

Old Embroideries.

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Illustrated by photographs from specimens in the famous South Kensington Museum, London, England.

PART II.

Heraldry to a considerable extent enters into the designs of embroidery for military and secular costumes of this period, and the representation of sacred events and personages, often adapted by needleworkers for illuminated missals, freely occurs in embroidery for ecclesiastical service. In nearly all the work ranging from the 11th to 15th centuries there is a mingling of Christian and Mohammedan, European and Oriental ornamental devices—a mingling that suggests eventful movements, such as the crusades which brought Western and Eastern peoples into contact with one another; an intercourse which was rendered more effectually beneficial by the commerce that arose about this time between Constantinople or Byzantium, Venice and Genoa, and Antioch, Damascus and other Eastern centers. Broadly speaking, then, the embroidery of this period was of finer stitchery and more elaborate in effect than had previously been known. With the sheeny silken threads, embroiderers harmonized glistening gold and silver ones, especially for sumptuous vestments. The decoration or ornament so wrought was often invested with symbolical meaning and sometimes with an epical or story-telling interest; at the same time it was as a rule more consistent æsthetically with the materials in which it was expressed than the bulk of modern embroidery. This mediæval school of embroidery therefore supplies us with much valuable information. It embodied in its productions both native freshness in idea and aim, and a sedateness of formal expression which was derived in a natural ancestral way from earlier schools, amongst which the Saracenic school occupies an important place.

So far as regards the English and French branch of the mediæval school in its earlier period, the oldest epical or story-telling embroidery is the so-called Bayeux tapestry made in the 11th century. Fig. 199, Frontispiece, gives a specimen of it. In the upper strip there are incidents of life and feeding in camps; in the middle strip the transshipment of soldiers and cavalry is given, as well as in the third and lower strip. Old chroniclers describe this Bayeux tapestry as "*une lente langue et estroite de telle a broderies de ymages et escript aux faisant representation du Conquest d'Angleterre.*" Its exact dimensions are 70.34

* The opening chapter of this article was published in the July 1900 issue of CORTICELLI HOME NEEDLEWORK. Copies of this number can still be supplied by the publishers for 10 cents each.