

# Islamic Courtly Textiles & Trade Goods 14th-19th century

## Acknowledgements

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Steven Cohen  
Alex Cousens  
Rosemary Crill  
Prudence Cuming Ass.  
Joana Fonseca  
Anne-Marie Keblow Bernsted  
William Kwiatkowski  
Rahul Jain  
Janie Lightfoot  
Mary McWilliams  
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Matt Pia  
Christine Ramphal  
Lucia Savi  
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Hülya Tezcan  
Bruce Wannell  
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In the past, Islamic courtly and trade textiles always played a highly important role in the social and economic life of the Muslim world. However, there has not been an exhibition on this subject in London for many decades and yet textiles form a central part of any museum or private collection of Islamic art.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly the rarity of the material and secondly, textiles today are a commodity that is mass produced and readily available. They bear no relation to what was woven for the Islamic courts, before the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Then, sumptuous court dress and furnishings were a means for rulers to display and enjoy their status and wealth. They were of a splendour and beauty that we can barely imagine today.

The Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal courts of the 16th and 17th century rivalled, and at times eclipsed, many of the Renaissance courts of the time. Textiles, both for furnishings and costume, were an extremely important part of ceremonial and court life. There was a strictly regulated industry where silks, velvets and embroideries of superlative quality and design were produced in royal ateliers, often housed within the palace grounds. The best were for the sole use of the ruler and his court, but they were also an important means of trade and diplomacy. For example, no other nationality produced figurative velvets to compete with the Safavid weavers under the control of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). Robes of honour made of this fabric were given as diplomatic gifts to the Russian, Ottoman and Mughal courts. The range of Ottoman silks and velvets stored in the Topkapi Palace Museum are all of magnificent quality, their bold and inventive designs exuding both pleasure and power.

India has been famous for its painted cottons and embroideries since Roman times. Today our knowledge relies on historical trade accounts kept by Europeans who had trading outposts in India. Recent discoveries have identified an important and long standing trade of differently designed Indian cottons for a South-East Asian market, some of which pre-date Indian painting on paper. The designs of textiles made for the exclusive use of the Muslim rulers of India, both the Mughal emperors and the Deccani sultans, were more voluptuous and less disciplined than their Safavid and Ottoman counterparts but they too were of stupendous quality.

Although there have been a number of intelligent and exciting exhibitions and in-depth studies of specific areas of Islamic textile production a major museum exhibition on the subject as a whole is now long overdue.

This exhibition and catalogue will show a concise selection of around twenty textiles ranging from Mamluk Egypt and Nasrid Spain to Sultanate and Mughal India, Safavid Iran and Ottoman Turkey.

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## I Winged felines in roundels

East India, 15th – early 16th century  
89 × 35 cm  
Silk *samite*; loom end

This silk belongs to a rare group of Indian draw-loomed silks discovered in Tibet. Most of them are woven in the complex fabric structures of *samite* and *lampas* and date from the 15th to the 17th centuries. As many pre-date the earliest surviving silks of the Mughal period, they are of the utmost importance to the study of medieval Indian textile history. Our silk is one of the earliest of the group.

By the time this silk was woven in India, the theme of inhabited roundels had already appeared for a thousand years in draw-loomed silks woven elsewhere in Asia. In this relatively late, attractive Indian version, a winged feline is confined within a plain roundel. The creature is of simple but menacing form, freely suspended within its circular space. Absent here is the decorative infill often seen in this sort of woven design. A simple quatrefoil motif occupies the interstices of the pattern.

It is likely that this cloth would have been joined to other lengths and used as a panel or hanging in a Tibetan

sinuous, energetic form distinguishes it from the fleshy, ponderous bodies of *vyalas* from other regions. The snarling canine head, deep-set fangs and nodule nose recall those of a Chinese dragon rather than of the stately leonine representations that appear elsewhere in medieval Indian art. Bronze *vyalas* from medieval Assam and Bengal are similarly lean, ferocious, hound-like creatures. The Chinese-style winged lion was the royal emblem of the Ahom rulers of Assam, who are believed to have brought it with them when they invaded the area from northern Myanmar in the 13th century (Das Gupta 1982, p. 82). An alternative explanation might lie in the prolific exchange of embassies between Ming China and Sultanate Bengal in the first half of the 15th century.

Compared to the *vjala*, the quatrefoil motif in the interstices is more anonymous. It is one of many floral devices that appear with subtle and endless variation in India's temple sculpture and painting from the earliest



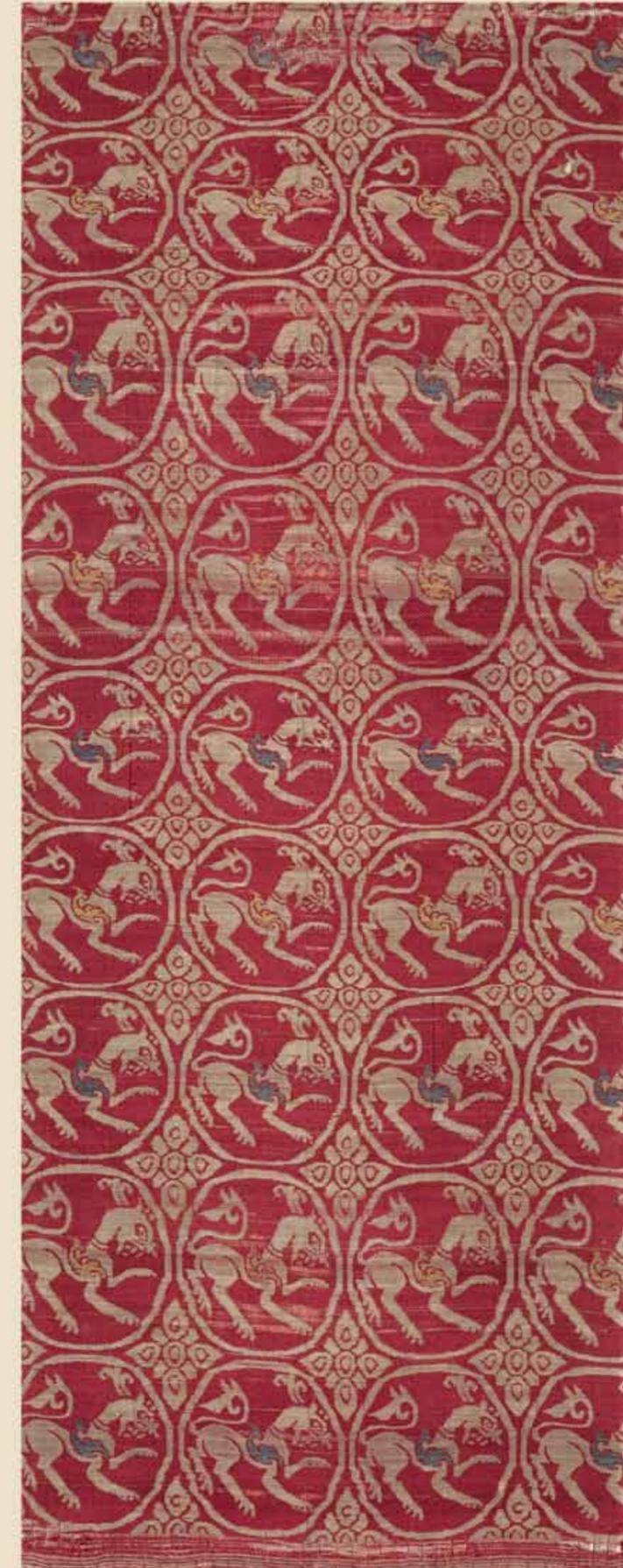
Coin of  
Sultan Jalal al-Din  
Muhammad Shah of Bengal  
issued in 1421  
(r. 1415–1416 & 1418–1433)  
Courtesy of IIRNS, Nasik

monastery. Apart from its outstanding decorative value in an architectural setting, an expensive silk *samite* such as this probably carried a certain ritual significance for its wealthy donor. The accumulation of merit, in particular, was a highly desired outcome of donating precious textiles to Buddhist temples. A silk of this design might also have been stitched into an aristocratic or ecclesiastical garment. Ordered roundels or rows of fantastic animals and birds appear on garments depicted in 14th to 16th century manuscript painting from west India, and even earlier in the 12th–13th century murals in the Buddhist temples of Alchi in Ladakh, in north India (Guy 1998, fig. 57, p. 52; Goepper 1995, fig. 1, p. 101).

The feline beast of this silk, a *singha vyala* or *yali*, is a mythical creature endowed with protective powers. It appears as a heraldic motif in Indian temple sculpture of all periods and regions. In this instance, it is of an East Indian type that is unique in the arts of India. Its

times. Its representation in this silk has been compared to motifs seen in early sculpture from east India (Cohen 1997, p. 101). It may be compared, equally successfully, to minor decorative devices in medieval painting from the region (Losty 1980, fig. 8, p. 13).

More specifically, the roundels of this silk reproduce the 'lion coins' of the Sultanate rulers of Bengal. Small, slender felines with plumed heads, arranged in the same posture as in this silk, appear in a series of coins issued by Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah (1437–1459) from about 1445 onward (Choudhury and Ray 1974, pp. 84–86; pl. IV, nos. 6–9, page unnumbered). A very similar series was issued from about circa 1490 onward from another neighbouring kingdom, the hill state of Tripura (Banerji 1913–14, p. 250; pl. LXVIII, nos. 4–13, page unnumbered). This trend followed the precedent set by Sultan Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah (1415–1433), a Hindu convert, when he issued in 1421 one of the largest and heaviest



silver coins ever minted in India (see illustration p. 2) (Farid 1976, p. 88; pl. V, page unnumbered). The dramatic *vyala* depicted on the reverse of that coin is not only the first such creature to appear in the Islamic coinage of east India but also resembles closely a more elaborately drawn *vyala* in another Indian *samite* from this group of medieval silks (that textile, one of the earliest Indian silks known so far, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 1993.21-m; Cohen 1995, Fig. 13, pp. 34-35).

It is reasonably certain that this particular example was woven in east India sometime during the 15th or early 16th century. The west Assam-north Bengal region was an ancient, culturally rich area known for its silk industry and was held intermittently, in this period, by the Hindu rulers of Kamrupa-Kamata and Koch Bihar as well as the Muslim sultans of Bengal. By then, the influence of Bengal's sultanate art had spread all the way to the eastern frontiers of Assam, and it is possible that a silk such as this one was originally woven for the Bengal court but entered the brisk export trade to neighbouring Tibet.

Text by Rahul Jain 2011

*Provenance*  
Private collection, USA

- Literature*  
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## 2 Large *tiraz* fragment, possibly from a shawl or mantel

Egypt, Mamluk period (1250–1517), 14th century  
Inscription reads in mirror image the repeat of:  
'al mulk' (dominion)

36 × 144.5 cm

Plain weave linen with supplementary weft threads;  
left selvedge

A large fragment of *tiraz*, of fine linen woven with paired linen indigo wefts simulating embroidery. The decoration consists of three bands, the first with a long inscription in Kufic in mirror image with the repeat of the word 'dominion'. The second band is a series of lozenges with simple geometric decoration; each lozenge linked by a repeat of the same Kufic inscription, while the third and largest band is incomplete and consists of a different geometric design enclosing diamond shaped details.

This type of decoration is most commonly seen in Mamluk embroideries and knitting and is more rarely seen in woven textiles of the period.

The Arabic word *tiraz*, originally from the Persian word to embroider, is associated with dress and robes of honour. It is thought to have first appeared in the Umayyad period and was probably based on earlier Sassanian and Byzantine models. A *tiraz* band is a line of inscription on the upper sleeves of a robe or on the border of a shawl or turban sash. Until the late 11th century, *tiraz* inscriptions usually included a blessing, followed by the names of the caliph, the vizier and the place of production and finally the date. By the Mamluk period, the text was greatly shortened to a repeated pious formula.

*Tiraz* textiles were part of an official custom, the *khila'* ceremony, in which robes of honour were presented to a deserving subject by the caliph. Until the mid 14th century there were two types of *tiraz* factory, a private one for the royal household and a public institution, also under the caliph's or ruler's control, working for the domestic and export markets.

There was a change in the Mamluk textile industry around 1340–41. Government officials headed the royal textile workshops and not the Sultan, suggesting a withdrawal of royal patronage. These later Mamluk *tiraz*, with abbreviated text and geometric designs, were the product of more ordinary workshops and sold in the Cairo bazaar. This is a rare survival of such work.

### Literature

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### 3 Mudejar silk depicting rampant crowned lions under split palmette leaves

Spain, probably Granada, late 15th century  
22.5 × 25.5 cm  
Silk lampas

A fragment of silk lampas with excellent colour showing pairs of crowned lions within a trellis design of swooping half-palmettes.

According to Florence May, 1957 (p. 185) at least five variations of this popular design pattern were woven in Spain in different colour-ways throughout the second half of the 15th century and early 16th century. Examples exist in many textile collections in Europe and the States. The most detailed and up-to-date scholarship on this design group was produced by Otavsky (1995, cat. nos. 144-147) where four different variants, now in the Abegg Stiftung in Bern, are discussed together with identical or near identical silks in other collections.

Our fragment appears to be of the same design to cat. no.146 (Otavsky 1995; Abegg inv.no.49) from the very end of the 15th century, probably woven after the Catholic conquest of Granada in 1492. Other fragments with a slight variation of design to ours are in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Errera 1927, no. 103, pp. 114-115), the David Collection in Copenhagen (von Folsach 1996, no. 202) and the Museum of Islamic Art Qatar. These textiles travelled. A painting of The Deposition (c.1515) by Giovanni Bellini (1431-1516) and Rocco Marconi (c.1490-1529), in the Gallerie dell'Accademia Venice, shows St John the Evangelist wearing a silk of this generic design (Monnas 1991, figs. 2-3, p. 44) showing that this pattern was exported to Italy and continued into the early 16th century.

The Nasrid rulers (1232-1492) of the kingdom of Granada were the last Muslim dynasty in Andalucía. Their survival was due to shrewd political compromises and alliances with their Muslim and Christian neighbours. Their palace complex of the Alhambra in Granada was a showcase for their luxurious life-style

and eventually served to camouflage their dwindling and precarious political power. By the 14th century Granada was famed for the high quality of her silk production which continued throughout the 15th and early 16th century when silk weavers continued to produce Nasrid style silks for their new Christian patrons. The Mudejar style, a term invented in the 19th century to describe the Spanish decorative styles evolved by Muslims in Christian Spain or by Christians and Jews working with the Spanish Muslim tradition. The Mudejar style is best known in architecture, for example the 14th century Alcazar in Seville, but the term also applies to all the decorative arts.

*Provenance*  
Private collection, USA

*Literature*  
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## 4 Ogival lattice velvet from the Sanguszko tent

Iran, Safavid period, circa 1600  
100 × 41 cm (minimum width: 8 cm)  
Cut and voided silk velvet with remains of weft silver  
lamella over a satin ground

Wedge shaped panel widening towards the bottom in a pointed lobe, this velvet consists of two systems of elegant, coordinated scrolls with richly varied large palmette flowers and rosettes in six colour pile velvet on a satin ground once entirely covered with silver lamella. This high quality velvet would have been woven during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) and is a rare survival from an industry that was both high-value and high-production. The shape of the blossom in the bottom right hand corner of our velvet is very close in design to the embossed flowers on a silver-faced door, dated 1020/1611–12 in the Shrine of Shaykh Safi at Ardabil (Canby 2009, fig.55).

Other examples of this velvet are in the Keir Collection (Spuhler 1978, nos. 97–99) and further variations of these 'botanical' designs within ogival lattice are also in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. no. 27.51.2), a private collection in New York and the Textile Museum in Washington. Milton Sunday, in his seminal article 'Pattern and Weaves: Safavid Lampas and Velvet' in Bier 1987 reconstructs and analyses how these textiles were conceived and woven.

McWilliams (2010, pp.168–175) discusses 16 fragments from the Sanguszko tent to which our velvet belongs. She dates the group 1540–1640 and identifies 7 different patterns, of which 5 are illustrated in Spuhler 1978 (cat. 94: dragon slayer; cats. 95–96: Khusraw and Shirin; cats. 97–99: elaborate ogival lattice; cat.100: stencil-like ogival lattice, cat. 100a: framing strips). The remaining two designs are illustrated in Bier (1987, cat. 9: spiral lattice; cat. 31: scenes of hunt).

This famous group has an interesting provenance which warrants further research. They were reputedly part of the decoration of a prized Turkish tent once owned by the Sanguszko family of Poland. These tent decorations probably entered Ottoman Turkey through trade or as diplomatic gifts but more popular tradition first brings them to light as embellishments for the tent of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566) who, as the

story goes, gained some of them by a raid into Iran in the 16th century. They appear again in 1683 among the possessions of the Turkish Grand Vizier at the siege of Vienna. With the Turkish defeat, they were claimed as a war prize by Prince Sanguszko of Poland, Commander in Chief of the victorious European forces. They remained in the Sanguszko family until the 1920s when a reverse of fortune forced their sale (McWilliams 1987, p.199).

*Provenance*  
Private collection, USA

*Literature*  
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## 5 Mother and child

Iran, Safavid period, first quarter 17th century,  
possibly for export  
28 × 27 cm  
Cut voided silk velvet on a satin ground;  
remains of woven silver lamella

Fragment of silk cut velvet of a woman holding a child in her arms, the child offering his mother a flowering plant. She is bejewelled and wears a long sleeved voluminous dress in cream with golden yellow belt under the breast. A large golden yellow shawl falls from her shoulder behind, sweeping in large folds in front, around her wrists; her nails and lips in peach. She stands facing a sinuous emerald green cypress tree entwined with a pomegranate tree with golden yellow and peach coloured leaves and pomegranate fruits of indigo and pale blue. A tiny leopard prances around. It has been suggested there are remains of an inscription in the pendant hanging from the neck of the woman, more clearly visible on other examples of this velvet. For example the part of the inscription still visible on the velvet in the David Collection reads *'amal-e ...'* "The work of ... " (private communication Will Kwiatowski 2011).

The features and costume of the woman are not strictly Safavid and suggest foreign influence – either European or Central Asian, given the very round features of the woman's face and her hairstyle and the unusual subject matter of the Madonna and child. The pile of the velvet is very silky and long and the textile unusually supple to the touch. All the technical features are consistent with Safavid production according to Mary McWilliams, who suggests that this group might one day be reassigned to an Indian weaving center staffed by Persian weavers (private communication 14th Feb. 2011).

This figurative velvet is part of a small corpus of two and four figure velvets that came out of Tibet in the 1980s (von Folsach 1993, cat. 34). Although no other examples were known in the West at the time, these textiles bear some relation to a series of large figure velvets in the Textile Museum, Washington (inv. no. 3.321) and the Musée Historique des Tissus in Lyon (Ex Figdor collection) and an extraordinary metal ground velvet with repeat design of a haloed mother suckling her haloed child while an attendant offers her a cloak or large cloth. This was presented to Doge Marino Grimani by the visiting Persian mission sent by Shah Abbas to Venice in 1603 (in the collection of Museo Civico Correr, Venice inv.no. CL XXII, no. 37 published in Curatola 1993, p.429 cat.no.275). Another grand Safavid velvet with similar spatial order is now in the Museum of Islamic Art Qatar (ex Sotheby's lot 37 14.10.98).

Safavid figurative velvets represent the zenith of textile art in terms of elegance, richness of colour and technical complexity. Such luxurious commodities must have been made for Shah Abbas I (1588–1629) and his court but were also presented as honorific garments or as diplomatic gifts such as the famous velvet coat given to Queen Christina of Sweden by the Tsar of Russia in 1644 (Livrust-kammaren, Stockholm). Similar coats appear in the portraits of two diplomats – Nagd Ali Beg by Richard Greenbury 1626 (Baker 2010, fig. 4) and Sir Robert Shirley by Anthony van Dyck painted in Rome in 1622 (Scarce 2010, fig.11).

*Provenance*  
Private collection, USA  
Lisbet Holmes

- Literature*  
Baker, P., 'Wrought of Gold or Silver – Honorific Garments in Seventeenth Century Iran' in *Carpets and Textiles in the Iranian World 1400–1700*, proceedings of conference held at The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford on 30–31 August 2003, Oxford and Genoa, 2010  
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## Sash on silver ground

Iran, possibly Kashan, late Safavid or early Zand period, 1690–1750

377 × 62.5 cm

Silk, metal foil wrapped around white silk core; *tacqueté* (plain weave with complementary wefts and inner warps), brocaded

Long, elegant sash woven in silk on a silver ground, with narrow horizontal bands of floral arabesque alternating with elongated cartouches, each row separated by a narrow band of tiny red circular motifs. Both ends have a row of lozenge shaped medallions enclosing a diaper pattern, the centre with iris and tulips around a stylized rose. The outer border of the sash is woven with a clearly defined floral arabesque with twisted leaves, roses and other flowers.

The design of the central field remains identical but there is a subtle change of colour scheme. One half of the sash is woven with a pale green arabesque and silver design on indigo ground cartouches while the other half is woven with pale pink cartouches and a darker green arabesque. The elements of the design warrant close examination. For example, the silver ground around the cartouches is intricately patterned.

Persian silk and metal-thread sashes of courtly quality, such as ours, were woven throughout the 17th and 18th centuries and were popular at the Safavid court but also abroad, particularly in Poland where Armenian traders imported them from Iran and Turkey. King Sigismund III of Poland sent the Armenian merchant-cum-diplomat, Sefer Muratowicz, to Persia in 1601 to buy sashes and carpets in Kashan and to deepen diplomatic ties with Shah Abbas I, according to Muratowicz's diary now in the National Museum in Cracow (private communication with Beata Biedrońska-Słota 14th Feb. 2011). These diplomatic and commercial ties between Poland and Persia continued into the 18th century.

Safavid sashes were an essential element of Polish national dress and most noblemen had at least one

magnificent sash, sometimes many more (Biedrońska-Słota 2010, p. 177). They were also popular with the Muslim courts of India since at least three examples with elements of decoration very close to ours had at one time belonged to Asaf Jah (r.1720–1748), the first Nizam of Hyderabad (Geijer 1951, no. 46; von Folsach 1993, nos. 43, 44). We can date our sash by the intricate floral and cartouche decoration of the field which is extremely close to a brocaded sash in the Röhss Museum in Göteborg, Sweden, which has the seal of Asaf Jah of Hyderabad from 1724 (Geijer 1951, no. 46).

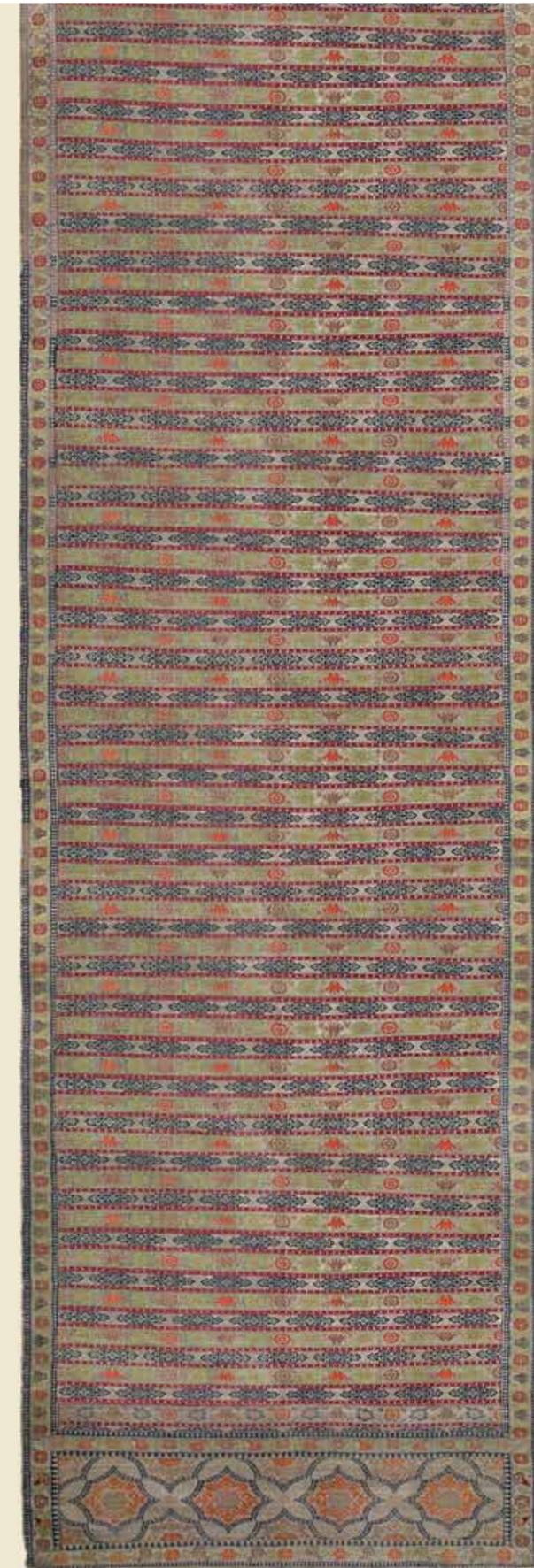
A half sash from the early 18th century with standing falcons in the border and field decoration very similar to ours is in the National Museum in Cracow (inv. no. XIX-4604; Biedrońska-Słota 2010, fig. 9; Pope 1939, 1074D). Finally, two more sashes in The Danish Museum of Decorative Art have inventory stamps on the back belonging to Asaf Jah of Hyderabad and the year 1746 (von Folsach 1993, nos. 43, 44).

### Provenance

Private collection, Germany

### Literature

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## 7 Rosettes enclosing *cintamani* roundels

Ottoman, second half 16th century

75.5 × 64.25 cm

Silk lampas with silver-gilt lamella wrapped around yellow silk core

Small but spectacular panel of silk lampas on gold ground with staggered rows of rosettes with petals in white outlined in green around a crescent shaped *cintamani* roundel in gold, outlined in white on green ground, the interior of the *cintamani* further decorated with a small-scale diaper pattern, adopted from a decorative device used in Italian, particularly Venetian silks in the second half of the 16th century. This device adds visual texture to this grand and yet restrained and utterly satisfying design (Atasoy 2001, fig.266, p.291).

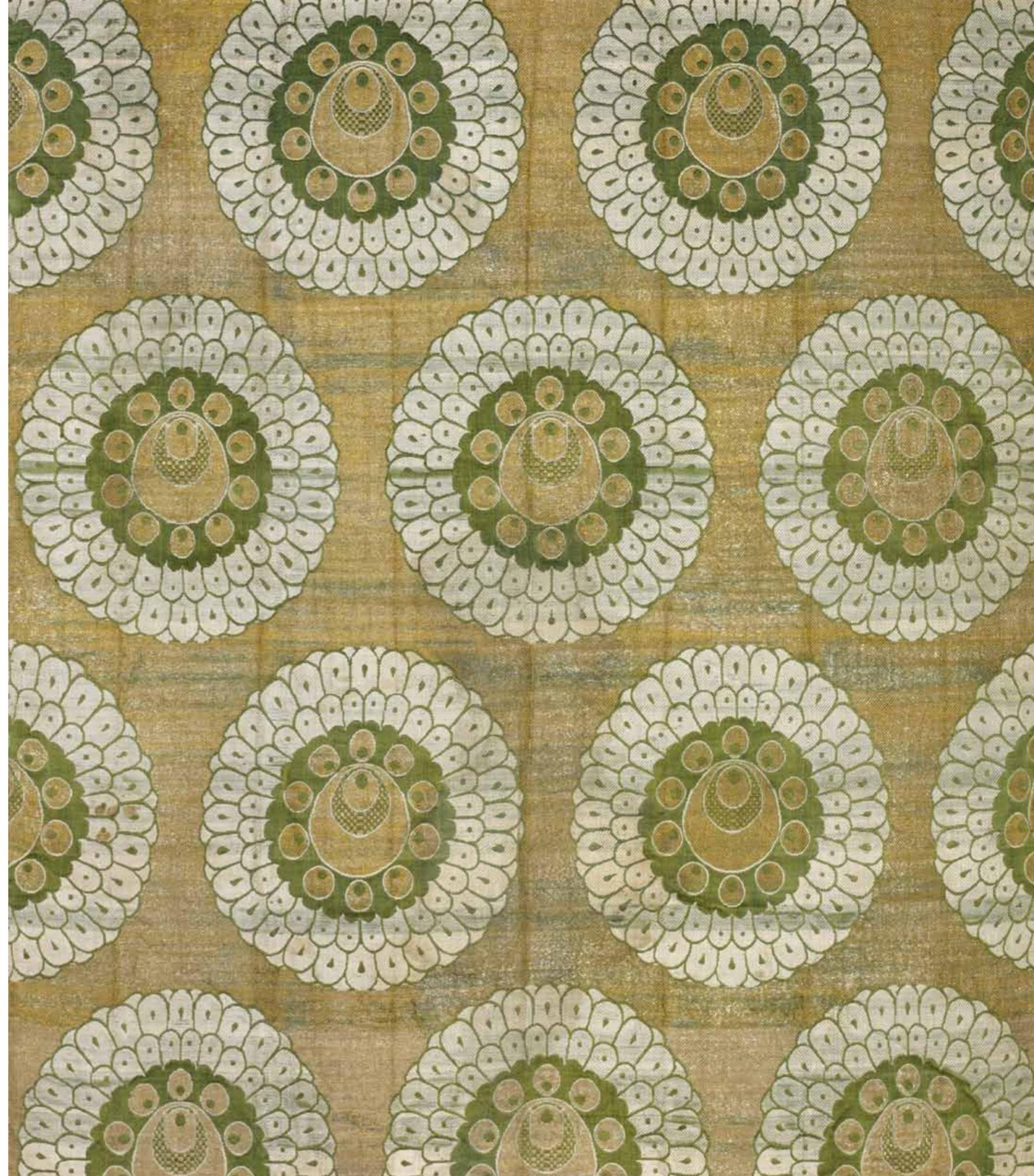
A length of silk from the same design group is in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin (inv.no. 01.69) published in Atasoy 2001, pl.48.

### Provenance

Private collection, England  
Kelekian collection, Paris

### Literature

Atasoy, N., Denny, W.B., Mackie, L.W., Tezcan, H., Ipek, *the Crescent and the Rose, Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets*, Azimuth, London, 2001.



## 8

### Staggered ogival medallions with leafy frames

Ottoman, second half 16th century

102.5 × 63 cm

Silk lamps with silver-gilt lamella wrapped around yellow silk core

Rows of staggered, large ogival medallions with leafy frames float on a plain crimson background. Each cusped medallion encloses a floral arrangement in red, white and green around a central pomegranate motif on a gold ground and is surrounded by a leafy frame in white outlined in red. Elements of the design and restrained colour scheme can be compared to a blue ground silk with leafy white frame in the Bargello Museum, Florence (inv.no.2521C) published in Atasoy 2001, pl.59 and Suriano 1999, cat. 27. The interior floral decoration in the medallion is quite close to another example in the Cleveland Museum of Art, dated to the third quarter of the 16th century (inv.no.46.419) published in Atasoy 2001, fig.214.

Ottoman art experienced its most brilliant era in the 16th century, when the empire reached its apogee and when the growth of its economy was strongest. The silk

weaving industry had its roots in Byzantium but the importance given it by successive Ottoman sultans, starting with Mehmet II in the mid 15th century ensured the production of a strictly regulated industry of superlative quality. Imperial workshops in Bursa and Istanbul produced highly inventive, bold and elegant designs which remain as astonishing and yet modern today as when they were made.

#### Provenance

Private collection, USA

#### Literature

Atasoy, N., Denny, W.B., Mackie, L.W. and Tezcan, H., *IPEK – The Crescent & the Rose – Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets*, Azimuth Editions Limited, London, 2001, pl. 59, figs.214, 218.  
 Suriano, C.M., Carboni, S., *Islamic Silk – Design and Context*, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, 1999





Ottoman Turkey, with European influence,  
late 18th–early 19th century  
124 × 118 cm  
Wool, silk chain stitch, silver and silver-gilt  
lamella couched over cotton

A sumptuous and unusual cover (*bohça*) of fine salmon wool, embroidered with a flamboyant design of large curled feathers surrounding exotic flowers and shell-like motifs, revolving around a central medallion with four radiating flowers. The embroidery is published in Taylor 1993, p. 104.

The flowers, feathers and other decorative motifs are embroidered in chain stitch in a painterly manner with varying gradations of colour. This is combined with an abundant use of flat silver and silver-gilt lamella, either couched down or covering embossed areas made up of very thick cotton twisted thread. It is possible all the metallic thread was once silver-gilt and there are now areas in the central medallion where the metal lamella has completely disappeared revealing the underlay of cotton threads.

The exuberant style of decoration, influenced by European late Baroque and Rococo styles, is not dissimilar to the illumination of a later manuscript in the Topkapi Palace Museum (inv.no. E.H. 435). This superb Arabic alphabet was written by Mustafa Vasif for a young Ottoman prince in the first half of the 19th century (Aubaile-Sallenave 1999, cat.126).

*Provenance*

Private collection, USA

*Literature*

Aubaile-Sallenave, F. et al, *Topkapi à Versailles – Trésors de la Cour ottomane*, Versailles May–August 1999, Edition de la Réunion des musée nationaux, Paris, 1999  
Taylor, R., *Ottoman Embroidery*, Uta Hülsey, Wesel, 1993





## 10 Circular table or tray cover

Ottoman, possibly Palace workshop,  
19th century  
Diameter: 176 cm excluding fringe  
Coiled gold thread and sequins sewn onto silk taffeta

The circular table cover with fringe has a repeating vertical design of undulating leafy stems and floral sprays tied together with ribbons. The embroidery is almost entirely worked with gold sequins on blue taffeta silk while the coiled gold thread with which some of the flowers are worked give variation to the design as a whole.

Another embroidery, this time on a red woolen ground, of similar design and quality from the Palace workshop is in the Topkapi Palace Museum (Rogers 1986, no.113, inv. no. 31/228,). In addition there is a similar table cover to ours in the Textile Museum in Washington (inv. no. 1965.14.1) which Sumru Belger Krody believes would have been used for serving coffee (Krody 2000, cat. 41, p. 143). She refers us to Leyla Saz's memoirs where she describes how coffee was served to Sultan Abdulaziz in the Ciragan Palace in the late 19th century:

*'Two servants held a gold tray on which were small coffee cups [...]. These girls also held a cloth of silk or velvet richly embroidered with gold, pearls small precious stones and with a central motif in diamonds, all surrounded by a fringe of gold. It was folded diagonally and the girls each held one end in the palm of their hands at the same time as they held the tray in such a way that the edge of the tray was covered by the cloth which fell down on both sides. The first mistress of the coffee service would take a saucer from the tray and carefully place a coffee cup on it; then with a small quilted piece of linen, which was always on the tray, she took the handle of the coffeepot and poured the coffee. She would then, with great delicacy, take the base of the saucer and with the end of her fingers in such a fashion that it rested on the tip of her thumb and in this way she carried it to the Sultan with gesture full of grace and skill' (Krody 2000, p. 82).*

The Ottoman sultans' fascination with European art which had so strongly influenced the arts of the 18th century played an even greater role in the 19th century. This was a period in which westernization of the Ottoman Empire became institutionalized. All the European styles were adopted in Ottoman architecture, painting and decorative arts. The palaces constructed in Istanbul in the second half of the 19th century such as Dolmabahce, Beylerbeyi, Goksu, Ciragan and Yildiz were all quite different from the earlier, traditional Ottoman architecture. They displayed an eclectic mix of European neo-baroque, neo-classical and even neo-gothic styles. Their interiors were overpoweringly dazzling often



with European furniture and porcelains, made for the Turkish market. The Ottoman elite, who also adopted westernization, used the same style and decoration in the mansions they built in Istanbul (Renda 2005). Our embroidered table cover, influenced by French taste, would have been made for one of the Ottoman palaces or mansions in Istanbul.

*Literature*

Krody, S. B., *Flowers of Silk and Gold – Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery*, Merrell, London, in association with the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 2000

Renda, G., 'The Ottoman Empire and Europe: Cultural Encounters' in *Cultural Contacts in Building a Universal Civilisation: Islamic Contributions*, ed. E. Ihsanoglu, IRCICA, Istanbul, 2005

Rogers, J. M., Tezcan, H. & Delibas, S., *Topkapi – Costumes, Embroideries and other Textiles*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1986



## 11 Central section of a royal floorspread

South-East India, probably Petaboli,  
for the Golconda court, c. 1630–40  
107 × 464 cm  
Cotton, painted resist- and mordant-dyed

The unifying vocabulary of ornament which permeates all the Islamic arts produces a harmonious whole. So, for example, the art of illumination, architectural surface ornament or carpet decoration was also used to embellish textiles. When their technical and artistic quality is masterful, such as in this example, the art becomes world-class.

This central section of a royal painted cotton floor-spread consists of the entire width, showing both borders and the central lobed medallion with part of the field, decorated with wildly exotic flowers of an inventiveness and exuberance that one associates with the best of Deccani art. Our large textile relates most closely to a complete summer carpet and a fragment both now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (Smart 1985, p. 65) in addition to part of a floorspread now in the TAPI collection (Barnes 2002, no. 61).

These textiles belong to a small group of important Golconda court painted cottons, a velvet and pile carpets which came into the possession of the Kachhawaha clan of Rajputs, sometime before 1645. Their palace was at Amber near present day Jaipur.

Many of these textiles bear Amber palace inventory notations on the back, some with the ownership seal of Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Amber and dates, the earliest being AH 1066/AD 1645–6 (Smart 1987, pp. 7–23). Raja Jai Singh (r.1621–1667), an eminent general campaigning in the Deccan under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, must have brought this material back to Amber, either as war loot or through purchase from the Golconda court.

This group was first identified by John Irwin in his 1959 article 'Golconda Painted Cottons of the 17th Century'. His research into early 17th century English and Dutch trade records, his identification of local dyes and his stylistic analysis of the designs identified Petaboli on the Coromandel Coast as the probable centre for production.

Textiles such as these, using the most highly skilled craftsmen and raw materials available only in limited supply, were clearly destined for the luxury market and production could never have been large. By 1636 European traders could no longer procure them because 'the Great Mogore (Mughal emperor) and Persian (Shah of Iran) took so great affection unto fine paintings; but after that they delighted therein, the said places adjacent Masuliptama were wholly taken up for their use, with command from the King of Golconda (whose country it is) that the painters should work only for them [...]' (Irwin 1959, pp.14, 15).

These royal Golconda painted cottons including tent panels (*qanat*) and small covers (*rumals*), all dating from the first half of the 17th century, came to the West in the first half of the 20th century, through the great collector-dealers, Imre Schwaiger (1868–1940) and Nasli Heeramaneck (1902–1971).

Ellen Smart wrote a detailed study of this group based on the inventory inscriptions and dates in her 1986 article for the *Textile Museum Journal*.

*Provenance*  
Nasli & Alice Heeramaneck

*Literature*  
Barnes, R., Cohen, S., Crill, R., *Trade, Temple and Court – Indian Textiles from the Tapi Collection*, India Book House, Mumbai, 2002, nos. 61, 61a, 61b, 61c.  
Ed. Guy, J., Swallow, D., *Arts of India – 1550–1900*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1990, pl.37, 196, pp.116–119.  
Irwin, J., 'Golconda Cotton Paintings of the early 17th Century' in *Lalit Kala*, no 5, April 1959  
Smart, E. 'A Preliminary Report on a Group of Important Mughal Textiles' in *The Textile Museum Journal*, Washington D.C., 1986  
Stronge, S., *Made for Mughal Emperors – Royal Treasures from Hindustan*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2010, pl.172, pp. 203–211







## 12 Coverlet or floorspread

India, Deccan or South India,  
first half of 18th century  
269 × 209 cm  
Cotton; embroidered in thick floss silks in long and short  
stitch, satin stitch, with painterly details embroidered in  
thinner silk threads; metal wrapped silk thread

Coverlet or summer carpet with a bold design in brilliant colours very close in style to contemporary chintzes produced on the Coromandel Coast for the European market. Our embroidery, on undyed cotton ground, has a vigorous design of large exotic, imaginary and real flowers and curling leaves covering most of the field. The centre consists of a small roundel with an open blossom on a metal ground, with eight radiating floral shrubs each growing from a footed vase. The four corners are embroidered with high footed bulbous vases with dainty handles and elaborate floral arrangements. The wide border is decorated with eight distinctive vases from each of which emanate two branches with strongly defined large exotic flowers and long serrated leaves, again similar in design to contemporary painted cottons (cat. 14).

The embroidery in three tones of pink, yellow, two-tone blue, white, emerald green, aubergine and red is unusual in that the design and colour scheme are exuberant and highly imaginative and the execution is bold, giving the coverlet an almost three-dimensional effect. In addition to the embroidered blocks of colour





the more refined details are superimposed in fine silk.  
Embroidery for the Mughal courts in Agra, Delhi and Lucknow, workshops (*karkhanas*) in Gujarat and in Bengal both for domestic and export consumption have been studied in some detail but less is known of courtly and export embroidery from the Deccan and South India. The mid 18th century Deccani floorspread said to have belonged to Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1750–1799), now in the Victoria & Albert Museum (inv. no. 783.1864) is the grandest of a group of courtly embroideries of similar colour scheme and embroidery technique to ours. Some were made for export as they have been found in Turkey (Tezcan 2007, no. 53) and in Portugal. Our embroidery which came from France relates to but is not part of this group. A virtually identical embroidered floorspread to ours, now in the Fundação Oriente Museu in Lisbon (inv.no. FO/1089) would suggest these Deccani embroideries were made for export to Europe.

#### Literature

Crill, R., *Indian Embroidery*, V&A Publications, London, 1999  
Curvelo, A., Pereira, F., Pimpaneau, J., Pinto, C., *Le Musée de l'Orient, Lisbonne*, Fondation BNP PARIBAS, Paris, 2008  
Tezcan, H., Okumura, S., *Textile Furnishings from the Topkapi Palace Museum*, Ministry of Culture and Tourism/ Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, 2007



## 13

**Tanchifa or Bniqa (head covering worn in the hamam)**

North Africa, Algeria, 18th–19th century

309 × 36.5 cm

Linen embroidered with twisted silk threads, thin gold lamella twisted around golden yellow silk core, flat strips of gold lamella; one side edged with narrow passamenterie

Spectacular gold and silk double-sided embroidered head covering on a loosely woven linen ground with narrow undecorated centre, both ends with double border of lozenges enclosing star designs, the rest of the field with lavish gold decoration of foliate scrolls enclosing different stylized flowers in coloured silks and gold.

The *bniqa* (usually narrower and measuring 190–250 cm × 15–25 cm) was folded in half and then a small central section of one side was sewn up to make a kind of hood with the seam at the back and two long tails. After the bath, the *bniqa* was worn on the head and the tails were wrapped round the hair to dry it. The borders and ends of the *bniqa* are generally richly embroidered in gold. Sometimes, as in this example, the whole piece is embroidered in very fine gold thread and has flowers in pink, plum, pale blue and other colours to provide relief.

The *tanchifa* is, like the *bniqa*, used in the *hamam* for women to wrap up their heads. The *tanchifa* is usually around 260 × 30–40 cm and is generally more heavily embroidered than the *bniqa*.

Our example which appears to have no wear would have been made for a wealthy woman and could also have been reserved for ceremonial occasions such as weddings, circumcisions or religious festivals. The bold foliate scrolls and stylized flowers are possibly influenced by Ottoman designs.

*Literature*

Stone, C., *The Embroideries of North Africa*, Longman, Harlow Essex, 1985, p. 95



## 14 Chintz Palampore or bed-cover

India, Coromandel Coast, for the European market,  
first half 18th century  
225 × 310.5 cm  
Cotton, painted resist- and mordant-dyed

The design consists of a central eight-pointed floral medallion and four corner arched medallions. The field is filled with rows of small bouquets of flowers, some tied with ribbons. The wide border is decorated with robust, serpentine flowering branches extending from pedestal urns in each corner and with large flowers resembling tulips, chrysanthemums, roses and other varieties of flower.

A similarly decorated palampore in the Royal Ontario Museum (Irwin 1970, no. 79, pl. 76) shows a design where the four corner floral arrangements are drawn from engravings depicting *The Twelve Months of Flowers* by Robert Furber, London 1730, after paintings by Peter Casteels. Elements of our palampore, in particular the eight pointed medallion and arched corner medallions appear to be a progression from similar shapes found in a palampore fragment in the Victoria & Albert Museum (Irwin 1970, no. 75, pl. 74a) dating from the first quarter of 18th century. Other comparisons are elements from the border decoration of a hanging or bed-cover c.1700–1725 (V&A inv. no. IS.182-1965) and a fragment of dress fabric c.1725–1750 (V&A inv. no. 489-1883-29) both in the





Victoria & Albert Museum (Crill 2008, nos. 6, 53). An early 18th century palampore with similarly formed corner arched medallions is in the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York (inv. no. 1956-51-5 published in Beer 1970, cat.5).

Chintz (from *chitta* meaning spotted cloth) was cotton made in India for the European market by the process known as resist- and mordant-dye. Its main appeal in 17th and 18th century Europe was the brilliance and fastness of its colours – a process unknown in the West at that time. The history of this trade is one of ever increasing demand, from household furnishings such as bed-hangings, quilts and wall hangings to high fashion. In fact India was the greatest exporter of textiles the world had ever known. Chintz bed-hangings were ready made in India, decorated according to European musters, and sent to Europe.

Palampore, from the Hindi and Persian word *palang posh* meaning bed-cover is the name used for a single chintz panel, decorated with a central medallion and four corner medallions, the design deriving from the Persian carpet. Towards the end of the 17th century, the

flowering tree or Tree of Life came into fashion, a design also seen in contemporary English crewelwork.

The middle of the 18th century saw the invention of plate-printed cottons in France and England and by the 1780s the introduction of roller-printed cottons greatly undermined and eventually extinguished the Indo-European chintz trade.

#### Literature

Crill, R., *Chintz - Indian Textiles for the West*, V&A Publishing, London, 2008

Beer, A.B., *Trade Goods - A Study of Indian Chintz in the Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1970

Gittinger, M., *Master dyers to the world : technique and trade in early Indian dyed cotton textiles*, Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 1982

Irwin, J., Brett, K., *Origins of Chintz*, H.M.C.O., London, 1970



## 15 Embroidered floorspread

India, Deccan, for courtly domestic or export market,  
1750–1790  
269 × 225 cm  
Cotton, embroidered with floss silk in satin stitch and  
couched metal-wrapped thread

The design of this luxurious embroidery consists of a field with an exuberant floral and leafy scroll originating top and bottom, like tree trunks from a mound. The scroll meanders around a central medallion while the four corners are decorated with highly stylized vases of flowers. The wide border is similarly decorated with floral scrolling stems. This embroidery is finely executed with vividly coloured floss silk, the designs outlined in couched metal-wrapped thread. This floorspread has similarities of design and execution with the mid 18th century summer carpet in the Victoria & Albert Museum (inv. no. 783-1864) which is said to have belonged to Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1750–1799), who died at the battle of Seringapatam (Crill 1999, pl.16).

Opulently embroidered spreads of this type have not yet been studied adequately.

They were definitely the work of highly organised workshops which produced a number of variants based on a number of basic models. Their attribution to the Deccan is based on their flamboyant and luscious colour-scheme and their similarity of design to an embroidery on which Sultan Ali Adil Shah II reclines, painted in Bijapur around 1660 (Zebrowski 1983, no. 107; Dye 2001, pp. 479–481). The Deccani Sultans presided over a region dominated by a Muslim culture with close ties to Ottoman Turkey as well as Safavid and Qajar Iran. We know that this style of embroidery was also exported to the Ottoman court as well as to Portugal since examples exist in the Topkapi Palace Museum (Tezcan 2007, no. 53) and the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (Leite 1978, no. 16). The earlier attribution of these embroideries to Goa, Portugal's major Indian colony, which is adjacent to the Deccan is probably based on the port from which they were exported to Europe.

### Literature

- Crill, R., *Indian Embroidery*, V&A Publications, London, 1999  
Dye III, Joseph M. *The Arts of India – Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, Philip Wilson Publishers, Richmond, 2001  
Leite, M.F., Pinto, M.H., Mendonca, M.J., *Embroidered Quilts from the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, India, Portugal, China, 16th–18th century*, Kensington Palace, London, 1978  
Tezcan, H., Okumura, S., *Textile Furnishings from the Topkapi Palace Museum*, Ministry of Culture and Tourism/ Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, 2007  
Zebrowski, M., *Deccani Painting*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983



## Cenotaph cover for a Sufi shrine

India, possibly Deccan, found in Sumatra,  
late 18th–19th century  
235 × 165 cm  
Cotton, painted resist- and mordant-dyed

This important and rare painted resist- and mordant-dyed grave cloth, from a Sunni Sufi milieu, possibly commissioned for a Sufi shrine or mosque in the Deccan was found in Sumatra. It is also possible that it was produced in the Deccan for a Sumatran patron. The cloth is covered with numerous inscribed cartouches in naskhi with occasional elements of Bihari script. These include various forms of the *Shahadah*, invocations to God, prayers in prose and verse, the Shiite *Nadi 'Aliyyan* prayer, the names of angels and archangels, prophets from Adam to Muhammad, companions of the Prophet, the Orthodox Caliphs and the repeat of the name Muhiyy al-Din with his different attributes.

Indian painted cloths were made for domestic use, as well as for export to Europe and to South-east Asia and Japan. Robyn Maxwell has observed that the increasing numbers of pilgrims all over the Islamic world making the Hajj in the 19th century led to a great influx of Islamic textiles into South-east Asia, particularly Sumatra.

The following is a commentary by Bruce Wannell on the religious text and how visitors to this Sufi grave would offer these prayers:

The tradition of offering a cloth to cover the grave or cenotaph of a deceased royal or holy person is still very much alive in Indian Islam. It is rare to find historic grave-cloths as rich in text as in this example.

The grave stone or cenotaph lies above the actual burial which is under ground. The corpse is buried with head to the north and feet to the south, in a cotton winding sheet; the head is turned slightly to the right so that it looks west over the right shoulder in the direction of Mecca, the qibla of prayer. The precise direction of course depends on the orientation to Mecca and the accuracy of that measurement.

Visitors to the grave offer prayers for the benefit of the deceased while standing either at the foot of the grave, or preferably at the right side facing over the grave to the direction of Mecca. In this example, the four panels of invocations to God's Beautiful Names (*al-asma al-husna*) considered powerfully apotropaic, are on the right side of the cloth, in doubled/mirror script, and carry on to the foot-end of the cloth.

That the cloth is directional and should be read from, as it were, the left shoulder of the deceased in clockwise direction ending at the head, is further emphasized by the diagonal axis of the First Archangel (Jibril), First Prophet (Adam), First of the Rightly Guided Caliphs



(Abu Bakr) and the last and Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad). The powerful prayer Nadi 'Aliyyan, usually but not exclusively found in Shiite contexts, is found at the top end of the cloth, as it were, protecting the head. The Kalima Profession of Faith is in the black, panel in doubled/mirror script over the heart in the centre of the whole cloth.

A pious visit to the grave of a deceased holy person often involves circumambulation in clockwise direction, which would make the entire cloth legible, as the visitor walks offering prayers all around the cenotaph with the cloth draped over it. Of course, the apotropaic function of the inscriptions would be valid whether these are recited by visitors or not. As a quasi-magical practice, such enriching of surfaces with sanctified inscriptions is sometimes condemned by Islamic modernists. Nevertheless, in Islamic history such practices were not only tolerated but encouraged as giving example of right sentiments and correct ritual action.

The four Archangels (Jibril, Mika'il, Israfil, Azra'il) guard the four corners of the inner panel, each in a flaming palmette, reminiscent of Deccani 'alams, with the series of over 300 Prophets beginning with Adam starting immediately to the left of Jibril, in seven roundels down each of the sides, one each at head and foot (16), and continuing in the inner frame with some doubled in each cartouche (74) and into the outer frame with some tripled or quadrupled in each cartouche (224) amounting to 314 named Prophets from Adam to Muhammad. This is close to the figure given in some traditions about the number of Prophets. The names are often fantastic or invented, and it would be interesting to find a printed or manuscript source that gave a similar list.

The four corners are also protected by the name of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in large flaming palmettes, each with a version of the Kalima or a wird or short prayer. In six of the smaller side panels are given the name of six Companions of the Prophet (Sa'd, Sa'id, Talha, Zubair, 'Amir – also known as Abu 'Uбайд – and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Auf). Together with the four Caliphs these six Companions make up the ten who are promised immediate entry into paradise according to the Tradition.

The three large flaming palmettes on each side contain a penitential poem in Arabic (which begins also on the 'left-shoulder' axis) surmounted by the titles of Muhiyy al-Din (six – Sayyid, Shaikh, Auliya, B...a, Ghauth,

Sultan) which are also carried on in the outer roundels on the far/qibla side of the cloth (five – Khuj=Khwaja, Makhdum, Badsha – sic, not Padshah, Darwish, Faqir).

These are the most important clues to a specific placing of the tomb cloth in the context of Indian Sufi Islam, which is Sunni, though not adverse to using a Shiite prayer, and mixes Arabic and Persian with elements of invented almost magical formulae. It is unlikely that Muhiyy al-Din is either the saint of Baghdad – almost always referred to as 'Abd al-Qadir Gailani – or the saint of Mahan – Ne'matullah Wali or the famous Muhiyy al-Din Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 AD).

The Sayyid and Shaikh, Muhiyy al-Din of our grave cloth, is venerated with mostly Arabic honorifics attributing to him the capacity of manifesting God's command (amr), grace (fazl), surety (aman), light (nur), pole (qutb), sword (saif), order (farman, Persian), proof (burhan), throne ('arsh), signs (ayat). The large element of superstition argues for a later date for our cloth.

The invocations to God's Beautiful Names start also at the 'left-shoulder' axis and proceed around the outside of the central panel in a series of twelve cartouches (4 + 2 + 4 + 2) ending in the small roundel to the lower left of the Nadi 'Aliyyan prayer with the enigmatic phrase 'al-Rafiq al-A 'la the highest companion: this is the crux of the matter, as far as the devotional content of the grave cloth goes. It refers to a tradition reported by the Prophet's wife Ayisha, that as he lay dying, his last words were 'al-Rafiq al-A 'la as he preferred to any continuation of earthly life the promise that he would see God after death – a promise that has been widely discussed, contested or that has given hope to the mystically minded among Muslims. Its placing by the head of the deceased is significant, and also, as the thirteenth and culminating element of the invocations implies the promise of the beatific vision to whichever saint was buried under this grave cloth.

A complete translation of all the inscriptions by William Kwiatowski is available on request as is a plan of disposition of the inscriptions and the position of the corpse under the cenotaph according to Bruce Wannell.

#### Literature

Rizvi, S.A.A., *A History of Sufism in India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, vol.I, pp.1-2, 25, 84-85



17 Persian purse in original box given by Purdon Clarke to Thomas Wardle

Persia, 1890–1899

Purse: 10 × 7.5 cm; box: 11.5 × 24 × 2 cm

Muslin, cut and drawn threads and then wrapped; drawn work in border; embroidery

Small purse or bag given by a virgin bride to her mother before her marriage. The textile was acquired in Iran by Caspar Purdon Clarke and given to Thomas Wardle.

The leather box, lined in blue satin and velvet, with label on the outside which reads:

'Persian Lace, very rare. Gift from a virgin Bride before marriage to her mother. Given to me and brought from Persia by C. Purdon Clarke Director South Kensington Museum'.

On Sir Thomas Wardle's (Leek) compliment slip inside the box is written:

'The sample of fine needlework out of this case, taken to London by Sir T. Wardle to show C. Purdon Clarke dated 2.1.02 [1902]'. On the reverse of the slip is written same inscription as on the front of the box.

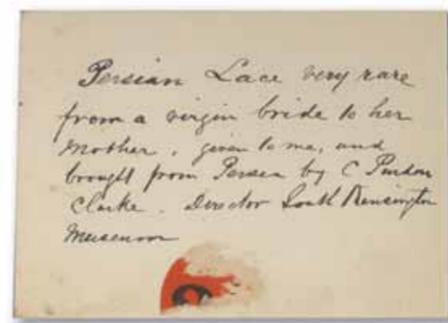
The South Kensington Museum became the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899.

Although a late and minor object, the ensemble is interesting because it illustrates the curiosity and collecting sensibilities of those Victorians concerned with reforming art and design training in Britain to enable British goods to compete more favorably in foreign markets. The South Kensington Museum was

formed as the educational part of this process and so successful was this philosophy that museums of applied art were established throughout the world along the lines of the South Kensington model.

Sir Thomas Wardle (1831–1909) was an important figure in the British textile industry. He was a silk dyer and owned print works at Leek. He worked with William Morris reviving recipes for vegetable dyes and printed fourteen of his designs. Wardle was very interested in Eastern patterns and traveled a great deal collecting ideas. He imported silks from India which he dyed and over-printed in Leek. There is a group of Wardle's printed velveteens in the Municipal Museum in Jaipur (with original labels) which he must have given the museum.

Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke (1846–1911) was a legendary director of the South Kensington Museum which later became the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899. While he was still a curator he traveled extensively in the Middle-East in the 1870s buying art for the museum. In 1880 he installed the Indian collection at the South Kensington Museum and was made director in 1896. He was also director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York from 1905–1910.



## 18 Length of royal *jamdani* muslin

India, Bengal, Dhaka, c. 1910

890 × 85 cm

Cotton, plain weave with supplementary warps and brocading (discontinuous supplementary pattern wefts) of silver lamella wrapped around cotton

Almost nine meters of superb quality Bengal *jamdani*, the light-weight and transparent undyed cotton balanced by the silver brocading, both in the warp and wefts, of silver lamella which has been wrapped around cotton threads. Sixteen narrow stripes of silver warp threads have been added to the loom, each stripe filled with supplementary silver weft, the wider area between each stripe is woven with brocading silver in a design of small staggered flowers.

This textile and the following (cat. 19) were almost certainly gifts from King George V to his valet, Richard Howlett. George V received these gifts from the King of Nepal during the Delhi Durbar of 1911 since other *jamdani* of identical style are now on loan to the Victoria & Albert Museum from HM the Queen.\*

Bengal has always been famous for the exceptional quality of her undyed cotton and the skills of her artisans who spun the thread and wove the cloth with the most unbelievable fineness (Cohen 2002, p. 192). Cohen writes that the cotton threads were sometimes so thin that only during the monsoon period could the fibers be spun as they were less liable to break in the humidity. Although these cottons could be densely woven, they weighed surprisingly little and were almost transparent. These were the famous *malma*, known in English as 'muslin'.

When the Mughals conquered Bengal at the end of the 16th century, *malma* had long been considered one of its rarest products. Royal workshops were set up in Dhaka, Sunargaon, Jangalbari and Bazetpur to supply the Mughal court with special muslins of the highest quality.

*Jamdani* was one of the two techniques used to decorate Bengal muslin. *Jamdani* involves adding

discontinuous supplementary cotton wefts during the actual weaving process (brocading) to subtly create more dense designs against the thinner, semi-transparent ground of the cloth. In our example, in addition to the supplementary silver wefts, pairs of continuous warp threads have also been wrapped with silver lamella.

\*King George V (1865–1936), who was passionate about hunting, visited the Tarai region of Nepal, on the borders of India, to shoot tiger at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Nepal, Maharaja Chandra Shamsher Jang Bahadur, from the Rana dynasty. He effectually ruled Nepal from 1901–1929, the King of Nepal only holding an honorary position. In fact the King of Nepal died a few days before George V's planned hunting trip. The Maharaja of Nepal presented King George V with over seventy varieties of animals indigenous to Nepal so these gifts of textiles were also possibly from the Maharaja.

#### Provenance

Mrs Elaine Brunner (née Howlett), daughter of Richard Howlett, valet to King George V from 1901 until his death in 1936

#### Literature

Barnes, R. Cohen, S., Crill, R., *Trade Temple & Court – Indian Textiles from the Tapi Collection*, India Book House, Mumbai, 2002

Ghuznavi, R., 'Muslins of Bengal' in *Textiles from India: the Global Trade*, papers presented at a conference on the Indian textile trade, Kolkata, 12–14 October 2003 ed. R. Crill, Seagull Books, 2006



## Length of royal *jamdani* muslin with applied gold decoration

India, Bengal, Dhaka, c. 1910

325 × 75 cm

Cotton, plain weave with supplementary brocading (discontinuous supplementary pattern wefts) in different colours; gold lamella appliqué embroidery

This finely woven *jamdani* cloth is decorated with rows of small square blocks of colour – yellow, green, red and black – in the shape of five petalled flowers within squares. The design is emphasized by the application of narrow strips of gold lamella finely manipulated to form petalled flowers within squares. The gold is held in place by cotton stitching only visible on the reverse of the textile. The general effect is spectacular.

For further information on the importance of Bengal cotton manufacture and weaving and the association of these textiles with King George V, the King of Nepal and the Delhi Durbar of 1911 see cat.18. A length of *jamdani* muslin with gold decoration virtually identical to ours is at present on loan from HM the Queen to the Victoria & Albert Museum.

### Provenance

Mrs Elaine Brunner (née Howlett), daughter of Richard Howlett, valet to King George V from 1901 until his death in 1936.

### Literature

Barnes, R., Cohen, S., Crill, R., *Trade Temple & Court – Indian Textiles from the Tapi Collection*, India Book House, Mumbai, 2002

Chuznavi, R., 'Muslins of Bengal' in *Textiles from India: the Global Trade*, papers presented at a conference on the Indian textile trade, Kolkata, 12-14 October 2003 ed. R.Crill, Seagull Books, 2006



### Ceremonial hanging embroidered with tree of life and koranic inscription

Indonesia, Aceh, East Sumatra, early 20th century

90 × 69 cm

Wool, silk, gold thread, sequins, glass beads, appliqué, lace, couching and embroidery, lined in cotton

Inscription reads: 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God' in naskh

A ceremonial hanging from the Islamic court at Aceh, East Sumatra, consisting of red woolen felt, surrounded by a wide border of deep mauve wool framed by lace. The border is embroidered with the *Shahada* while the centre of the hanging is embroidered with a Tree of Life above a sacred mountain, a bird perched on one of its branches.

The Islamic courts produced some of Southeast Asia's most sumptuous textiles.

Their prolific use of gold in the decoration of their dress, textiles and jewellery demonstrated their wealth and power and even after Dutch domination they continued to use lavish amounts of gold in their courtly regalia. Embroidery was a popular means of creating elaborate furnishings for ceremonies of state since the technique was ideal for figurative imagery.

Gold and silver thread in Southeast Asian textiles are associated with the Sumatran and Malay Islamic world. Lavish metallic thread embroidery appears to have been used since the 17th century – originating in Mughal

India and Ottoman Turkey with whom there were long standing trade connections.

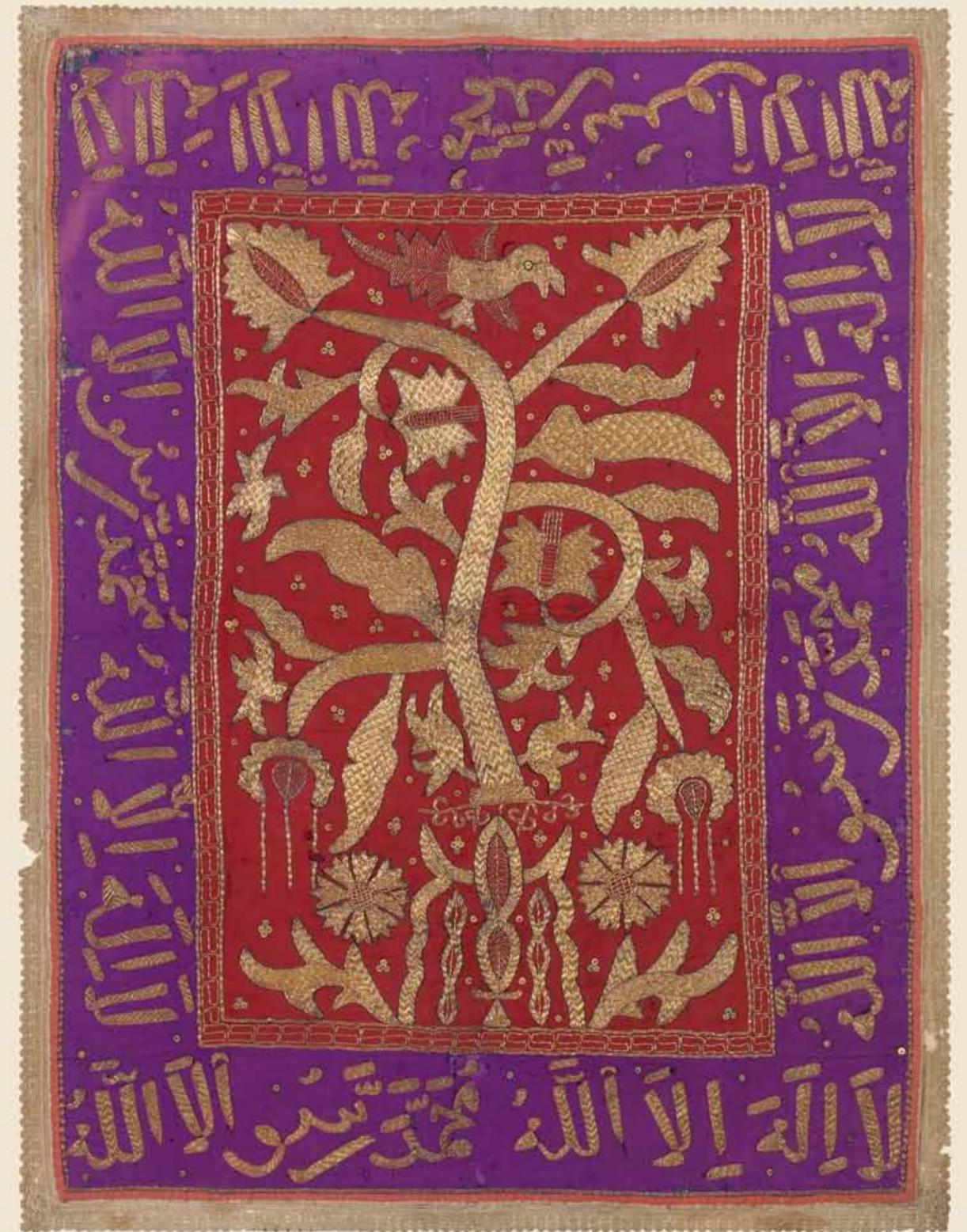
Many of the objects used in Southeast Asian Islamic ritual are covered with protective textiles, displaying images such as birds, foliage, animals, the tree of life and the sacred mountain as well as Koranic inscriptions, these motifs being chosen for their powerful symbolism and protective qualities.

Our textile bears some similarities to a spectacular ceremonial hanging from Aceh in North Sumatra, in the National Gallery of Australia (Maxwell 2003, pp.70-77, 95).

#### Literature

Maxwell, R. *Sari to Sarong – Five hundred years of Indian and Indonesian textile exchange*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2003

Maxwell, R. 'Tradition and innovation in the Islamic textiles of Southeast Asia' in *Crescent Moon – Islamic Art and Civilisation in Southeast Asia*, ed. J. Bennett, National Gallery of Australia and Art Gallery of South Australia, Canberra and Adelaide, 2005



First published in 2011  
by Francesca Galloway

Catalogue accompanies the exhibition  
*Islamic Courtly Textiles & Trade Goods, 14th–19th century*  
(4th April – 6th May 2011)

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ISBN 978-0-9553306-8-1

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Printed in Italy

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Cover: Rosettes enclosing *cintamani* roundels (cat.7)