Embroidered Favor

Silk and metallic threads on linen

by Genoveva von Lübeck of Cynnabar

Documentation Summary

Inspired by the embroidered linens of the 16th century, I created a favor for my fighter to wear to tournaments. The favor employs "blackwork" (Holbein stitch in repeating geometric patterns) with both silk green thread and metallic gold thread, as well as period-appropriate pictographic representations copied directly from 16th c. emblem books, just as embroiderers did at that time. I closely studied high-quality photos of extant embroidery work at the Victoria and Albert Museum and borrowed patterns and techniques used during this time period. All stitches used in this piece (Holbein, backstitch, speckle, chain, and stem) were also used in period embroidery work. The ground material is a 32-thread Belgian linen, which was worked in 1 or 2 thread sections with single strands of silk or metallic thread.

Why a Favor?

I wish to encourage my fighter, Gregor Reinhardt von Holstein, in the chivalric values by presenting him with a token. For historical evidence of favors, I offer this passage from *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, a book written in 1405 by Christine de Pisan:

"If this lady sees any gentleman, be he knight or squire, of good courage who has a desire to increase his honor but does not have much money to outfit himself properly, and if she sees that it is worth while to help him, the gentle lady will do so, for she has within her all good impulses for honor and gentility and for always encouraging noble and valiant actions. And thus in various situations that may arise this lady will extend wise and well-considered largesse."

Why The Pictograms?

I was inspired by a 1570 embroidered work I found in the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.219-1953). This piece has a large center illustration of a shepherd, surrounded by unusual emblems and mottoes, worked in the characteristic blackwork of the period. I was curious about the emblems, and quite by chance, discovered that many of the emblems in this piece were clearly copied directly from *The Heroicall Devises of M. Claudius Paradin*, translated from Latin into English by P.S. William Kearney (London, 1591). The book illustrations of the emblems and the embroidered emblems are nearly exact! A knowledge of emblems and their use in art was part of the intellectual climate of Elizabethan life—the images represented important allegories.

What Do the Emblems Mean?

I chose emblems that represented the chivalric values I wish to encourage, as follows:

Honor: The emblem of a crown of grass (not a laurel) is from page 312 of *The Heroicall Devises*. The motto is "Merces sublimis honorum" (the reward of honor is great). The crown was awarded to those that had valiantly subdued their enemies and, while it was only made of grass, flowers and herbs found at the place of battle, it was thought to be the most honorable of all and held in the greatest estimation. This emblem represents ***honor*** and encourages my fighter to seek great stature of character by holding to the virtues and duties of a knight (though he is not one), and realizing that though the ideals cannot be reached, the quality of striving towards them ennobles the spirit. View the page of the book at http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/parad311.htm

DEVISES. 311

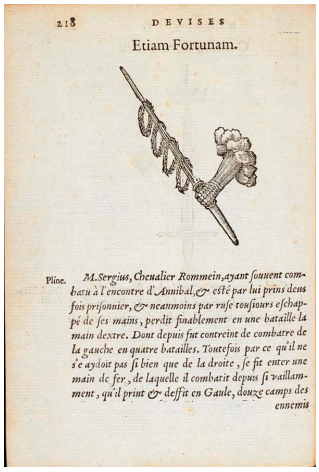
changed from the natural laurell, into a grauen laurell compassed about with a circle of gold, as is to be seene yet to this day in old coynes and pictures.

Merces sublimis honorum.
The reward of honor is great.

Those that were deliuered, and had escaped in any battell, gaue to the tribune, or gouernor of the armie, who had valiantly subdued

V.4

Prowess: The emblem of the sword is from page 218 of *The Heroicall Devises.* This emblem depicts the hand of Marcus Sergius, who famously fought in Gaul with an artificial iron hand—he is a symbol of prowess and manhood, overcoming personal obstacles to attend to duty. I encourage my fighter to seek ***prowess*** and excellence in all endeavors expected of a knight, martial and otherwise, seeking strength to be used in the service of justice, rather than in personal aggrandizement. View the page of the book at http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/facsimile.php?id=sm816_p218


218 DEVISES

Etiam Fortunam.

Pline. *M. Sergius, Chevalier Rommein, ayant souuent combatu à l'encontre d'Annibal, & esté par lui prins deux fois prisonnier, & neanmoins par ruse toufiours eschappé de ses mains, perdit finablement en une bataille la main dextre. Dont depuis fut contreint de combatre de la gauche en quatre batailles. Toutefois par ce qu'il ne s'e aydoit pas si bien que de la droite, se fit enter une main de fer, de laquelle il combatit depuis si vaillamment, qu'il print & deffit en Gaule, douze camps des ennemis*

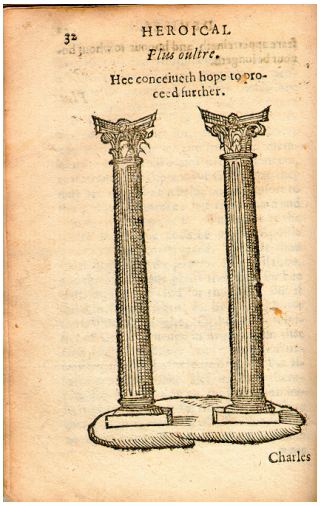
Humility: This emblem carries the motto "sic terras turbine perflat" on page 166 of *The Heroicall Devises*, which translates to something lile "so he troubles the earth with whirlwinds." The descriptive text warns that "God our creator doth resist the proud, the high minded, lovers of themselves, and the arrogant, but giveth grace to the humble and the lowly." This emblem represents ***humility***, inspiring one to refrain from boasting one's your own accomplishments, and instead tell the deeds of others before one's own. View the page of the book at http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/parad166.htm

166 HEROICAL

Sic terras turbine perflat.
So he troubleth the earth with whirlewindes.

1.Pet.5 Iames.4 Luke.1. God our creator (as Saint Peter, Iames and Luke doe witnes) doth resist the proude, the high minded, louers of themselues, and the arrogant, but giueth grace to the humble and lowlie. Wherein he seemeth to imitate the lightning, which leaueth vntouched thinges that are low, and striking those that are loftie and

Courage: The emblem of two pillars appears on page 32 of *The Heroicall Devises*, depicting the Pillars of Hercules which mark the edge of the then known world. According to mythology the pillars bore the warning "Nec plus ultra" (nothing further beyond). These pillars represent the ***courage*** to go beyond what is known, choosing a more difficult path. View the page in the book at http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/parad032.htm


32 HEROICAL

Plus oultre.

Hee conceiueth hope to proceed further.

Charles

Loyalty: The central element is a personal image, combining symbolism of my own and my fighter, and thus I will not go into detail about it here. It is still inspired by an illustration from an emblem book, however. The image of the King of Lycia on Pegasus from Les emblemes by Andrea Alciato provided the image for me (view at http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/emblem.php?id=FALd102). This image represents ***loyalty***, the cornerstone of all virtues. I encourage my fighter to continue to be known for his unwavering commitment to the people and ideals he chooses to live by. There are many places where compromise is expected; loyalty is not amongst them.

Why Blackwork?

Blackwork in silk on linen was the most common domestic embroidery technique for clothing and household items throughout the reign of Elizabeth I. Blackwork is a counted-thread embroidery which is usually stitched on even-weave fabric. Traditionally blackwork is stitched in silk thread on white or off-white linen or cotton fabric. Sometimes metallic threads or colored threads are used for accents. In the earliest blackwork, counted stitches are worked to make a geometric or small floral pattern. Historical stitches for blackwork primarily used the Holbein stitch (double running) and the backstitch, as I have done in my work, but also employed other stitches such as stem, chain, ladder, couching, coral, speckling, and others. Evidence of this can be seen in extant embroidery pieces, such as the 1598 sampler by Jane Bostocke in the Victoria and Albert Museum (T.190-1960).

References

"The Shepherd's Buss." 16th century embroidery by Unknown. Housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Textiles and Fashion Collection, British Galleries, room 58c, case 6. Item T.219-1953. View at http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78790/embroidery/

Sampler. Jane Bostocke in 1598. Housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Textiles and Fashion Collection. Item T.219-1953. View at http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O46183/sampler/

The Heroicall Devises of M. Claudius Paradin, Whereunto are added the Lord Gabriel Symeons and others. Claude Paradin. Translated out of our Latin into English by P.S. William Kearney (London, 1591). In the collection of the Penn State University Libraries Rare Books Room. View at http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/paradtoc.htm

Les emblemes. Andrea Alciato. 1615 (translated from earlier work). In the collection of the Glagow University Library (SMAdd32). View at http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=FALd

Treasure of the City of Ladies. Christine de Pisan. 1405. Translated with an introduction and notes by Sarah Lawson (Penguin classics). Rev. ed.London: Penguin, 2003.