

EMBROIDERY AND LACE OF OTTOMAN TURKEY



THE ROYAL SCOTTISH MUSEUM
CHAMBERS STREET EDINBURGH

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I EMBROIDERY

Turkey has long enjoyed a textile tradition of remarkable vitality and richness seen both in the carpets, brocades and robes created for the Sultan's court which have survived mainly from the 16th-19th centuries of the Ottoman Empire and in the colourful household equipment and animal trappings which catered to the needs of village and nomad life. Turkish textiles were justly famed beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire which resulted in the development of a thriving export trade. European paintings of the 15th-16th centuries feature Turkish carpets in their backgrounds, surviving examples of carpet of this same period are still to be found in the German churches of Transylvania, and woven brocades of the 17th century preserved today in the Kremlin Armoury at Moscow were used for the robes and vestments of noblemen and church dignitaries.

An equally vigorous tradition of embroidery flourished. Embroidered textiles varied in material and design as some closely copied the graceful and stylised floral and foliage designs of brocades and velvets, while others used more popular motifs based on themes of everyday life. The pieces on exhibition here demonstrate the type of embroidery produced by women for the needs of their households. This work has survived in great abundance mainly from the 19th and early 20th centuries and is to be found in both private and museum collections. An exact sequence of chronological and geographical range is at present difficult to establish because the pieces were made privately and their date and place of completion was not recorded.

Turkish women traditionally lived segregated from men other than those of their immediate family and played little obvious part in public life devoting most of their time to managing their households which included such tasks as supervising the weaving of linen and cotton and embroidery. Unmarried girls especially spent long hours embroidering textiles for their dowries. The style of life followed in affluent Turkish households required the use of many types of embroidered textile. There was little furniture in the European sense. Meals were eaten

seated on the floor around a low table and each member of the family and their guests had a *yağlık* — a napkin embroidered at both ends to spread across their knees (nos. 1-3, 10-11). The home's reception room had no chairs or sofas only a narrow bench running around the sides of the walls which was furnished with brocade and embroidered cushions. In the absence of a wardrobe clothes and household linen were folded and wrapped up in a large embroidered cloth or *bohça*. Bath towels — *havlı* — were also lavishly embroidered. Costume and its accessories were natural vehicles for fine embroidery. Women's trousers — *şalvar* — had embroidered panels at the sides (no. 6). Long narrow girdles — *uçkur* — with embroidered ends were used as draw-strings at the waists of trousers (nos. 4, 5, 9). Various types of cover existed such as *çevre* which were either worn by women as headscarves or could be used as gift wrapping (no. 12). A similar range of embroidered articles were also used in village households.

The basic materials of Turkish domestic embroideries were obviously a foundation fabric and the threads used to stitch the designs. The most usual fabrics were lengths of handwoven cream coloured linen or cotton woven in a simple plain weave which could vary in texture from a fine muslin (no. 12) through a compact firm weave (no. 1) to comparatively coarse weaves.

Sometimes the plain weave could be varied by weaving an additional thicker weft thread to create a patterned surface (nos. 10, 11). By the late 19th to early 20th century new materials were introduced such as a machine-woven organza (no. 9). Twill weave wools and brightly coloured satin weave silks were also used (no. 22). Embroidery threads were normally of thick floss silks though increasingly machine twisted silks and mercerised cotton threads were used. The colour range was both rich and subtle in graduated shades of red, pink, blue, green, yellow and brown. Early dyes were natural but from the early 20th century chemical dyes began to be used. Additionally designs were embellished by the use of metal thread — gilded or silvered copper either wrapped around a yellow silk core or used as a flat strip.

Standards of embroidery were high, natural enough in a society where this was valued both as a gracious feminine accomplishment and as a practical skill. Technically designs were built up from a fairly limited range of stitches of the neat small type which could be used as outlines or repeated to fill solid blocks of colour. These stitches were also carefully chosen to suit the needs of silk and metal threads. Another requirement was that the finished embroidery should be reversible especially in the case of napkins, handkerchiefs, and scarves. In order to work the stitches correctly and without distortion the foundation fabric was mounted in a frame. This was either a double hoop frame which held the fabric taut and was moved a section at a time as work progressed, or a low rectangular table frame on to which the entire embroidery was

mounted. Other equipment included needles, hooks and materials for tracing the outline of a design on to the foundation cloth. The stitches themselves may broadly be grouped into three types — flat, looped and drawn thread — which could be used either to outline or fill motifs. The flat stitches included *sıra işi* — double running stitch used as a filling in straight and diagonal variations (no. 9) and as an outline — *gözeme* — in single rows, *hesap işi* — half-cross stitch (no. 6) *sarma* satin stitch (no. 1) and *susma* — a type of brick stitch (no. 11). Drawn thread stitches were *mürver* and *müsebbek* — two and three sided stitches (no. 2) respectively and *kesme* — a needle-woven insertion border (no. 7) while the main looped stitch was *kasnak* — a chain stitch (no. 8). A special technique used for metallic thread was *dival* or couching (no. 22). Here the thread was laid in a zigzag progression over a card template and sewn down with silk thread. The result resembles satin stitch and by being worked on the surface only avoids wasting expensive thread and tearing the fabric.

A glance at any selection of Turkish embroideries is sufficient to realise the versatility and range of its decorative motifs which were drawn from many sources such as pattern books, comparable designs on woven and printed textiles, objects and themes of everyday life and in village environments subjects from folklore. The treatment of all motifs is similar as they were organised into rows and borders of repeats. Combinations of plant motifs form one of the most popular groups of designs. Here flowers such as carnations, roses, tulips and hyacinths, may be enfolded within gracefully curving sickle leaves (no. 1), grouped into bowls (no. 5) or trained into scrolls (no. 9) and treated in a stylised or naturalistic manner. A border of watermelons with knives stuck into them (no. 10) adds a lively note of everyday life.

Animal motifs are less common and probably are derived from characters in fairy tales such as the fantastic cockerels with floral tails (no. 14) and the large horses with their strange riders (no. 15). The camel (no. 16) with a palanquin on its back is a rare subject as it represents an episode in one of the most important events of the Islamic year the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Throughout the Ottoman Empire, notably in Istanbul and Cairo, when the pilgrims were grouped ready for departure their procession was led by such an adorned camel — the *mehmil* — which represented the Sultan's authority. More familiar themes of Turkish life especially in Istanbul were the elaborately caparisoned ships which sailed up and down the Bosphorus (no. 20) and the handsome summer houses set in cypress gardens (no. 18). A design of nomad tents (no. 21) possibly indicates that the embroidery was worked in central or south Turkey where migratory tribes were a familiar sight. The decorative qualities of Arabic calligraphy were also exploited in embroidery in the form of monograms (nos. 7, 22).

The art of fine domestic embroidery has not died out in Turkey although the social environment in which it flourished is rapidly changing. Encouragement of the craft is both official and private. Institutes in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Trabzon — Olgunlaşma Enstitüsü — organise advanced courses which continue and develop the classic tradition and embroidery is taught in various technical schools. In villages and in smaller and more conservative towns girls still learn the arts of fine needlework from their mothers and devote much effort to preparing their dowries. In larger cities well-stocked drapers establishments commission pieces from embroideresses who work for them at home. Especially popular here are the elaborate sets of bed linen, and quilts embroidered for a bride's trousseau. A city family can therefore go to one of these shops and order articles to be made to their choice. Much of the modern embroidery exhibits the same high standard of craftsmanship as the older pieces. Often traditional designs are adapted to modern synthetic materials and threads and new colour schemes are introduced. Increasingly items are embroidered to suit European style furniture — for example — chair back covers, place mats for table settings. Turkish fashion designers have successfully employed embroidered motifs of traditional inspiration and technique as decoration on simply tailored garments.

CATALOGUE

1. YAGLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, blue, two shades of green, brown, beige, white and in silver metallic thread.

Double darning and satin stitches.

Design of graceful sprays of carnations and roses within a sickle leaf.

TURKEY, 19th century, 47 x 131 cm.

1975.276

2. YAGLIK – NAPKIN

Cream cotton in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, peach, blue, two shades of green, two shades of yellow, brown and silver metallic thread. Two-sided and three-sided and satin stitch.

Design of stylised pavilions among cypress trees and a border of heartshaped flowers. Knotted pink oya lace border.

TURKEY, 19th century, 54 x 113 cm.

1975.281

3. YAGLIK – NAPKIN

Cream cotton muslin in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, mauve, purple, orange, blue, two shades of green, brown, grey, beige and silver metallic thread. Three-sided, double darning and satin stitches.

Design of shallow bowls full of flowers and foliage. Borders of oya lace floral sprigs.

TURKEY, 19th century, 55 x 136 cm.

1974. 153. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

4. UÇKUR – GIRDLE

White linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, peach, blue, beige and flat metallic gold strip. Two-sided, double darning and satin stitches.

Design of vase of carnations and foliage.

TURKEY, 19th century, 23 x 200 cm.

1978.135. Given by Mrs Helen B Herklots.

5. UÇKUR – GIRDLE

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, blue, beige, white, and silver metallic thread. Three-sided, double darning and satin stitches.

Design of a bouquet of stylised tulips.

TURKEY, mid-19th century, 27 x 196 cm.

1873.39.11

6. LEG PIECE OF WOMAN'S ŞALVAR – TROUSERS

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, blue, two shades of green, beige and silver metallic thread. Half-cross stitch and needlewoven insertion.

Design of repeated vertical stripes of quartrefoil flowers and insertion bands.

TURKEY, mid-19th century, 42 x 55.5 cm.

1887.172

7. ÖRTÜ – COVER

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in red, blue, lime green, peach, yellow, grey and beige. Two-sided stitch and needleweaving.

Design of star shaped medallions at centre and corners each containing the name "Ali" of the Prophet Mohammad's son-in-law in Kufic calligraphy against a background of angular floral sprays and groups of female figures in bell-shaped skirts.

TURKEY, 19th century, 42 x 49 cm.

1974.147

8. ÇARŞAF – BORDER OF VALANCE

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in three shades of pink, two shades of orange, mauve, three shades of green, brown, yellow and metallic silver thread wrapped around a yellow silk core. All worked in chain stitch.

Design a continuous scroll of flowering trees.

TURKEY, late 19th century, 38 x 114 cm.

1947.71B. Bequeathed by Mrs Charlotte M Cameron.

9. UÇKUR – GIRDLE

White cotton organza in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, two shades of blue, three shades of green, brown, grey and beige. All worked in double darning stitch.

Design of delicate scrolls of flower buds and tendrils, Border of oya lace floral sprigs.

TURKEY, late 19th century, 45 x 260 cm.

1962.801. Given by Miss H E Ionides.

10. YAGLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave, with a lattice pattern created by using an additional weft.

Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, blue, two shades of green, black and silver metallic thread. Double darning and oblique satin stitches. Design of bowls of watermelons with knives stuck into them.

TURKEY, 19th century, 62 x 136 cm.

1975.292

11. YAGLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave with repeated rows of a triangular pattern woven in a supplementary weft. Embroidered in silks in two shades of blue, two shades of green, yellow, orange, brown, beige, and silver metallic thread. Double darning, brick and satin stitches.

Design of knife sheaths containing roses, tulips and hyacinths.

TURKEY, 19th century, 49 x 144 cm.

1975.291

12. ÇEVRE – COVER

Cream muslin in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, crimson, green, blue, yellow, brown, and metallic silver thread. Double darning and satin stitches. Design of groups of crescents and kalyan pipes within a border of continuous floral scroll. Looped silver braid edging.

TURKEY, 19th century, 144 x 108 cm.

1975.294

13. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in peach, beige, three shades of green, and flat gold metallic strip. Two sided and satin stitches.

Design of pairs of parrots alternating with stylised trees.

TURKEY, 19th century, 45 x 89 cm.

14. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, lime green, grey and beige. Double darning and half-cross stitches.

Design of fantastic cockerels with floral tails and combs.

TURKEY, 19th century, 48 x 92 cm.

1975.286

15. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in blue, mauve, violet, green, black, beige, and flat silver metallic strip. Two and three-sided, and satin stitches.

Design of stylised horses and riders.

TURKEY, 19th century, 42 x 79 cm.

1975.288

16. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, blue, violet, three shades of orange, yellow, brown, and flat metallic gold strip. Three-sided and satin stitches.

Design of a striped camel with a low palanquin on its back led by a cloaked figure. This represents the mehmil, the symbol of the Sultan's authority on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

TURKEY, 19th century, 43 x 126 cm.

1975.290

17. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, two shades of blue, beige, and gold metallic thread. Two-sided, buttonhole and double running stitches.

Design of repeated motifs of turretted houses.

TURKEY, 19th century, 50 x 84 cm.

1974.133. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

18. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Very fine cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in blue, green, orange, yellow, beige, and flat silver metallic strip. Double darning and satin stitches.

Design of two-storeyed houses among cypresses and bridges. Gold lace border.

TURKEY, 19th century, 51 x 130 cm.

1975.280

19. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream cotton muslin in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in three shades of pink, two shades of blue, three shades of green, violet, mauve, orange, yellow, brown, and flat gold metallic strip. Double darning and satin stitches.

Design of small pavilions and canopied boats among cypresses and roses. Gold lace border.

TURKEY, early 19th century, 51 x 127 cm.

1974.143. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

20. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream linen in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in pink, violet, beige, and gold metallic thread. Two-sided, three-sided and satin stitches. Design of ships flying striped sails and flags.

TURKEY, 19th century, 41 x 97 cm.
1975.284

21. YAĞLIK – NAPKIN

Cream cotton muslin in plain weave. Embroidered in silks in two shades of blue, two shades of green, brown, beige, and flat metallic silver strip. Three-sided and satin stitches. Design of nomad tents set among trees and meandering paths.

TURKEY, 19th century, 56 x 110 cm.
1975.282

22. ÖRTÜ – COVER

Lime green, blue and crimson satin weave silks used in a patchwork mosaic. Embroidered in silver metallic thread. Couching and chain stitch.

Design of medallions of Arabic calligraphy, pomegranate fruits, and flower sprays, arranged in an ordered scheme around a central medallion containing a tughra — a stylised monogram of the Sultan Abdul Hamit II (1876-1909).

TURKEY, late 19th-early 20th century, 65 x 91 cm.
1975.223. Given by Mrs D Colvin-Smith.

II LACE

Together with embroidery other equally accomplished needlecrafts were practised and still flourish in Turkey. These include lace — oya — made in various techniques some of which are exhibited here to provide an opportunity of seeing Turkish handicrafts which are perhaps less familiar to a European public. The most characteristic Turkish lace is worked entirely with the needle and is known as *ıg̃ne oyası*. It was also made in parts of Greece, where it is known as *bebilla*, Bulgaria and Bosnia — all provinces under the direct control of the Ottoman Empire. The provincial styles of *ıg̃ne oyası*, however, never matched or surpassed the technical skills and ingenious sometimes eccentric designs of the Turkish work.

The basic technique of *ıg̃ne oyası* consists of building up motifs using a buttonhole loop stitch sewn with a double knot. Originally silk was used but as with embroidery synthetic threads were introduced. *ıg̃ne oyası* may be worked into either borders (nos. 1-4) or articles such as table mats (no. 5) and small purses (no. 8). When worked as a border the first row of stitches may be knotted along a foundation of several strands of horsehair (nos. 1-4) or directly on to the article itself. *ıg̃ne oyası* borders were used to decorate all manner of clothing and household items such as edgings to scarves, girdles (see Embroidery Section no. 9) underwear, napkins (see Embroidery Section nos. 2,3), and handkerchiefs. It was especially popular as an edging to the printed headscarves — *yemeniler* — which are still worn by village women. *ıg̃ne oyası* borders were worked in monochrome (no. 3) or polychrome (nos. 1,2,4,) schemes using a large repertoire of motifs based mainly on flowers and foliage interpreted in a lively often naturalistic manner (see for example the poinsettias of no. 4) but at times including the unexpected such as lions (no. 1).

Lace worked in crotchet is more closely related to European examples as the same stitches of double crotchet, half, single, double trebles and chain are used. Elaborate white crotchet borders are still made for sheets and pillows. The small book cover (no. 7) shown here illustrates the use of crotchet to decorate an article. A specifically Turkish use of crotchet is the preparation of floral motif borders in fine thread and neat small stitches imitating the needlework of *ıg̃ne oyası*.

CATALOGUE

1. SAMPLER WITH 14 BORDERS OF OYA LACE

Cotton threads in shaded of green, blue, pink, crimson, yellow, orange, brown, beige and white. Worked in a knotted buttonhole stitch. Designs include floral borders and more elaborate compositions including flower and fruit trees, sheaths of wheat and lions worked in relief.

TURKEY, late 19th century, each 24.5 cm in length.

1974.156 & A-M. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

2. SAMPLER WITH 10 BORDERS OF OYA LACE

Cotton threads in shades of green, blue, pink, crimson, violet, mauve, yellow, orange, brown, black, grey, beige and white. Worked in a knotted buttonhole stitch. Designs of neat floral borders and motifs of rose trees and wheat sheaths.

TURKEY, late 19th century, each 36 cm, in length.

1974.159 & A-I. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

3. SAMPLES WITH 8 BORDERS OF OYA LACE

Cotton threads in shades of mauve, green, purple, yellow, black and beige. Worked in knotted buttonhole stitch. Borders of flower motifs and fruit trees.

TURKEY, late 19th century, each 37 cm in length.

1962.836-843. Given by Miss H E Ionides.

4. SAMPLER WITH 4 BORDERS OF OYA LACE

Cotton threads in shades of green, yellow, crimson, scarlet, purple, blue, beige and white. Worked in knotted buttonhole stitch. Designs of narrow sprigged edgings, and elaborate borders of flowers including roses and poinsettias.

TURKEY, late 19th century, each 29 cm. in length.

1974. 157 & A-C. Bequeathed by Mrs Zoe Manuel.

5. OYA LACE MAT

White cotton thread worked in knotted and looped buttonhole stitches.

Design of concentric bands of starlike flowers and openwork lattice.

TURKEY, late 19th century, diam. 22 cm.

1962.908. Given by Miss H E Ionides.

6. OYA LACE PURSE

Worked in black, pink and green cotton threads using knotted buttonhole stitch. A rose motif is applied separately to the black background.

TURKEY, late 19th century, length 10 cm.

1962.808. Given by Miss H E Ionides.

7. CASE PROBABLY FOR A COPY OF THE KORAN

Cotton cloth with a design printed in pink and blue within black outlines — yazma. Crotchet details worked in chain stitch and double treble using fine silver thread wrapped around a yellow silk core. Motifs outlined in continuous rows of chain stitch. Openwork filet band and shell border worked in chain stitch and double treble. Inscribed in Arabic on each side "al-kitab — the Book" which probably refers to the Koran.

TURKEY, late 19th century, 23 x 18 cm.

1971.670. Given by Mrs A L Shaw Smith.

JENNIFER M SCARCE, ROYAL SCOTTISH MUSEUM 1983

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