

A TEXTILE OF THE YEAR 1741  
IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
BEARING AN ARMENIAN INSCRIPTION

by

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The collection of the Library of Congress contains a piece of ecclesiastical embroidery bearing an Armenian inscription. The following description has been prepared with the cooperation of Dr. Mattiebel Gittinger, Research Associate in the Textile Museum and Ms Sumru Belger Krody, Assistant Curator, Eastern Hemisphere Collections of the same Museum who examined the textile and the technical description given here is the result of their counsel. The writers' thanks are also extended to Ms Yasmeen Khan of the Conservation Department of the Library of Congress for manifold kindnesses and gracious cooperation as well as for invaluable technical assistance.

*Dimensions*

The textile measures 16.7 cm wide and 63.4 cm long. On it an embroidered design may be observed composed of the following elements. (1) A horizontal line runs all the length of the piece, 2 cm from the top. It is embroidered predominantly in golden / yellow thread (see below). (2) Beneath the line, from left to right, may be observed two embroidered crosses measuring 8.3 cm wide and 10.3 cm high. (3) To the right of the second cross is an image of the Virgin holding the Child Jesus, seated on a throne, measuring 8.1 cm wide and 10.3 cm high. (4) Two stars flank the Virgin, the diameter of which is 3.3 cm. The left-

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hand one, which has eight spokes, is 3.1 cm and the right-hand one with six spokes is 3.3 cm from the top of the textile. The stars are 3.6 cm to the right and left of the Virgin<sup>1</sup>. (4) On the right of the image of the Virgin is another cross, measuring 8.6 cm wide and 10 cm high.

Below the image of the Virgin are two lines of writing. The letters are, on an average, 2 cm high and 1.5 cm wide. The base of the upper line is 3.5 (3.25) cm from the bottom edge of the cloth and is centered on either side of the throne of the Virgin (24.2 cm from the left edge and 11.8 cm from the right edge). The second line of writing runs virtually the full width of the cloth (0.5 cm from the left edge and 3 cm from the right edge) and its base is 0.7 (0.5) cm from the bottom of the cloth<sup>2</sup>. Below it is the debris of yet another framing line which runs almost at the bottom of the textile, to its full width.

### *Textile*

The ground is of silk velvet. Both the warp and the woof are of silk threads. The nap is rubbed and missing from most of the surface of the textile. It is torn vertically to nearly all its length in one place and has been repaired. A cloth backing has been tacked onto the rear of the cloth. It appears to be secondary and might be related to the secondary use (perhaps framing) of this textile.

The embroidery is executed in metallic wrapped threads with a silk core. There are two types of such threads, a thinner one which is metallic thread wrapped in an "S" direction, and a thicker one with a core of two or three silk yarns, wrapped in a "Z" direction. Along the bottom edge are remnants of a bordering line like that towards the top of the textile and underneath this, a glue-like substance, perhaps from secondary mounting. On the arms of the cross and at its central point, glass beads have been sewn, five in all. These are blue in color and a hole has been drilled through their width through which they have been sewn into position. A number of these beads, which may be of glass, have fallen.

The right-hand edge of the textile was examined closely for evidence that another piece might have been joined to it. This was suggested because of the asymmetry of the number of crosses and because there appears to be a vertical line in the nap very close to the right-hand edge of the textile. However, the expert examination revealed that there had

<sup>1</sup> In fact, on the left, it is 3.3 cm from the scepter and 5.2 cm from her shoulder.

<sup>2</sup> Measurements were taken to the edge of the piece, since the debris (see below) is on the cloth itself. The measurements without the debris-laden edge of the cloth are in parentheses "()".

been no further piece sewn to the right-hand vertical edge. The embroidery does not go all the way to the edge of the textile and there are no signs of a join.

It seems likely that the textile was secondarily mounted, perhaps in a frame. This was suggested by the glue-like substance along the bottom and the vertical line of rubbing in the nap. The backing may have derived from the same secondary mounting.

Thus the textile first served as part of an ecclesiastical garment or appurtenance. Apparently, it was subsequently mounted in some way and that resulted in the thick glue on the lower edge, and perhaps in the vertical line in the nap at the right-hand end.

### *The Virgin and the Child*

The Virgin and the Child are seated on a throne of blue-green clouds. The clouds are stylized and represented as ovoid disks, a feature found in Armenian manuscript illumination, and typical of the style of Constantinople. The central disk, below the throne, may be the sun, which sends its rays into the clouds.

The Virgin is wearing a crown, surrounded by a halo, and holds the Child on her knee. In her right hand she has a scepter, which is divided into three. In his left hand, the Child is holding at a somewhat unclear object that appears to be a blue globe. He is making the sign of blessing with his right hand. The clothes are yellow colored but when examined through the microscope there are also blue threads. Both faces are very clear. The artist used black and red thread to mark the features.

### *The Inscription*

The inscription is embroidered in two lines. The text is

*Ս[ՈՒՐ]Բ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏԻՆ:*

*Յ[Ի]Շ[Ա]Տ[Ա]Կ Է ՄԵՍՐՈՔԻ ԿՈՂԱԿԻՑԻ ՄԱՆՈՒՇԿԻՆ ԵՒ  
ՄԱՆՈՒԿԻՆ ՂԱԼԱ ԾՌՂԻ*

For [the Church of] St. Karapet

It is a memorial of Manušik, Mesrop's wife, and of the child Łal in  
(the year) 1190 [A.E. = 1741]

The script is Armenian uncials (*erkat'agir*). There is one standard abbreviation, a number of cases of omission of inter-consonantal vowels for abbreviation's sake, of raised letters, and many instances of ligatured letters (*kapagir*). An elongated dot is used as a word divider. From the paleographic point of view the inscription is in no way remarkable for its time and medium. Such dedications tend to be written in fairly short and ligatured form, so a dedication in this style is standard.

The inscription bears a date, 1741, but the issue of provenance remains open. Dr. Gittinger excludes an Indian provenance and consequently the most likely suggestions seem to be somewhere in Turkey or Turkish Armenia or else in Iran. We incline, tentatively, towards the former possibility, on grounds of certain features of the iconography of the image. Ms Sumru Belger Krody suggested that the embroidery was not at odds with such a supposition.

The name ՄԱՆՈՒՇԿԻՆ *Manuškin* is to be taken as a genitive singular with the demonstrative *n* which serves as a definite article. This name must be *Manušik* or the like, with reduction of the last vowel, regular in Ancient Armenian<sup>3</sup>. This form of the name does not occur in Ačaryan's onomastic dictionary, but he does give մանուշքան *Manuškan*<sup>4</sup>. The name Łala is not usual and is not listed by Ačaryan, who however does record a name Łalabek<sup>5</sup>. The form ՅՌՂԻ is taken as the date with the oblique case suffix *-ի*.



1. Armenian Textile of the year 1741

<sup>3</sup> Note that the word *կողակիցի* "wife" in the genitive does not have this reduction. This reduction is not always shown in Western Armenian dialects.

<sup>4</sup> H. Ačaryan, *Hayoc' Anjanunneri Bařaran* (Dictionary of Armenian Names; Beirut; Sevan Press, rpr. 1972), 3.243.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v.



2. Detail of the Virgin