

# EMBROIDED PORTRAITS IN THE ROMANIAN MEDIEVAL ART

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**Abstract:** If the artistic value of the Romanian medieval embroidery is obvious, it is no less real its documentary value. Most embroidered portraits are made on liturgical pieces and they are a proof of the relationship of the rulers with the Orthodox Church. The position of the characters is a mute way of communicating the status that the voievod had. The vertical rigid representations, kneeling, the gestures of the palms and elbows, the beneficence objects, the way characters are grouped, the proportion or their placement in the work can be symbolically interpreted depending on the type of the Liturgical item on which the embroidery was done.

**Keywords:** medieval embroidery, voievodal portraits, symbolic gestures

The medieval Romanian embroidery has one of the most significant contributions regarding the execution of portraits in the South-East European art. The origins of these representations are to be found in the Byzantine and South-Slavonic embroidery, the art of medieval embroidery ripened in the second half of the 15th century and has evolved in time for almost four centuries until modern times. Most of these works have a particular history behind and a series of suggestions connected to political, social or economic aspects of that time can be intuited.

If the artistic value is obvious, of great importance is also the documentary value. Depending on the purpose for which it was created, the Romanian medieval embroidery was divided into three main categories: liturgical embroidery, the one for embellishing voievodal and manorial residences, the ornamental embroidery on the garments of the voievods and manors<sup>1</sup>. Most embroidered portraits are made from liturgical pieces; the only exception is represented by tomb integuments, but these are also destined, to a certain extent, for a cult space and ceremonies. The presence of the embroidered portraits of the voievods on these items can be interpreted as a political and social manifesto. They are the proof of the lords' relationship with the Orthodox Church, this is a means for them to present themselves, their families and, in some rare cases, their achievements. Indirectly, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Anca Lăzărescu, *Arta din Moldova de la Ștefan cel Mare la Movilești*, București, 1999, p. 136.

case of the embroidery having a liturgical character, we can state that it was also envisaged the reflection of the direct relationship of the voievod with God who gave His blessing to him to rule. Consequently, the association of the image of the lord and of his family with different important moments in the religious life practically becomes a compositional rule in the case of the embroideries executed in the wonderful workshops of the monasteries.

### **The Voievods' Portraits on Liturgical Embroidery**

The Byzantine embroidery is based on the portraits of the founders of the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna (the Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora), from the 6th century and those from Hagia Sophia from Constantinople, from the 10th century (the Emperor Justinian and the Emperor Constantine) and the 12th century (the Emperor John I the Comnen and the Empress Irina).

Most of these portraits represent the founders, standing up, from a semi-profile or, rarely, knelt. As a sign of worship, the lords kneeling appear only in embroidered items (dvore, epitaphs, stoles), in some miniatures and on silver objects (the ones which protected precious books). The gestures of the arms and palms are different from one situation to another, depending on the type of communication that the character establishes in the votive image with the others, but also with the people watching him. The arms can be in a gesture of prayer or of beneficence (holding an object in the hand: the shrine of the church, the cross, the handkerchief). The ruler receives the divine gift through his arms (he is sometimes held by the hand by a saint or a saint's hand is placed on his shoulder).

In his turn, the voievod suggests power through his hands (leant on his elder son's shoulder or crown) the future inheritant of the throne. The palm is always wide open, as a symbol of his unsparing and receiving attitude, it is never closed – a symbol of violence and concealed things.

No matter the situation, the gestures are sober-minded, limited by the natural frame of the character, violent expressions of gesticulation are avoided, being considered inappropriate.

The role played by the embroidered item during the Liturgy, the place where it was preserved or the moment when it was used are also important. The portraits of the rulers are not embroidered on the items frequently used during the religious ceremony. On the contrary, they only appear on the embroideries having a particular significance and they are used rarely, most of the time once a year. The air, the epitaph, the dvore and the stole from the priest's clothing are the most frequently met embroidered pieces that have portraits included<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Anca Lăzărescu, *Arta din Moldova de la Ștefan cel Mare la Movilești*, București, 1999, p. 137–138.

Each item has its role during the Liturgical ceremony. The presence of the voievod's portrait signals, on the one hand, the inclusion of the ruler in a high position among the saints, as a guardian angel of the Church and, on the other hand, it is a political declaration, an authentication of the ruler's power as a divine gift. The voievod makes his presence known inside the Church through these portraits and takes part as a spectator to the Biblical scenes. The combination of real, historical time to the Biblical, sacred one is done only through the ruler. Of course, the attitude of the characters, the gestures or the objects that surround them are different from one situation to another, either depending on the topic of the dominant Biblical scenes, or on the bigger or smaller space for creating the portraits.

In Liturgical embroideries, the ruler is almost never represented alone. He is always near his wife, his son and his throne follower or, starting with the 16th century, near his entire family. The family and its members are the symbol of a balanced life and a sober-minded Christian attitude. In front of the Church, the voievod is seen as a husband, a good Christian and, consequently, a good ruler.

The oldest portrait of a ruler and of his wife, having the name and the titles mentioned, was executed on an embroidery (around 1427–1431), on the stole from Ladoga<sup>3</sup> showing Alexander the Great and his wife, Marina. Even if, from a technical point of view, the faces seem sketched, upright and conventionally represented, what is underlined is represented by personal features and the characters' individualization. It seems that this piece comes from a Moldavian workshop, probably from the monasteries of Neamț or Bistrița.



Fig. 1. The Stole from Alexander the Good; the portrait of the ruler and of his wife Mary (around 1427–1431)

<sup>3</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, București, 1985, p. 13; Maria Ana Musicescu, *Broderia medievală românească*, București, 1969, p. 8; Corina Nicolescu, *Istoria costumului de curte în țările române, secolele XIV–XVIII*, București, 1970, p. 225; idem, *Moștenirea artei bizantine în România*, București, 1971, p. 48; Vasile Drăguț, *Arta românească. Preistorie, Antichitate, Ev Mediu, Renaștere, Baroc*, București, 1982, p. 198; Vasile Florea, *Istoria artei românești veche și medievală*, vol. III, Chișinău, 1991, p. 205.

Alexander the Good and his wife are represented from a semi-profile, in the last compositional register of the stole, under the Biblical scenes. Their gesture is taken from the typically Byzantine representations. The position of the character is erect, vertical, the only movement is that with the arms that sketch the gesture of worship or adoration, but this is also reserved. It is a conventional representation, typical for a Christian emperor who is on his knees in front of God, met in all artistic genres (painting, sculpture, miniature or silver work) in the Romanian art of the Middle Ages.

Stephan the Great was repeatedly represented on different embroidery pieces having a Liturgical character. At the Museum of Putna Monastery, among the most valuable pieces, there are the following items preserved: the Dvera of the Crucifixion<sup>4</sup>, executed at the order of Stephan the Great and his wife, Mary. Represented kneeling at the bottom of the Cross, one can see Nicodim and Joseph of Arimathea. Down, in the left, Stephan the Great and in the right, Lady Mary. The background is neuter, being dotted with stars; in the corners, up, the sun and the moon create an atemporal ambiance. Four seraphs form a frame in the lateral part. The embroidery is executed using precious materials: a gold and silver thread on a red silk background.



Fig. 2. The dvera of the Crucifixion from the Monastery of Putna (1500)

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Ana Musicescu, *Broderia medievală românească*, București, 1969, p. 16; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 201; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 208; *Scurtă istorie a artelor plastice în R. P. R.*, îngrijită de George Oprescu, vol. I, *Arta românească în epoca feudală*, București, 1957, p. 383.



Fig. 3. The portrait of Stephan the Great and of his wife, Maria Voichița; details from the dvera of the Crucifixion

The ones portrayed are of reduced dimensions, compared to the Biblical characters. The Crucifixion of Jesus dominates the composition, but the voievod and his wife appear as atemporal witnesses of this event. The reduced dimensions are also explained by reference to a celestial hierarchy (Jesus is the biggest, then, in a decreasing order, the other Biblical characters, the saints and the smallest are Stephan and Mary). The ruler is represented as a witness of the event, but also as a mediator between the celestial order and the earthly one. The fact that they are the direct witnesses of the event is underlined also by the slightly inclined to the back position, having the head raised and the look focused towards the centre of the composition, towards the face of Christ.

The representation of the sovereign as a defendant and bearer of the Christian faith in the Liturgical embroidery seems to have been initiated during the reign of Stephan the Great. Borrowing a conventional look, already represented in mural painting and the miniatures of the time, both in the representation of Christian emperors, but especially of the apostles and saints, the ruler who bears the cross will become a typical image in many Romanian embroideries. The cross which appears in the votive painting can be borne by the founders or by their children, being interpreted as a symbol of the church foundation<sup>5</sup>. We do not meet the cross as a symbol of the church foundation before the reign of Radu Paisie (1535–1545), it sometimes replaced the stole of the church, having the same meaning. Despite all these,

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<sup>5</sup> Carmen Laura Dumitrescu, *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în veacul al XVI-lea.*, București, 1978, p. 53.



the cross remains a symbol of faith, but also of sacrifice, reminding us of the Crucifixion of Jesus. In the Middle Ages, the cross received a special significance, symbolizing the fight for true faith. Since the beginning of Christianity, the symbol of the cross has been associated with the fight against paganism. The legend of Saint Constantine, but also the Occident's adoption of the cross as a symbol of the crusaders, of the Templars, lead to the cross's imposition as a fight and sacrifice for the true faith. When the ruler holds it in his hand, the cross can also represent a declaration of his own religious belief, a symbol of continuity, especially when Moldavia and the Romanian Country were in the Ottoman sphere of influence, the ruler being forced to buy his throne from the pagans.

The cross appears in the man's hand, but also of the woman's. The ruler is not represented standing up all the time. Especially on the stole, only his bust can appear in a cameo, having the same gestures like in the other types of portraits.

In this respect, the portraits of Stephan the Great and of his son, Alexander, can be analysed, from the stole from Putna<sup>6</sup> considered to have been executed around 1480 (anyway, before the death of Alexander, the son of Stephan the Great, who died in 1496).



Fig. 4. Stole (The Monastery of Putna, 1480): Stephan the Great and his son, Alexander

Except for suggesting the symbol of religious belief, of unity, such an embroidery also had a political role of attestation and confirmation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 15; Maria Ana Musicescu, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 228; *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare*, p. 484; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 201; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 206; *Scurtă istorie a artelor plastice în R. P. R.*, vol. I, p. 383.

hereditament of the voievod's family. The stole from the Monastery of Dobrovăț<sup>7</sup>, dating from 1506, has the topic of *Deisis*, Stephan the Great and his wife, Mary, standing up, having the crowns on their heads and the ruler holding a cross in his hand. This seems to be the last portrait of the voievod (who died in 1504), sitting near the apostles, as a representative and defendant of the holy religious belief. This time, the focus is on placing the characters under the (ogival) vault, a representation usually reserved for the members of the ruling families and which has its origin in the Roman art.



Fig.5. The stole from Dobrovăț Monastery  
The Portrait of Stephan the Great and of his wife, Maria Voichița (approximately 1504–1506)

The originality of the embroidery from The Romanian Country in the 16th century consists in an aspect that Moldavia did not know at that time: the manorial portraits of the donors. These are simple and true, connected to a large number of laic painted portraits, in the Post-Byzantine period, in the Balcanic countries. Their value does not always reside in their artistic achievement, but, especially because they do not contain any fancy element, they have the quality of a direct and authentic expression of the society from that period.

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<sup>7</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 15; Maria Ana Musicescu, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 231; *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare*, p. 485; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 201; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 207; *Scurtă istorie a artelor plastice în R. P. R.*, vol. I, p. 383.

The stole from Bistrița, with Barbu Craiovescu and his wife, Negoslava<sup>8</sup>, or onamentless. The characters are sitted almost frontally, under large trifoil arcades, having the background entirely embroidered in gold. Barbu Craiovescu, known by his monk name as Pahomie, is represented near his wife, Negoslava who is also dressed as a nun. These are small realistic portraits, showing interest for an artistic rendering of human face.



Fig. 7. The stole from Bistrița: Barbu Craiovescu and his wife, Negoslava (1521)



Fig. 8. The dvera from Stănești: the portrait of Preda Buzescu and his wife, Cătălina from the beginning of the 17th century

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<sup>8</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 20; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 308; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 350; *Scurtă istorie a artelor plastice în R. P. R.*, vol. I, p. 384; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, îngrijită de George Oprescu, vol. I, București, 1968, p. 278.



On the dvera from Stănești<sup>9</sup>, Preda Buzescu and his wife, Cătălina, appear knelt under the scene of the Crucifixion. In most cases, when we have representations of the boyards who were donors, they are represented exactly as lord regarding their attitude in the context of donation, but wearing the boyards' costume, without a crown and a cross held in hand. Up to the 16th century, in embroidery, the donors had not been represented on their knees. Judging after the preserved items, the introduction of this scheme first appears in Muntenia and then it is spread in the embroidery workshops from Moldavia. The knelt characters is a gesture of devoutness and it must not be judged as a technical solution of placing them in a reduced space. Each time this happens, the serious severe sober posture and the gesture of worship are kept. Kneeling is not the specific way of illustrating the portraits of the donor boyers. The voievods will be also represented in the same way, in some embroideries.



Fig. 9. The Dvera of Mourning from Kremlin: the portraits of the Lady Despina and her daughters

In the dvera of Mourning exhibited in Kremlin, the wife of Neagoe Basarab and their three daughters are knelt in the right corner of the work, at the feet of the Virgin. The small votive painting does not include the ruler<sup>10</sup>, this makes us suppose that the dvera was done after his death. The order of placing the portrayed characters in the scene is the classical one: first of all, the children, secondly, the mother. Not suggesting the order of ascension to the throne, because the painting only represents the daughters of the lady, the girls are painted in the order of their age, also reflected in the dimensions of

<sup>9</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 20; Maria Ana Musicescu, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.* p. 402; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Ana Musicescu, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

the children. Lady Despina is in the left corner, then, gradually smaller, are the embroidered portraits of her daughters Stana, Ruxandra and Anghelina. The custom of grouping the mother with the daughters and the father with the sons is to be found in miniature and it is explained by the Orthodox behaviour, according to which women are placed in the left side of the church's nave, while men are in the right.

In the case of the dveras from the Monastery of Slatina<sup>11</sup>, having representations of Alexander Lăpuşneanu and Lady Ruxandra, we have a much more complex composition. The ruler of Moldavia and his wife are under the arch, in the inferior register, enframe the beneficence inscription.

If in one of the dvere, Lăpuşneanu and Ruxandra are knelt, small, being dominated by the importance of the Biblical scene, in the second dvera, they are represented standing up, having a dignified attitude, they no longer are exaggeratedly small, compared to all the otehr characters and they even occupy a dominant space. In this case, it is paid much more attention to their rendering than to the one of Messiah: Jesus only reaches a third of the ruler's height. In both representations, the voievode has the icon of Jesus placed above, and his wife – the one of the Virgin Mary. This proves a change of attitude and a new rapport of the society with the Church. Even if the founder continues to be the submissive Christian, appears the desire of showing power and the conscience of one's own value. The accent falls on the realism of the portraits which becomes obvious; one can notice the tendency of separation from the drastic conventionalism of previous representations.



Fig. 10. The dvere from Slatina Monastery:  
The portraits of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu and Lady Ruxandra (1561)

<sup>11</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 22; Maria Ana Musicescu, *Broderia medievală românească*, p. 16; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 240; Vasile Drăguţ, *op. cit.*, p. 308; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

The three epitaphs, almost identical, from Cotroceni (1680)<sup>12</sup>, Tismana (1681)<sup>13</sup> and the one from the Lady's Church from Bucharest (1683)<sup>14</sup>, with the portraits of Șerban Cantacuzino, Lady Mary and the children. The characters are typically grouped, the ruler and his son on the left, while his wife and daughter on the right, being centrally placed, under the scene of Jesus's Mourning. The gesture of adoration and the direction of the look towards the centre of the Biblical scene from above are preserved.



Fig. 11. The epitaph from Cotroceni: the portraits of Șerban Cantacuzino, of Lady Mary and of the children (1580)

The gesture of adoration becomes a donation gesture when the portrayed people symbolically hold the model of a monastery. This type of representation is frequent in the votive painting from mural art, but it rarely appears in embroideries. The bottom of the icon from Cotroceni<sup>15</sup> from 1681 is an exception to the rule. In this type of presentation, the accent falls on the family of the ruler Șerban Cantacuzino who, with his wife, are holding the model of a church above their son's head. The interpretation of the gesture is different, the message is enriched. The ruler and his family appear as supporters of the Church, they all hold a cross in their hand.

<sup>12</sup> Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 250; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 402; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 467; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, îngrijită de George Oprescu, vol. II, București, 1970, p. 84; Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 24; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 250; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 402; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 467; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, vol. II, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 407; Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 25; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 251; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 470; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

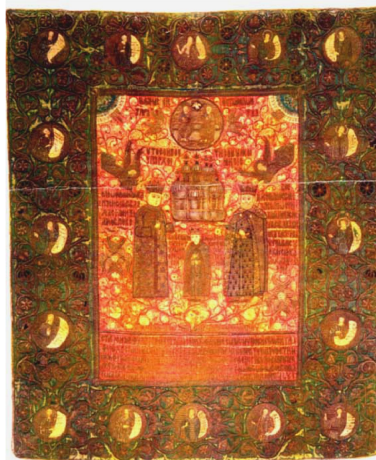


Fig.12. The Bottom of the Icon from Cotroceni:  
The portraits of Șerban Cantacuzino, of Lady Mary and their Son (1681)

### **The placing of characters**

A feature of the embroidered portraits is the fact that, almost on none of the pieces, we do not have a composition with all characters, both secular and divine, put in the same plan. Every time, the image is structured in two superposed registers, one above the other, in the superior one are the Biblical characters and in the inferior one, the portraits of the ruling couple; or one in front of the other, in the background one can see Biblical characters, in most cases having much bigger dimensions compared to the voievodal characters from the proximity. First of all, the ruling couple (a husband – a wife or a father – a son) is placed at the inferior border of the embroidered piece, oriented towards the main axis, focused on the interior, usually towards the icon of Jesus, or centrally, under the Biblical scene. When we have as donors only women or only men, on dvere, the lateral placement of the characters is respected, only in one of the corners of the image. Finally, when all the members of the ruling family are portrayed, parents and children, the disposal is usually centred, the adult characters frame the children – one on the left and another one on the right. Each time, the gestures of the children imitate the ruler's. Kneeling seems natural when the voievode is present at an important event, such as the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross or the Ascension. Unlike mural painting, liturgical embroideries with the voievodes' portraits were used only for the great celebrations, and through his portrait, the sovereign was the first of the Christians to worship God. If we look at the ruler's attitude as a worship in prayer, a symbolic gesture during the Liturgy, kneeling seems normal. In embroidery, we have the biggest number of the rulers' portraits in which the characters are knelt. In

painting, in miniature or precious metal's craft, this type of composition is rarely met and in sculpture, they do not exist.

### The Embroided Gisant

From an stylistic point of view, a special place is held by the embroidery having a funerary character. Tomb palls were used in Byzantium, both for the tombs of the emperors and for the shrines with the holy relics<sup>16</sup>, but these items did not reach our time. The tradition was kept in the Balkan space, but only in Moldavia, these embroidered pieces will have the aspect of gisant. In the western Europe, the portrait of the deceased, usually a member of the royal house, was sculpted on the sarcophagus, in a dignified unmoved posture, having her/his arms on the chest, praying.

The practical role of these embroideries was to cover the funerary stone. The presence of the portrait of the deceased over the tomb which covers its remains can have a symbolic interpretation of the idea "*the double body of the king*"<sup>17</sup>. According to this medieval belief, the sovereign, by anointment, received the gift of God, becoming in the same time two persons: a human one and a divine one that legitimized his power. The idea of continuity beyond physical death, of the divine dimension, of the sovereign dignity lead to the creation of some portretistic representations of the deceased (effigies), through which this eternal nature of the sovereign can be celebrated. We cannot know if the same symbolic role was played by the funeral embroideries from Moldavia; it is certain that in the 17th century, under the influence of the western part, the person seems to be celebrated more than one's divine nature.

The tomb pall of Mary of Mangop<sup>18</sup> is the first piece of this type in the Romanian Middle Ages. It has been studied and analyzed for a long time, both from the point of view of the artistic technical realization and from a symbolic perspective, as a historical document. Referring strictly to the method of presentation and to the gestures of the character, what one can notice is the extreme brushing-up of the face and of the statuary position. The princess is represented having her hands crossed on her chest, having a complexion of great nobility, associated with the solemnity of death. She wears luxury garments and typically Byzantine jewells. The representation under the vault<sup>19</sup> is often met in Byzantine art, both in the case of the saints

<sup>16</sup> Maria Magdalena Székely, Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Maria Asanina Paleologhina, o prințesă bizantină pe tronul Moldovei*, Sfânta Mănăstire Putna, 2006, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *op.cit.*, p. 148–149.

<sup>18</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 16; Maria Magdalena Székely, Ștefan S. Gorovei, *op. cit.*, p. 143; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 228; *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare*, p. 504; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 212; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 201; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, vol. I, p. 385.

<sup>19</sup> Maria Magdalena Székely, Ștefan S. Gorovei, *op. cit.*, p. 147.



and of the emperors, also. It seems that it derives from the Roman art, from the image of the emperor blessed by the gods with the victory in front of the enemies and passing under the arch of triumph. In the same time, this representation is spread especially on the coins of the Late Antiquity, will be associated with the idea of kingship. This is the reason why the portraits under the vault of the characters who do not belong to the royal family or that were not saints are almost nonexistent.



Fig. 13. The tomb pall of Mary of Mangop (the Monastery of Putna) after 1477.

The dvera with the funerary portrait of Simion Movilă<sup>20</sup> (the Monastery of Sucevița, 1609), treated as a gisant, is very similarly represented to the portrait of Mary of Mangop: the eyes are closed, having the hands crossed on the chest, the entire appearance is marked by hieratism, coming back to the traditional representation of the deceased. Thus, the figure is very strongly individualized. Simion Movilă appears dressed as a real lord, wearing the crown on the head. On one side and the other, in the upper part of the piece, there are two Biblical scenes, carefully sewn.

The character is representing having a cross in his hand, here a sign of his faith, but also a handkerchief whose interpretation is not necessarily symbolic. On the one hand, it creates the image of a "trendy" man (at that time, the portraits on the handkerchiefs had a great success in Europe). On the other hand, the handkerchief played a symbolic role in the ceremony of

<sup>20</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 22; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 473; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 403; Ana Dobjanschi, Victor Simion, *Arta în vremea lui Vasile Lupu*, București, 1979, p. 68; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, vol. I, p. 145; Răzvan Theodorescu, *Itinerarii medievale*, București, 1979, p.160.



church sanctification, being carried by the founder. Depending on the situation, one can interpret that both the handkerchief and the cross were a symbol of the founded church, due to the fact that Simion Movilă, together with his father, Ieremia Movilă, are the founders of the Monastery of Sucevița.



Fig. 14. The tomb pall of Simion Movilă (the Monastery of Sucevița, 1609)

Fig. 15. The tomb pall of Ieremia Movilă (the Monastery of Sucevița, 1606)

The tomb pall of Ieremia Movilă<sup>21</sup>, from 1606, has a totally different way of artistic expression. Reminding us of the portraits from the Polish painting, the piece represents the voievod not dead, but alive, in vigour, inquiringly looking at people from underneath his cap called "cușmă". His clothes, similar to the ones from the embroidery of Simion Movilă, underline the luxurious atmosphere from the court of Moldavia. Different from the tragic sobriety from the tomb pall of Mary of Mangop, in this case, we can feel the desire of authority, expressed even beyond death, presenting the lord as a true hero of his time. In this portrait of Renaissance prince, one can identify an atmosphere which is not yet familiar to the Moldavian society. The influence from the Polish court is remarked especially by the comparison of the gisant embroidery of Ieremia Movilă and of the portrait of Sigismund II Vasa, the king of Poland and Sweden (1586–1632), made in 1596. It seems that such a representation was the basis of the embroidery from Sucevița.

The tomb pall of Ieremia Movilă is the first psychological portrait in the Romanian medieval art. The accent falls on the representation of reality.

<sup>21</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 23; Corina Nicolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 475; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 402; Ana Dobjanschi, Victor Simion, *op. cit.*, p. 68; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, vol. I, p. 145; Răzvan Theodorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 155; idem, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern. Orizontul imaginii (1550–1800)*, București, 1987, p. 101.

The lord is relaxed, but not standing up, but in contrapposto<sup>22</sup>, the same relaxed position from the Polish portraits, with the left knee a little bit bent, this fact is suggested by the clothes' plies. Ieremia Movilă holds the head of the oriental sword in his hand. In the western representations of the emperors from the miniatures of the 12th – 15th century, the hand placed on sword is the symbol of the defender of Christianity. In the 17th century, the gesture of Ieremia Movilă is one of authority, having a social and political interpretation and it is not a symbol of fight for Christianity. A general change of attitude appears, the elbow starts to have, *in the Occidental Renaissance portraiture*, an increased importance. In all the lords' portraits that we have discussed so far, the elbows are close to the body, the movement is done only from the forearm, not from the shoulder. *This thing was due to the attempt to represent the sovereign in a dignified position, without useless movements*. Deriving from the position of the hand placed on the sword, the representation of the elbow is a sign of aggression, of boldness, of the high social position<sup>23</sup>.

There is an obvious Polish influence in the composition with the tomb pall of Ieremia Movilă, but there are also Byzantine symbols. In the left upper corner, the hand of God appears and blesses a church (the Monastery of Sucevița) and also its founder, Ieremia Movilă himself. There is an incredibly good bounding of the elements which are specific to the Byzantine art, with the new aspect of the Renaissance portraiture.

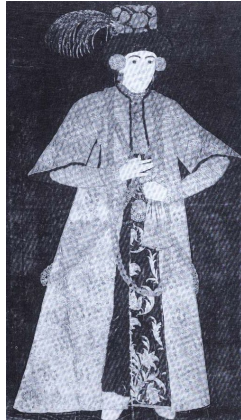


Fig.17. The portrait of Lady Tudosca (Three Hierarchs, Iași, the 17th century)

Fig.18. The portrait of John (Three Hierarchs, Iași, the 17th century)

<sup>22</sup> Jan Bremmer, Herman Roodenburg, *O istorie culturală a gesturilor*, București, 2000, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p.83, 108.

The embroidered portraits of Lady Tudosca<sup>24</sup>, the wife of Vasile Lupu, and of his son, John, are no longer in the category of medieval representations. Though they had been made for covering tombs, the depicted characters are as vivid as possible and they seem to have a more relaxed attitude, but in the same time a dignified and authoritative one. Compared to the dvere of the Movilescus, where one can still see Biblical scenes presented, a vague landscape or the symbol of the divine hand, the artist is preoccupied only with accurately rendering personal features. In the embroidered portraits of Lady Tudosca and John, Christian symbols disappear, being replaced by secular objects which expose luxury and power (gold chains, the bag, the handkerchief and the sword). The position of arms itself (with bent elbows, as if miming the hands on the hip) reflect a new approach in portraiture, similar to the attitude and the real gestures of the characters. The same posture has always been interpreted as authoritative and aggressive, being avoided.

Stept by step, in the 18th century, embroidery tends to become nonfigurative; it is sumptuous, just like in the past, though worked with lower quality materials. The role of the vegetal-floral ornament increases to the prejudice of any figurative element.

The embroidered portrait has known a slow evolution for many centuries, in most cases, the attitudes of the characters are not changed, being encapsulated in the canon imposed by the Byzantine art. Despite all these, the representations underline the most significant gestures, representing the ruler as a good Christian, committed to God (in the attitude of worship, standing up or knelt), confessing his allegiance to Christianity (when he holds the cross in his hand) and as a founder (when he holds the model of the Church). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the lord slowly fades from secular representations and acquires a new meaning, he is represented as a lively nobleman, being preoccupied by his own image and the way it is seen by his contemporaries. The typical attitudes in this case are the one of the lord holding his hand on the sword or elegantly holding the handkerchief. The new ruler no longer relates with the Church and God, the gestures and attitudes from his portraits, even from the funeral ones, are for and towards his contemporaries.

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<sup>24</sup> Ana Maria Musicescu, *Broderia veche românească*, p. 24; Vasile Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 475; Vasile Drăguț, *op. cit.*, p. 402; Ana Dobjanschi, Victor Simion, *op. cit.*, p. 68; *Istoria artelor plastice în România*, vol. I, p. 146; Răzvan Theodorescu, *Itinerarii medievale*, p. 155; idem, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern*, p. 101.

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