

The Needle's Excellence: Ottoman Embroideries, March 24, 2000-June 18, 2000

The textile arts in Ottoman Turkey encompassed luxurious woven silks, woolen pile carpets, professional embroideries in silk and metallic yarns on velvets and plain silks, and domestic embroideries in silk and metallic yarns, on linen or cotton grounds. Of these types of textiles, the domestic embroideries have, until recently, been the least studied.

Embroideries in silk yarns on a linen ground tended to be for domestic use: decorative, but retaining a functional element. Textiles large and small, for apparel, utility, or household furnishing, were all decorated with needlework. Design elements were generally disposed to follow the function of the cloth. Long rectangles with plain centers and embroidery confined to the ends were meant to be used as sashes, napkins or towels, depending on the width of the cloth. Large scale floral designs in which all the flowers "grow" in the same direction were probably used as wall hanging or bed covers. Square cloths with central designs and borders oriented toward the corners may have been scarves or wrapping cloths.

Design elements follow those from other textile forms and other Ottoman decorative arts, such as the ceramics displayed in the case in the center of the gallery. From the late 18th century onward, European influence can be seen in the use of architectural elements, shading within motifs, and lighter colors.

The textiles displayed in this gallery were probably all worked by women, but not necessarily for personal use. Skilled needlewomen were often commissioned by others to make special pieces. Most women embroiderers worked in their homes, but around the mid-19th century, women (especially non-Muslims) started working in factory-like workshops. In materials, function, and design, this type of embroidery is urban art.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Turkish

Towel, late 1800s

Linen, silk, metallic yarns; 2/2 twill weave, supplementary warp loop pile, embroidery

Bequest of A. Alice Bridge 23.309

Towels with bands of pile loops and decorated ends were used by women on visits to the communal bath house. Each stage of the bath required a different type of towel, usually in sets. "Terry" towels such as this and the one in the neighboring case were draped around the hips and shoulders to absorb moisture. Care was taken to arrange the towels to show off the embroidery.

Floral sprig motifs made up a central rose flanked by hyacinth stems were often used in embroidery, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Towel, early 1900s

Cotton, silk, metallic yarns; 2/2 twill weave, supplementary warp loop pile, embroidery

Gift of John Davis Hatch in honor of Olivia Eggleston Phelps Stokes
1991.013.2

Bath towels are among the embroidered textiles that required reversible decoration. Because the cloths were meant to be seen from both sides, the stitches most commonly used were double running, satin, and stem. Sets of decorated bath towels were a status symbol among urban Ottoman women.



Turkish

Napkin or Yağlık, late 1700s

Cotton, silk, metallic yarn; plain weave, embroidery

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.562.4

During the 18th century, influences from western Europe, such as architectural elements separating elements of the composition, are often seen in the domestic Ottoman embroideries. In this piece, the niches are combined with traditional Turkish motifs: cypress trees and urns filled with fruit.



Turkish

Hanging or quilt cover, late 1600s- early 1700s

Linen, silk; plain weave, embroidery (atma stitch)

Gift of Daphne Peabody Murray 82.289.26C

The embroidery stitch known in Turkey as atma is used in this large hanging. Atma is the composite stitch, combining single-faced satin stitched with an overlay of self-couching stitches. The resulting embroidery is very dense, but is not reversible. Atma was an economical use of silk embroidery threads, used on textiles in which the reverse face would not be seen.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Towel, early to mid 1800s

Cotton, silk, metallic yarns; plain weave, needle lace, embroidery
(double running stitch, satin stitch)

Gift of Mrs. Robert Fairbank and Mrs. Donald Crafts 1988.096.47

19th century designs for domestic embroideries tended to be somewhat less stylized than earlier work. This embroidery combines fruit trees with flowers, perhaps suggesting a garden along a riverbank.



Turkish

Towel, mid 1800s- late 1800s

Linen, silk, metallic yarns; plain weave, embroidery

Gift of Morgan and Katherine Cutts 1999.61.2

The patterned borders of these two ceremonial towels are identical except for slightly darker shaped of the same colors in the towel on the left⁶. Examination of the stitching indicates that both of them were probably made by the same professional embroiderer, in a workshop setting.

Towels such as these were commonly found in urban Turkish homes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were generally used for display, or for ceremonial washing at the beginning or end of a meal.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Pillow cover, 1920s or 1930s

Cotton, silk; plain weave, embroidery (atma stitch, herringbone stitch)

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.196

The design of this embroidery refers back to the palmette and çintamani motifs common in 17th and early 18th century Ottoman textiles. The heavy cotton ground fabric and the coarse silk embroidery yarns, place it in the early 20th century. The relatively unsophisticated design and workmanship suggest that it was not made in a major urban center.



Turkish

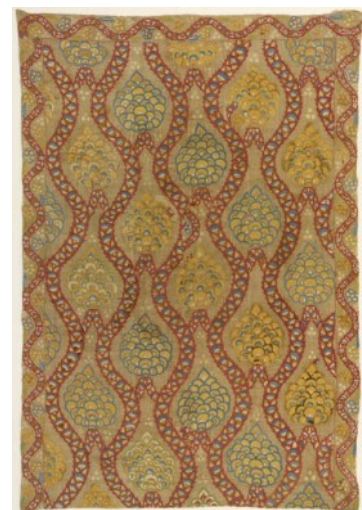
Hanging or quilt cover, late 1600s-early 1700s

Linen plain weave with silk-yarn embroidery

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.563

One of the earliest Ottoman embroideries in the RISD collections, this hanging has typically Turkish design elements: opposed meanders with imbricated scales, artichoke palmettes, and the çintamani motif of 3 balls or crescents. The dense patterning and predominance of blue, red, green, and yellow are stylistically associated with the 17th century.

The panel is missing its lower border. It has also been patched in several places, probably with pieces taken from that border.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Bohça (wrapping cloth), 1600s or early 1700s

Linen, silk; plain weave, embroidery (5/1 running stitch)

Gift of Mrs. Robert Fairbank and Mrs. Donald Crafts 1988.096.44

Bohça were used to wrap and protect clothing and other textiles, either for storage or transportation. Garments were folded and placed in the center of the cloth, on the embroidered side, and the corners were folded in over the garments, making a compact bundle. The embroidery technique used here, closely spaced rows or running stitches with a long stitch taken on the face and a short stitch on the reverse, is not reversible. The cloth was originally lined with another textile, now missing.



Turkish

Fragment of hanging or quilt cover, late 1600s-early 1900s

Linen, silk; plain weave, embroidery (double running stitch, self couching)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.556

The formal branching floral and palmette pattern of this embroidery is common to other types of Ottoman textiles, particularly woven silk velvets and damasks. Large embroidered textiles were either used as wall hangings, or were loosely sewn to the top of a bed quilt as a decorative element. The fashion for this type of furnishing textile did not last much past about 1800.



Turkish

Napkin or Yağlık, late 1800s

Cotton plain weave with silk- and metallic-yarn embroidery

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.562.5

Decorated napkins such as this one were ceremonial objects, placed on the lap of guests at a meal, but not generally used. The pulled work is a feature of 19th century embroideries. It creates tiny open squares in the ground of the cloth, a delicate addition to the dense floral motifs.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Towel, mid 1800s-late 1800s

Linen, silk, metallic yarns; plain weave, embroidery

Gift of Morgan and Katherine Cutts 1999.61.1

The patterned borders of these two ceremonial towels are identical except for slightly darker shaped of the same colors in the towel on the left⁶. Examination of the stitching indicates that both of them were probably made by the same professional embroiderer, in a workshop setting.

Towels such as these were commonly found in urban Turkish homes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were generally used for display, or for ceremonial washing at the beginning or end of a meal.



Turkish

Pillow cover panel or Mirror cover, late 1700s

Linen, silk; plain weave, embroidery (double running stitch, self couching stitch)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.557

The red silk yarns used in this embroidery are a link between the 17th century color tradition illustrated by the 3 large hangings in this gallery, and the 19th century use of a lighter palette. The 3 double branched stems display rosebuds, drawn in the stylized manner characteristic of 18th century embroideries.



Turkish

Napkin or Yağlık, late 1700s-early 1800s

Cotton plain weave with silk- and metallic-yarn embroidery, trimmed with metallic needle lace

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.562.10

Roses were on the preeminent motifs in the 18th century embroideries. The borders of this towel show roses in full bloom, in bud, in profile, and full face. The careful shading of colors within a motif was adopted during the 18th century from European woven silks.



RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

Mat made of towel borders, mid 1800s

Cotton, silk, metallic yarns; plain weave, embroidery (double running stitch, satin stitch)

Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.433

The end borders of a single towel were cut off and sewn together to make this mat. Collectors outside of Turkey often did this to make use of the most decorative portions of the towel, discarding the plain center sections.

The colors used in this piece, particularly the use of browns, indicate a mid-19th century date. The rose and cornucopia design was popular beginning in the 19th century.



Turkish

Pillow cover, late 1700s-early 1800s

Linen, silk; plain weave, embroidery (atma stitch, double running stitch, satin stitch)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.558

The narrow rectangular shape, line borders, and use of a non-reversible stitch indicate that this textile was originally lined with another fabric, and was used as a pillow or bolster cover. The light colors and airy design suggest a late 18th or early 19th century date. The atma stitch is unusual in 19th century embroideries.

