTO-ARABIC EMBROIDERY, 11TH TO 13TH CENTURY

THE EXHIBITION OF EMBROIDERIES AT THE ARDEN GALLERY

BY MARIAN HAGUE

THE first public exhibition held by the Needle and Bobbin Club since the war put a temporary stop to such activities was held at the Arden Gallery, through the great generosity of Mrs. John W. Alexander, from January 28th to February 14th. It was in this same Gallery that the Club's first exhibition of lace took place in the Spring of 1917, and the present one proved as interesting in its way as the earlier one had.

Ancient Embroideries were chosen as the subject for this occasion, and it was decided to show as early examples as could be gathered from those who were willing to co-operate by lending their treasures. Some very rare pieces of the highest quality were collected, giving not only great pleasure to the eye but making interesting subjects of study from the more historical point of view.

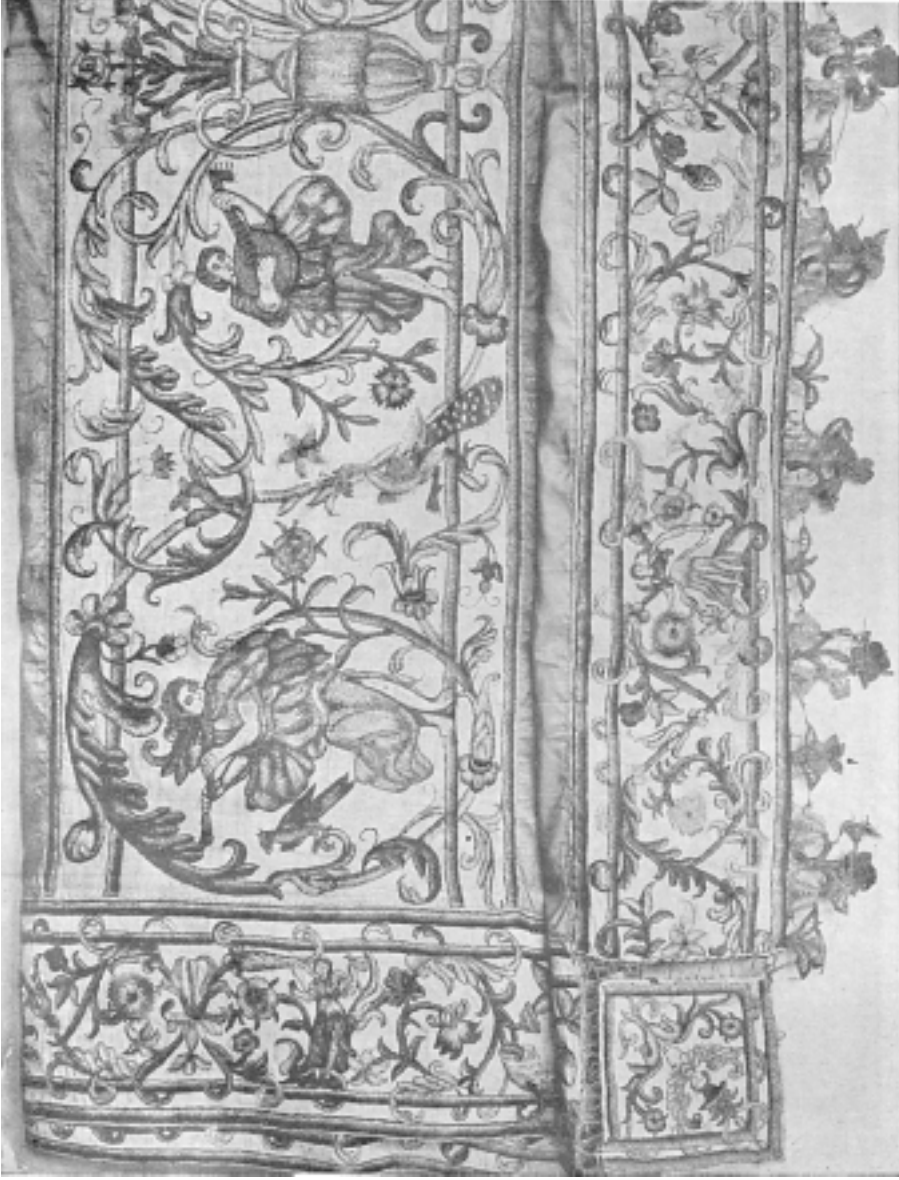
As one entered the room a group of splendid vestments and altar frontals struck the eye with their glow of gold and crimson. The golden altar frontal lent by Mrs. George T. Bliss, worked in every variety of stitch that was used in the elaborately wrought gold embroidery of the 16th century, with its only color in the medallions of saints and bishops, made a beautiful contrast to the crimson of the splendid red

velvet frontal lent by French & Co., which had been made for use in a Spanish Cathedral. Another frontal of about the same period as these two was interesting as showing still a third method of work: Mrs. Bliss's with the ground entirely covered by the gold work in raised and padded designs forming large panels; the one belonging to Messrs. French & Co. worked on red velvet, leaving a large part of the ground uncovered, and this third one, belonging to Mrs. George M. Tuttle, with a design of heavily worked gold branches on a background of solid needlework in "tent stitch" of a very dark greenish silk with leaves and other details in brighter colors picked out with gold.

A chasuble belonging to French & Company had an orphrey with panels of figures equal to the very finest needlework of the Renaissance [see frontispiece], and brought to mind the embroideries designed by Pollaiuolo, which are still preserved in the Duomo at Florence. The figures are worked in that most painstaking of the embroidery stitches which de Farcy, in his monumental work on the art of embroidery, calls "*or nué*" or shaded gold, in which strands of gold thread are laid across the whole surface of the piece and then worked over with fine threads of colored silk till the surface is like a ribbed silk, the gold almost entirely covered by the minute stitches and yet gleaming through and adding its richness to the color.

A Dalmatic, of the Byzantine type, though of 16th century workmanship, reminded one in its arrangement and style of the famous so-called "Dalmatic of Charlemagne" in the Vatican, which recent students of Byzantine art ascribe to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century. This was lent through the courtesy of M. Ducasse. A few small pieces made for use in the Greek Church, worked with great richness in metal thread, with pearls and color in the figures, were remarkable in their richness and color, and all of these Byzantine pieces have a slightly archaic quality which clung so much longer to this work done in Greece than to the Italian work. One of these pieces was lent by Mrs. Alexander, for the others we must thank Mr. Kelekian.

Two lovely pieces belonging to Mrs. George T. Bliss, of somewhat less monumental style than the vestments just described, but of the utmost delicacy and perfection, were the covers, the shape of the typical "Nuziale" or "Care-Cloth" such as was used at weddings to hold over the heads of bride and groom. One was of light-green silk embroidered in silver with arabesques of typical Renaissance form, and with touches



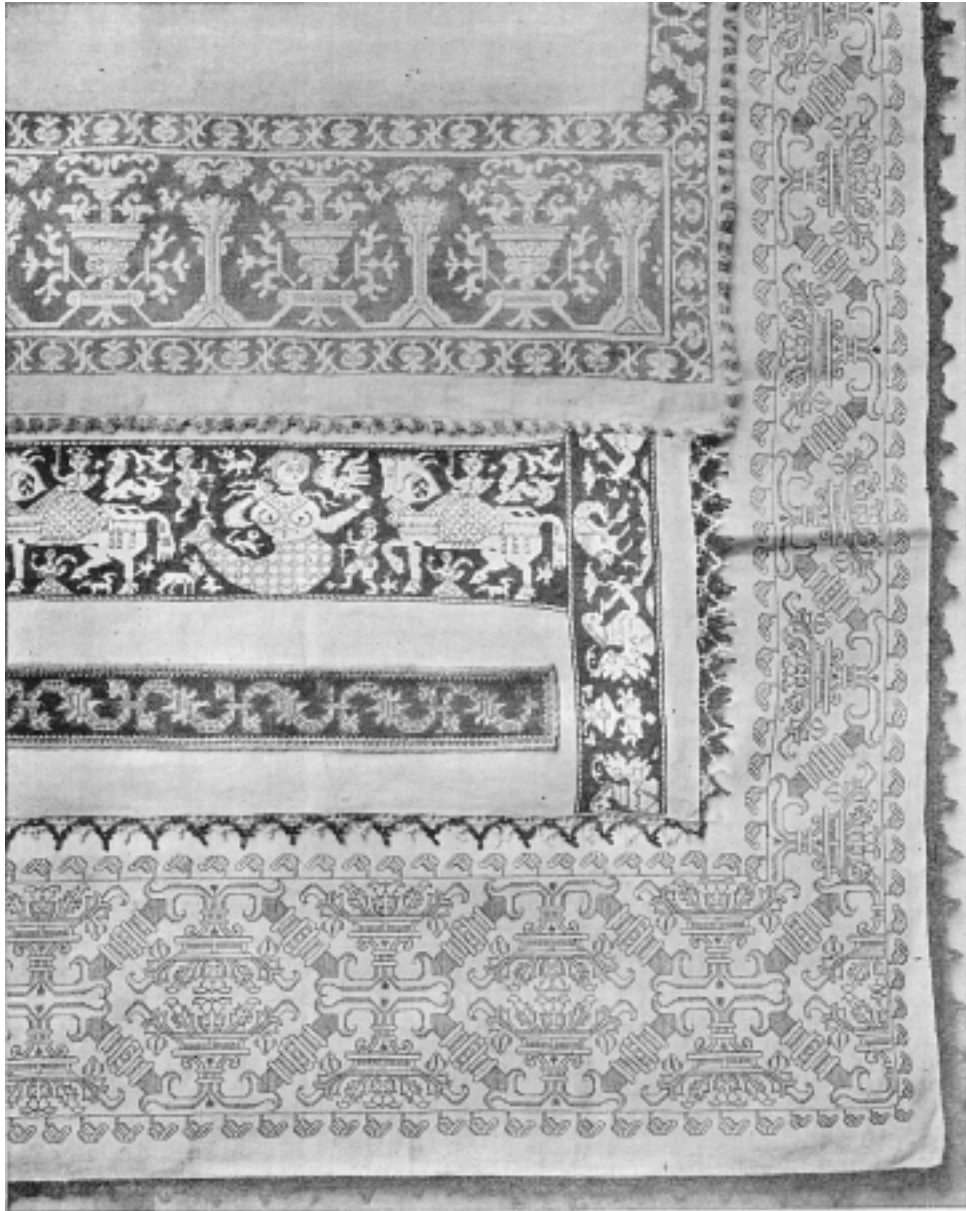
(1) PART OF A COVER WITH EMBROIDERY IN COLORED SILKS AND GOLD ON LINEN, WITH AN EDGING OF COLORED "PUNTO IN ARIA." ITALIAN 16TH CENTURY
LENT BY MRS. GEORGE T. BLES



(2) WIDE BAND OF DEEP AMBER-COLORED SILK WITH EMBROIDERY IN MANY COLORS. ITALIAN OR FRENCH, LATE 16TH OR EARLY 17TH CENTURY
LENT BY MRS. GEORGE T. BLISS



(3) PORTION OF A COVER WORKED IN COLORS AND GOLD ON WHITE SILK, WITH
A NEEDLE-MADE EDGE, LIKE THOSE MADE IN ASIA MINOR
PROBABLY ENGLISH, 17TH OR 18TH CENTURY
LENT BY MISS A. MILES CARPENTER



(4) A GROUP OF LINEN COVERS WORKED IN COUNTED STITCHES IN EITHER
RED OR BLUE. ITALIAN AND SPANISH 16TH CENTURY
LENT BY MRS. DEWITT C. COHEN, MISS A. MILES CARPENTER AND MRS. HARRY MARKOE

of coral color among the scrolls; the other one, with bands of many-colored embroidery on a white linen ground (the spaces between the bands being filled with a light-blue silk), with scrolling vines, among which were placed figures carrying musical instruments—a bass viol, a mandolin, a flute, each one different, and each figure drawn with the movement and billowing draperies of the lovely musical angels in altar pieces of the sixteenth century in Italy. [See illustration No. 1.]

A most interesting piece also belonging to Mrs. Bliss, about three yards long and nearly two feet wide, was of deep amber-colored silk, worked in many colors, with gold, in a design of masks, sphinxes, grotesque figures and animals, of the type of design that was brought to France by Primaticcio and the Italian artists who came to work at Fontainebleau for Francis First, and who might be said to be the forerunners of Bérain. [See illustration No. 2.]

Two exquisite squares for church use were lent by Miss A. Miles Carpenter: one on a white linen ground, the other on crimson silk, and both examples of the perfection of workmanship. The flowers are worked in many-colored silks, with formal design and the naturalistic detail that was beginning to creep into embroidery at the end of the sixteenth century, at the time when Jean Robin was planting his garden in Paris to grow rare flowers for models for designers, and he and Jean Vallet were changing the fashion of the day and bringing about a cult for flowers embroidered from nature.

Each of these pieces had a particularly charming edge—one a “punto in aria” of colored silk and gold needlepoint, the other one a gold bobbin lace whose little, upstanding flowerets are of the type of design that was the earliest successor to the geometrical forms of edgings.

Another piece combining a sort of quaintness with delicate work, belonging also to Miss Carpenter, is shown on page 7. [See illustration No. 3.] The wealth of small birds, animals and insects would suggest that it was English work of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, when there was such a craze for “Emblemes,” and the little needlemade edge is of a delicate and playful workmanship.

A group of lovely bags and purses, lent by Mrs. Albert Blum and Mrs. James Alexander, were charming examples of the work of the “boursiers” and embroiderers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Worked on dark velvets, with gold thread, padded and fancifully wrought, with lovely cords and tassels, some with elaborate shields

of arms and heraldic devices, they bring back the splendor of the nobles and ecclesiastics of those days, and also are wonderful examples of careful craftsmanship.

Several very engaging caps were shown by Mrs. DeWitt C. Cohen, such as were apparently worn by elderly gentlemen, who must have added greatly to the gaiety of life for those around them by so doing.

A beautiful dress, lent by Mrs. J. P. Morgan, Jr., of heavy white silk with embroidery of gold and many-colored flowers and foliage, was full of the glamour of the past. It seems as though Madame de Sevigné's reference to La Grande Mademoiselle in a dress "*brodée et rebrodée d'or*" must have described some such splendid garment as this.

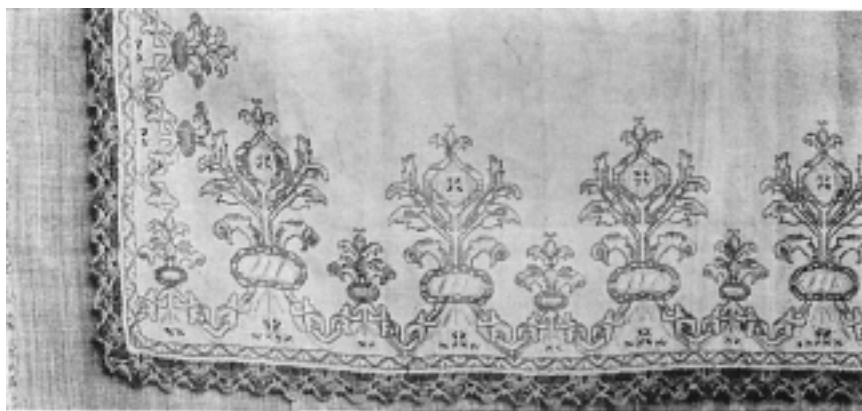
On the west wall hung a group of bedspreads—two lent by Mrs. G. C. Speranza were worked by the peasants of Calabria in rich colors of bronze and yellow and green, in a knotted stitch like tiny tassels, making a plush-like surface, and giving, one would think, suggestions that might be of use in some of our modern revivals of old work.

Near these was a case with bits of embroidered fabrics coming from Egyptian excavations, the earliest dating from about the fifth or sixth century, A. D., with a little figure such as one finds among the Coptic tapestries, worked in what we call satin stitch, in dark-blue and brownish woolen thread. It was probably made to decorate the opening of a garment. Other pieces were such as are found among remains of the Arab civilization in Egypt, from the seventh century to early mediæval times. Most of them show various forms of counted stitches, worked by the thread of the linen ground, like the later Italian "*punto scritto*," and counted darning or running stitch, which looks so much as though it might be weaving that the Spaniards, who learned from the Arabs, called it *Tejidillo*. A few of these Arab pieces are worked in the freer stitches, such as chain stitch, outline stitch, and a sort of catstitch. One piece has eyelets worked in buttonhole stitch and from its design might possibly be ascribed to the fourteenth century. Several pieces were ornamented with more or less conventionalized forms of Cufic characters.

To those who love fine needlework, the Italian linen pieces of the sixteenth century, worked with carefully counted stitches, "*punto croce*," "*punto scritto*," "*punto quadro*," "*punto reale*," always have an especial charm. Of these fine linens which were sometimes considered more humble in their uses, there seemed to be a particularly fascinating group. The illustration on page 8 [No. 4] shows only a few, but Mrs. Markoe.

Mrs. DeWitt Cohen, Miss Carpenter and Mrs. Speranza all showed very perfect examples, marvels of delicately worked exactitude, many with their bobbin lace edges made with the same colored silk as that used in the embroidery—red lace on the pieces worked in red and blue lace with the blue embroidery.

It is well to cherish these lovely things that seem to hold a little immortality for their creators, and to hand them down to posterity so that the younger generations may be inspired with admiration for the workers of the past.



COVER WORKED IN DARK-BLUE AND CREAM-COLORED SILK, WITH CUTWORK AND BOBBIN LACE EDGE. ITALIAN 16TH CENTURY

LENT BY MRS. GINO C. SPERANZA