



FRONTISPIECE  
FIGURE OF CHRIST EMBROIDERED WITH PEARLS AND JEWELS.  
GODUNOV WORKSHOP, EARLY XVII CENTURY.

## ANCIENT RUSSIAN ECCLESIASTICAL EMBROIDERIES

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**I**N OLD Russian manuscripts preserved in monasteries, mention is made as early as the twelfth century of ecclesiastical embroideries. None of these ancient pieces, however, has survived until the present day, so that the history of Russian church embroidery does not begin until the fourteenth century in a period when Russian art was under a strong Byzantine influence that disappeared only gradually during the following centuries.

Embroidery as an art was one that had been highly developed in Russia. It had always been part of the education and the domestic duties of the well-born Russian woman. In aristocratic circles, indeed, needlework was an important accomplishment and one in which its members were carefully trained and took great pride. The women of this world led an extremely sheltered life and, with their activities limited of necessity to a narrow field, they devoted the greater part of their time to embroidery. The art of needlework in its finer phases therefore was well known and technical skill in a world of expert workers met with understanding.

While women utilized embroidery for the ornamentation of dress, both their own and that of their families—for styles changed slowly in these early centuries and costume differed only in material and decoration—needlework found its highest expression in work that was done for the church. Its application to such purpose was deemed a praiseworthy expression of piety and religious devotion. Offerings of such a nature might arise from more than one cause: they might be personal, the promise of a woman praying for a child's recovery from illness or a husband's safe return from a war, her petition answered, to work a piece of embroidery for the church; gifts of this kind, on the other hand, might be made simply as a disinterested act of devotion.

These embroideries were of the most sophisticated nature for their designs, done by skilled artists, were taken from icons, themselves the work of the great Russian painters, Rublev in the fifteenth century, Dionysius, toward the end, and Procopius Tchirin at the turn of the six-

teenth.<sup>1</sup> Dionysius, distinguished for the grace of his figures and for his brilliant colors, is believed to have designed the celebrated veil of Sophia Palaeologus in the late fifteenth century. Procopius Tchirin, outstanding among his fellows for his lovely vermillion, his transparent, velvety dark green, and the gold that he applied to the patterns of his beautiful brocades, is credited with the design of an early seventeenth century banner, The archangel Gabriel appearing to Joshua, the son of Nun.

The earliest example of Russian ecclesiastical embroidery known to exist is the veil, or shroud for a relic, made in 1399 by the order of the Grand Princess Maria of Tver.<sup>2</sup> This historic piece, once in the Schukin collection and now in the Historical Museum in Moscow, illustrates the legend of Veronica's Veil, the towel, in religious tradition, offered to Christ on the way to Calvary by a pious woman of Jerusalem, which retained the impression of the sacred features (Plate 1). The design shows an assembly of figures, saints, angels, and ecclesiastics, grouped around the central symbol. The work is done in colored silks—blue, turquoise, purple, red, yellow, and white—whose brilliant tones stand out effectively against the pale yellow damask of the ground, and in split stitch so fine in quality that the stitches themselves can scarcely be seen in the smooth surface of the work. It is only in the folds of the robes that the technique is heavier.

In the center of the panel, surmounted by cherubim, is shown the miraculous image in archaic representation, the oldest known form in Russian art of the version of the Veronica's Veil of the Western church.<sup>3</sup> On either side of the central motive stands a group of saints and prelates, preceded, at the left, by the Mother of God (the Virgin Mary) wearing a white and purple robe. Following these figures are two metropolitans, Peter (in office 1308-1328), in purple vestments embroidered with gold crosses, and Alexis, in red. On the right, in similar order, are shown St. John, in blue, the archangel Gabriel, in gold tunic and red robe, the

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting account of Russian icon painting, by Andrey Avinoff, may be found in the Catalogue of Russian Icons and Objects of Ecclesiastical and Decorative Arts from the Collection of George R. Hann, exhibited in 1944 in Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh. This collection was shown later in the year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> The Grand Princess Maria of Tver was the daughter of the Grand Prince Alexander of Tver and the third wife of the Grand Prince of Moscow, Simeon the Proud (d. 1353). She died in Moscow in 1399.

<sup>3</sup> The representation of Veronica's Veil in old Russian art differs somewhat from its Western interpretation. The Eastern version shows a calm face with the eyes open. According to the Western legend, Christ gave this veil with his "image" to Veronica while going to Golgotha and in this version he is shown, unlike the Eastern portrayal, crowned with thorns, the face showing signs of suffering. For the Eastern legend see N. P. Kondakov, *Iconography of Christ*, St. Petersburg, 1905, pp. 14-18; Adolphe Didron, *Manuel d'Iconographie Chrétienne*, Paris, 1845, p. 12; Louis Bréhier, *L'Art Chrétien*, Paris, 1918, p. 120.

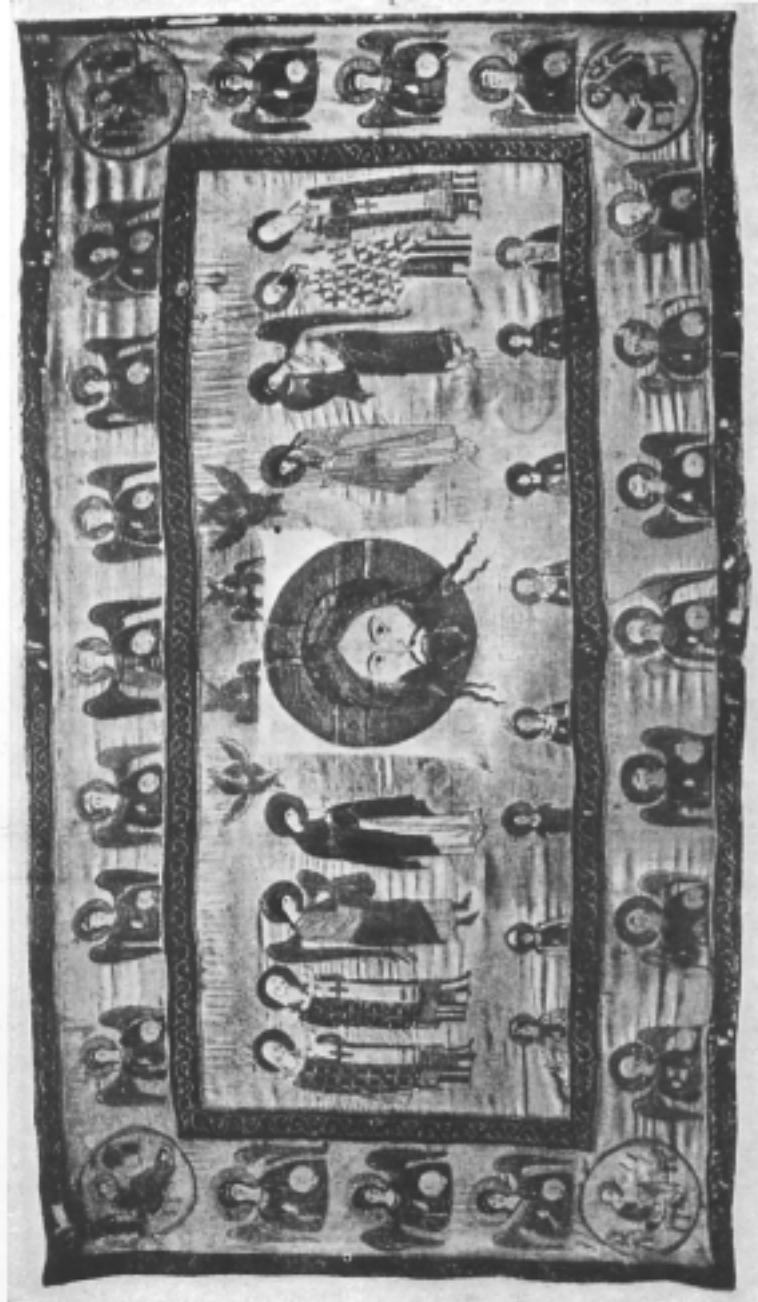


PLATE I  
FUNERAL VEIL. MADE FOR THE GRAND PRINCESS MARIA OF TVER. DATED 1399.

metropolitans Maxim (in office 1283-1308) and Theognost, the one in white, his vestments ornamented with gold crosses, and the other similarly robed in blue. Below this central assembly is a line of saints represented in half-figure. Above their heads are embroidered their names, which in most cases have been preserved. The first and last are as yet unidentified, but the others, beginning at the left, are St. Boris, St. Alexis, St. Nicetas, St. Gregory, St. Demetrius, and St. Vladimir. In the wide outer border, edged like the central pattern, with purple damask patterned in gold, are figures of seraphim wearing deep blue and wine-colored robes, and in the corners, in the form of medallions, are portrayed the four Evangelists. An inscription, worked on the left beneath the group with the Mother of God, states that this veil was embroidered by the order of the Grand Princess of Tver, wife of the Grand Prince Simeon, in 1399.<sup>4</sup> This inscription is particularly important, since in very few of these fourteenth century embroideries have such legends been preserved.

This embroidery is considered the best and most characteristic of the fourteenth century pieces still remaining. In its style and technique it shows the strong influence of Byzantine art. With its plain colored ground, the outlines and folds of the vestments worked in fine silk thread, it produces the flat, linear effect characteristic of the Byzantine style. Similar also to the Byzantine school is the posture, somewhat mannered, of the slender, graceful figures and the beauty of the faces, which, in their turn, reflect the Hellenistic influence which still was strong in Byzantine art of the fourteenth century. In the severity of its composition and a certain dryness of design it bears a resemblance to Byzantine embroideries of that century. For the most part it follows the style and composition of Russian painted icons and frescoes of that period.

Embroideries of this kind were made, as has been seen, in exalted circles, by Princesses and by Czarinas as well. About 1556 Anastasia Romanovna, the first wife of Ivan the Terrible<sup>5</sup>—who had seven—executed in “her broidery room”<sup>6</sup> a hanging for the altar of the Khilandar monastery on Mount Athos. The subject, from Psalms XLV:9,<sup>7</sup> was copied from

<sup>4</sup> This date, in all probability, indicated the year when the embroidery was begun. Most authorities date it as of 1399 when, upon its completion, it was presented by the Princess to a monastery. By some it is assumed that it was made by the Princess herself during the last years of her life. It is possible that the central image is of a much later date than the rest of the embroidery. It is applied in the center of the embroidery, partly covering the seraphim above. Also it is worked in a style different from the other parts of the work. It is, however, interesting in its workmanship and in its conception.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan IV (1530-1584).

<sup>6</sup> N. P. Kondakov. *The Russian Icon*, St. Petersburg, 1927, pp. 160-161 and footnotes.

<sup>7</sup> “Kings’ daughters were among thy honorable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.”

a Russian icon entitled "The Queen Did Stand," which showed Our Lord seated on a throne, Our Lady crowned and vested as a Queen, and St. John standing nearby. Irina, again, the wife of Czar Feodor Ivanovich (reigned 1584-1598) and who directed in this capacity the great court workshops where embroidery was done, is said to have worked a shroud for the relics of Prince Vsevoled in Pskov as an expression of gratitude for the victory of the Russians in the long war that was waged for years between this nation and the Lithuanians. Sometimes again, it was a Czar or nobleman who might express his piety by ordering some liturgical embroidery to be made at his expense. Pieces of this kind were veritable works of art, for women were willing to spend years on such an accomplishment and the finest of materials, silk, gold, silver, and jewels were used. It was felt that the greater was the sacrifice of time and effort, the greater was the degree of religious devotion that was expressed.

Beside individual examples such as these, there were many of these embroideries, especially the larger ones, that were the product of collective work; this is attested by the inscriptions that are worked on many of these pieces. Sometimes it was the women of one family who would work on one particular piece, particularly since nearly every well-to-do family had a workshop where the mistress of the household, together with her daughters and a staff of workers, produced fine embroideries for both house and church. There were princely houses, also, that carried out this work on a grand scale and whose workshops often set an individual style that influenced work to a marked degree. In the palaces of the Czars, likewise, ecclesiastical embroidery had an important place. Finally, among the innumerable convents in Russia of that day there were many that had establishments where the nuns produced beautiful embroideries.

For the Russian needleworker up to the seventeenth century, the choice of material for liturgical use was an important problem. During this time, as instanced in the veil of the Grand Princess Maria, the ground outside the embroidered design was left unworked. With so much of the fabric remaining visible, the color became a matter for consideration, since the material would form the basic tone of the finished work, with other shades picked to harmonize with it. Equally important was the character of the textile—whether it should be plain or figured, dull or lustrous in finish, and large or small in pattern—for the ground material contributed in great measure to the subject of the design and the purpose for which it was to be used. The most popular fabrics used for grounds were damask, velvet, taffeta, and satin. Damask in one color was used when embroider-



PLATE 2

VEIL WITH FIGURE OF A SAINT SET AGAINST A LARGE-PATTERNED DAMASK.

ing groups of angels or saints wearing gold and brocaded vestments. Its pattern gave movement to the ground and softened the heavy lines and solemn effect of their robes. A large pattern was chosen when working a full-sized figure standing in a quiet posture, for in such a case a minute design would have been too restless in character and would have interfered with the severity of the subject. An excellent illustration of such a choice is the veil given to the St. Sergius monastery, now the Sergiev Historical Museum (the word Sergiev is used here in the sense of an adjective), near Moscow, by Maria Feodorovna, the last wife of Ivan IV, for the relics of St. Sergius. The tall figure of the saint stands against a sixteenth century damask with a large ogival design. A little scene of the Trinity is embroidered at the top (Plate 2). Examples of such combinations are found in the grounds of the altar covers from the Czars' workshops, now also in the same museum. They were the gifts of Vasili III, Grand Prince of Moscow,<sup>8</sup> and of the Czar Ivan IV and his wife, Anastasia Romanovna.

Examples of ancient embroidery still preserved, and in great numbers, in Russian museums, both in cities where museums as institutions had existed since the time of Catherine the Great, and in museums which once had been monasteries and were made at the time of the Revolution into museums, include church vestments, altar frontals, palls, winding sheets or funeral shrouds for relics, icon covers or veils, and church banners carried in religious processions. Of these, icon covers form a large class and possess distinctive features.

In its simplest form the icon cover resembled a towel or scarf—the Russian name *ubrús* means, indeed, a towel. It was embroidered on both ends and lightly over the surface, and was laid over the top of the icon hanging down at either end. Later, though shaped in the same way, it became more elaborate when it was made up of five pieces, a broad horizontal band at the top, heavily lined to form a kind of pocket into which the top of the icon was fitted, and two long panels, attached to the top by loops and buttons which hung down at either side, each finished at the end by a square-shaped piece of material. The band and the two end squares were made of one kind of material and embroidered in the same design, while the panels themselves were of another fabric and pattern.

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<sup>8</sup> Before the Moscow period, Russia was divided into principalities and members of the House of Rurik (the founder of the first Russian dynasty) ruled over cities with their surrounding provinces; Kiev was the most important and the capital of the country. This system gradually died out under the Tartar rule (1237-1502). Toward its end, the city of Moscow developed a great importance and the Moscow princes became rulers, and later, Czars of Russia. Ivan IV was the first to take the title of Czar.



The effect was that of a three-sided frame, somewhat like a draped scarf. Still later another feature was added, a square or rectangular piece attached to the lower edge of the icon, which was called a hanging veil (hence the terms cover or veil for these pieces) and which was richly worked in the materials in fashion, gold and silver thread, colored silks, pearls, jewels, and gold or silver plaques; it was finished often with gold or silver tassels, sometimes strung with pearls. Veils of this kind, ornamented in so splendid a manner, were used for great celebrations, such as church holidays. For more ordinary occasions a piece more modest in character was employed. For the embroidered picture or hanging veil, several subjects were available: the Mother of God, the Savior, St. Sophia, called also Holy Wisdom (the word Sophia, in Greek means wisdom), the Annunciation, scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin, and the Cross with the Instruments of the Passion.

One of the most famous of these icon veils is the piece, preserved in the Suzdal monastery-museum in the Province of Vladimir, north of Moscow, which is entitled Our Lady of Georgia and which was worked and given to the monastery by the Czarina, Anastasia Romanovna (Plate 3). It is one of the group of beautiful covers and embroideries of the kind belonging to this former monastery which were worked by this first wife of Ivan IV and by her successor, Maria Temrukovna, as well as by Princesses of the Russian court. Anastasia was born about 1534, she was married in 1547, and she died in 1560; her veil is dated as the middle of the sixteenth century.

In this piece the horizontal border and the panel ends are a purple-blue damask, ornamented with pearls and silver-gilt plaques. The side panels are red silk (the weave not designated) lined with velvet, and are similarly embroidered. The squares finishing the panels are decorated with gold tassels strung with miniature pearls. The hanging veil is of cloth of silver bordered with black velvet, designed with the same Virgin and Child that appears on the icon for which it was made.

In an inventory in the Suzdal monastery, made in 1597, this veil is described. The robes are worked, in the words of the inventory, "in gold and silver thread"; the features of both Virgin and Child are embroidered in colored silk. The Virgin's veil and the halos are decorated with large pearls, with the figure of the Child in small ones. Framed within the pearl star on the Virgin's veil and the ornament on her shoulder are semi-precious stones, sapphires, red and yellow topazes, and other jewels of the kind. Silver-gilt plaques, ancient in type and outlined with small pearls,



PLATE 3  
VEIL FOR THE ICON OF OUR LADY OF GEORGIA. MADE BY ANASTASIA ROMANOVNA,  
FIRST WIFE OF IVAN IV. MIDDLE OF XVI CENTURY.

form the decoration. They make part of a vine pattern where plaques represent the leaves. Some of them are embossed with sacred figures: Christ, Our Lady and St. John the Baptist, and with them other saints. On either side of the Virgin's head, worked in couched gold thread over a padding, are the Greek symbols meaning The Mother of God.

Over the hanging veil the icon, painted in the fifteenth century, may be seen (Plate 4), though here the features, due perhaps to age or the smoke of candles which may have darkened the painting, in this plate are just visible. The position of the figures, however, may be defined by the pearl halos of both Mother and Child, and by the long strings of pearls and jewels which hang from either side of the Virgin's face. Superimposed on this halo is another of jewels on an ornamental ground. The crown which is above is later, for it was added in 1699. A wide band of pearls hangs from the shoulders of the Virgin, and pearls form a collar; they outline also the jeweled ornament which depicts the scene of the Crucifixion. Underneath is the *tsata* or breast ornament; it is similar to the one that hangs from the shoulders of the child. Back of both figures, as well as forming a frame for the whole, is an ornamental sheath or *riza* of the kind that may often be seen on icons, with an interlaced design. In 1722, Peter the Great forbade the use of icon covers as detrimental to the appearance of the icon itself. They were banished from the church, but continued to be cherished by the nuns and were preserved as well by their use in private houses.

Among others of the ecclesiastical embroideries which still exist are palls, used variously as altar cloths, corporals, or chalice covers. They were square or oblong in shape, made of satin or taffeta, and generally bordered with a material of a different kind. They bore inscriptions, such as parts of prayers, worked in silk, gold, or pearls. Shrouds, termed also winding sheets, and which appeared as such in western Europe at the end of the twelfth century,<sup>9</sup> were oblong, measuring from five to seven feet in length, and were worked, as a rule, with the scene of the Entombment, where the three Marys appear wearing robes of blue, yellow, or red. Shrouds were used to cover relics, such as those of saints, or as the cover of an empty bier symbolizing the body of Christ which was brought into the body of the church on Good Fridays. Church banners, square in form, were embroidered in silver and gold on a heavy fabric, such as satin. They were designed with a single motif—the figure of a saint or the head of

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Morey, *Medieval Art*, Norton and Company, New York, 1942, p. 173.



PLATE 4  
ICON OF OUR LADY OF GEORGIA.

Christ as portrayed in Veronica's Veil. They were finished around the edge with gold or silver fringe. Funeral veils were often as large as shrouds and were intended to cover a bier. They were embroidered with a four-pointed cross mounted on a pedestal and with additional motifs of skull and cross-bones outlined with pearls. Applied gold plaques also were used on these veils.

Specific as to material and color were certain classes of these embroideries. For funeral veils, velvet was considered to be the suitable material, for its pile, absorbing the light, gave a deep tone to the picture and emphasized its severity; black and purple were the colors usually chosen. For borders, figured, colored silks woven with gold threads were used with somberly rich effect. Gold-covered velvet also was favored, and satin in which gold thread was used, either in the design or the ground. There was also at this time a kind of moire in diagonal weave which, in its Eastern version, was woven in gold or silver. It was used in Russia as early as 1328.<sup>10</sup> For shrouds, silver-gray and pale turquoise fabrics were often chosen.

For these many and varied purposes, material was not lacking. Silks of the most beautiful quality were imported from East and West, from Asiatic and European countries. Damask, used, as may be remembered, in 1399, was brought from Broussa in Asiatic Turkey, from Anatolia in Asia Minor, and from Arabia. Taffeta came from Shemakha in the Province of Baku in Transcaucasian Russia and also from France. Satin, both plain and figured, was imported from China, Turkey, Broussa, Anatolia, Afghanistan, Persia, and China, as well as from Venice in Europe. These materials, in some cases, were known by more than one name, according to the design, the color, and the country from which they came. Damask, for one, was known under the names of *kamka* and *adamashka*.

Like other materials used in these Russian embroideries, the thread with which they were worked, at least up to the late years of the sixteenth century, was imported. The silk thread found in Russia came from China and Persia, as well as from western Europe. The City of Great Novgorod in the fourteenth century carried on trade with her Western neighbors, and among them the great Hanseatic towns. From these towns, as is noted in old records, purchases were made of silk thread.<sup>11</sup> In the sixteenth century, however, a local industry was started under Czar Feodor Ivanovich,

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<sup>10</sup> V. K. Klein, *Foreign Textiles found in Russia up to the Eighteenth Century and their Terminology*. Moscow Armory Museum Publications, 1925.

<sup>11</sup> In the eighteenth century it was imported from France.

the son of Ivan IV (1584-1598), at the time when Italian workers were invited to come to Russia to produce the silk fabrics, brocades and velvets, which formerly had been imported. (In 1633, German and Dutch workers were to come as well and under the same auspices.) Silk thread was produced, though on a small scale, late in the sixteenth century, but the amount had increased by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Silk thread in Russia appears in more than one form. It was used both spun and unspun, and sometimes combined with silver thread. A beautiful thread of this kind, spun with gold and used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was called *skanny*, or "twisted gold." This was often used in working the hair, as may be seen in the angel in the Staritzky shroud (see Plate 10—detail). It was one of the few varieties that could be pulled through thin materials. Wool or flax occasionally appears for use in these embroideries, but this, generally, was in the case of shrouds. The type of thread to be employed in an embroidery was chosen in accordance with the effect that was desired. Spun silk produced a dull surface, while unspun thread produced a lustrous effect similar to that of the tones of the skin. Unspun thread was used, therefore, when working the hands and faces in embroideries. For a still glossier finish Shemakha silk was used, for it combined both a lustrous and a wool-like quality.

Silk thread was used almost entirely in the embroideries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Gold rarely appears and then only for small details as halos and wings of angels and shoes and the cuffs of vestments.

Embroideries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries copied the effect of the painted icon, richly colored and austere of pattern. To simulate the appearance in needlework, skilful use was made of colored silks. According to the way in which the thread was laid, different shades of a color could be produced. For faces, worked in satin stitch, the threads laid vertically for the face and horizontally for the forehead resulted in two different effects. Amazing results were obtained by the varying of the stitches in this way. With all justice, these early embroideries can be called paintings executed with a needle instead of a brush, reflecting the artistic trend of the period. The embroideries of these centuries are distinguished by their severity. Pearls, that were used so lavishly in the sixteenth century, and the jewels that accompanied them would have been

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<sup>12</sup> It is not improbable that the Stroganov workshops of the seventeenth century used this thread for their embroideries, and it is possible that they established for this purpose factories of their own.

incongruous in embroideries of this character. Their beauty lay in their design and their color. Like the icons which were their models, they used shades of green, red, and yellow, and with these colors they combined gold.

A beautiful piece among the fifteenth century group is a veil with the title St. Sophia or The Wisdom of God, from the scriptural text in the parables of Solomon. "Wisdom built unto herself a temple, she hath hewn out her seven pillars"(Plate 5). Little realization can be gained of its beauty in what is only a black and white reproduction. It combines shades of vermillion, dull purple, pale green, and blue in a pattern that is noble in its dignity. It is an embroidery of the utmost distinction.

In the center, on a gold throne, is seated the figure of Holy Wisdom. The face, hands, and wings are vermillion, with the throne and the halo in gold. At one side stands the Virgin, robed in dull purple with a mantle of gold. At the other side is John the Baptist arrayed in similar colors. Above, also in purple and gold, is God the Father. These figures are set against a great circle or halo, its outer rim patterned with radiating bars of gold on a white ground. The inner circle is similarly designed, but on a turquoise ground. Between the two is a band of the same blue that is studded with stars. A square gold altar, with something of the appearance of a low, broad seat, stands in the center at the top on a curling scroll made of bands of pale blue, green, and yellow, ornamented with stars. Over this, angels bend in gold robes and halos, and wings of the same dull purple that is found in the figures below.

The silk embroidery is worked in split and satin stitch, while the gold threads are couched as was the customary fashion. The ground on which the entire design is worked would seem to be a pale beige damask; at least, certain parts of a pattern can be seen. This again would simulate the effect of the icon where the design was executed on a panel of wood covered with linen, glued and sized.<sup>13</sup> The piece is perfect in workmanship and in its design, which is thought to have been done by a Novgorod painter. Its likeness to an icon design may be seen by comparing it with

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<sup>13</sup> After the material for the ground was chosen, the embroideress stretched it on some heavy fabric, such as coarse linen, and basted the two pieces together. The artist, generally an icon painter, then drew the pattern, the figures, the floral ornament, the architectural background and the inscription, should there be one, using chalk or ink or white lead, sometimes on paper and sometimes sketching the design directly on the silk itself. Occasionally two or three artists worked in conjunction on the same pattern, one doing the faces and figures, another the floral or architectural details and the third, the inscription if there were one. This completed, the worker stretched the fabric on the embroidery frame and chose her materials, silk and gold and silver thread.



PLATE 5  
ICON VEIL. ST. SOPHIA. THE WISDOM OF GOD. XV CENTURY.



one of the icons in Mr. Hann's collection, though this has five supports for the throne instead of the traditional seven (Plate 6).

A few excellent embroideries of this century are preserved in Russian museums. Outstanding among them are the Shroud of Puchezh, dated 1441; the Veil called Deësis or Chin, fifteenth century; the Veil of Sophia Palaeologus and the St. Sophia (already described), and the shroud "Dormition," end of the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Like silk, Russia at the time of her early embroideries, had no gold thread of her own. She imported it from the East and from England and Holland. Early in the seventeenth century, however, about the time when silk thread was attaining a local production, the manufacture of gold and silver thread, along with bullion, which was a fine gold thread wound around a needle to produce a spiral, was started in Moscow, by German workers, who, in 1623, were joined by a few Russians.

As an embroidery material gold appears first in the form of a wire. The metal was hammered flat into thin sheets which were passed between two cylinders to make them more soft and flexible. These sheets then were cut into narrow strips which were pulled until they became thin wire and were ready to be used. The method originated in Asia and was attributed by Pliny to King Attalus; this kind of embroidery there is known as Attalic. Gold and silver thread in Russia was used sometimes in this wire form and sometimes as a hollow tube strung on silk threads. It appears also, in more familiar form, with the metal thread wound around an inner core. Gold wire was used when it was desired to simulate the effect of hard hammered gold, such as a metal, or to work heavy gold vestments, while for the appearance of a gold brocade, spun thread was employed.

The use of gold thread in Russian embroideries can be divided into three periods. In the first, which was up to the twelfth century, only pure gold was used, sometimes wound around a thin flax thread or core. During the second period, from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, together with a pure gold, a cheaper kind of metal thread appears, silver, heavily gilded, either as a wire or spun tightly with a raw silk thread. In the third period, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, pure gold rarely appears, and by the sixteenth it had generally been replaced by a

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<sup>14</sup> It would be impossible to describe in detail these particular embroideries because of the lack of space. The first two have been published and illustrated in the excellent work of A. N. Svirin, *Une broderies du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle du style pittoresque représentant le Chin au Musée de Troitse-Sergiev Lavra in L'Art Byzantin chez les Slaves*, Vol. 2, pp. 282-291, plates XL-XLIII.



PLATE 6

ICON. ST. SOPHIA. THE WISDOM OF GOD. NOVGOROD SCHOOL. XV CENTURY.

silver-gilt thread spun with yellow silk to simulate the appearance of gold. Up to the time of Peter the Great (1672-1725) such thread was known as "golden," and in seventeenth century trade records mention is made of "semi-golden" thread. With the second half of the eighteenth century a further deterioration had set in, for in place of silk, metal thread was now spun with yellow cotton. Handspinning also at this time began to be superseded by machinery and the fine technique of gilding changed.

Gold and silver embroidery in Russia attained great technical perfection and many and various were the ways in which metal thread was used. In general Russian embroidery is made up of colored silks, and of metal threads laid flat on the ground and caught down by short transversal stitches in silk. (Metal threads were rarely pulled through the fabric, only occasionally in the case of light cottons, muslins, tulle or thin taffeta.) It was a couching technique, but it was capable of many effects. By the manner in which the couching threads were worked over the metal, any variety of design could be made—tiny squares or diamonds to indicate a pattern on a halo or an incised design on a crown, or small, stylized flowers to simulate a pattern in a brocade. Known as *prikrep*, it was a favorite technique with the Russian needleworker and so numerous were the patterns that each one had its special name.

For an effect of relief in this couched embroidery, threads or thin strings were laid on the fabric and the gold thread was stretched across and held in place by stitches in silk thread sewed between the strings. For a higher relief several layers of string were added, while for a very high effect parts of the pattern were cut from coarse linen or heavy woolen cloth, or even cardboard, applied to the ground and then embroidered in the usual laid and couched technique. For extreme effects several layers of material might be used or even over this padding an extra covering of linen and flannel. It was a method reminiscent of the "stump" or raised work embroidery that was done in England in the seventeenth century. By working across the couched thread with colored silks a very beautiful embroidery was made; it was the same type that was known in France and Italy as *broderie en or nué* or *nuancé*. The effect was that of cloisonné enamel on a gold ground. It was a stitch that rarely was used because of its cost, and even in European countries it was employed, as a rule, only for the finest church vestments. Two sided stitch, technically one of the most difficult of embroidery stitches, produced a pattern that was the same on both the right and the wrong side of the material. It was used for the background on church and military banners. Embroidery in

faceted gold meant the use, alternately, of a gold wire and a hollow tube which, thus combined, the one with the other, produced an effect like facets in gems. Another embroidery stitch copied the appearance of the material called *altabas*, a silk fabric in a twill weave with one and two wefts, one of which was a gold wire. A *bouclé* effect was secured by threading a thick needle with a heavy gold thread, passing it under the foundation gold thread before it was couched and pulling it out after each tying-down stitch. This resulted in a series of small gold loops, which produced at the same time an effect of relief.

Embroidery in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was done with silk threads with touches of gold, copying the painted icons with their noble Byzantine designs. But with the sixteenth century the effect was changed when pearls were introduced into the pattern. In the earlier periods, when the effect was that of an icon, pearls rarely are seen and few of the embroideries show their use. But later they make their appearance, first as details to ornament the halo or parts of the vestment or for inscriptions worked on borders. Gradually pearls became more important as decorations until finally they were used to outline the figures. This changed entirely the character of the outline and destroyed the resemblance of the embroidery to the painted icon. Pearls continued to be used profusely throughout the sixteenth century in church embroideries. In the famous icon veil of Solomonia Saburova, which is dated 1525, the pattern is outlined largely with pearls (Plate 7).

This unhappy Princess, the wife of Vasili III, Grand Prince of Moscow (r. 1505-1533), was divorced by her husband for her failure to provide him with heirs. She was sent to the Suzdal monastery where she took the veil under the name of Sophia. It was while she was still at court that she embroidered this veil, called The Vision of St. Sergius, which is extraordinary in part for the skilful manner in which numbers of figures are portrayed in so small a space since the veil measures twenty-eight by thirty inches. In this veil the worker expressed her feelings in the prayer embroidered in small pearls so perfect that they still retain their beauty and lustre. "Have mercy, My Lord, on the most Christian Grand Prince Vasili Ivanovich and his most Christian wife, Grand Princess Solomonia, and on their people and give them, Oh Lord, the fruit of their marriage. This veil was completed in 1525, the nineteenth year of his reign." The embroidery was made for the icon of the Holy Trinity. It is worked on red velvet in silk and gold and silver thread and ornamented with pearls and precious stones. It contains over ninety figures. The



PLATE 7  
ICON VEIL MADE BY SOLOMONIA SABUROVA. DATED 1525.

central motif is a Cross made of very large pearls which stand out against the dark red ground. Calvary hill, on which it stands, is composed of stars worked in gold, under it is the head (skull) of Adam. To the left of the Cross stands the Mother of God with St. Peter and St. John. To the right is Sergius kneeling in prayer before the Mother of God while behind him St. Nikon, his disciple, covers his face with his hands in awe. Above are weeping angels and the sun and moon, embroidered in silver and gold. In the borders is a series of groups representing scenes from the life of Christ, angels and saints, including the patron saints of the city of Moscow and of the Moscow princes. The central panel and the small panels in the borders are outlined with small pearls; the mountains and buildings in the background landscapes are worked in colored silks. The tiniest stitches possible were used to embroider the vestments to accord with the miniature size of the veil.

For use in embroidery pearls were strung on fine silk thread to form the outline of the pattern. Or they were applied in close rows entirely covering the surface of the design by stretching double rows of silk thread over the surface and catching down to these pearl strings, attaching them, between pearls, with a silk thread. They were a favorite decoration for icon veils, especially for the figure of the Virgin. They appear often as long earrings made up of several strings of pearls put together, attached usually, as in the veil of Our Lady of Georgia, to the lower part of a pearl head-dress. Sometimes these strings were divided into parts by alternating them with gold, silver or silver-gilt bands, ornamented themselves with precious stones or enamel. Large jewels, also, were used, strung between rows of pearls as also may be seen in this same veil. (See Plate 3, page 11.)

As for the pearls themselves, they were imported from India and the island of Ormuz in the Persian Gulf by way of the Sea of Azov and also through Feodosia, the ancient Kaffa, a seaport in the Crimea. They came as well from Holland and other Western countries through the city of Novgorod. Some pearls, in addition, were found in northern Russian rivers and in the lakes of the Archangel, Novgorod and Olonetz provinces.

Pearls had long been a favorite Russian decoration and they were used by many classes in an abundance that greatly surprised Western travelers who visited Russia in the sixteenth century. Besides their use as jewelry, the Russians sewed them on their clothing, on head-dresses and shoes, which themselves were made of velvet or morocco leather and embroi-

dered in gold. Their use in embroidery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was to soften the effect in a bright scale of colors and to emphasize, as well, certain features of the pattern. Soft and dull in tone, they counterbalanced to some extent the high tones of the embroidery. Unconsciously the effect might have been felt of pearls against the brilliance of the fabric and the gold thread and colored silks.

With the last years of the sixteenth century, especially in the era of Boris Godunov (reigned 1598-1605) and all through the seventeenth, Russian embroideries took on the effect of jewelers' work with their use of precious and semi-precious stones. These added even more color to the pattern of the embroidery and also increased their cost. Like pearls, few jewels appeared in the fifteenth century. The altar frontal of Sophia Palaeologus in the Sergiev monastery-museum is an exception, and in such case it indicated the individual taste of the worker (Plate 8).

Princess Zoe-Sophia Palaeologus was the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine (XIII) Palaeologus (reigned 1448-1483). She came to Russia in 1472 to marry Prince Ivan III of Moscow and brought with her Greek and Italian artists and craftsmen. Her position as Princess of Moscow furthered the relations of Russia with Western Europe, particularly with Italy. In early years she wielded great influence over her husband but these relations cooled when Ivan III wished to make his orphaned grandson, Dimitri, heir to the throne; Sophia naturally wanted their son, Vasili, to succeed his father. In the end Ivan agreed to this arrangement and Vasili received the title of prince and became co-ruler with his father. The period when this question was being debated was a trying one for the Princess and it was at this time that she embroidered her famous veil which she dedicated to St. Sergius and gave it to the monastery of that name, now known as the Sergiev Historical Museum, where it is still preserved. The veil is very small, four by five inches square, and in this limited space are shown great numbers of miniature figures. It is celebrated for its design, compiled from well-known icons, for its color and for its technique—scarcely visible in this small print—with tiny stitches which resemble the strokes of a brush in a painted icon. The design was done, certainly, by some outstanding painter, possibly Dionysius the famous artist of the Novgorod school and well known also as the painter of the celebrated frescoes in the Therapon monastery in the vicinity of Novgorod. The veil is embroidered in split and satin stitch in beautiful, rich colors, such as accorded with the taste of the Russian court at the time. The material is a striped taffeta, and as decoration

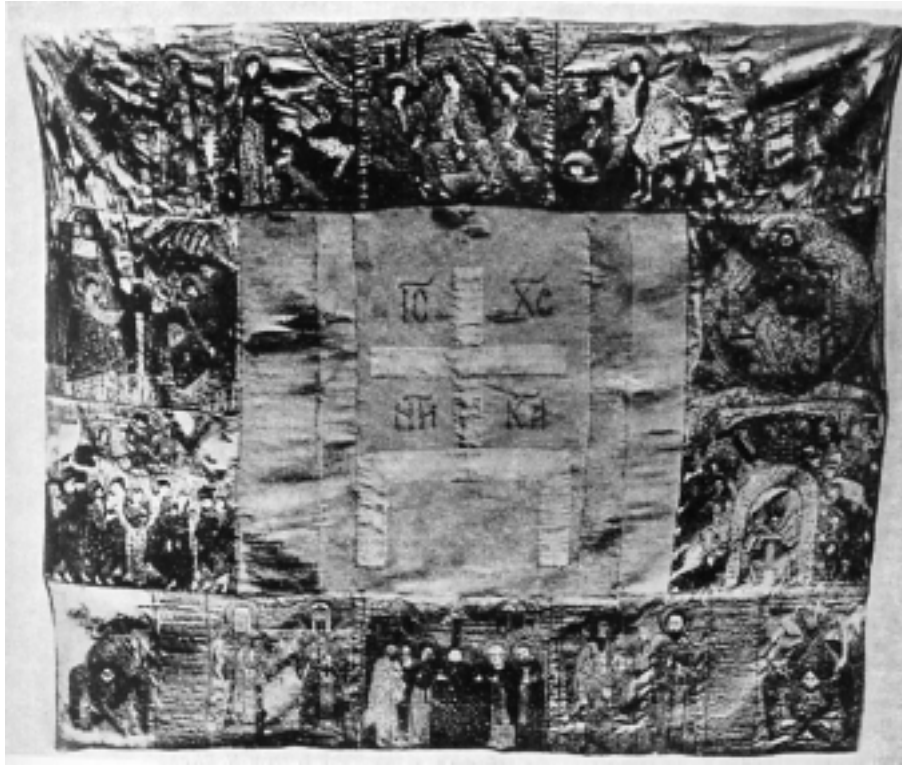


PLATE 8  
ALTAR FRONTAL WORKED BY SOPHIA PALACOLOPUS. 1499.





PLATE 9  
SILVER-GILT PLAQUES ON THE VESTMENT OF THE METROPOLITAN PETER. ABOUT 1322.

precious stones are used, scattered over the ground with the effect of having been spilled carelessly over the embroidery.

Jewels, like pearls, appear first on the halos and crosses in embroidery, but in the seventeenth century they began to be used in great numbers. Sometimes they were mounted in plain gold, sometimes they were pierced and sewed on in the same way as pearls. Or they were inserted into gold plaques, which, along with gold and silver thread, pearls and jewels in the seventeenth century formed part of the decoration of church needlework. The stones that were used generally were colored, and of these there was a great variety. Diamonds do not appear at all, perhaps because the polishing of diamonds was not known until the fifteenth century and even then was a costly process. Colored stones, also, corresponded more closely with the character of the embroideries where white already was represented by pearls. In Russian records mention is made of yellow topazes, garnets, smaragdites (a green stone similar to the beryl or the emerald), emeralds themselves, almandines (an Asia Minor ruby with a purplish tinge), sapphires and colored crystals.

Of great importance also in Russian embroideries along with jewels, were gold and silver plaques. These were disk-like ornaments, large or small, from the size of a small coin to that of a quarter dollar. They were made in a variety of shapes, circular, triangular, square or oblong. They might also be flat or convex as to form, and either plain or elaborately ornamented, with jewels, or with designs engraved or embossed, enameled or decorated with *niello* work, which is the filling of an engraved design with a black alloy. They were made in pierced designs also framing the figure of a saint. Plaques were used early for the decoration of ecclesiastical embroideries, certainly in the fourteenth century, for in about 1322 they appeared on the chasuble and stole of the metropolitan Peter, the same prelate, it would seem, that appears in the embroidery of the Grand Princess of Tver, and who was in office from 1308 until 1328. Interestingly enough these ornaments are in the Tretyakov Art Gallery in Moscow, a row of large plaques in the shape of oval medallions, ornamented in relief with half-figures of saints, alternating, above and below, with smaller ones outlined with pearls and linked together by the same jewels. They exist also on his vestment in the Moscow Armory Museum (Plate 9). Plaques added to the sumptuous effect of silver, gold and pearl embroidery and they increased the variety of pattern.

Among the many workshops in Russia that were attached to great

households, three, by virtue of the quality of their work, stand out among the others. They are the Staritzky and the Godunov workshops of the sixteenth century, and that of the Stroganov family of the seventeenth. These shops were established entirely for domestic purposes—for the making of fine embroideries for donation by their respective families to the church. They did not take outside orders, except for the Stroganovs, who in later years made, upon occasion, pieces for wealthy people who had no such facilities of their own. Their status, therefore, was amateur, but their work was professional to the highest degree.

### THE STARITZKY WORKSHOPS

The Staritzkys were a princely family, and something more than that, for Prince Andrey Staritzky was an uncle of the Czar, Ivan IV, and his son, Prince Vladimir, in 1553 became a pretender to the throne. Very little is known about the early history of these workshops or precisely when they were established, but it was early in the sixteenth century, and they were in a flourishing condition in the middle years, judging from the embroideries that still remain. With their connections this family could avail itself of the services of the great court painters, and their compositions as a result reached as high a point of perfection as any other work of this time, even that of the court shops under the direction of Anastasia Romanovna and later of Irina Godunov, the wife of Ivan's son, Feodor Ivanovich. Contained, as is embroidery, within the sphere of women's work, and particularly so in Russia, where this art was their form of activity, the directorship of these shops fell to women, Princesses though they might be, or the wives of Russian Czars. Prince Andrey Staritzky's wife, Princess Euphrosynia, was one of these, a stubborn and ambitious woman who exerted all her efforts to rival the court shops and with such success that, though the work of the court was beyond criticism, the Staritzkys, in their embroideries, more than equaled the products of their brilliant rivals.

Exalted as was their station, and indeed because of that, tragedy attended this family. Prince Andrey, in 1540, was executed (he was strangled by order of Ivan IV) and the Princess and her son were thrown into prison. Later they were released and allowed to live in their native Moscow, but with orders never to leave the city. Their shops naturally had always been located there, which is the reason why they often are referred to as the "Moscow shops." These shops, in the early 'sixties, were obliged to suspend their activities when the Princess was

exiled to a convent and forced to take the veil; soon after, both she and her son were executed—also by order of the Czar.

The shops, however, seem to have survived for a time. Apparently they were carried on as a family tradition, for there is a veil embroidered by the Princess Eudoxia, the second wife of Prince Vladimir, in about 1578, at which time she, also, became a nun under the name of Euphraxia. The Staritzky shops, when their work is reviewed, had a rather troubled existence, but in their time they created an individual style and one that influenced strongly the art of embroidery in Russia in that era.

Embroidery in the sixteenth century was distinguished by the brilliance of its colors. Unlike the delicate shades of the day of the Grand Princess Maria, bright tones were popular. Though they conformed in the main with the fashions that prevailed, the Staritzkys were conservative in their tastes. They made only sparing use of the pearl, that was so popular a decoration in Russian embroidery at this time, and there is only occasional appearance of the jewel. They were still exponents of an older style. They were famed particularly for their shrouds, and their high period was between the years 1545 and 1564, at which time they were producing their finest pieces. Any study of work of this kind, even in the form of an illustration, shows the skill and the amount of labor required to work these elaborate designs. The ground is entirely covered, not only with the figures themselves but with an endless number of details, carried out in the variety of stitches which were demanded in such designs. It can easily be understood why a shroud, even with numerous and devoted workers, required, as it often did, three years for its completion. The kind and amount of work that such needlework required argues a large shop with many able and skilled workers. No small staff could have coped with it.

These shrouds were designed generally with the scene of the Entombment where the three Marys appear in company with apostles and saints. The difference among them lies in details of the decoration. A shroud of 1561, one of the best products of the Staritzky shops, was the gift of the Princess Euphrosynia and her son, Vladimir, to the Sergiev monastery. This shroud was made in Moscow in an era when the art of embroidery was flourishing there through the assemblage in this city, thanks to the efforts of the metropolitan Macarius, of the best icon painters of this period. It is probable, however, that all of the Staritzky embroideries of this time were executed from the designs of the same icon painter, or his pupils, since they are so much alike in style and design, even to such small details as the patterns of the vestments.

This shroud (Plate 10) originally was embroidered on red damask, parts of which are still visible in certain places, but at the present time most of the ground is made up of the glazed linen with which the pattern is backed. Its predominant colors are red, blue, light brown, a purple-red, light green, dark brown and white. During the process of restoration it was discovered that a layer of flesh-colored silk had been laid on the ground wherever flesh tones, such as hands and faces, were to be represented. This was done, probably so that the red ground would not show through if the embroidery were damaged or worn.

The picture shows the usual representation, the figure of Christ on a bier, the head supported by the Virgin resting on a low seat. To the right St. John, St. Joseph and St. Nicodemus bend horizontally toward the prone figure, the rounded lines of their figures imparting a certain rhythm to the composition. Their vestments show designs which would seem to have been copied after existing materials, a very interesting idea, but unfortunately seldom used except in these Staritzky shrouds. Behind the Virgin are the other two Marys (or the holy women as they also are called). In back are two angels holding liturgical fans, shaped like scepters and adorned with figures or inscriptions, and in front are two angels, drawn in miniature form, on either side of a shroud which is about to be used. At the top of the picture the Holy Ghost descends in the form of a dove with the sun and moon at either side and in the corners are the symbols of the evangelists, the lion, the eagle, the ox and the book.

The stitches employed in this shroud, fortunately, may be described in some detail. The body of Christ is worked in satin stitch with untwisted silk in a pale shade of brown. The ribs and muscles are outlined with a fine thread which is darker in tone than the rest of the body. A suggestion of relief is produced by working parts of the body in circles in untwisted silk in a very close stitch which gives this effect though no padding was used. The hair is worked in brown silk with gold thread used to define the separate locks. This is a treatment often found in the icons. This technique may be seen clearly in the detail of Plate 10 in the hair of the angel on the right. The robe of the Virgin is embroidered in a twisted gold and silver thread couched down with silk to form a design, the *prikerép* of which there were so many patterns which may be seen clearly defined in the robe of the same angel. The figure just behind the Virgin wears a magnificent garment patterned in an undulating floral design probably taken, like the vestments, from an actual brocade. The effect is obtained by the use of a twisted silver thread which is caught



PLATE 10  
SHROUD WITH DESIGN OF THE ENTOMBMENT. STARITZKY WORKSHOPS, 1561.



DETAIL OF PRECEDING EMBROIDERY.

down with colored silks. The robe of Mary Magdalene is of special interest since blank spaces have been left in the embroidery. This seems to have been a feature of the time and is believed to have originated in Novgorod.

The halos, the shroud and the inscriptions on the border of the piece are worked in gold thread in a low relief, with the threads laid across a padding of cotton, as has been described, and caught down between the threads of the padding. For the outlines of the robes and vestments, the halos, the folds in the robe of the Virgin, the handles of the fans and the framework of the circular medallions, a higher relief is employed with the gold threads worked over a thin cord, while for the floral patterns on the halos, and the low chair upon which the Virgin is seated, several layers of thread or thin string are used. In the case of the symbols of the evangelists and the sky above the bier split stitch is employed. The border shows a liturgical inscription inset with twelve medallions, at the top, in the center, The Trinity, at the lower edge similarly placed, Our Lady of the Sign, at the four corners the four evangelists, the others being half figures of saints and prophets. Attached to the right border is a band with an inscription (not visible in the plate) stating, in free translation, that the shroud was embroidered "during the reign of the most Orthodox Czar Ivan (IV) of all the Russias—and donated by Princess Euphrosynia Staritzky and her son Prince Vladimir with a reminder to their progeniture to pray for their souls. Amen."

Another shroud of the same year, in the city museum of Smolensk, the gift of Prince Vladimir, is so handsome that mention of it must be made (Plate 11). It is embroidered on a splendidly patterned silk in colored silks, gold and silver thread and with a few precious stones where they would have appeared on a vestment. The design in general is the same as that of the preceding shroud, but here the border is made up of thirty-two fine medallions framing figures of apostles, prophets and saints within circles formed of running vines and separated by torch motifs. In the center, at the top, against an eight-pointed star, God is seated on a throne accompanied, on the left, by King David, Moses, St. Elias, and St. Abacum, and on the right, King Solomon, the prophets Isiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. In the lower border, in the center, is shown, in its usual representation, the scene of the Assumption where the Virgin Mary lies on a bier with two bishops standing behind. The piece is remarkable for the quality of its technique, the beauty of its colors, and the variety in its stitches. Every halo is worked in a different stitch, the



PLATE II  
SHROUD SHOWING SCENE OF ENTOMBMENT WITH BORDER OF SAINTS AND APOSTLES.  
STARITZKY WORKSHOPS, 1561.



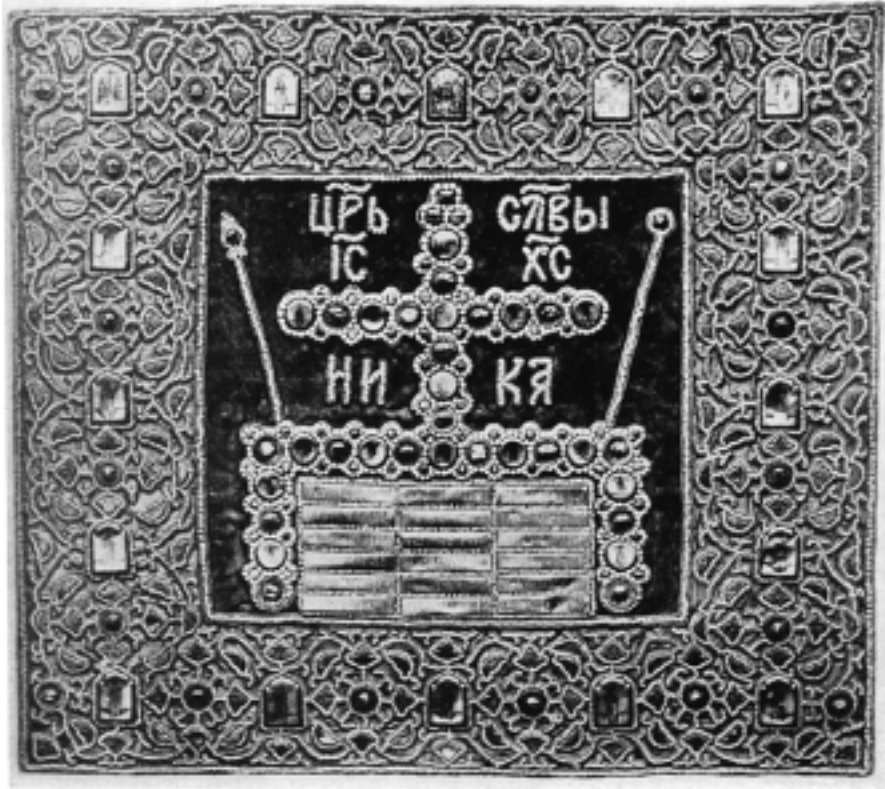


PLATE 12  
ICON VEIL GIVEN BY BORIS GODUNOV FOR THE ICON OF THE TRINITY  
IN THE SERGIEV MONASTERY, GODUNOV WORKSHOPS, 1599.

vestments of the saints show a variety of ornaments and even the bindings of the Holy Scriptures, tiny volumes in the hands of the figures, imitate gold and colored brocades. The embroidered inscription on the right states that this embroidery was donated in 1561 by Prince Vladimir Andreevich and his mother, Princess Euphrosynia, to the cathedral of the Assumption (in Moscow). Later this shroud was transferred to the cathedral of the city of Smolensk.

### THE GODUNOV WORKSHOPS

The Godunov workshops, unlike those of the Staritzky family, which continued over generations, existed for a short time, perhaps from twenty to twenty-five years. They covered the later years of the sixteenth century and the first few of the seventeenth. Like the Staritzky's, this shop was distinguished in its origins, for this was the family of Boris Godunov who was Czar of Russia from 1598 to 1605 and before this, the brother-in-law of Czar Feodor, Ivan IV's son and successor, who had married Boris Godunov's sister, Irina. Though he was born a poor and unimportant nobleman of Tartar descent, Boris Godunov rose to great prominence in the reign of Ivan IV, and became virtually the ruler of Russia under Feodor, who was weak and easily influenced and who was devoted to this friend. After Feodor's death Boris was elected Czar of Russia.

The Godunovs worked in a rich and brilliant style. They were the forerunners of an era that was to run to sumptuous effects. Their work, accordingly, tended toward the spectacular. They made great use of pearls and precious stones, imparting a new and original touch to the whole picture. Instead of a skilful blending of bright silks, as was done in earlier centuries, they secured their effects by the use of gold and silver worked on bright colored materials—usually red silk—by threads of various colors.

A fine example of this new style is a veil of 1599, the gift of Boris Godunov for the icon of the Trinity in the St. Sergiev monastery (Plate 12). Only a small part of the embroidery, the square base that represents the Hill of Calvary, is embroidered; the rest is done in pearls, silver-gilt plaques and precious stones, with a strong resemblance to a piece of jewelry.<sup>15</sup> This effect is increased by the use of a double or

<sup>15</sup> Vasili T. Georgievski *Ancient Embroideries in the Sergiev monastery*, in *Svetilnik*, 1914. Nos. 11, 12, plate VI.

triple silk couching thread whereby the couching itself stands out as if it was also a design embroidered on a gold or silver ground.<sup>16</sup>

In the matter of composition, the Godunov embroideries are simple and unpretentious. There is no attempt to arrange figures into groups; the design is built on principles of symmetry and balance. This is shown in two palls, one with the design of Our Lady of the Sign, and the other Agnus Dei (Plate 13).<sup>17</sup> In the first, which is sixty by sixty-eight centimeters in measurement, the circle enclosing the Virgin and Child is framed in a square formed by the wings of cherubim placed in the corners, another characteristic of the Godunovs who had a great liking for ornament and often used for this purpose parts of figures in their designs. In the other pall, which is slightly larger, the principle of rectangles vertically arranged is carried out by the pattern of the Child lying in a chalice with two angels standing at either side.

These two embroideries, according to old monastery records, were presented in 1593 by Czar Feodor Ivanovich and his wife, Irina, to the monastery of St. Sergius. They are worked in silk, silver, and gold threads on a ground of red silk bordered with red velvet and in a variety of stitches of not very complicated character, such as were popular in the sixteenth century. Small pearls outline the halos, the wings of the cherubim and angels and are used to work the elaborate inscriptions in Slavic on the borders. These palls testify to the tendencies of the Godunovs to preserve sixteenth century features combining with them, as in this instance, new fashions such as the use of pearls.

A well-known piece of embroidery where the main design is made of plaques is the veil presented by Irina Godunov in 1594 to the Suzdal monastery (not illustrated). It was made for the bier of Solomonia Saburova, who, as remembered, once made a veil herself. The piece, two hundred and fifty by one hundred and thirty centimeters, is of black velvet with a border of blue-purple satin. In the center is the Cross, made

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<sup>16</sup> In the couching technique in the seventeenth century, the color of the silk was of minor importance. Gold and silver threads made up the most of the embroidery with the grounds of the materials entirely covered, adding to the brilliant effect. To tone with the bright color of the gold, the couching thread was usually yellow or golden-brown or a greenish tint, whichever was nearest to the color of the metal thread. When colored silk was used, it was only for the sake of variety of pattern.

<sup>17</sup> As a composition, Our Lady of the Sign originated during the old Christian era and penetrated later into Byzantine art. It appears in Russia in the twelfth century in old church frescoes and is seen later on in the Novgorod school of painting. But the Agnus Dei in its Eastern interpretation, the Child in a chalice, is unknown in Byzantine art. It is Slavic and is seen in church frescoes of the fifteenth century. It is often mentioned in church and monastery records as the design for smaller embroideries used during the church service.



A.



B.

PLATE 13

PALLS FOR CHALICE. A. OUR LADY OF THE SIGN. B. AGNUS DEI.  
 PRESENTED BY TZAR FEODOR IVANOVICH AND HIS WIFE, IRINA, TO THE  
 SERGIEV MONASTERY. GODUNOV WORKSHOPS, 1593.

of silver-gilt plaques outlined with two rows of small pearls. In the design is also the group with Christ, the Virgin, and John the Baptist in supplication for the sins of the world (Deësis) and with them a number of saints. In the four corners formed by the arms of the Cross are the words, embroidered in pearls: "The King of Glory—Jesus Christ—Victory." Underneath is an inscription worked in gold which gives the name of the donor and the purpose of the gift.

A last example of these richly ornamented embroideries is a piece of the early seventeenth century given by Boris Godunov, who died in 1605, to the St. Sergiev monastery (frontispiece). It shows a half-figure of Christ embroidered on what would appear to be a sixteenth century Italian velvet, with the ground woven in silver or gold. This is a particularly interesting feature, since it is one of the few pieces where such textiles may be seen. On the head is a crown made of large pearls, and the halo is bordered with pearls of the same size. Pearls decorate also the surface of the halo which is worked with metal threads couched in a strapwork pattern, one of the many *prikrép* designs. Around the face may be seen the line that was used to simulate shadow, and behind the figure is a suggestion of a large circle, of which only a part of a border may be distinguished.

These Godunov embroideries with their pearls, plaques, and precious stones, were far removed from the early work, which showed a fine gravity. They were representative of an era, dazzling though it might be, which was to lead in time to great decadence. These palls, veils, and altar covers are typical examples of what now had become a purely decorative style.

## THE STROGANOV WORKSHOPS

The Stroganovs were a fabulously rich family who owned the largest salt mines in Russia and who were conspicuous in the economic and political life of Russia at that time. This powerful family sponsored the conquest of Siberia in the sixteenth century and was authorized by Ivan IV to have an army of its own. The Stroganovs were devoted to the church and were generous patrons of all forms of religious art, especially that of icon painting. In the seventeenth century the Stroganovs lost their political power, though their interest in ecclesiastical art continued, and many of their painters joined the workshops that had been established in Moscow by the Czar. Among them was Procopius Tchirin, whose era accords with the highest point of Russian icon painting.

The Stroganovs, along with icon painting, interested themselves in ecclesiastical embroidery and theirs was one of the famous workshops attached to a great house. Some historians are of the opinion that the family came to Solvytchegodsk, where they lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from Novgorod, but no embroideries of this school prior to the sixteenth century have been found in Novgorod which argues either that the Stroganovs did not begin their patronage of that special branch of religious art until after they had settled in their new home, or that the family, as is quite possible, had always lived in Solvytchegodsk. The Stroganovs were known as the patrons of what is called the "Stroganov school" of icon painting and it is evident that it was painters from this same school who made the designs for the outstanding pieces of embroidery of the Stroganov shops.

The earliest embroideries of this school, known to be such, lack any dates, but there can be no doubt that they were completed before 1579 for this is the date of the earliest church records of the Solvytchegodsk cathedral and in these records they are mentioned. These early pieces are made up, for the most part, of small embroideries such as veils, palls and deacons' stoles, although there are a few shrouds, somewhat larger, embroidered on satin, damask or taffeta in gold, silver and silk thread, often with borders of different colors. Their subjects are The Assumption of the Virgin, Deësis, Our Lady of Vladimir with figures of saints embroidered on the border. But none of these pieces bears either a date or the name of a donor.

The earliest dated example among these Stroganov embroideries is a shroud of 1602 in the Russian Museum in Leningrad that is worked with a scene of the Entombment. It was the gift of Nikita Stroganov (1564-1618) to the cathedral of Solvytchegodsk. Made as it was at the turn of the century, this piece still retains sixteenth century characteristics and differs in many ways from the work that was done later. In the earlier fashion it is embroidered in gold thread couched down with bright colored silks whose purpose it was to simulate the effect of the painted icon.

It is a matter of regret that few of this early seventeenth century group of embroideries have been preserved in museums and monasteries. Possibly it was because this was the time when the Stroganov shops were beginning their activities and before they had attained the perfection that characterized them in the second half of the century. A great many splendid embroideries of that time still can be found in Russian museums, many of them in an excellent state of preservation.

The Stroganov embroideries, generally speaking, may be divided into three distinct categories:

- (1) Embroideries of the first half of the seventeenth century. Of these few have been preserved.
- (2) Embroideries made between 1650-1670. A great many of these exist.
- (3) Embroideries made between 1670-1680. Also well represented in Russian museums and monasteries.

#### FIRST PERIOD OF THE STROGANOV SCHOOL (1602-1650)

Embroideries of the first half of the century do not show, to any great extent, the features that were to characterize the work made in later years. They no longer resemble, it is true, the bright pictures worked in colored silks of the fifteenth century, nor do they imitate the icons of the sixteenth. But, like their immediate predecessors, they are worked generally in silk and in thin gold and silver wire, to imitate hammered metal, on deep red satin or damask grounds with the space outside the embroidery left free as was the fashion in the earlier works. With these features, however, they combine, as a seventeenth century trait, the close and complicated stitch that was peculiar to that century as a whole, and particularly to the Stroganov school.

Several features mark the embroideries of this early seventeenth century group. One is the flat technique that was employed, and that was to continue in the Stroganov embroideries as the century progressed. In the execution of the faces, as an example, there is neither relief nor shading, with eyes and features worked in a very fine silk to produce a thin outline. An outstanding feature is the heavy silver cord, made of thin silver thread worked over a padding, that is used to outline the figures. This also continued to be used throughout all the later years. Introduced as well at this time was the ingenious device for suggesting movement in the figures, an abrupt massing of drapery in an otherwise flowing line, such as the end of a train, which, in contrast to folds lying motionless, gives the impression of a step suddenly checked. A certain mannerism of posture and gesture characterizes the figures, the feet, for one, scarcely touching the ground. But in all instances these embroideries show a skill of execution and a beauty of design that is present in the Stroganov icon paintings of this same period.

A fine example in this early group is a splendid banner, deemed in

all probability to have come from this shop, now in the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow, called The Archangel Michael appearing to Joshua, Son of Nun, a term by which Joshua was known, his father being Nun of the Tribe of Ephraim (Plate 14). Here the archangel is shown standing on a cloud, holding in one hand a sword and in the other an oval disk inscribed X C, which was the symbol for Christ. The slender figures are typical of the Stroganov school of this period and movement on the part of Joshua is shown by the massed material at the end of his cloak. The pattern, in all probability, was made after the design of Procopius Tchirin. In style it is very like one of his icons, St. John (Ivan) the Warrior, with the features of John Stroganov, who was his patron and to whom the painter gave the icon (Plate 15).

An icon cover of the first quarter of the century representing St. George and St. Theodore (a bishop of Galatia who died in 613), accompanied by an assembly of saints, combines a late with an early style with the central figures worked in silver and gold on red satin with the background left free and the use, also in the case of these two figures, of the close and complicated stitch which was characteristic of this later era. Here again may be seen the device of arrested motion in the bruskiy rounded outline of St. George's mantle, the pointed end still visible, showing that the figure, recently moving, has met with a sudden stop. That this veil belongs to the first quarter of the century is indicated not only by its technique but also by the names of the saints embroidered in the border, for they are the patron saints of the members of the donor's family, Peter, Matrena, Theodore, Catherine and Anna, and as Anna died in 1625, as shown by her tombstone, the veil could not have been donated later than that year (not illustrated).

Beside these examples a few other embroideries of this period are known, a veil representing Our Lady of Vladimir and pieces embroidered with the figures of saints, preserved in various monastery-museums in Russia. But these embroideries are not numerous nor do they show great variety as to subject or composition. Saints form the greater part of their designs and they are usually small in size, excepting the shroud of 1602 and even this cannot compare with the shroud of 1660-1661, now in the Russian State Museum in Leningrad, or the enormous shrouds of 1611 and 1671, now in the Museum of the Sergiev monastery near Moscow.

Undoubtedly it was the best icon painters of the Stroganov school, such as Procopius Tchirin, who designed these pieces which the Russian





PLATE 14  
BANNER SHOWING THE ARCHANGEL MIKHAEL APPEARING TO JOSHUA, SON OF NUN.  
ATTRIBUTED TO STROGANOV WORKSHOPS, XVI-XVII CENTURY.



PLATE 15  
ICON WITH FIGURE OF SAINT JOHN, THE WARRIOR.  
PAINTED BY PROCOPIUS TCHIRIN. XVII CENTURY.

needleworker executed with such skill and understanding. Still, even with such aid, it is evident that the Stroganov shops had not yet attained a great distinction judging by the simplicity and general similarity of their subjects as well as by the comparatively small number of the examples that have been preserved.

#### SECOND PERIOD OF THE STROGANOV SCHOOL (1650-1670)

Beginning with 1651, which was the era of Dimitri Andreevitch Stroganov, the embroideries given by this family to different churches and monasteries increased in number and their character changed noticeably. Between 1651 and 1670 many beautiful pieces were produced, most of them still preserved in Russian museums. They were the gifts of Dimitri Stroganov and his son, Gregory (1656-1715), to the church.

It was to the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Solvytchegodsk that the first embroideries were given. Quite unlike the small pieces of the earlier day, these are large, measuring from four to five feet in length, richly embroidered, and with the ground solidly covered in gold and lined with costly materials. On these pieces, inscriptions are worked and often the date when the piece was completed. Among these embroideries, with their gold embroidery, and often decorated with pearls, the most interesting is a group of altar covers. Two represent, respectively, St. Peter and St. Jonas; both of these were done in 1656 and are now in the Moscow Armory Museum. St. Sergius was worked as a subject in 1666 and 1671, these pieces being in the Sergiev monastery-museum, near Moscow. St. Zosima and St. Sabbatius of Solovetz, the one done in 1660 and the other in 1661, are in the Russian State Museum in Leningrad. In the Rostov museum, also of interest is a large shroud of 1661 and many smaller pieces, such as veils, picturing church holidays and scenes from the life of Christ (not illustrated).

Conspicuous among the embroideries of this period and entirely unrelated to those portraying saints, are the pieces that represent a dramatic subject—Prince Dimitri of Ouglitch. Of all the Stroganov works of the first decade of this period, the veils with the Dimitri subject may be considered as the most characteristic and the most important. Dimitri was a son of Ivan the Terrible and his last wife. He was exiled with his mother to the town of Ouglitch, where, supposedly, he was murdered, while still an infant, by the order of Boris Godunov. Dimitri was the patron saint of Dimitri Stroganov, which explains his frequent appear-

ance as a subject in the Stroganov embroideries. In addition, he was popular in his capacity of saint in the Moscow of the period, and the Stroganovs were closely identified with this city, supporting the Moscow ruler on many occasions, financially and in other ways, receiving in return various privileges.

One of the most important embroideries of this series is an icon veil, dated 1654, which is entitled *The Murder of Prince Dimitri in Ouglitch* (Plate 16). It is a piece two feet four inches square, embroidered on dark red satin in gold, silver, and silk thread, and with an inscription done in silver, executed with great skill and done undoubtedly by a fine designer, which reads "The murder of the most orthodox Prince Dimitri in Ouglitch."

Represented in the scene are two figures, one the Prince and the other his murderer. Dimitri is shown half-kneeling, his feet barely touching the ground, on a narrow strip embroidered in gold which represents the soil. He wears a crown and a loose, long-sleeved tunic, embroidered also in gold and with gold shoulder pieces. Bordering the tunic is silk of another color, ornamented with a design of precious stones whose effect is simulated in the needlework by the use of colored silks.

Over Dimitri leans his murderer, his dark hair showing from beneath a silver hat with upturned brim lined with gold, the kind of hat that is worn by shepherds in the scenes of the Nativity and by ordinary people as well, as they appear in Russian icons. Like his hat, his tunic is embroidered in silver, and his mantle in gold. His posture in this position is quiet, but the disarrangement of the ends of his mantle, like the long step forward by Dimitri, indicates that a brusque movement has just taken place. Out of the mouth of the unhappy Prince flies his soul, portrayed as a naked child in the manner customary in Russian icon painting, and from above an angel descends, arms outstretched to receive Dimitri's soul.

Like his aggressor's, Dimitri's clothes are embroidered in gold and silver, the few pleats, falling in slightly curved lines, worked in dark silk in stem stitch. The face and hands, like the figure of the child, are done in flesh color in the flat Stroganov technique of the period. The eyes are outlined in the same manner as the pleats, but now with the line continued to form the eyebrows and join a similar line running from the corner of the eye toward the temple, producing the effect of eyeglasses. These glasses are a feature of the years between 1650 and 1660 and show, during this decade, several variations. Toward the end of the period, instead of outlining the eye they are reduced to a narrow line that runs



PLATE 16  
ICON VEIL. THE MURDER OF PRINCE DIMITRI IN OUGLICH. STROGANOV WORKSHOPS, 1654.

from the eye to the temple. The narrow band outlining the face, and which is done also in dark silk, replaces the wider one that was characteristic of the sixteenth century. It was meant to represent the shadow thrown by the face and as such to provide an effect of relief. Accompanying each figure appearing in this embroidery is an identifying inscription: Prince Dimitri, Murderer Nikita Kachalov, The Blessed Soul, the Angel of God. At the left are two stylized trees with flat tops, and in the upper left-hand corner, in the form of a medallion, is a half-figure of Christ reclining on clouds.

The entire composition is designed on a diagonal line, starting, as it appears to the spectator, from the lower right-hand corner and rising toward the left. An inscription embroidered on the back states that the work was completed on October 19, 1654, and donated to the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Solvytchegodsk in fulfilment of the promise of Dimitri Andreevich Stroganov: "Embroidered the pearl embroidery by his wife Anna Ivanovna and the rest executed by the nun Martha." The Anna Ivanovna referred to in this inscription, and others as well, was the second wife of Dimitri, an extremely skilful needlewoman and apparently a good executive in addition, for it was she who brought the work of the Stroganov shops to such perfection and who enlarged them, judging from the amount of embroidery that has been preserved to the present time.

Another icon veil, embroidered in silk, gold, and silver, and quite as important as the first, shows the same subject, but with a different presentation (Plate 17). Here St. Dimitri, who by this time had been canonized, appears as a single figure, as he is shown in contemporary frescoes, with the scene of his murder drawn in miniature in the background. Stocky in build, set against a ground of red *kamka*, the feet, in the manner traditional at this time, scarcely touching the ground, the saint-prince wears the customary vestments of his rank—a loose tunic and five-pointed crown embroidered in gold. The shoulder pieces and the wide border of the tunic are ornamented again by a design of precious stones worked, as in the first piece, in colored silks. The crown originally was set with jewels and outlined with pearls, as indeed were all the figures on the veil. These now have entirely disappeared and only their traces, as may be seen on the crown, remain. The background at the left is embroidered solidly in gold, with the scene of the murder, small as it is in scale, meticulously reproduced. A low, white crenelated wall with a gate represents the action, as visualized by the artist, as taking place within the city walls. Present are the familiar features; the two figures, the angel, the escaping



PLATE 17  
ICON VEIL. PRINCE DIMITRI. STROGANOV WORKSHOPS, 1654.

soul, and even the traditional strip of earth upon which Dimitri kneels and which is worked in colored silks to differentiate it from the main subject. The face, embroidered in flesh-colored silk in the usual flat effect, shows the eyeglass treatment and the narrow band typical of that time. In the upper left-hand corner, replacing the Christ shown in the other veil, is the Mother of God with the Christ Child in her arms.

Embroidered in gold on the veil are two inscriptions, one on the lower part (not visible in the illustration) stating that this veil was donated by Dimitri Stroganov in the year 1651, while the other, on the back, more elaborately phrased, says: "In the year 1654, October 19, [that is three years after it was begun] was completed this veil for the icon of Saint Prince Dimitri of Moscow, which is in the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the city of Solvychevodsk in fulfillment of the promise of the noted and esteemed man Dimitri Andreevich Stroganov. The work in pearls done by his wife Anna Ivanova, and faces, figures, vestments and the rest executed by the nun Martha called Veselka." Underneath this inscription, in a frame, the cost of the embroidery is given. Unfortunately, in the account given of this piece, the price, which would have been of the greatest interest, is not stated. Wide borders embroidered with the figures of saints in medallions frame this embroidery and in the four corners are the symbols of the evangelists, the ox, the book, the eagle, and the lion.

Another embroidery, dated 1661, and representing Our Lady of the Don (Plate 18), was made when gold embroidery was at its height and when its particular purpose was to simulate the casing in gold or silver, called *riza*, with which, as early as the fourteenth century, the Russians, under Greek influence, began to cover their icons. The *riza* showed, more or less in relief, the folds of the clothes and vestments with the face and the hands, and any other part of the figure left unclothed showing through the holes in the *riza* (Plate 19).

To simulate such an effect in embroidery the ground, as in this particular piece, was embroidered solidly in gold thread couched down with a light yellow silk, which against such a color was invisible and which produced an appearance of a sheet of gold incised with a fine design. The vestments, carrying out this same idea, were worked in gold with only the hands and faces embroidered in silk. The resemblance to the icon was further heightened by the use of a thick gold cord for the working of the inscriptions and for the framing as well. The face in this embroidery and also the hands are done in flesh-colored silk with the features worked in





PLATE 18  
OUR LADY OF THE DON.  
THE EMBROIDERY SIMULATES THE EFFECT OF A *riza*. STROGANOV SCHOOL, 1661.



PLATE 19

ICON COVERED WITH *riza*. THE VIRGIN AND CHILD. XV CENTURY.  
FROM THE USPENSKI CHURCH, PSKOV. THE APPLIED METAL WORK IS EARLY  
XVI CENTURY. USPENSKI MUSEUM.

dark silk. The face is worked in the usual flat technique and is outlined with a narrow band, with the eyes marked by the elaborate eyeglass effect. (A veil, Our Lady of Vladimir, given by the same donor, Dimitri Andreevich Stroganov, embroidered at the same period, but not dated, resembles this preceding piece closely, except for the treatment of the eyes, which in this instance, are marked with the fine line in dark silk extending from the corner of the eye to the temple, a feature that came into use in the Stroganov embroideries between 1660 and 1670.)

With this second period which was a flourishing one, the embroideries of this famous workshop attain their highest merit. The dramatic subjects such as Prince Dimitri, are few; they represent for the greater part full length figures of saints robed in stiff gold vestments with the pleats outlined with heavy cords, either in silver, like St. Sergius (1661) or black, as in the case of St. Zozima and St. Sabbatius, or even in pearls as appears in the case of St. Sergius, 1671, embroidered by Anna Stroganov, who was so skilled in this kind of embroidery.

### THIRD PERIOD OF THE STROGANOV SCHOOL (1670-1680)

The embroideries of this period generally bear the name of the donor, now Gregory Dimitrievich (1656-1715), the son of the Dimitri who in his time had given so generously to the church. While similar in many respects to the work of the previous period, the embroideries of this era have a character of their own. Usually they are made up of smaller pieces, veils embroidered with figures of saints, those of local fame or popular in the provinces with which the Stroganov family had business and trade connections. Many of the veils are still preserved in the museums of Solvytchegodsk and of Nijni Novgorod on the Volga River. In these pieces the ground generally is embroidered all over the surface in gold, often with a floral ornament. The saints are shown both as single figures and as groups. The figures are no longer tall and slender but now rather short and stocky, a tendency which was evinced in the case of Prince Dimitri in the second of the veils with this subject. The faces are still worked in a flat effect with the eyeglass detail finely executed. The vestments are outlined with heavy silver cord, now absent. The borders of these pieces are generally cherry-red. Some of these veils are not done as well as the work of the preceding period, but the technique of the gold embroidery is still very fine.

An analysis of these Stroganov embroideries will show that for the most part, especially in the case of conventional subjects such as The Annunciation, The Holy Trinity and other of the kind, they followed the old traditions of contemporary Russian icons where the composition is built on the traditions of balance and symmetry. But when the artist deals with a different type of subject, such as "The Murder of Prince Dimitri," the design follows a diagonal line.

As for the problem of perspective, this had never really been solved, though it should be pointed out that embroidering in gold, which was a feature of seventeenth century work, rendered a solution extremely difficult. A measure of success, however, was achieved by placing figures at an angle that would give an impression of depth, by arranging groups so that they would break the picture into several planes and finally by securing an effect of relief by outlining the faces and the folds of the robes. Throughout all these embroideries the technique is fundamentally flat and the presentation in many cases symbolic, in the manner peculiar to the seventeenth century. The figures, robes, and vestments all show a flat execution. The faces are treated in the same way without any attempt to express relief or any delineation of the features. In the sixteenth century an attempt had been made to effect a contrast of light and shade by the use of silk in two shades to imitate the strokes of a paint brush, but in the seventeenth century this was succeeded by the flat technique.

While preserving the characteristic features of their century the Stroganov embroideries contained certain traits of their own. In their use of gold thread, so universally employed in the seventeenth century, and where technique was of main importance, these shops attained an amazing skill and a beauty of workmanship rarely found in other embroideries of that era. In the gold *riza* work they achieved the effect of hammered gold sheet; their inscriptions look as if they were chased on metal plates. Peculiar to this school was the treatment of the eyes, and the outlining of the pleats is another detail in which their work is distinct from that of other establishments.

As analysis of the style of the Stroganov embroideries, as far as it concerns period, would relate them to the Gothic, though new tendencies were being made visible which later would bring them to the baroque. Such features at this time, however, were scarcely noticeable; they are shown only in the figured backgrounds and the attempts to effect in some new way the feeling of perspective.

The beautiful style of the Stroganov embroideries was greatly admired by the Russians of that period. To explain their originality there must be remembered the wealth, the taste, and the comparatively high intellectual standards of the Stroganov family, who in this respect stood well above their contemporaries. There was, in addition, their famous school of icon painters and as well their great library which was unusual for that period in its wealth and in the variety of its contents. Anna Stroganov, wife of Dimitri, was herself a famous needlewoman. She personally inspired and directed the work of the Stroganov shops which were considered to be of the first rank among other shops, provincial, court and monastic. After the death of Dimitri Stroganov in 1670 large embroideries ceased to be made. The last creation of Anna Stroganov was a veil representing the life of St. Sergius which she donated, after her husband's death, to the St. Sergiev monastery in 1671 "to pray for the peace of his soul." This veil is embroidered in gold, silver, and colored silks and decorated with pearls and precious stones, a feature that relates it to the later seventeenth century embroideries when this kind of decoration was so much used. During the lifetime of Dimitri's son, Gregory, the shops still kept their high standards, but after his death in 1715, the Stroganov workshops ceased to exist.

With the end of the Stroganov School, the history of fine Russian embroidery ceases. The eighteenth century taste for rich and extravagant effects placed emphasis upon the use of gold, pearls and precious stones rather than on fine workmanship and design. This century, moreover, brought Russia into close touch with Western Europe and introduced into the Russian way of life a variety of interests and changes so great that the aristocratic classes had neither time nor attention to spare for this old Russian art. Embroidery was confined to convents with leadership lacking to encourage the development of fine, private workshops.

Few examples of this work, it is to be regretted, can be found outside Russia, but certain fine pieces may be seen in the following collections: The Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore which contains some few examples, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the von Lanza collection in London, the one with a seventeenth century stole and the other sixteenth and seventeenth pieces, the George H. Hann collection in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, which includes a seventeenth century altar cloth very similar to the Godunov embroidery of 1604, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which received recently a fine seventeenth century altar cloth with the Scene of the Entombment.

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