

Embroidered Aumônière

THL Constance of Caldrithig
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Motivation

I was a casual embroiderer for years before I found the SCA. I loved the process and the product. Once I joined the SCA, I quickly fell in love with Opus Anglicanum embroideries. The detail of the figures and the sparkle of the gold seemed the height of beauty. I decided that I was finally going to "do it right" and to be able to wear my creation.

Archeological Support

There are many excellent extant samples of Opus embroidery dating from the 8th century right through to the end of period. The majority of surviving items date to the mid-14th century.

This style of embellishment was used on many items:

Altar fronts;



Parament Detail of St. Hippolyte being torn by four horses. From Museum Mayer van den Bergh, dated 1340-1360

Ecclesiastical garments;



Crop of the Sion Cope. From the Victoria and Albert Museum, dated 1300-1320. (Museum # 83.1864)

Burses;



Coronation of the Virgin detail from a Burse (pouch that contains corporals used in the celebration of Mass). From the Victoria and Albert Museum, dated 1310-1340. (Museum # T.62-1936)

And most importantly for this project: Aumônières aka Alms Purses. (see Appendix A for more examples)



Bag depicting a lovers' scene. From Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe at Hamberg, dated 1340.

Design

Most of the extant examples are approximately six inches long by just under six inches wide. I chose a six inch square for my embroidery after measuring my relaxed hand span. This means that the pouch itself will be marginally longer and wider than the extant examples once the band for the drawstring is added.

The scenes on the extant purses tend towards couples in botanical surroundings. I didn't want to reproduce one of the existing pouches, and sought inspiration in other artwork of the period. I chose a couple from folio 60 of the Luttrell Psalter (see Appendix B) as the subjects of the front of my pouch. I separated the figures to accommodate the size of the pouch, and added the corner detail from the same folio to balance the scene and fill out the space.

Most of extant examples have similar scene on the back side of the pouch. One pouch, however, has a heraldic display (see Figure 3 of Appendix A). With this support, and the SCA's love of heraldic display in general, I decided that I would use the back of the pouch to display my lineage. The lineage starts in the top left with the device of Master Johannes von Narrenstein, then proceeds right to the device of Dame Sarra Elisabeth Graeham of Birnham. The bottom row, left to right, holds the device of my Mistress, Dame Helen of Greyfells, and finally, my own.

Materials

The museum records for extant examples state that these types of purses are embroidered on both linen and silk velvet. I chose a scrap of light weight (3.5 oz) white linen for my ground, since the entire ground fabric was going to be covered.

Beyond stating "...embroidered with silk...", there is little detail about the silk floss used in online museum records. In the absence of data from the sources I was using, I chose Rainbow Gallery Splendor 12 ply (spun) silk. I have worked with this brand and this floss before, I like how it holds up to passing through the fabric and the sheen of the final product. It is an affordable price, is available in many many colours and is easily obtainable.

For the gold background, I chose Krenik Japan #7. The museum records state "gilt thread" or metal thread, some explaining that they mean a silk core wrapped with strips of silver or gold leaf. The Krenik thread is a Mylar core wrapped in faux gold leaf. It is a good imitation that is both inexpensive, and easily obtainable. Using imitation gold will also reduce the amount of tarnish.

To couch the gold, I considered using the Splendor floss as well. However, I wanted something with a tighter twist to it, and a better colour match than is possible on a monitor. Ultimately I chose Gudebrod silk thread in size "E", sourced from a local beading shop.

Method

I created an outline pattern by printing each figure separately and taping the sheets of paper together into a six inch square, then tracing this image onto one sheet of paper. I arranged and scaled the devices digitally using PowerPoint, then printed the arrangement for transferring to the fabric. I used this method to create the outline pattern to compensate for my poor drawing skills. I then used a lightbox and ink pen to trace the design onto the cloth.

I looked to multiple Opus Anglicanum embroideries for what stitches I should use. For example, the Sion¹ cope in the V&A museum, used split stitch, French knots and satin stitch in silk and surface and underside couching for the metallics. The Burse² displayed on page 1 of this document uses underside couching, split stitch and laid and couched work. An Orphrey Band³ in the Art Institute of Chicago (not pictured) uses split, stem stitches, laid work and couching.

I chose to outline the figures and devices a single strand of black, to match the look of the Psalter, using stem stitch. I then filled the figures and devices with two strands of silk, using split stitch. To complete the silk work, I used French knots to form the dots on the ermine of Master Johannes' device after all the other stitches were laid. After all of the silk was done, I then couched the gold to the background with the golden yellow beading silk, using no pattern on the back, but a chevron pattern on the front.

Completing the pouch

Following the extant examples, I added a band at top of each side in a high thread count linen to allow space for a drawstring, and cut another piece from the same high thread count linen to act as a lining. I used a blue lace-weight silk yarn to make a decorative braid for the drawstring, the tassels for the bottom and the edging for finishing the purse. The sides and top edge were finished using the card-weaving to an edge method which included an integrated strap for hanging the purse.

Sources

The Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/>

The Art Institute of Chicago, <http://www.artic.edu/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/>

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, <http://www.mkg-hamburg.de/en/>

Germanic National Museum, <http://www.gnm.de/englische-seite/>

Medieval Silkwork, Machteld, et al., <http://m-silkwork.blogspot.ca/>

Luttrell Psalter, commissioned by Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, ~1340

¹ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93171/the-syon-cope-cope-unknown/>

² <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15367/burse-unknown/>

³ <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/143679>

Appendix A: Extant examples

Figure 1: Purse with scenes from the story of Patient Griselda



Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Accession Number: 27.48.2
Silk and metal thread on canvas
6" Long by 5.625" wide

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/466693>

Figure 2: Bag depicting a lovers' scene.



Image of the back of the bag from Lady Petronilla of London
<http://elisheskitchen.blogspot.ca/2009/11/what-you-can-find-on-flea-market.html>



From Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Arts and Crafts) at Hamburg,
Fine silk embroidery

<http://www.mkg-hamburg.de/en/sammlung/schwerpunkte/mode/minnetasche-mit-minneszene.html>

Figure 3: Bag with English and French coat of arms



Germanic National Museum, Inventory Number T518
Silk and metallic thread on linen
6.89" Long by 5.9" wide
<http://objektkatalog.gnm.de/objekt/T518>

Figure 4: Scenes from La Chatelaine de Vergy



Housed at the Sens Cathedral Museum
No online records
Image courtesy of Bridgemanart.com

<http://images2.bridgemanart.com/cgi-bin/bridgemanImage.cgi/400wm.XIR.2581420.7055475/238673.jpg>

Figure 5: French Pouch



Housed at the Wawel cathedral museum, in Krakow, Poland
Embroidered in silk and metal threads

6.1" Long by 5.7" wide

Photographed and described by:

Machteld of Medieval Silkwork

http://m-silkwork.blogspot.ca/2011/07/ca-1340-french-pouch_14.html

Appendix B: Design Source

