

An embroidered indulgence

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1 For more information
consult the Deu Museum
website: www.museudeu.com.

The Deu Museum is a public institution in El Vendrell (Tarragona), founded with a donation made by the notary Antoni Deu Font to the city. Deu was a collector who followed his own highly personal standards to amass a great many works of art throughout his lifetime. Chronologically, the objects range from the twelfth to the late twentieth century. While they have no thematic unity, several fairly well-defined groups can be established: religious carvings, silver and gold liturgical objects, sculpture, contemporary paintings and ceramics, drawings and watercolours, furniture, “Modernista” glass, ivories, reliquaries, pharmacy mortars and oriental rugs¹.

An exceptional object

The object in question belongs to the Deu Museum and can be placed in the group of liturgical objects because it is an indulgence. Unusually, however, the original print has been decorated with hand embroidery and silk and metal appliqué. The basic information for the object is set out below:

Name: indulgence

Location: Deu Museum, rec. no. 2842

Dimensions: 28.5 x 22 cm

Origin: unknown, possibly Spain

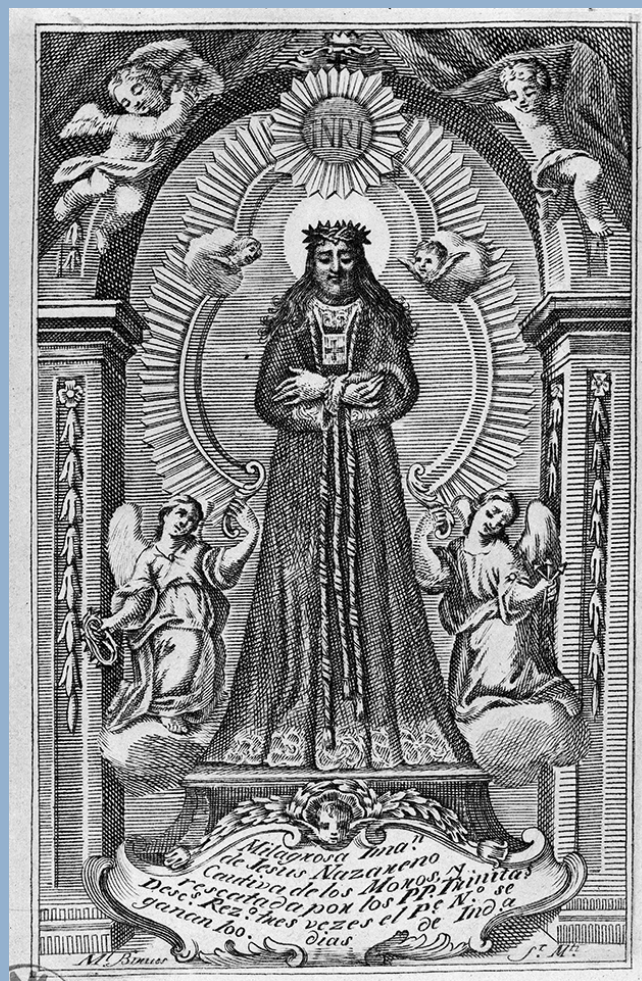
Date: second half 18th century – first half 19th century

Materials: paper, linen or hemp, silk, metal (possibly silver and other unconfirmed metals), wax, pâte de verre

Techniques: engraving, taffeta, hand embroidery, appliqué



Image of the indulgence, framed by embroidered decoration with floral motifs.



Iconographic description

2 INRI is the initialism representing the Latin inscription “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews”.

3 According to the Code of Canon Law, “An indulgence is the remission before God of temporal punishment for sins whose guilt is already forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful gains under certain and defined conditions by the assistance of the Church which as minister of redemption dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints”, Chapter IV, Indulgences, (Cann. 992-997), in *Code of Canon Law*, available at: <http://goo.gl/0p5p5S>.

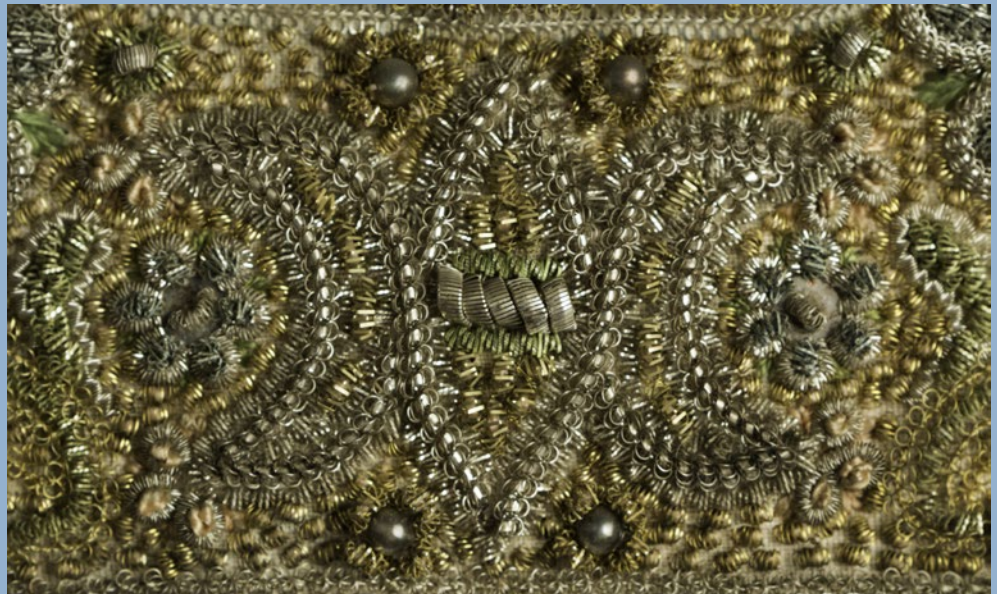
The piece is divided into two areas: the central part, which contains the indulgence, and the part that frames it. The central figure is of Christ standing, with long hair, a beard and robe. He wears the crown of thorns on his head and his hands are tied at waist level with a rope that descends from his neck and hangs in front of his feet. On his chest, he wears a scapular with the cross of the Trinitarian Order and above his head is the inscription INRI².

Christ is accompanied by six angels, three on each side. The angels in the lower part wear a crown of thorns and have three nails. All of the elements are linked to the Passion of Christ, with the representation following the iconography of the figure known as the Jesus of Medinaceli, a life-size statue venerated in the Madrid basilica that bears its name. The National Library of Spain, in Madrid, houses an engraving that is very similar, including even the inscription at the bottom: “*Milagrosa Imagen de / Iesus Nazareno cautiva de los Moros / y rescatada p. los PP Trinitarios Desc. Rezando tres / vezes el Pater Noster se ganan 100 días de Ind.*” (In English: “Miraculous Image of / Jesus the Nazarene captive of the Moors / and rescued by the Barefoot Trinitarians. Reciting three / times The Lord’s Prayer can earn one 100 days of Ind.”) The last word is the abbreviation for indulgence and defines the object’s function³. The Church generally issued indulgences in the form of prints, with a religious image accompanied by an inscription.

Detail of the monstrance with central piece imitating the host and engraved with a cross, the initials IHS (monogram of the name of Jesus Christ) and three nails.



Monogram of Ave Maria, with the embroidered letters A and M superimposed.



Two more symbols can be found in the embroidered frame that surrounds the central scene: the upper part has a monstrance that surrounds a circular piece, possibly of wax, engraved with the initials IHS, while the lower part has the monogram of Ave Maria. The rest of the frame is decorated with floral motifs of varying sizes.



Inscription beneath the image, showing the arrangement of silk threads around it, with gold leaf adorning the hem of Jesus' robe above.

4 The braided thread has a central thread of silk around which a very fine sheet of metal is wrapped, nearly covering the silk completely.

Technical description

In the indulgence in the Deu Museum, the engraving is only visible in the inscriptions and the flesh of the figures, while double-stranded silk thread, braided metallic thread⁴ and metallic leaf cover the rest of it. This must not be mistaken for embroidery, however, because all of the threads have been fixed with some sort of adhesive and arranged in parallel or zigzag lines, filling the surface of the paper.

This part is affixed to a piece of card that is, in turn, affixed to a larger piece of taffeta made out of linen or hemp. The textile serves as a support for the central image and for the embroidery of the frame. A look at the reverse shows the textile being reinforced with paper.

The decoration of the frame itself can rightly be described as embroidery. The materials are silk thread and, to a greater extent, metallic thread. The silk threads have little twist, while there are up to twelve different types of metallic thread. In general, the metallic threads most commonly used to weave or embroider come typically in the form of thin sheets or braided threads. This piece, however, has another type. It has thick threads that combine different metallic strands to form bouclés, coiled threads in which some coils have a circular cross-section and some a quadrangular cross-section, or to form braided threads, some combining different metals. In the embroidery of the period, silvery metals generally correspond to silver, but pure gold was never



Reverse of the object showing the paper that reinforces the textile and the stitch work.

Different threads used in the embroidery: silk thread and a variety of metallic threads. [See structural detail of the floral embroidery.](#)



5 FERNÁNDEZ, E. *Los talleres de bordado de las cofradías*, Editora Nacional, Madrid, 1982, pp. 71-81.

6 GONZÁLEZ, M.A. *Catálogo de bordados*, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid, 1974, p. 54.

used in gilding. Instead, they used silver coated in gold powder, also known as gilt silver, and in some cases the silver was replaced with copper, resulting in gilt metal or imitation gold⁵.

Turning to the technique, the silk thread has been used to embroider the central part of the largest flowers using a knotted stitch, while some of the petals have been done with long basting stitches, which could be identified as flat stitches. The metallic threads follow the embroidery technique known as gold appliqué⁶, which involves applying the thread or strand without piercing the fabric, affixing it to the textile with small, very discreet stitches until achieving the shape required by the design.

A look at the reverse of the piece shows the original colour of the silk threads, which is lost on the finished side. The remainder of the stitches are done with linen or hemp thread that is the same colour as the background textile. This thread is of two thicknesses: a thicker thread in the centre of some coils and a finer thread to hold the thicker strands.

In addition to the embroidery, the piece has appliqués of silver sequins at the centre of the medium-sized flowers and pâte de verre beads at the centre of the smaller flowers. These elements, together with all the threads mentioned earlier, create a stylistically rich and dynamic design.

Function of the indulgence

In addition to the function described above, the first word of the inscription, “Milagrosa” (or “Miraculous” in English), indicates that this indulgence could also be seen as a talisman to protect against misfortune. Religious prints were the most widespread prints of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, they were the leading business of engravers, whose most important customers

7 CARRETE, J., CHECA, F. & BOZAL, V. “El grabado en España (siglos xv-xviii)”, in *Summa Artis*, vol. XXXI, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1987, p. 412.

8 ALARCÓN, C. “La iconografía religiosa en el siglo xviii”, in *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares*, no. 45, Madrid, 1990, p. 269.

9 FERNÁNDEZ, D. “Historia de la imagen de Jesús Nazareno de Medinaceli de Madrid”, in *Actas del VII Congreso y Encuentro Nacional de Cofradías y Hermandades dedicadas a las Advocaciones de Jesús Nazareno Cautivo, Rescatado, de Medinaceli*, Cofradía del Santísimo Cristo de la Expiación y del Silencio, León, 2011, pp. 213-221.

10 PORRES, Bonifacio, *Libertad a los cautivos*, Secretariado Trinitario, Córdoba-Salamanca, 1997, p. 509.

11 The Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives was founded by the Frenchman Saint John of Matha (1160-1213) and it was dedicated to the peaceful redemption of captives through mercy. The sixth work of mercy is to free captives and act as mediators through the exchange or request of charity to pay ransoms. For additional information on this religious order, see PORRES, Bonifacio, *Op. cit.*

12 The protection of the Medinaceli home continued even during

were parishes, convents and religious orders, which would order enormous print runs of the images they venerated⁷. In the case of the Jesus of Medinaceli, the brotherhood in Madrid owned the engraving and one of its inventories even indicates that it had possession of the copper plate⁸.

The figure of Jesus of Medinaceli enjoyed a boom from the year 1682 because of its rescue by the Trinitarian Order. While the identity of the sculptor is not known, the piece is believed to have been produced in Seville in the first half of the seventeenth century⁹. In the mid-seventeenth century, it was taken to La Mámora (present-day Mehdiya in Morocco). But in 1681, the Sultan Moulay Ismail conquered the city, took soldiers and images captive and removed them to the city of Meknes¹⁰. There, Father Fray Pedro de los Ángeles, a Barefoot Trinitarian, witnessed the outrages to which the image was subjected and put in motion the steps necessary to rescue the captives and the figure of Jesus¹¹.

Upon being rescued, the image began wearing a scapular with the Trinitarian cross on its chest and it went on a journey from city to city. When it reached Madrid in 1682, its fame as the “Rescued Jesus” and a miraculous figure preceded it. So much so that the authorities and many faithful wishing to venerate the image gathered for its reception. It was put in the convent of the Barefoot Trinitarian Fathers in the city, next to which a chapel was built between 1686 and 1689 through the patronage of the Duke of Medinaceli¹². In the early eighteenth century, its worship spread to all the dominions of Spain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Poland and even to the West Indies by means of reproductions in sculpture, painting, prints and medals and through the creation of brotherhoods.

Conclusions

Although there are parallels with the print in the National Library of Spain, no embroidered indulgence has yet been found in any online databases that bring together the collections of different museums at a regional or national level. While representations of religious images that combine paper for the flesh and

the disentailments of Mendizábal, after which the church was built on its current site. This is why the image is known by that name and not by “Jesús Rescatado”, which was its original name. LARIOS, J.J.

“El comienzo de una relación secular: nuestro Padre Jesús y el Duque de Medinaceli”, in *Actas del VII Congreso y Encuentro Nacional... Op. cit.*, pp. 207-212.

13 Examples include Our Lady of Guadalupe (Reg. no. 1987/01/01) and Saint Ignatius of Loyola (Reg. no. 2014/02/01), both from the Museo de América, whose records can be consulted on line in the Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España (<http://ceres.mcu.es/pages/>), and the image of Saint Bibiana (Reg. no. 2278) in the Museu Arxiu Tomàs Balvey, whose record can be found in the Museu en Línia database (<http://goo.gl/5VOnZu>).

14 The records for these pieces can be found at:

<http://goo.gl/vDM1J1> (completing the “REGISTER NUMBER” field with 2943 for the cape and 11322 for the purse).

15 FLORIANO, A., *El bordado*, Alberto Martín, Barcelona, 1942, pp. 18-23 and GONZÁLEZ, M.A., 1974, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

embroidery over the remainder of the image have been found¹³, they all date from the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, there are parallels with the embroidery of two objects housed in the Documentation Centre and Textile Museum of Terrassa, particularly a purse dated from the eighteenth century, which has metallic threads of the same type and uses the same technique to decorate the indulgence¹⁴. Based on the quality of the materials used, the technique and the function of the object, it may perhaps belong to the category of scholarly embroidery, according to the classification established by experts in the field¹⁵. It is not known whether the indulgence was issued with embroidery or whether the decoration was added later. From the identified similarities, however, the print and the type of embroidery appear to be contemporary, possibly from the latter half of the eighteenth century or the first half of the nineteenth century. As for who did the embroidery, the fact that the object is an indulgence and tight control was exercised over indulgences, our hypothesis is that it was probably done in the workshops of a brotherhood or convent.

The reverse of the object poses another mystery. No remains of a backing have been found, so we do not know whether it had one or what it might have been made of. The object was found in a frame of much later date. The deterioration of the wood and glass made it necessary to remove the indulgence. From the silver filigree that decorates the perimeter of the front, the object appears to maintain its original margins, but it must certainly have had a backing or been affixed to a larger piece, because the reverse could not have been visible. Nor have any nail marks been found in the margins or any adhesive marks on the paper, though there are small holes made by a needle. This suggests that the object might have been hand-stitched to another piece of textile.

With the publication of this brief description of such a singular and extraordinary indulgence, perhaps these gaps in our knowledge can soon be filled in. ●