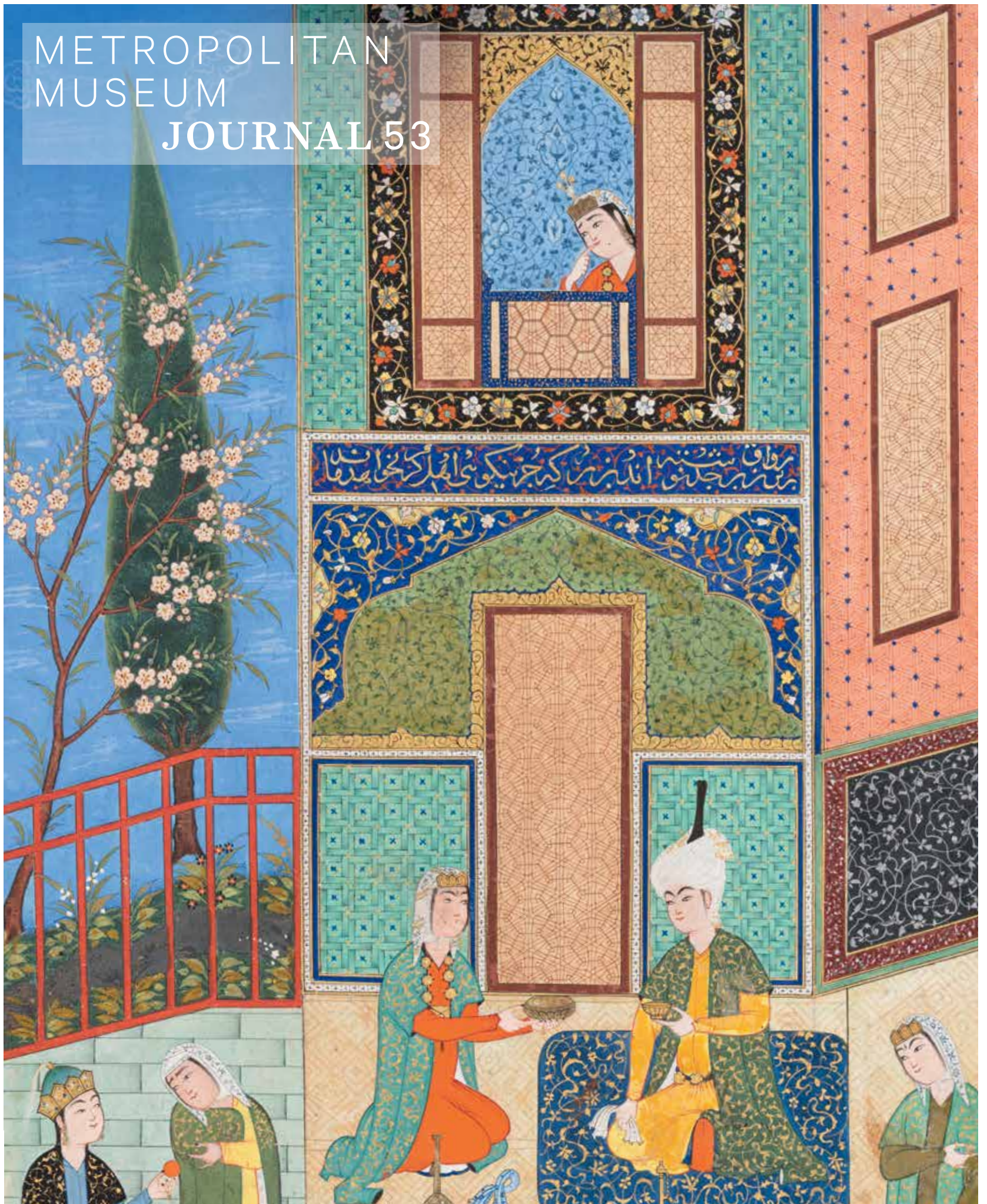


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MUSEUM  
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VOLUME 53 / 2018

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ISBN 978-0-226-60263-9  
(University of Chicago Press)  
ISSN 0077-8958 (print)  
ISSN 2169-3072 (online)

Library of Congress  
Catalog Card Number 68-28799

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Typefaces: Calibre, Lyon, and Harriet  
Printed on Creator Silk, 150 gsm  
Separations by Altamage New York  
Printed and bound by Puritan Capital, Hollis, New Hampshire

Front cover illustration: *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. *Bahram Gur in the Green Palace on Monday*. Detail of folio 224b. See fig. 3, p. 28.

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Illustration on p. 2: Ruan Zude (Chinese, 16th or early 17th century), Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five*, 1561 or 1621. See fig. 1, p. 48.

Opposite: Attic red-figure bell-krater attributed to the Persephone Painter. Greek, ca. 440 B.C. Terracotta, H. 16½ in. (41 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1928 (28.57.23)

*For Joan Mertens*

IN HONOR OF HER YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THIS PUBLICATION  
AND HER EXEMPLARY ERUDITION, GENEROSITY, AND WIT



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### ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*

MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

*Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.*

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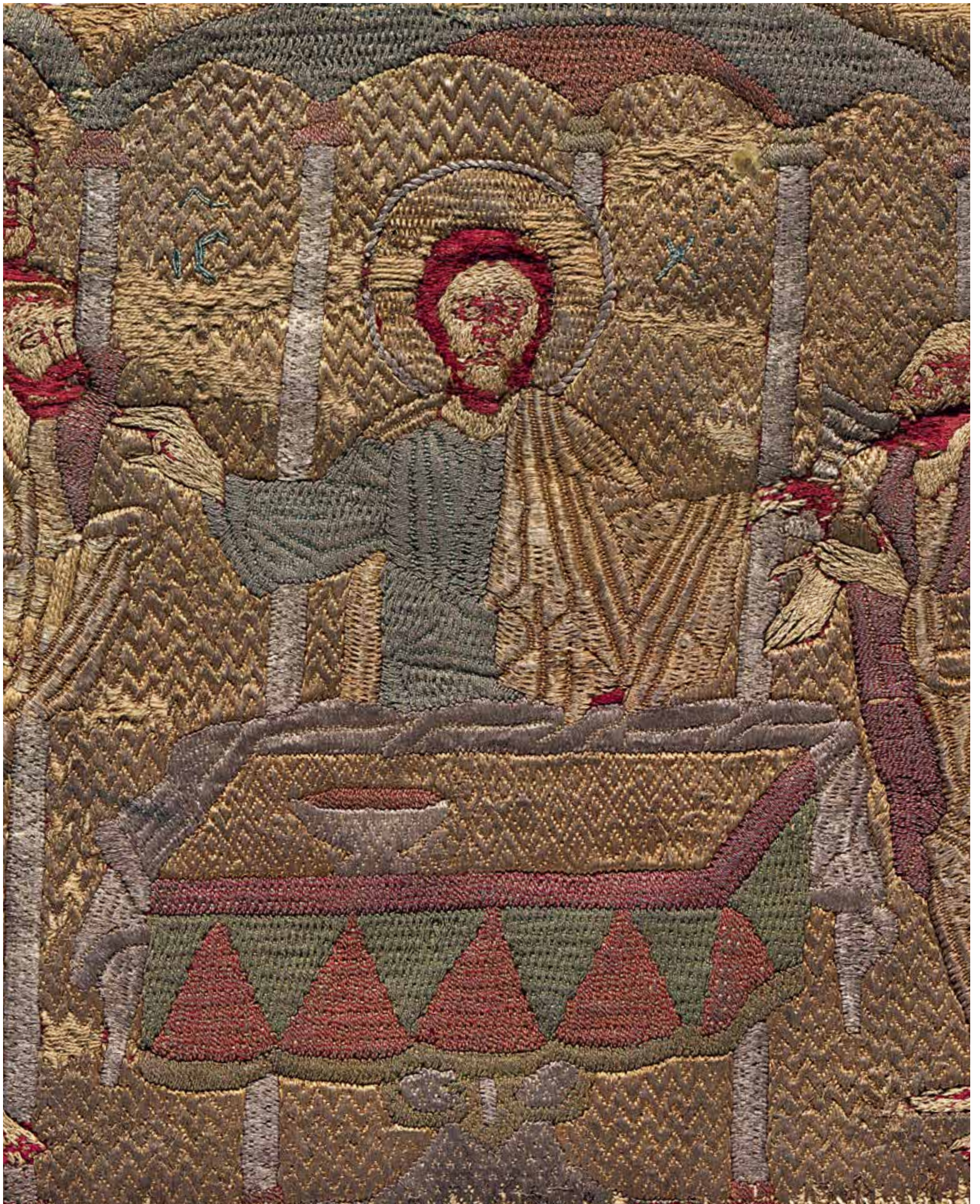
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**ALICE ISABELLA SULLIVAN**

## Two Embroideries Used as Liturgical Cuffs

Two small trapezoidal embroideries in The Metropolitan Museum of Art displaying the Communion of the Apostles were repurposed sometime after their creation in the Byzantine-Slavic cultural sphere in the sixteenth century (figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> The rough edges suggest that they were trimmed from their original rectangular formats in order to function as a pair, measuring now approximately 17.2 × 28.6 centimeters. Set on a foundation of silk satin and cotton plain weave, the pieces, used as liturgical cuffs, or epimanikia, were executed with silk and metal thread. Their similar materials, weave-work, and color palettes dominated by gold, silver, blues, greens, and purples, may have contributed to the decision to reuse and pair them, as did their shared images and compositions. The present study closely considers the iconography of these richly executed liturgical textiles and suggests possibilities for their original forms and functions.

*fig. 1* Textile re-formed into a liturgical cuff. Bulgarian or Moldavian workshop, 16th century. Silk and metal thread embroidery on a foundation of silk satin and cotton plain weave, 6¾ × 11¼ in. (17.2 × 28.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.168.1)



*fig. 2* Textile re-formed into a liturgical cuff. Bulgarian or Moldavian workshop, 16th century. Silk and metal thread embroidery on a foundation of silk satin and cotton plain weave, 6¾ × 11¼ in. (17.2 × 28.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.168.2)



*fig. 3* Epimanikia (liturgical cuffs). Wallachian workshop, ca. 1500. Gilded silver thread on silk, 14¾ × 9⅝ in. (37.5 × 24.5 cm). Vintilă-Vodă Monastery, Wallachia, Romania



The theme of the Communion of the Apostles is common to Byzantine and Slavic manuscript illuminations, icons, textiles, liturgical objects, and mural cycles.<sup>2</sup> Presenting liturgical interpretations of the Last Supper, the scenes frequently show Christ standing behind a draped altar, often under a ciborium, distributing the Eucharistic bread and wine to the twelve apostles arranged in various configurations on either side of the central composition.<sup>3</sup> The Met embroideries display this iconography, although with some divergences across the pair. On one of the textiles (fig. 1), Christ extends his arms to both sides, offering the Eucharistic bread to the apostles clustered to his right, and the communion wine to those gathered to his left. Only the paten remains on the altar. In the other (fig. 2), Christ administers only the Eucharistic bread to the apostles on his right side, while those on his left side await communion with the wine. The chalice rests on the altar alongside the paten. Christ's left arm is shown raised to his chest.

In their current form, the textiles function as epimanikia. Orthodox priests, bishops, and deacons wear such embroidered cuffs as part of their liturgical vestments. Whereas deacons wear the cuffs underneath the elaborate, broad sleeves of their sticharia, priests and bishops lace them over the sleeves of this garment.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the more visually rich cuffs, like the two in the Metropolitan Museum, belonged to the priest's liturgical ensemble, whereas plainer cuffs (some without any visual or narrative imagery) were part of the deacon's sartorial repertoire.

The scene of the Annunciation appears to have been most common on liturgical cuffs produced in the Slavic and Byzantine context, with the angel Gabriel on one of the pieces and the Virgin on the other, and with the mystery of the Incarnation occurring in the empty space between them.<sup>5</sup> However, in the fourteenth century, the Communion of the Apostles also appears on epimanikia.<sup>6</sup> The usual configuration shows six of the

apostles receiving the communion with the bread on one of the cuffs, and the other six apostles receiving the wine on the other (fig. 3a, b).<sup>7</sup> The compositions depict Christ either in the center, behind the altar with the apostles grouped in threes to either side of the central scene, or standing beside the altar with a group of six apostles approaching from one side. As such, six apostles in various arrangements appear on each of the cuffs, signaling that the objects are part of a pair that form a unified image when worn together.

Only in the context of Orthodox liturgical rituals, particularly during the Divine Liturgy, and with the aid of the celebrant activating the images, would the complementary scenes of the Communion appear as a single compositional field.<sup>8</sup> When the priest brings his wrists together during the Eucharistic celebrations, the cuffs would display a double figure of Christ at the altar with all twelve apostles around him. At the center of the ceremony the priest assumes the role of Christ in the distribution of the Eucharist, thus reenacting the activities taking place at the altar in the cuffs' representation.<sup>9</sup> Further, such composite images would place an emphasis on the space before and between the visual fields—a space characterized by a “tension” and an “air of expectancy,” per Otto Demus's characterization of the “spatial icon,” that necessitates the participation of both the priest and the beholders.<sup>10</sup>

The iconographic differences between the two Met embroideries—particularly in the structure of the ciborium, the design of the altars and the rendering of their accoutrements, and the positioning of the figures—suggest that the two were not conceived from the outset as a pair. Moreover, the lack of corresponding iconographies or a unified composition suggests that neither was meant to have a complement. As stated above, one of the embroideries shows the communion with both bread and wine concurrently, whereas the other displays only the communion with the bread. Moreover, the groups of apostles in each of the embroideries are



fig. 4 *Aēr* (liturgical veil), late 14th–early 15th century. Gold and silver thread on silk, 19½ × 23¾ in. (49.5 × 60 cm). Hilandar Monastery, Mount Athos

fairly large, indicating that in the original format, twelve figures were shown in each of the compositions. No pair of embroidered liturgical cuffs from the sixteenth century or earlier shows twelve apostles on each of the cuffs.

Following Byzantine conventions of representing the Communion of the Apostles, the two Met embroideries in their original form would have displayed the full figures of the twelve apostles, arranged in two compact groups of six on either side of the altar, as well as a continuous architectural backdrop with a central ciborium.<sup>11</sup> When the textiles were trimmed to their current trapezoidal shape—to function as a pair of liturgical cuffs—some of the structures in the upper sections of the compositions and some of the figures were also removed. Both pieces display only nine apostles with fragments of a tenth. The compositions also would have been surrounded by a wide border carrying either decorative motifs or an inscription likely written in Church Slavonic given the eastern European provenance of the objects. They were probably produced in a Bulgarian or Moldavian workshop, although their exact location of manufacture remains to be determined.<sup>12</sup>

Single compositions of the Communion theme with two groups of six apostles framing a central figure of Christ are found on larger liturgical veils, or *aēres*,

such as the one now preserved in the collection of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos (fig. 4). The arrangement of the figures and Christ's gestures are similar to those on one of the Met embroideries (fig. 1). Such large-scale veils would have been used in Eastern Orthodox Eucharistic ceremonies to cover the paten and chalice on the altar table.<sup>13</sup> Other liturgical textiles with variants of this iconography, and slightly smaller in scale, functioned as *kalymma*, or covers, either for the chalice or for the paten, or possibly for both. *Poterokalymma* would have been used to cover the chalice, and *diskokalymma* would have been intended for the paten.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that the Met embroidery showing the simultaneous communion with the bread and the wine (fig. 1) could have been laid across both the paten and chalice at the same time, or used separately on one or the other vessel. The other embroidery (fig. 2), emphasizing the moment of the communion with the bread, likely functioned mainly as a paten cover, although it is possible that it served to cover both the paten and the chalice at certain times.

The similar, but noncomplementary, iconographies of the Met embroideries suggest that they were likely produced in the same workshop, or possibly belonged to the same church but served different functions. Further study is required to determine the provenance and original context of these textiles, but it is now certain that the two liturgical veils were paired sometime between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries in large part due to their shared pictorial themes, materials, and colors in shades of gold, silver, blue, green, and purple on a red ground. The decision to trim and repurpose these objects to serve as liturgical cuffs overlooked the details of their distinct iconographies and the additional meanings that those convey about the original forms and functions of the textiles.

ALICE ISABELLA SULLIVAN

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## NOTES

- 1 The textiles were included in the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition "Liturgical Textiles of the Post-Byzantine World" (August 3–November 1, 2015). The embroideries figure into the present author's research on the mimetic and temporal aspects of the Communion of the Apostles scenes, and the iconographic variants of this image type in the Byzantine and Slavic cultural spheres from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century.
- 2 See Loerke 1975, pp. 61–97, figs. 12–23, for examples in various media. See also Dobbert 1891; Dobbert 1892; Aurenhammer 1959; Wessell 1963; and Wessel 1964.
- 3 This biblical event is recounted in the New Testament in Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:19–20; and I Corinthians 11:23–26. The symmetrical scheme of images of the Communion of the Apostles is noted by Kazhdan and Cutler 1991, p. 1989. Branislav Cvetković examined the intentional asymmetry sometimes found in images of this type as a response to the great eleventh-century schism between the eastern and western Church; Cvetković 2006, especially pp. 74–84. On the Schism of 1054 and the changes that followed in Byzantine monumental church painting, see Lidov 1998. On the ciborium, see Bogdanović 2017, pp. 21–28.
- 4 Woodfin 2012, pp. 5–20, especially pp. 8–9, 16–17; Papas 1993, p. 752.
- 5 For examples from two monasteries on Mount Athos, see Millet and Ylouses 1939–47, vol. 1, pp. 58–61, pls. CXVIII.2 and CXIX.2 (Stavronikita liturgical cuffs), pls. CXX.2 and CXXI.2 (Ivion liturgical cuffs).
- 6 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 58–61; Woodfin 2012, p. 81.
- 7 Woodfin 2012, p. 273, no. 2.
- 8 The action would be similar to how the images of the Communion would appear on the so-called Thessaloniki Epitaphios (ca. 1300, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki) when in use, as Roland Betancourt argues (2015, pp. 502–3).
- 9 Woodfin 2012, pp. 101–2.
- 10 Demus 1976, pp. 13–14, 79–85.
- 11 See Loerke 1975 for examples.
- 12 See, for example, Millet and Ylouses 1939–47, vol. 1, p. 62, pl. CXXIII, and pp. 82–84, pl. CLXIX. Between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, Church Slavonic (in various recensions) was regularly used in church and administrative documents, as well as in inscriptions on objects and buildings in regions of the Balkan Peninsula and the Carpathian Mountains, such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Romanian principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania.
- 13 Woodfin 2012, pp. 123–25, and n.67.
- 14 Betancourt 2015, pp. 493–94.

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ISBN-13: 978-0-226-60263-9

ISBN-10: 0-226-60263-X



PRINTED IN USA

