

On the beginnings of the Constantinopolitan school of embroidery*

Elena Papastavrou, Daphni Filiou

Ephoreia of Antiquities of Piéria
Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens**

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This paper examines Greek-Orthodox ecclesiastical embroidery in Ottoman Constantinople after 1453 until the emergence of the Constantinopolitan School of embroidery. We are well informed about the artistic production that flourished between the last decades of the seventeenth century and mid-nineteenth century via preserved artifacts and inscriptions bearing the embroiderers' signature. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the production between the fall of Byzantium and the last decades of the seventeenth century is lacking. In this paper, our aim is to evaluate whether the Byzantine artistic tradition continued to live in the Greek Constantinopolitan production. The iconographical and technical analysis of different artifacts will give the answer to this question revealing at the same time the foundation basis of the embroidery of that School.

Keywords: Post-Byzantine embroidery, embroidery of the School of Constantinople, Ottoman Constantinople, Greek-Orthodox church embroidery, Constantinopolitan embroidery school

This paper examines Greek-Orthodox ecclesiastical embroidery in Ottoman Constantinople after 1453 until the emergence of the Constantinopolitan School of embroidery. We are well informed about the artistic production that flourished between the last decades of the seventeenth century and mid-nineteenth century via preserved artifacts and inscriptions bearing the embroiderers' signature. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the production between the fall of Byzantium and the last decades of the seventeenth century is lacking. Art historians signal the beginning of the Constantinopolitan School with Despineta, whose earliest known work is dated to 1673 (fig. 1): an *epitaph* of the church of Sts. Theodores in Vlanga, Constantinople, burnt on the 6th of September 1955.¹ Most likely, many relative contemporary artifacts have been



Fig. 1. Epitaph, by Despineta, Sts. Theodores in Vlanga, Constantinople, photo: Mellas, *Μνημοσύνη Β'*, p. 338

destroyed during the last two turbulent centuries of Ottoman history. Moreover, it should also be taken in consideration that a great number of the artifacts housed at the Ecumenical Patriarchate still remain unknown. The present paper will investigate the Greek-Orthodox embroidery production during the two centuries that follow the sack of Constantinople. Our aim is to evaluate whether the Byzantine artistic tradition continued to live in the Greek Constantinopolitan production. The iconographical and technical analysis of different artifacts will give the answer to this question revealing at the same time the foundation basis of the embroidery of that School.

The embroidery in Constantinople after the fall, in 1453

After 1453, the first documented evidence concerning artifacts related to the Greek community of Constantinople comes from the first decade of the seventeenth century and it is a bilingual inscription (Slavonic and Greek) engraved in the embroidered liturgical veil of the

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** epapastavrou@yahoo.gr; epapastavrou@culture.gr; dafilou@yahoo.com; delafis@gmail.com

¹ The first known work of Despineta, the epitaph veil of the church of Sts. Theodores in Vlanga, Constantinople, bears an inscription with her name and the date 1673 (ΑΧΟΓ'). During the episodes of September 6th, 1955, the monument as well as the embroidery were burnt down. The photo of the veil has been published by A. Mellas, *Μνημοσύνη. Κωνσταντίνου Πόλις. Η Εντός των Τειχών Ορθοδοξία, Β', Από Κερατίου εις Προποντίδα*, Athens 2006, 338.



Fig. 2. Epitaph, Secu Monastery,
photo: Broderia Romaneasca, fig. 79

Secu Monastery (Moldavia)² dated in 1608 (figs. 2 and 3): “this holy and sacred veil has been realized at the great expense of the excellent ruler Nestor Ourekia, great Vornic of Moldavia, and of his wife Metrophano and was dedicated to the monastery called Secoul made by the hand of nun Philothei in Constantinople in the year of Lord 1608, 1st indiction, with the aid of lord Ioannakis”.³ According to this inscription, the Epitaph of Secu Monastery was commissioned at the beginning of the seventeenth century to a Greek embroidery workshop in Constantinople. The harmonically organized design⁴ appears to be of a very high quality technique: the threads of the figures’ skin are slim, various stitches were used for rendering the metals and pearls were used for decorating Christ’s and Mary’s nimbus. This high quality piece of art attests the existence of a mature embroidery workshop from as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century. Professor Petre Nasturel⁵ suggested that another series of veils must have been commissioned to Constantinople on the grounds of common decorative similarities (floral motif in the border). Three are found in Susevita: the first is dated in 1597, the second in 1606 and bears the portrait of Jeremia Movila⁶ and the third in 1609 with the portrait of voevod



Fig. 3. Epitaph, detail, Secu Monastery,
photo: Broderia Romaneasca, fig. 80

Symeon Movila.⁷ As far as the earlier period is concerned, Nasturel has attributed a commission of voevod Petros the Lamé (1576/1577) depicting the Anastasis to an embroidery workshop of Constantinople. The artifact is in the Episcopal Museum of Buzau.⁸ But we could attribute many artifacts dated between the end of the fifteenth and the first decades of the seventeenth century and housed in different Romanian monasteries and museums to Constantinopolitan embroidery workshops: an *epimani-kion* with Greek inscriptions of the sixteenth century;⁹ an epitaph belonging to the collection of the monastery of Sucevita (fig. 4), with Greek inscriptions in the interior and a Slavonic inscription on the bordure (1592–1593);¹⁰ an *epitrachelion* with Greek inscriptions (1618) in the Museum of Arts, Bucharest;¹¹ an *aer* with the representation of Threnos (1625–1626) at the Dragomirna monastery;¹² an *epigonation* with the Anastasis (1638) at the Secu monastery;¹³ an epitaphios-veil with Greek inscriptions (1638) in the Museum of Arts, Bucharest;¹⁴ and probably the portraits of the spouse of Vasile Lupu and of his son John (middle of seventeenth century).¹⁵

Due to the historical circumstances, Constantinopolitan embroidery of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine

² P. Nasturel, *L’épitaφιος constantinopolitain du monastère roumain de Sécul (1608)*, in: *Charistērion eis Anastasion Orlandon 4*, Athens 1967–1968, 130–140, pl. LXIII–LXVII.

³ In the lower part of the veil, the inscription reads: Ο ΠΑΡΩΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΙΕΡΟΣ ΕΠΙΤΑΦΙΟΣ ΕΤΕΛΕΙΟΘΕΝ ΔΑΠΑΝΗ ΠΟΛΛΗ ΤΟΥ ΤΙΜΙΩΤΑΤΟΥ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΚΥΡ ΝΕΣΤΟΡΟΣ ΟΥΡΕΚΙΑ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΒΟΡΝΙΚΟΥ ΠΑΣΗΣ ΜΟΛΔΑΒΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΥΖΥΓΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΜΗΤΡΟΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΦΙΕΡΩΘΗ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΚΑΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΝ ΣΕΚΟΥΛΑ ΣΠΟΥΔΗ Κ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΙΑ ΔΙΑ ΧΕΙΡ(ΟΣ) ΦΙΛΟΘΕΗΣ ΜΟΝΑΧΗΣ ΕΝ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΙ; and in the right margin: ΕΝ ε(τει) χ(ριστο)υ αχ(η)ω ιν(δικτιωνος) α(ης) + κο(πω) και συνδρομη κυρι(τ)ζη ιωαν(ν)ακη.

⁴ Unfortunately it was not possible to study in detail the *epitaphios* veil of the Secu monastery.

⁵ Nasturel, *op. cit.*, 133–136, pl. XLIV–XLVI.

⁶ M. A. Musicescu, A. Dobjanschi, *Broderia veche românească*, Bucharest 1985, fig. 74, 75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 68, fig. 81.

⁸ Nasturel, *op. cit.*, 135, n. 6, with bibliography.

⁹ Musicescu, Dobjanschi, *op. cit.*, cat. no. 57, fig. 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 56, fig. 68–70.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 73, fig. 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, cat. no. 74, fig. 85–86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 86, fig. 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 83, fig. 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, cat. nos. 97 and 98, fig. 95–99.



Fig. 4. Epitaph, Monastery of Sucevita, photo: Broderia Romaneasca, fig. 69



Fig. 5. Epitaph, Monastery of Iveron, photo: Karabina-Vlachopoulou, Monastery of Iveron, p. 23-24

periods is better preserved in Romania than anywhere else. We may also assume that the local production was frequently stimulated by Greek artists coming from the capital to establish local embroidery workshops or by imported works of art from Constantinople, usually commissioned by local rulers. This had always been the case regarding Byzantine influences in the periphery of the Byzantine world (e.g. the case of Venice during the middle ages).¹⁶ These direct influences kept Romanian embroidery production close to the principles of Constantinopolitan artistic tradition. If Constantinople had not played an important role as an embroidery center, reaching the Danube Principalities after 1453, the veil of Secu monastery probably would not have been executed and signed by the Constantinopolitan nun Philothei in 1608. Furthermore, the icon-cloth of Gherasim of Galata (1681)¹⁷ or the priest's stole with the portraits of Constantin Brancoveanu and Princess Maria made by Despineta (1695)¹⁸ are indicative of this Romanian custom to commission embroideries to the best workshops of the Capital.

Apart from works of art in Romania, we have additional material at our disposal attesting the continuation of the Byzantine artistic tradition in the Constantinopolitan Greek-Orthodox ecclesiastical embroidery workshops during the sixteenth century. Two pieces of the sixteenth century are traced back on Mount Athos: first, in the Koutloumousiou monastery, there is a *podea*,¹⁹ donation of the prince of Vlachia Vlad Vintila (September 1532 – June 1535); and second, an epitaph distinguished for its high artistic quality²⁰ at the Iveron Monastery (fig. 5). Regarding the first decades of the seventeenth century, there is also a liturgical veil in Jerusalem, published by Maria Theochari.²¹ According to its inscription the commission-



Fig. 6. Embroidered veil, photo: Kerkovian-Achdjian, *Tapis et textiles*, fig. 111

ers were Scarlat and Kokona, ancestors of Alexandros Mavrokordatos, a high official of the Ottoman Empire; the date 1613–1614 is also mentioned. Another embroidered epitaph by “hand of the monk David” in 1637 is kept today in the ecumenical Patriarchate.²² Furthermore, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem²³ has in its collection ecclesiastical embroideries which evidently follow Byzantine prototypes, such as the veil dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul dated 1619,²⁴ the veil of the church of Saint Nicolas in Constantinople (1620)²⁵ and the veil of Saint George of Samatia, Constantinople (1620; fig. 6).²⁶ These artifacts attest for Constantinople's position as artistic center of Christian ecclesiastical production. Armenians could have been clients of Greek workshops or could have been strongly influenced by them. This can be proved, for

¹⁶ O. Demus, *The mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, 1–4, Chicago 1984, *passim*.

¹⁷ Musicescu, Dobjanschi, *op. cit.*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ M. Theocharē, *Υπογραφαί κεντητών επί αμφίων του Άθω*, EEBS 32 (1963) pl. 2.

²⁰ E. Vlachopoulou-Karabina, *Holy Monastery of Iveron: gold embroideries*, Mount Athos 1998, 20–25.

²¹ For a photo of the veil see M. Theocharē, *Ο επιτάφιος του Παναγιού Τάφου*, Athens 1970, 5–17; the study does not deal with the

embroidery itself, but focuses mainly on the issue of the donors' origin. We have not seen the actual artifact.

²² Mēllas, *Μνημοσύνη*, 210.

²³ B. Narkiss, *Armenian art treasures of Jerusalem*, New Rochelle 1979, pl. 179.

²⁴ R. H. Kévorkian, B. Achdjian, *Tapis et textiles arméniens*, Marseille 1991, 120, fig. 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 121, fig. 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 181, fig. 111.



Fig. 7a. Epitrachelion BXM 1022,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

example, by the striking similarity between the *epigonation* of the Etchmiadzin Museum (1713)²⁷ and the Despina's *epigonation* (1696) at the Benaki Museum.²⁸

Taking this information into consideration, the following question arises: to what extent did Greek-Orthodox ecclesiastical embroidery continue the Byzantine tradition?

This question could be answered if we compare the technique of Byzantine embroidery with Post-byzantine

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 136, fig. 129. There are iconographic similarities; however the technique is characteristic of the School of Constantinople.

²⁸ A. Ballian, *Relics of the past*, Milan 2011, 153, no. 43.



Fig. 7b. Epitrachelion BXM 1022, detail,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens



Fig. 7c. Epitrachelion BXM 1022, detail,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

Constantinopolitan production. Beginning, we can refer to a Late-Byzantine *epitrachelion* at the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens (BXM 1022; fig. 7a). It is decorated with figures of saints in medallions, or standing



Fig. 8a. *Epitaph of Thessaloniki*, detail, archive photo: Byzantine and Christian Museum



Fig. 8b. *Epitaph of Thessaloniki*, detail

beneath elaborate arcs with floral motifs, whereas rhombs containing geometrical motifs and fleurs-de-lys appear in the lower register. Despite the damage, especially in the naked parts of the bodies embroidered with silk threads (fig. 7b), microscopic observation revealed the following technical features: 1) the embroidered surface of wires or metal threads is smooth (it is not embossed), although there are very fine padding threads, underneath; 2) the skin, beards, moustache and hair are made with very fine silk threads; 3) silk and metal threads (a silk core and a metal strip wound more or less densely around it) as well as wires are applied (fig. 7c); 4) the wires are worked in groups of three fixed on the sides; 5) we find the combination of a silk thread wound with a wire (or more wires); 6) the contour of some details of the design, such as the draperies, could be made by a colored silk thread (fig. 7c).

The extended damage in the previously mentioned *epitrachelion* forced us to take into account another very well-known piece of art, the veil of Thessaloniki (fig. 8a).²⁹ Decorated with the Christ-Amnos in the middle of two scenes of the Communion of the Apostles it demonstrates perfectly how the embroiderers' needle rivaled the painters' brush. This veil is of particular importance since it is very well preserved. The examination of the technique has shown the following: 1) again here, the labor is not embossed; 2) split stitch is used for the skin and the color contrasts are impressive (fig. 8b); 3) metal threads or wires are couched with undyed silk thread (fig. 8c); 4) in some areas silk threads are wound around wires, giving a special optical effect (fig. 8d).

The next artifact that we will examine is an *epitrachelion* (stole) of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation (figs. 9a and 9b). An inscription informs us that it belonged to the Metropolitan of Chalcedon, whose seat is geographically adjacent to Constantinople. The stole bears the date 1471; therefore, constructed two decades after the political changes in Byzantium it is still deeply rooted in the Byzantine artistic tradition of the Capital, mainly decorated with Dodecaorton scenes in medallions and dragon-like motifs placed in-between. Our assiduous examination on the technique has shown that in the relatively flat embroidery, the padding threads applied under



Fig. 8c. *Epitaph of Thessaloniki*, detail



Fig. 8d. *Epitaph of Thessaloniki*, detail

the metal wires create a very thin core, while the contours of the medallions are more embossed. Occasionally, the color of the couching silk threads is very contrastive (e.g.

²⁹ A. Muthesius, *Studies in silk in Byzantium*, London 2004, 175–206, with bibliography.



Fig. 9a. Epitrachelion, photo: courtesy of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation



Fig. 9b. Epitrachelion, detail, photo: courtesy of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation



Fig. 10a. Epitrachelion, Tatarna Monastery, photo: Koumoulidis et al., *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, p. 88

live purple on light blue) regarding the color surface on which they are applied, a typical Byzantine practice, as we have seen above. Furthermore, systems of three or four wires, wound in S-shape with a silk thread, are fixed in the surface, also according to Byzantine tradition (compare with the Byzantine artifacts mentioned above).

To continue, Tatarna Monastery has in its collection an *epitrachelion* bearing an inscription indicating that it was produced in 1609 in Constantinople (fig. 10a).³⁰ Its embroidered decoration shows the Apostles standing be-

³⁰ I. Koumoulidēs, *To μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας. Ιστορία και Κειμήλια*, Athens 1991, 88.



Fig. 10b. Epitrachelion, Tatarna Monastery, detail

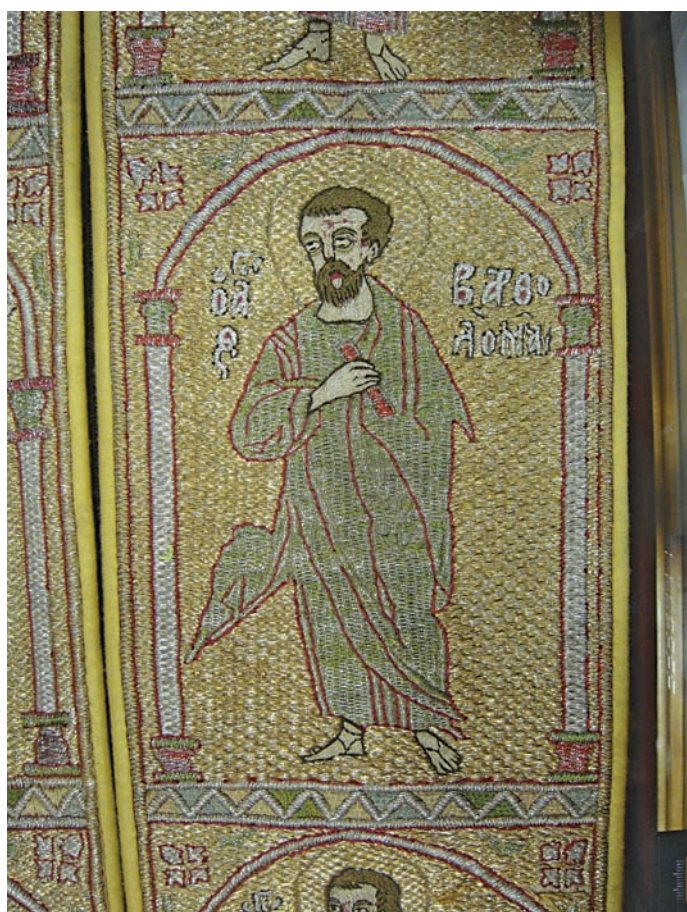


Fig. 10c. Epitrachelion, Tatarna Monastery, detail

neath arches. In the neck, there is a medallion with the bust of Christ as High Priest who extends both hands in a blessing gesture (fig. 10b). The design shows the figures in *contraposto* with floating drapery (fig. 10c). Nevertheless, the simple and rough embroidery work of this stole, contrary to standard scholarly approach,³¹ is unrated to the high quality, sophisticated Byzantine embroidery as far as

³¹ M. Theochare, *Εκκλησιαστικά Ἄμφια της Μονῆς Τατάρνης*, *Θεολογία* (27) 1956, 139-141; H. Vlachopoulou-Karabina, *Εκκλησιαστικά Χρυσοκέντητα Ἄμφια Βυζαντινῶν Τύπων στον Ελλαδικό Χώρο (16^{ος}-19^{ος} αἰῶνας): Το Εργαστήριο της Μονῆς Βαρλαάμ Μετεώρων*, Trikala 2009, 306.



Fig. 10d. Epitrachelion, Tatarna Monastery, detail



Fig. 10e. Epitrachelion, Tatarna Monastery, detail

the materials and technique are concerned. In fact, here, apart from the flesh (fig. 10e) which is by silk threads and the letters of the inscriptions, by wires (fig. 10f), the rest of the whole surface is covered only by metal threads (fig. 10d): a silvered or gilded strip³² is wound around a silk core of different colors. Applied in a straight line and couched by two with silk thread, metal threads create the background, the architectural members and the protagonists' garments. Besides, a characteristic feature of Byzantine embroideries is to be noted: the borderlines of the draperies or contours are marked with colored silk threads (fig. 10d). The Apostles' skin (fig. 10e) is made by satin

³² We do not know if the metal strip is plated silver or silver.



Fig. 10f. Epitachelion, Tatarna Monastery, detail

stitch of rather thick silk threads, while their features are not detailed, made by stitches of dark brown silk over the already made skin. Most possibly, this type of simple and almost raw, “monastic” technique seems to correspond to a current developed parallel to the Byzantine technique described earlier which survived during the Post-Byzantine period. Actually, similar examples to the technique of the Tatarna *epitachelion* could be discerned.³³

A pair of *epimanikia* (figs. 11a and 11b),³⁴ dated 1672 (ΑΧΟΒ), of private collection, shows direct connection with the high level Byzantine technique. The inscription written horizontally in the lower part of the garments³⁵ attests that they have been created for the Ecumenical Patriarch Denys IV. The commissioner, Denys Mouselimes Komnenos,³⁶ a man of good education and taste for luxury – whose first tenure as patriarch lasted from 1671 to 1673³⁷ – is well known for the expensive garments he bequeathed in the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Iveron monastery of Athos.³⁸ He signed on the *epimanikia* as *Byzantine* proudly declaring his descent from a notable family of Constantinople, the place of his birth. This pair



Fig. 11a. Epimanikion of Denys IV, the Baptism, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens



Fig. 11b. Epimanikion of Denys IV, the Transfiguration, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

of *epimanikia* can certainly be attributed to a Constantinopolitan workshop and therefore is an important artifact for our case study. The *epimanikia* are decorated with two epiphany scenes of Byzantine tradition, the Baptism and the Transfiguration respectively. The theological meaning of the representations is highlighted by an inscription in the upper part of the garments: the words of God during the Baptism are written in gold letters: THIS IS MY BELOVED SON.³⁹ Both scenes are placed centrally and are surrounded by columns supporting an arch, while a vase with flowers is located in both sides.

In the Baptism scene of the *epimanikion* (fig. 11a), the standing Christ occupies the main perpendicular axis of the composition where River Jordan runs, while the illuminated dove emerges from heaven. On the left riverside, John the Baptist in a characteristic pose is bending upon the head of Christ; and on the right, four angels are assisting the Epiphany. Some details such as the tree with the axe⁴⁰ or the fishes swimming

³³ For example, the epitachelion in the Iveron Monastery; for a photo cf. E. Vlachopoulou-Karabina, *Holy Monastery of Iveron: gold embroideries*, Mount Athos 1998, 56 sqq.

³⁴ Unpublished. I am indebted to Dr. Apostolopoulos for helping me comprehend the meaning of the inscription on this pair of *epimanikia*.

³⁵ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΑΤΟΥ Κ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ ΑΧΟΒ.

³⁶ On Denys Mouselimes Komnenos, the Bishop of Larissa, cf. *Θρησκευτική και ηθική εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, Athens 1966, vol. 7.

³⁷ M. Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικοί πίνακες*, Constantinople 1884, 595.

³⁸ M. Theodorarē, *Υπογραφαί κεντητών επί αμφίων του Άθω*, *EEBS* 32 (1963) 496–503, pl. 1.

³⁹ Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός.

⁴⁰ This detail appears after the Iconoclasm (G. Ristow, *Die Taufe Christi*, Recklinghausen 1965, 48) and is related to the evangelical saying: “ἡδη δε και η αξινη προς την ριζαν των δένδρων κείται. Παν ουν δένδρον μη ποιούν καρπόν καλόν εκκόπεται και εις πυρ βάλλεται” (Mt. 3.10 and Lc. 3.9).

in the river,⁴¹ as well as the lower part's personifications of Jordan and the See⁴² are connected with Byzantine iconographical tradition.⁴³ This scene is similar to the Baptism in fresco⁴⁴ and icons⁴⁵ at Stavronikita and Pantocrator monasteries (second half of the sixteenth century).⁴⁶ In particular, the personifications of the River and the See with the crown are found not only in the Pantocrator monastery icon,⁴⁷ but also in Northern Greek Post-Byzantine icon workshops.⁴⁸ In other words, the composition is based on a Byzantine iconographical scheme, which was diffused in northern Greece through the painting of Theophanes the Cretan.

On the other hand, the Transfiguration scene (fig. 11b) is organized in two levels.⁴⁹ In the upper level, Christ dressed in white garments and within illuminating aureole appears on the mount Thabor, flanked by Elijah on the left and Moses on the right. In the lower level, the three scared disciples, Peter, John, and Jacob, have fallen on the ground. The Transfiguration (Mt. 17, 2–9; Marc 9, 2–9; Lc. 9, 28–36) is a symbolic scene evoking the rejuvenation of human nature, while the two prophets, Moses and Elijah, symbolize the dead and living humans respectively.⁵⁰ The scene is related to late Byzantine,⁵¹ as well as Post-Byzantine works. It is similar to the iconography of two icons: one by Theophanes the Cretan (1535–1546)⁵² and another seventeenth century found in Arta,⁵³ espe-



Fig. 11c. *Epimanikion* of Denys IV, detail of the Transfiguration, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

⁴¹ In the Baptism scene the details of the fishes swimming in the river refers to prophetic visions related to the generative power of the “live water” and to eschatological symbolisms; cf. H. Papastavrou, *Recherche iconographique dans l'art byzantin et occidental du XIe au XVe siècle: l'Annonciation*, Venise 2007, 278 sq.

⁴² For these personifications, v. D. Mouriki, *The mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, Athens 1985, 136, n. 10.

⁴³ Like in the Baptism of St. Achillios in Arilje (1296), as well as in the Pammakaristos (1310) in Constantinople: C. Mango, H. Belting, D. Mouriki, *The mosaics and frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye camii) at Istanbul*, Washington 1978, 64–65, pl. 5 (Pammakaristos), fig. 117^a (St. Achillios).

⁴⁴ M. Chatzidakēs, *Ο Κρητικός ζωγράφος Θεοφάνης. Οι τοιχογραφίες της Ι. Μονής Σταυρονικήτα*, Hagion Oros 1986, fig. 7.

⁴⁵ A. Karakatsanis, Ch. Patrinelis, M. Theochari, *Stavronikita Monastery*, Athens 1974, fig. 8.

⁴⁶ *Εικόνες Μονής Παντοκράτορος*, Mount Athos 1998, 121, 149, fig. 61, 80.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, fig. 80.

⁴⁸ For example cf. the icon of the Baptism (the eighteenth century) of the collection Oikonomopoulos: Ch. Baltoyanni, *Icons. Demetrios Ekonomopoulos Collection*, Athens 1986, no. 176.

⁴⁹ The two episodes usually related with Christ's and the disciples' ascent and descent on the mountain are absent in our composition.

⁵⁰ See P. Eudokimōph, *Η τέχνη της εικόνας: Θεολογία της ωραιότητας*, Thessaloniki 1980, 228; B. Papadopoulou, A. Tsiara, *Εικόνες της Άρτας*, Arta 2008, 387, n. 55.

⁵¹ G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*, Paris 1916, 222 sqq; Dionysiou tou Fourni. *Η Ερμηνεία της Ζωγραφικής Τέχνης*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameōs, St. Petersburg 1906, 97; see also the Parisian manuscript of Kantakouzinos (fourteenth century.) in: G. Galavarēs, *Ζωγραφική βυζαντινών χειρογράφων*, Athens 1995, 224; as well as the fresco painting in Sklaverochori (1400), Crete; cf. M. Borboudakēs, *Παρατηρήσεις στη ζωγραφική του Σκλαβεροχωρίου*, in: *Euphrosynon. Aphierōma ston M. Chatzēdakē I*, Athens 1991, 378, 388, pl. 196^a, where other similar cases from Crete are mentioned.

⁵² *Εικόνες Μονής Παντοκράτορος*, Hiera Monē Pantokratoros 1998, 104–111, fig. 53.

⁵³ Papadopoulou, Tsiara, *op. cit.*, 139.

cially as far as the pose of the disciples is concerned,⁵⁴ for which numerous variations exist.

The bordure's decoration and garments' background deserve a special note. In the bordure, between two thin bands, a floral motif is unfolded with stem, leaves, and various kinds of flowers. This motif, as well as the various plants, tulips, carnations, daisies, and leaves emerging from the elaborate vase in either side of the central scene, are usually found in the Ottoman art of the same period and later.⁵⁵ Furthermore, there is an interesting detail in the handles of the vases: they are made by semi-*anthemia* combined with masks in profile; a long twisting stem with flower at his end is emerging from the masks' mouth. This is a characteristic theme of Renaissance art,⁵⁶ also found in Italian brocades with Ottoman flavor.⁵⁷

The previous analysis on the iconography of Denys IV's *epimanikia* (1672) has shown that the artistic trends of seventeenth century evident in monuments of North-

⁵⁴ For various examples of the disciples' pose echoing Palaeologan type v. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η μονή των Φιλανθρωπηγών και η πρώτη φάση της μεταβυζαντινής ζωγραφικής*, Athens 1983, 137, n. 374.

⁵⁵ H. Bilgi, I. Zambak, *Skill of the hand, delight of the eye. Ottoman embroideries in the Sadberk Hanim museum collection*, Istanbul 2012, Nos. 42, 44, 45, 46; *Textile furnishings from the Topkapi Palace Museum*, eds. H. Tezcan, S. Okumura, Istanbul 2007, no. 59. The sinuous motif of the bordure bears very strong European influence and becomes also very common in the Ottoman art.

⁵⁶ Cf. Vases of fifteenth–seventeenth centuries: J. E. Poole, *Italian maiolica and incised slipware in the Fitzwilliam Museum*, Cambridge 1995, 54, 59 (for the mask), 46 (for the fictional and hybrid creatures); 55 (for the semi-*anthemia* of the handles).

⁵⁷ A seventeenth century textile from Venice may not represent exactly the motif under discussion, but demonstrates similar types of vases with stems of plants and flowers, as well as, with zoomorphic shapes and masks, cf. D. Davanzo Poli, *Seta & Oro: la collezione tessile di Mariano Fortuny*, Venice 1997, 50, cat. no. 39.



Fig. 11d. *Epimanikion of Denys IV, detail of the Baptism*,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

ern Greece are also favored in the City of Bosphorus. Also, the special features that may be observed in the decorative themes of Ottoman textiles and the combination of Ottoman motifs with the seventeenth century Italian features are also attested in Greek-Orthodox ecclesiastical decorative systems. In the following technical analysis of this embroidery we shall ascertain its deep roots in Byzantine tradition, whereas at the same time some innovative tendencies make their apparition.

The excellently preserved embroidery is a very fine work in smooth surface with materials of high quality: gilded and silver wires and strips, different colors of silk threads, pearls (now missing around the haloes) and a great variety of stitches. Furthermore, the French knots in the bordure of the columns and arches (fig.11d), as well as the golden letters, demonstrate the high level of workmanship of the workshop that executed the patriarchal commission. The skin of the figures is made by fine silk in satin stitch, which resembles somewhat human anatomy, while their features are created with dark silk threads applied on the satin stitch of the skin (fig.11c). In the haloes, bright wires appear in a higher relief, while features, such as water (fig. 11e), are made by a blue silk thread wound loosely with wires (so that we can see the color intermediately). In some places, this system can be associated with two or three parallel wires. We can also see something that does not appear often later, but is derived from the Byzantine tradition: the silk thread for couching is intense blue, so that it contributes to the entire chromatic impression. This game with chromatic impressionism can also be seen in the contour of the columns by using French knots of intense blue silk thread, as well as in the color effects

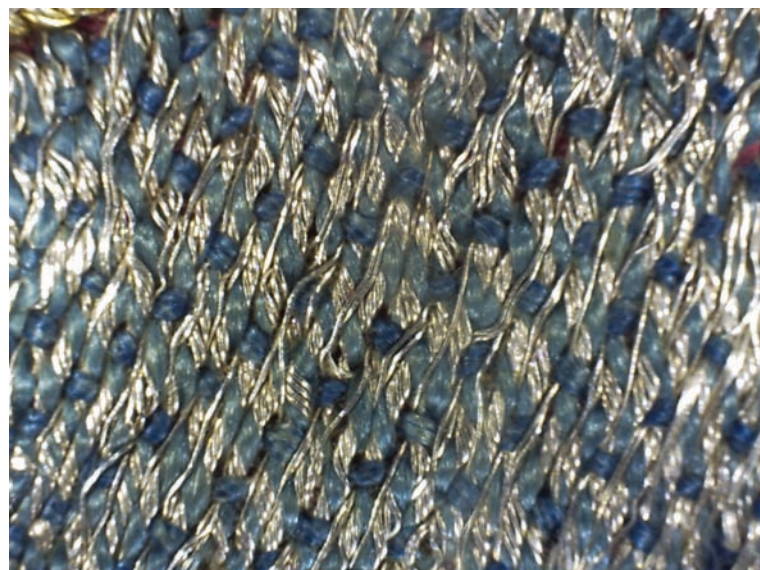


Fig. 11e. *Epimanikion of Denys IV, detail of the Baptism*,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens



Fig. 11f. *Epimanikion of Denys IV, detail of the Transfiguration*,
photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

of the ground. We actually see both: a) silk threads wound around wires leaving intervals; b) the surface covered by colored silk threads (grey, green or brown), above which groups of three gilded wires are couched in the form of a grid allowing the background's color to be seen (fig. 11f). The grid is couched with silk thread of the corresponding color. So, on the microscope it appears as a tabby bar binding with the exposed ground, while to the eye it appears as a bright color surface.

Small details are attentively marked. For example, in the Transfiguration, the hair of Elias is made by a two plied Z-shaped wound silk thread so that they appear curly (fig. 11c). Moreover, other features in this embroidery, such as the plait applied in the contour of the persons or the draperies, the spirals (tirtir) and French knots (fig. 11d), are all features that will dominate ecclesiastical embroidery of Ottoman Constantinople. The concern about depicting “realistically” small details does not characterize Byzantine embroidery in general, but it will appear more often in later centuries, at least in the works of the Constantinopolitan School of embroidery.



Fig. 12a. Epitaph BXM 2119, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

The next veil we will examine is an epitaph⁵⁸ (BXM 2119) of the Byzantine and Christian Museum collection, decorated with a multi-figured composition combining the Lamentation and the Descent from the Cross (fig. 12a). The artifact was donated to the Museum by the Zarifi family, a notable family of the Greek community of Constantinople. This fact combined with the sophisticated technique and iconography of the embroidery prompts us to examine it in this paper, although only the date (AXOB = 1672) is provided by the inscription and not its origin. Before the veil entered the Museum, extensive damage in its lower part had been restored by the addition of an oblong piece of silk along the lower edge of the veil. Damage is also visible where the silk fabric is not covered by embroidery, as well as in the central axis of the composition. Therefore, it is possible to examine the inner textile made of thick cotton tabby fabric. The obverse is covered by a thinner light brown fabric that could also have been added during a more recent period. Curiously, in both scenes the embroidery of the Christ's skin has disappeared completely. It seems that in a later intervention and before the object came into the Museum, somebody had removed completely the partially destroyed embroidery of the body. During a recent restoration⁵⁹ in the Museum a fine tulle has been added on the veil's surface.

The lower part of the veil is dominated by the Lamentation with Christ laying horizontally on the shrine, Virgin Mary in the left side holding the head of her son in her lap and bending over Him; the rest of the people are placed behind the shrine, represented in sorrowful poses. Behind and above the Lamentation, in a second level, Joseph from Arimathea, Nicodemos and John are depicted in process of helping to remove the dead body of Christ from the Cross. Two upright angels with *rhypidia*, placed



Fig. 12b. Epitaph BXM 2119, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

left and right, are slightly bending over Christ, emphasizing the liturgical symbolism of the scene. Beneath the angels a man and a woman without a nimbus are depicted praying in a smaller scale than the angels. Symbols of the evangelists encircled in medallions are placed in the four corners of the veil. In the background, the sun and the moon appear among the stars and the inscriptions.⁶⁰ In the lower part of the veil, the hymn of the Holy Friday,⁶¹ the date AXOB and the commissioner's name, Manoli, are written. The composition is framed by two fine bands of silver wire. Both represented scenes follow iconographical types of the Cretan School of painting.⁶² Stylistically, it is worth noting that the figures and the aristocratic faces are nicely designed, while the composition is harmonic and rhythmic. The Lamentation theme under the Descent from the Cross is almost enclosed in a semi-circular shape, creating thus a compositional type occurring commonly in Constantinopolitan workshops. The association of the two scenes is not very common in liturgical veils of this kind.⁶³ Especially, the fact that both scenes are arranged one behind the other in a relative perspective with focus on the Cross indicates both learned designer and commissioner.

As far as technique is concerned, the following features are characteristic. The light brown satin fabric of the embroidery lined with a cotton fabric bears a relatively smooth embroidery. Like in Byzantine technique, the work of the skin, features and hair is fine and detailed. Moreover, metals are fixed in all types of sophisticated stitches and gold is surprisingly bright, despite of the great damages caused to the artifact. Additionally, part of the garments (fig. 12b) or the book of the evangelists is co-

⁶⁰ Η ΕΠΙΚΑΘΛΩΣΙΣ, Ο ΕΠΙΤΑΦΙΟΣ ΘΡΗΝΟΣ.

⁶¹ Ο ΕΥΣΧΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΣΗΦ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΛΟΥ ΚΑΘΕΛΩΝ ΤΟ ΑΧΡΑΝΤΟΝ ΣΟΥ ΣΩΜΑ ΣΙΝΔΟΝΙ ΚΑΘΑΡΑ ΕΙΛΗΣΕΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΩΜΑΣΙΝ ΕΝ ΜΗΜΑΤΙ ΚΕΝΩ ΚΗΔΕΥΣΑΣ ΑΠΕΘΕΤΟ ΕΤΟΥΣ ΑΧΟΒ ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΜΑΝΟΛΗ.

⁶² For the Lamentation cf. *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art*, Athens 1986, no. 126; for the Descent from the Cross see: M. Chatzēdakēs, *Marcantonio Raimondi und die postbyzantinischkretische Malerei*, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 10 (1940) 154–159, figs. 8 and 6; N. M. Chatzēdakē, *Icons. The Velimezis collection*, Athens 1998, fig. 193, 194; Papastavrou, *op. cit.*, 402, 403, n. 10, 15–17.

⁶³ There are three epitaphios of Serban Kantakouzenos of Valachia dated 1681, depicting the Lamentation and Descent from the Cross side by side. Cf. P. Johnstone, *The Byzantine tradition in church embroidery*, London 1967, 125, fig. 111. An epitaph veil similar to that of the Byzantine and Christian museum is housed in the Museum of Greek folk art in Athens.

⁵⁸ H. Papastavrou, *Un épitaphios brodé du 1672 au Musée Byzantin*, *Deltion ChAE* 20 (1999) 399–407.

⁵⁹ In 2004, Anna Mastromena conserved the epitaph.



Fig. 12c. Epitaph BXM 2119, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens



Fig. 13a. Epigonation BXM 1702, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

vered with combined materials: eight wires are wound in S-shape around one silk thread (in blue or green tones or undyed). On the other hand, what seems innovative in this work is the painter's intervention in certain parts as this may be observed in Nicodemus' hair and beard (fig. 12c) or in the shading of the Virgin's face.

In conclusion, material quality, the work of the skin, the *ethos* of the faces, as well as the complexity of the composition all indicate a high level workshop of the Capital of the seventeenth century, which could be a rival to the one the Patriarch Denys IV would choose to commission his garments. If this conclusion is correct, then we could argue that Constantinople was a very open and receptive center of different artistic tendencies, not only for Northern Greek painting trends but also for those of the Cretan School of painting.

Now we will shift our focus to an *epigonation* (BXM 1702) (fig. 13a) of the Byzantine and Christian Museum, decorated with the Triumphant Pantocrator and made by the famous embroiderer, Despineta; her signature and the date 1689 are visible in the lower corner of the garment.⁶⁴ Actually, in the current bibliography Despineta's work marks officially the beginning of the so-called Constantinopolitan School. We will focus on both the iconography of the composition and the embroidery technique. Does Despineta's work reflect the artistic trends already observed in the ecclesiastical garments we examined above?

In the center of the medallion's diagonal axis Christ is depicted enthroned and surrounded by angelic orders and the four apocalyptic animals. In the upper corner, God is represented with the dove in front of Him; prophets are depicted in the other three corners down to their thighs. The central figure of the composition, Christ, is relatively thin with heart shaped draperies beneath his knees and his feet are placed the one near the other. This image is similar to compositions that influenced Northern Greek painting,

such as the Christ enthroned in an icon of the painter Angelos (second half of the fifteenth century) in Zante⁶⁵ and in a few other icons of the Xenophon Monastery in Mount Athos.⁶⁶ The embroiderer followed the basic lines of the draperies of the type mentioned above, but obviously, the transfer to another technique contributed to a slight simplification of the draperies. Moreover, it is interesting to point out that some details very common in post-Byzantine painting⁶⁷ have Western origin, such as the type of the bust of God with extended arms and the dove in front of Him. Furthermore, the simplistic cherubs' type is also Western and it is found not only in paintings of the Cretan School or in seventeenth century paper icons, but also in Ottoman textiles used by Christians, as in the case of a textile in the Prato Museum or the Jossip chasuble (1642–1652) in Kremlin Armory (TK-10).⁶⁸ On the other hand, the floral decoration of the bordure is made by simple rosettes with five petals seen in ground plan, framed by semi-*anthemia*, which in the corners make a full *anthemion*. Such simple decorative motifs can be seen in works of Renaissance art and early seventeenth century Italy.⁶⁹ Stylistically the faces and bodies have harmonious analogies making the figures look nice. Occasionally the miniature-like faces have spe-

⁶⁵ *Byzantine and post-Byzantine art*, Athens 1986, 99, nos. 100, 101; *By hand of Angelos. An icon painter in Venetian Crete*, Athens 2010, 196, no. 47.

⁶⁶ E. N. Kyriakoudēs, et al., *Ιερά Μονή Ξενοφώντος. Εικόνες*, Hagion Oros 1998, 138, fig. 53.

⁶⁷ *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης. Από τον Χάνδακα ως την Μόσχα και την Αγία Πετρούπολη*, Heraklion 1993, no. 191.

⁶⁸ It is an Ottoman textile of the early seventeenth century, Kremlin Armory (TK-10); N. Vryzidis, *A study on Ottoman Christian aesthetic. Greek-Orthodox vestments & ecclesiastical fabrics, 16th to 18th centuries*, London 2015, 157, fig. 16.

⁶⁹ There are numerous examples in different types of art, as in ceramic painting or faience, cf. the leaves and the rosette in the basin (Deruta, 1530–60), J. E. Poole, *Italian maiolica and incised slipware in the Fitzwilliam museum Cambridge*, Cambridge 1995, 198, 199, no. 272; cf. *Ibid.*, pls. 38, 55, 59.

⁶⁴ Διά χειρός Δεσποινέτας του Αργύρη εν έτει ΧΥ Αχπθ'.



Fig. 13b. *Epigonation BXM 1702, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens*

cific facial characteristics and expressions (e.g. the prophet David (fig. 13b) or the angel (the head measures ca. 1 cm high), which demonstrate Despineta's embroidery skill and also the skills of the composition's designer. Furthermore, the movements and the relative naive facial expressions of a few figures (e.g. David) remind us scenes of a seventeenth century psalter of the Byzantine and Christian Museum, which belonged to Luke, Metropolitan of Hungroblachia (BM 3126/Xφ 203),⁷⁰ or of a codex in the Iveron Monastery, dated 1686.⁷¹

Therefore, the present iconographic and stylistic analysis has offered all the necessary evidence to establish that the composition is embedded in the Byzantine and Post-byzantine iconographical tradition as defined in the Orthodox world of the seventeenth century. Actually, this piece of art is connected with the Northern Greek and Balkan artistic environment. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out once more the Italian influence, so important in Ottoman Constantinople during the seventeenth century, as we have been able to detect by examining the decoration of the garment's bordure.

The next step is to analyze the technique of this embroidery. The fine, smooth and sophisticated artifact made by silk threads and silver or gilded wires is directly related to Byzantine embroidery. Thus, the haloes and the parts of the garments (fig. 13c) worked by wires present various stitch types, whereas plaits of wires are used for the contours and in the draperies. The flesh (fig. 13e, 13g) by split-stitch following the anatomy and creating the effect of a painted surface is a technique we find in Byzantine embroidery. The same also occurs with the features rendered with dark silk threads especially for the contour. Furthermore, several other details of this embroidery remind us of artifacts of the Palaiologan era,⁷² as for example, the various combinations of materials in order to render a special visual effect. Thus, the aureole around the Pantocrator (fig. 13d, 13h) is made as follows: around a silk thread of blue-green color, two silver wires in S twist are winding sparsely so that the space in-between gives



Fig. 13c. *Epigonation BXM 1702, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens*



Fig. 13d. *Epigonation BXM 1702, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens*

out a colorful effect. This combination is looped in double. The optic result is a flat but "agitated" surface which renders the texture of the ethereal aureole. Similar combinations are applied also for the seraphs' background: five silver wires are winding in S twist around a silk thread without leaving big space in-between. In that way, here, the surface becomes shinier and the color tone different.

⁷⁰ *Post-Byzantium: the Greek Renaissance: 15th-18th century treasures from the Byzantine and Christian Museum*, Athens 2002, 202, no. 51.

⁷¹ *Treasures of Mount Athos*, Thessaloniki 1997, 566, no. 21.7.

⁷² Cf. the *epitrachelion* BXM 1022, as well as the epitaph veil of Thessaloniki, previously mentioned.



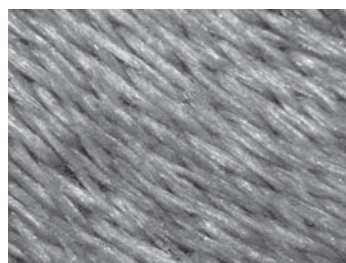
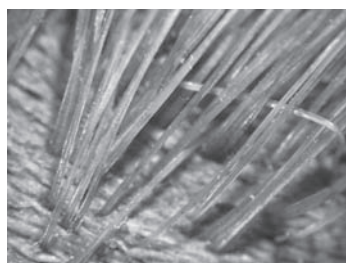
Fig. 13e. Epitaph BXM 2119, detail, photo: Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens

On the other hand, Despineta adopts some innovative features, such as the surprisingly big variety of stitches applied to render details more “realistic”. For example, for the eyebrows, the beard and partly the hair of Christ (fig. 13e, 13f) a special silk thread is in use previously bathed in a kind of varnish (shellac?), procedure that has given to the silk thread the impression of the texture of the hair. Again, another interesting detail is the seraphs’ curly hair (fig. 13i) made by bundles of brown or yellowish silk threads wound with wires and fixed in spiral (fig. 13d). Lastly, like in the *epitaph* previously examined, the painter’s stroke on the flesh of the embroidered figures can be encountered on the faces and hands of the prophets, which are covered with colorful varnish (fig. 13b).

To sum up, the previous analysis of Despineta’s work presents an *epigonation* created in a very well organized

workshop established in an artistic, intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, and financial milieu of high level. Firstly, the iconography of the composition is a testimony that the commissioner had some theological knowledge; it also attests that the designer of the composition was not only aware of accomplished works of painting originating from the artistic production of Greece and the Balkans during the seventeenth century, but also that he was a gifted master able to apply this design on textile. Secondly, the flat/smooth technique of the work as well as all types of combination of silk threads with wires or strips come from the Byzantine tradition. Nevertheless, the great variety of the technique methods applied by Despineta is surprising. Subsequent works do not exhibit this variety, but more standardization instead. Despineta used very expensive materials (silver and gilded wires, silk threads). Furthermore, the correct spelling of the inscription with the embroiderer’s signature shows someone with proper knowledge of grammar. We do not know whether the embroiderer would intervene in the pattern she would execute, but the collaboration between the designer and the embroiderer is obvious. Our examination of technique has shown that, contrary to the established scholarly opinion, Despineta’s artistry stems from Byzantine tradition. Finally, the high quality of the design combined with the perfect execution by the embroiderer show that ecclesiastic embroidery art in Constantinople had reached its pick already in the second half of the seventeenth century, as expressed by the hand of Despineta.

In this paper we attempted to investigate a) whether embroidery was produced in Constantinople during the period that goes from 1453 until the late seventeenth century; b) if this production was important enough to ensure that the former Byzantine capital continued to be an embroidery center during the same period; and c) if the Byzantine artistic tradition constituted an important component of the embroidery production of the Greek community. Answering these questions, we may now conclude as follows: it seems that Greek workshops did not only continue to produce, but also played a prominent role. Examples such as the *epitrachelion* of the Metropolitan of Chalcidon, 1471 (PFF), the epitaph veil of the Iveron Monastery and the artifacts treasured in Romania mentioned in this study attest that between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries Ottoman Constantinople was an important Greek-Orthodox embroidery center open and receptive of different pictorial tendencies. Besides, comparing the technique of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Constantinopolitan embroideries has shown that the latter was deeply rooted in the former. The same methodological process of comparison has also contributed to comprehend different artistic levels among the artifacts as well as to discern to what extent the artistic making remained attached to the previous tradition and to what extent it proceeded to proper innovations corresponding to a new *Zeitgeist*.



Figs. 13f–i. Epigonation BXM 1702, details, photo Byzantine & Christian Museum

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О почецима цариградске школе уметничког веза

Елена Папаставру, Дафни Филију

Продукција уметничког веза која је цветала у Цариграду између последње деценије XVII и средине XIX века добро је позната захваљујући сачуваним уметничким предметима и натписима с потписима везилаца. Историчари уметности почетак цариградске школе везују за везиљу Деспинету, чији је најранији познат рад датован у 1673. годину. То је покров из цркве Светих Теодора у Вланги (Цариград), који је изгорео 6. септембра 1955. године. Ауторке текста, међутим, покушавају да утврде да ли је грчко-православни уметнички вез стваран у Цариграду и раније, то јест између 1453. године и позног XVII века. Истраживање показује да су грчке радионице током тог раздобља имале истакнуту улогу. Примери поменути у овој студији – епитрахил из Митрополије у Халкидону (1471), покров у манастиру Ивируну и уметнич-

ка дела која се чувају у Румунији – сведоче о томе да је између XV и XVII века отомански Цариград био значајно средиште грчко-православног уметничког веза, отворено и пријемчиво за различите ликовне токове. Поред тога, поређење технике византијског и поствизантијског цариградског уметничког веза показало је да је поствизантијски вез дубоко укорееен у византијском. Исти методолошки процес поређења допринео је и разумевању различитих уметничких нивоа достигнутих у делима, као и поимању мере у којој је уметничка продукција, с једне стране, остала повезана с традицијом и оне у којој је, с друге, наставила са увођењем измена у духу новог времена.