



BROCADE WITH MEDICI CROWN. ITALIAN, XVII CENTURY. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

AN INTERESTING BROCADE

THE Metropolitan Museum possesses a certain brocade, the unique interest of which has but recently come to light. It is unusual in collections and museums to come upon fabrics which show evidence of having been made for particular persons or for particular occasions. The brocade in question appears to be one of this rare and interesting class. The pattern, an ogival framework, is composed of oak leaves in green silk and acorns worked in metal thread on a white satin ground (now yellow) with a large crown and a bow knot introduced alternately at the finial of the ogive.

It is the crown which gave the first hint as to the unusual character of the piece. Whereas crowns are often met with in XVI century fabrics, this seemed more specific in type and upon observation proved to be the Medici crown worn when they became the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. It will be remembered that not long after the death in 1492 of Lorenzo the Magnificent the younger branch of the family came into power, and in 1637 Cosimo, afterward the first Grand Duke, was asked by the Florentine Council to assume the rule of the city. In 1569 Pope Pius V published a bull creating Cosimo Grand Duke of Tuscany and in 1570 he was crowned in Rome. The shape of the crown was laid down in the Pope's bull; it was to be radiated like that of Eastern kings alternate with the Florentine lily.* The actual crown as it appears in portraits of the grand

*Col. C. F. Young, *The Medici*, Vol. II, pp. 297-298.

Dukes was a royal crown with points curving outward, like blades of the iris, and in the center was a large red Florentine lily usually heavily jeweled. The crown represented in the brocade is certainly the Medici crown as the careful rendering (in metal thread) of the peculiar features of the Florentine lily can leave no room for doubt.

The crown is, however, only half the story. It remains to determine the significance of the oak leaves and acorns. The character of the brocade as to design and weave would lead one to assume that it dated from the XVII century. With this in view, an examination of the Medici genealogy reveals the secret. For, in 1634, Ferdinand II dei Medici, whose great-grandfather was Cosimo I, married Vittoria, the last of the della Rovere, the badge of whose family was the oak. The bow knot in the design may signify that the fabric was made for their wedding. At any rate, it was in the early part of Ferdinand's reign that the ducal palace (now known as the Pitti Palace) was enlarged to its present size by the addition of two large wings which doubled the size of the palace and gave ample space for the splendid court entertainments which Vittoria, who was of a frivolous disposition, desired. The state apartments, numbering about sixty, were decorated with ceiling paintings to commemorate the astronomical discoveries of Galileo. Among the private apartments upstairs were the rooms of Vittoria the ceilings of which were decorated with her motto and family arms. It seems reasonable to assume that the brocade of which the museum has a piece, if not made at the time of the wedding, was ordered when the palace was enlarged and the many apartments so handsomely redecored.