

EMBROIDERING BIBLICAL HEROINES IN
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

English embroideries in the seventeenth century frequently depict biblical narratives that feature examples of proper female behavior. Produced by young girls and women, they were made to adorn the embroiderer's home in the form of wall hangings, framed pictures, and trinket boxes. In this thesis, I focus on embroideries produced from the beginning of the seventeenth century through the end of the Commonwealth (1600-1660). I assess the social, economic, and political climate of the time period, then turn to the surviving embroideries and pattern books from which the female domestic embroiderers drew. I argue that through the embroidery subjects we are sometimes able to identify the embroiderer's economic status, religion, and even political convictions.

Girlhood education and contemporary expectations of women's behavior are essential to the place of embroidery as a valued art form produced in the home. Behavioral guidelines and pamphlets from the period have survived and prove that the education of most women was focused on how to become proper housewives. Biblical narratives were commonly represented. The story of Esther in particular was used as a lesson in morality because of her docility, loyalty, obedience, and sacrifice. Both the practice of performing the task of embroidery, which had become a tool in itself to

produce well-behaved women, and the subject matter of praiseworthy biblical heroines played a role in shaping the young English girls for their future role as wives and mothers.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined this thesis titled “Embroidering Biblical Heroines in Seventeenth-Century England,” presented by Lesley Poggemoeller, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worth of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

English seventeenth-century pictorial embroideries were cherished for their precise and technical construction, intriguing subjects filled with symbolism, and the countless hours the embroiderers toiled over something seen by so few. The sheer number of embroidered works that have survived is a testament to their importance within seventeenth-century English society and their intrinsic value to subsequent generations. The fact that a culture that would encourage, make, and preserve an art form outside of the traditional academic definition of art has significance to the overall understanding of that culture. Despite their obvious importance, these embroideries have been largely overlooked for two reasons: they were made by women in the home and embroidery is associated with craft.

Female domestic embroiderers started their embroideries by selecting designs from a pattern book—a principal reason embroidery has been considered a craft. These books provide a link between different women's embroideries and offer an explanation for the similarities they share. In this thesis, I explore the relationship between the embroidery pattern designs and the final embroideries produced by the female domestic embroiderer. I analyze women's education, the embroidery subjects, and the embroidery pattern books. To evaluate the significance of seventeenth-century English pictorial embroidery from a scholarly perspective, it is imperative to look to the creators of the embroidered works within their social contexts. The focus of my thesis is pictorial embroidery produced during the first half of the seventeenth century. These embroideries are identifiable by their sizes and compositions. From the years 1600 to 1660, English

women produced an astonishing number of domestic embroideries that share common elements, compositions, and themes such as Esther, Suzanna, Adam and Eve, and the Judgement of Solomon.

England had a social environment under the rule of Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth (1649-1660) drastically different from that during the reign of Charles I. The puritanical ideology of Parliament during the Commonwealth prescribed austere lifestyles void of superfluous activities. I have selected embroideries that were made before and during the Commonwealth and will argue that there are symbolic political associations in these biblical narratives. The practice of embroidery expanded after the 1660s with an increase in the production of embroidered caskets—small table top trinket boxes filled with small drawers and secret storage compartments.

Only recently has there been interest in exploring the meaning behind these embroideries prompted by the feminist critique of art history. Feminist scholars have begun to embrace this topic precisely for its connection to the definition of femininity. Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the Feminine* (1984) sparked a new interest in embroidery and its association with indoctrinated femininity emerged. Parker's study and analysis is one of the first modern accounts that devoted significant research into the act of embroidery and its social significance. Prior to Parker's book, writings on embroidery were mostly limited to descriptions of stitching techniques and praise for the ornamentation of embroidery in English domestic textiles. One exception was Dorothy Gardiner's book *English girlhood at school: a study of women's education through twelve centuries*, published in 1929. She discussed embroidery's presence within girlhood education but as her interest was in social history,

her study lacks analysis of embroidery as an art form. Myra Reynolds' in *The Learned Lady of England, 1650-1760* (1920), briefly discussed the education before 1650 but does not mention the role of embroidery within overall girlhood education.

In 2008, The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture published a collection of essays written by scholars Christina Balloffet Carr, Ruth Geuter, Susan North, and Kathleen Staples focusing on Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition of English embroidery produced between 1580-1700. The exhibition and related essays demonstrate more contemporary interest in embroidery and its social relevance to Tudor, Stuart, and Commonwealth English women's lives. Particularly helpful to my research on the significance of seventeenth-century political atmosphere on English embroideries was Ruth Geuter's essay "Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context", in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature* (2008). Geuter, however, does not address the key role of pattern books. Even Parker had limited her discussion of embroidery as an art form, as she focused her argument on embroidery's role in the definition of "femininity". Few scholars discuss the significance of published pattern books to the history of embroidery. Suzanne Hull's *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English books for women, 1475-1640* (1982) is a compilation of practical guides, devotional materials, and literature intended for literate English women evident from her title. The author, however, does not include pattern book.

I will argue that the existence of embroidery pattern books indicate that after the sixteenth century, embroidery was identified as a woman's task, as seen by the illustrations on the cover pages of my primary sources. Therefore, the absence of an

analysis in most scholarly studies is a significant lacuna. Previously, embroidery making had been reserved for craftsmen in embroidery guilds¹. While embroidery guild production did not halt entirely during the seventeenth century, the creation of embroideries moved largely into the homes of noblewomen. Embroidery entered the domestic sphere during the beginning of the seventeenth-century as an answer to society's expectations of, and restrictions upon, women. Therefore the existence of—and extensive reliance upon—pattern books, is essential to our understanding of how embroidery came to embody the ideology of “femininity”.

Embroidery production embarked on a permanent transformation during the seventeenth-century. It embodied all the characteristics seventeenth-century English society demanded of women: obedience, submissiveness, diligence, docility, and the absence of employment outside the home. During the seventeenth century, the practice of needlework was introduced early in the education of young girls, and the resulting behavior resembled “instinctive” proficiency. This association produced a relationship between femininity and embroidery, which became inextricably intertwined. As Rozsika Parker emphasized in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984), embroidery played an important role in the maintenance and creation of the notion of femininity.² The behaviors encouraged by the practice of embroidery contributed significantly to the ideology of femininity.

¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984), 10.

² Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (1984): 11.

An important component to the study of embroidery production in seventeenth-century England was the pattern book. Engraved images were sold in bound book form to domestic embroiders to assist with the creation of their compositions. Depicting women engaged in embroidery, weaving, and lacemaking, the title pages indicate that the books' intended audience was women. By studying the published pattern books, I found that there was not one "original" template for these female embroiderers to copy. Viewed by some as creating a technical distance between the embroiderer and her embroidery, the pattern books in fact aided women in creating a unique art form. While the patterns were important to the production of the works, the embroideries were not faithful duplicates of the predesigned patterns. Although there are similarities between embroiderers' works, individual embroideries bear elements of distinction. The domestic embroiders altered, rearranged, adjusted, and borrowed elements during the preliminary layout of their embroidery. Women were not solely concerned with the mechanical act of needlework; compositions are fundamentally distinct due to embroiderers' personal choices. There are noticeable trends in subject matter, both religious and secular. Depictions of Esther, Solomon, Adam and Eve, or of King Charles I were often employed by needle-workers for many reasons. Their popularity emerged from the lessons that could be learned from their study: submissiveness and self-sacrifice from female biblical figures and loyalty to both God and crown.

In a society in which women were raised to be married and bear children, most seventeenth-century English women did not work outside of the home. The assignment of embroidery to women led to a relationship that both changed and suppressed women. Reports exist of women writing negatively about their experience with needle-work

because of its rigorous guidelines and laborious techniques. But the multitude of examples that have survived the centuries indicates that there must have been some pleasure in the experience, if not in the act itself, then perhaps in the pride of creating work with one's own hands. Women created pictorial embroideries because of gendered cultural expectations, but in the process they produced individual works of art and a lasting legacy.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF EMBROIDERY IN THE EDUCATION AND DAILY LIVES OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH WOMEN

Embroideries that emerged out of the dark ages were mostly found on church vestments or garments worn by members of the royal court. Monks can be credited as designers of the first embroidery patterns—heavily enriched designs abundant with ecclesiastical connotations. Their background in manuscript illustration made them ideal pattern designers due to their extensive knowledge of Christian iconography.¹ The wealthier medieval English household could afford small luxuries such as pillows, window coverings, and padded chairs. Soft furnishings were a rare element within the vast majority of medieval homes, so there are very few embroidered textiles that survive from the early Middle Ages. Embroidery production during the seventeenth century was built on the activity's sixteenth-century history and reputation. Embroidery guilds and men and women employed by the church were given the task of embroidering garments used during religious ceremonies. Embroidery was practiced by generations of women studying in convents during the sixteenth century as a means of efficiently creating garments used during service and passing the hours, not because of the restrictive social prescriptions for women that would emerge later. The young female nuns would stitch biblical stories on robes, altar cloths, and banners for the Church.²

¹ Pamela Warner, *Embroidery: A History* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1991), 13

² *Ibid.*, 13.

Life improved in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England.³ Emerging comforts that would have before been unobtainable to all but members of the nobility over time became accessible to the emerging gentry. Interior improvements such as permanent furniture and separate rooms provided a new form of stability and privacy that encouraged a more rooted home life.⁴ With the rise of wealth came better, larger homes for those born outside the nobility. The importance of the home changed, as it acquired a new social and cultural role within seventeenth-century society and by doing so, focus was placed more on the family and children.⁵

Unfortunately, very little historical literature exists on the subject of the education of children. Scholars such as Dorothy Gardiner and Ann Rosalind Jones have pieced together accounts from literate women's letters and journals. Once a child had been taught, she was expected to embrace the social ideology responsible for mandating women's behavior. Gardiner discussed how the education of children in the sixteenth century progressed under a newly developed social structure. The education of wealthier English children—including girls—consisted of learning how to read and write.⁶ Without career expectations, the purpose of a young girl's education was to secure a suitable marriage. Unless a young girl's family expected her to become a nun, all focus turned to preparation for marriage and the search for a prosperous husband as early as possible. For wealthy girls with marriage in their futures, education took place in the home.

³ Christopher Hill. *England's Turning Point: Essays on 17th Century English History* (London: International Socialist Organization, Chicago, 1998), 38.

⁴ Hill, *England's Turning Point* (1998), 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶ Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education Through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1929), 114.

Governesses provided instruction in home manners, embroidery, music, French, and any other housewifery skills considered essential by social standards.⁷

A better understanding of children's education developed throughout England towards the end of the sixteenth century and at the birth of the seventeenth.⁸ For many boys, education moved from the confines of their birth home to apprenticeships with other families. The concept of boarding became a popular solution to boys' education in England. Boys from the gentry were sent to be apprentices or serve a noble family, lower class boys were sent to craftsmen to learn trade, and apprenticeships or servitude was a requirement for impoverished children as well.⁹ Girls were seldom given this educational exodus, but their studies primarily reflected their future in the domestic sphere. No English girl was considered properly educated unless she had been taught the very basic forms of needlecraft and possessed a cursory knowledge of garment sewing.¹⁰

Literature was widely used as a governing tool within English society, and numerous books on the subject of appropriate female behavior were published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These practical guides were instruction manuals that counseled women on the importance of adhering to a particular feminine ideal. The subjects of these books ranged from advice on girlhood education, wifely duties, and appropriate behavior of widows, childbirth, and how to occupy leisurely hours.¹¹ These instructional guides instilled within contemporary society a strong image of what a

⁷ Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (1929), 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹ Hill, *England's Turning Point* (1998), 41.

¹⁰ Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (1929), 115.

¹¹ Suzanne W Hull. *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English books for women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 31.

respectable and proper English woman was to be. Through its introduction into young girlhood education, the practice of embroidery became a tool in the encouragement and reinforcement of the feminine ideal.¹²

Books circulated in England that expressed the ideal behavior and attitudes of a well-born woman. Two such books, both written by men, were John Taylor's *The Needle's Excellency* (1631) and Richard Brathwait's *An English Gentlewoman* (1631). *The English Gentlewoman* (1631) is an instructional book that describes appropriate behavior expected of women in seventeenth-century England. Seventeenth-century women's lives were driven by religious scripture and the ensuing interpretations that were derived from that source. Catholic and Protestant families alike were prone to severe restrictions on women's liberties. According to Brathwait, a gentlewoman should not concern herself with education, but she should want to be judged on her sober lifestyle.¹³ The books she might read were to be strictly related to the Old and New Testaments and consulted when she needed to stir up devotion and passion for prayer.¹⁴ Brathwait suggested that women could consult herbals for inspiration and imagery used in their pictorial creations, but he warned that honorable women did not participate in conversation unless it pertained to her family, needle, or sampler.¹⁵

Religion was an ominous presence in seventeenth-century English life. Puritanism, an austere Protestant sect, emerged in England during the sixteenth century

¹² Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (1984): 14.

¹³ Josephine Kamm. *Hope Deferred; Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965), 54.

¹⁴ Kamm, *Hope Deferred* (1965): 54.

¹⁵ Kamm, *Hope Deferred* (1965): 54.

and remained prominent through the eighteenth century.¹⁶ Edmund Tilney's *A Brief and Pleasant Discourse of the Duties of Marriage* (1571) summed up the contemporary view on the role of women: "...the office of the man is to maintain well his livelihood, and the office of the woman is to govern well the household."¹⁷ With the spread of Puritanism across England and Central Europe and the elimination of convents during the seventeenth-century, opportunities for women in the church declined.¹⁸ Puritanism became the ideology of the household.¹⁹ The home was viewed as an extension of the Church, and household chores were infused with pious devotion. Every activity in the home was thus associated with worship. Regarding the leisurely activity of embroidery, it was between 1610 and 1660 that most embroidery depicted religious subjects drawn from popular biblical narratives. It was expected that women influence the inhabitants of household, from the children to the servants, by setting a pious example through their physical and spiritual behavior.²⁰

By the early seventeenth century, embroidery was an established activity for upper-class and noblewomen. Because embroidery embodied femininity and all of its connotations—docility, reverence, obedience, and life without occupation—it became an indicator of a woman's worth to her husband. If a young woman embroidered, she was thought to make a devout, loving mother and an obedient wife. Embroidery produced by

¹⁶ Hill, *England's Turning Point* (1998): 35.

¹⁷ Edmund Tilney. *A Brief and Pleasant Discourse of the Duties of Marriage* (London, printed by Henrie Denham, 1571) <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> (accessed July 17 2015)

¹⁸ Hill, *England's Turning Point* (1998): 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰ Michelle M. Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 96.

women in the home was a pastime rather than a source of income. Decorating housewares and garments was considered a voluntary activity and, because of this, needlework was often paired with the idea of play.²¹ Although embroidery was a socially expected activity for women during their leisure time, the dedication it required resulted in women embroidering day and night, all year long.²² Women were rarely without embroidery work to complete, especially when there were a growing number of textiles within the home to adorn. Embroidered clothing was fashionable during the seventeenth century. Women's dresses, bonnets, and petticoats as well as men's waistcoats and gloves served as a ground for needlework. The ornamentation embroidery provided was praised by writers and exalted to upper class status while the action of garment and cloth construction was assigned to lower class people.²³ Women were proud of their creations, and the embroidery would have been displayed throughout their household in public rooms and on the garments they wore.

Inspiration for their embroideries was found in women's everyday surroundings. English gardens had become very fashionable and for exercise and socialization, women walked the gardens of their homes or the perimeter of the country estates.²⁴ Botany was a popular subject during the seventeenth century. Several illustrated books on plants and herbals were published during the seventeenth century and would have been filled with depictions of flowers and plants.²⁵ These books served as flora references for women

²¹ Jones, *Renaissance Clothing* (2000), 134.

²² *Ibid.*, 134.

²³ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁴ Hole, *The English Housewife in the Seventeenth-century* (1953), 156.

²⁵ Townsend, W. G. Paulson, *Embroidery: Or the Craft of the Needle* (London: Truslove, Hanson & Comba, 1899), 31.

working on a variety of subjects with their needlework and embroideries. Bed linens, curtains, panels, caskets, and garments all played host to pictorial embroidery. The lady of the house would have occupied her days with the meticulous pastime of needle-work and would have been the dominant creator of the embroidered goods within her home.

The practice of employing embroidery as an instrument to cultivate proper feminine behavior began with the introduction of the art into young girls' curricula. By teaching a societal idea of femininity through the process of embroidery, it was ensured that a young girl would possess the proper characteristics held in high regard by polite society.

CHAPTER 3

ENGLISH EMBROIDERIES:

SUBJECTS, COMPOSITIONS, AND HIDDEN MESSAGES

English girls would have been introduced to their needles through the practice of making samplers and from there would have graduated to figural or pictorial embroideries. It is important to discuss the techniques employed by seventeenth-century English embroiderers to best comprehend the role of embroidery in a woman's life. These compositions were a time-consuming affair, often taking months to complete. Old Testament female protagonists like Esther, Sheba, and Susanna appear in many pictorial embroideries, and beyond creating a visual portrayal of the religious stories with which they are connected, there existed a deeper reason for seventeenth-century English women to depict these women. Peace was absent in both country and court because of the growing polarization of religion in England and the opposing doctrines' influences over politics. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants ran high throughout the century. Pictorial embroidery subjects often included the likeness of Charles I, Henrietta Maria, and Charles II. The opinions of the embroiderer's family and her own personal beliefs certainly assisted with the selection of the subject she worked with needle and thread.

The embroideries I examine in this thesis share common subjects but were created through a wide variety of stitching styles. An instance of a pictorial embroidery worked overall in tent stitch is Esther and King Ahasuerus from the collection of the St. Louis Art Museum (fig. 1). It is an example of stumpwork, a popular embroidery style during the middle of the seventeenth-century, often found as an embellishment for a casket or

cabinet. These caskets are comparable to modern day jewelry boxes with lids, doors, drawers, and even hidden compartments to hide the most valuable possessions. They had inkwells inside with separate compartments for quills and parchment. The insides of these boxes were also embellished with interiors of painted scenes or marbled paper. Embroidered panels were made by domestic female embroiderers, and then constructed into cabinets by craftsmen.

The tools women used to create pictorial embroideries are nearly identical to those used by embroiderers today. Thimbles worn while embroidering were made from silver, bone, or ivory.¹ Needles with varying eye size and girth, along with spools of thread, skeins, and ornate decorations such as pearl beads, mica, and wood could be found in a domestic embroiderer's sewing basket. The patterns used for the embroideries were derived from pattern books and illustrated publications of flowers, animals, and biblical narratives. The embroiderer would have purchased pattern books and used them as a recurring source to accurately duplicate the desired motif. Embroidery materials were expensive, and often it was wealthy women who were able to produce lavish works with gold and silver thread, pearls, and semi-precious stones.

Biblical narratives were a popular subject matter of pictorial and figural embroideries, but subjects were not limited to biblical heroines. Historian Ruth Gueter has cataloged hundreds of seventeenth-century English embroideries and among over 900 surviving textiles that include figural work that she has studied, forty-three percent

¹ Hole, *The English Housewife in the Seventeenth-Century* (1953), 163.

pertain to biblical stories². While more than 900 textiles have survived from the seventeenth century, the percentage found in this sample indicates an overall trend of embroideries depicting biblical narratives.

Esther, Sheba, and Susanna were heroines in stories wrought with dramatic plots including death, assassination attempts, rape, and sacrifice. Biblical stories with a female in a trying situation were chosen as embroidery subjects because of the morality lessons they provided. Seen as vessels for the word of God, Old Testament biblical heroines were strong and obedient supporting characters to their male counterparts. The Ashmolean Museum has at least 30 surviving embroideries depicting the tale of Esther.³ A heroine popular with embroiderers and craftspeople during the seventeenth-century, Esther's tale explains the origin and significance of the Jewish festival Purim—a feast that celebrates the failure of the plot to kill the Jews living in Persia in the fifth century BCE. Two versions of the tale of Esther existed during the seventeenth century, one came from the Greek Old Testament most commonly found in Roman Catholic bibles. The second version was the Hebrew tale used in Protestant bibles.⁴ Typically, as we would expect, English seventeenth-century embroideries depicted the Hebrew tale.

² Ruth Gueter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context” in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature*, edited by Andrew Morrall, Melinda Watt, and Cristina Balloffet Carr. p. 57-77, (New York: Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 2008), 57.

³ Mary M Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: In the Collection of the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum in association with Jonathan Horne Publications, 2004), 17.

⁴ Geuter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and their Social Context” (2008), 64.

In the Hebrew version, King Ahasuerus abandoned his first wife, Vashti, when she disobeyed his order to appear before him at court. After Ahasuerus banished Queen Vashti from the kingdom, a search for beautiful virgins was conducted in the hope of finding the King a new companion. Esther was brought before the King by her cousin and surrogate father, Mordecai. Ahasuerus chose Esther as his next bride, not knowing that she was a Jewish refugee hiding in his kingdom. Mordecai overheard two eunuchs plotting to assassinate the King, and he revealed their treachery to Esther and Ahasuerus. Soon after, Mordecai did not bow down to a recently appointed official, and when asked why he did not do so, he confessed that he was a Jew. The man he upset, Haman, decided to destroy all the Jews who lived in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. Haman falsely told the King he knew of subjects in the kingdom who broke the law, and the King gave Haman the authority to kill anyone found disobeying the law. Individuals could only be saved if the King held out his golden scepter. Mordecai learned of the genocide and informed Esther of the plot, but Esther was unable to go before the King without first being summoned because to do so was illegal and punishable by death. Regardless, Esther decided to tell the King of Haman's treachery, and risked her life in order to do so. "As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favour and he held out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter."⁵ Esther begged the King to revoke Haman's order to kill the Jews, and her request was granted.

⁵ The Bible, The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, 1973, book of Esther, (chapter 5 Verse 2)

In the Greek version of the tale, Esther went unbidden before the King, covered in dirt from praying for her people. His anger causes Esther to faint and he went to her aid and extends his scepter, granting her permission to speak.⁶ In both narratives, the story revolves around the emotionally charged moment Esther impetuously goes before the King, risking her own life. The story of Esther was employed as a lesson in loyalty, honesty, duty, submissiveness, modesty, faithfulness and courage. She risked her life to save her people, and for that she was rewarded.

The seventeenth century does not mark the first appearance of Esther in English art or politics.⁷ However, the numerous seventeenth-century English embroideries depicting Esther can be traced to the political climate during that time. The narrative of Esther became symbolic for many groups within English seventeenth-century society. It was during the tumultuous middle part of the seventeenth century that Esther was embroidered most frequently by middle and upper-class women. Her story appearing on so many domestically produced panels and caskets during that time may suggest that because of the political unrest the tale of Esther resonated with women. She was a heroine for those who felt ostracized for their political or religious beliefs. Royalists related to the story of Esther because of her loyalty to her King. Catholics identified with her action of hiding her faith. Protestants felt vindicated by her noble actions in the face of personal harm. After the beheading of Charles I and the establishment of the

⁶ Gueter, "Embroidered Biblical Narratives and their social context" (2008), 64.

⁷ In 1392 Richard Maydiston wrote a commemorative poem for the marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in which he compares the new queen consort to Esther; John N King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 196.

Commonwealth with Cromwell as Lord Protector, English citizens, including women, appeared before Parliament and gave their comments directly through petitions.⁸ This allowed members of English society to address their issues straightforwardly with the governing body, paralleling the plot of Esther closely enough for the English to identify with the heroine. For instance, levellers—members of the political group that plotted to assassinate Charles I and protested the Commonwealth—were referred to as Hamans in printed material because they were viewed as traitors by rivaling sides.⁹ In his sermon delivered in London in 1648, Paul Knell utilized the parable of the vineyard as a metaphor for traitorous levelers. “It is most evident how bloody and covetous these leveling vine-dressers are. What therefore should the Lord of the Vineyard do unto them? Sure in justice he may destroy them (though he delighteth more in mercy) and might let out his vineyard to others, he might discard these unjust Judges, he might displace these unfaithful stewards, these zimeries deserve no peace, no pardon, that would have slain their Master, these Shebas deserve to have their heads thrown over the wall, these Hamans to be executed upon their own gallows, those mine enemies (might the King say) which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.”¹⁰ In “A Looking-Glasse for Statesmen”, an anonymous leaflet published in response

⁸ Gueter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and their Social Context” (2008), 65.

⁹ Paul Knell, *A Looking-Glasse for Levellers: Held Out in a Sermon, Preached at St. Peters Pauls-Wharfe, Upon Sunday in the After-Noone, Sept. 24. 1648* (London, 1648):16. Referenced in Ruth Gueter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context” In *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature*, edited by Andrew Morrall, Melinda Watt, and Cristina Balloffet Carr. p. 57-77, (New York: Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decortive Arts, Design, and Culture, 2008), 67.

¹⁰ Knell referenced in Gueter, 67.

1648, the author warned politicians of what happens to those whose pride impedes their prudence. “Haman came short of no man in his time, but the king only: he wanted neither power, wealth, favor, no council, to accomplish his designs and complete his honor but only to supple the sinews of Mordecai’s stiff knees, which would not bend for him. He now consults with his council how to quit himself of the whole rabble of those *agitating Jews*—mark well the end of his tragedy.”¹¹ This identification with Esther explains compositions that depict her bowing to a King Ahasuerus who resembles Charles I. In the sixteenth century, Catholics and Protestants fought bitterly over the English crown after the death of Henry VIII. When French Henrietta Maria married the English Charles I, she was viewed by some as the protector of her people, the Catholics, from a modern-day Ahasuerus.¹²

To ensure the tale of Esther was recognizable, certain elements had to remain consistent. The similarities found in depictions of Esther range from the expected central compositional scene to seemingly innocuous details of hares and specific species of birds. The commonality of these details provides another rich layer of history and allegory to embroidered Esthers. The placement of Esther to the right of King Ahasuerus is found in two embroideries from the St. Louis Art Museum (Figs. 1 & 2), but Esther approaches

¹¹ Anonymous, *A Looking-Glasse for Statesmen, Wherein They May Clearely See the Reward of Their Severall Actings* (London, printed for I.H., 1648), referenced in Ruth Gueter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context” In *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature*, edited by Andrew Morrall, Melinda Watt, and Cristina Balloffet Carr. p. 57-77 (New York: Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 2008), 67.

¹² Gueter, “Embroidered Biblical Narratives and their Social Context” (2008), 65.

King Ahasuerus from the left in the example from the Metropolitan (fig.3). Portrayed in contemporary clothing in each of these embroideries, Esther is shown kneeling before the King who is seated on a canopied throne placed outdoors. All three examples of the biblical story show King Ahasuerus bearded with brown hair, wearing a cape of fine cloth and ermine with the hand opposite his side towards the viewer holding the scepter out to Esther. One or two servants assist Esther with her cape as she bows before Ahasuerus. In the stumpwork example from the St. Louis Art Museum (Fig. 1) and the example from the Metropolitan (Fig. 3), the two servants are shown conversing. Beside and slightly behind Ahasuerus's throne is one guard. Ahasuerus is depicted somewhat differently in each of these embroideries, but his presence remains uniform. In each composition, he sits on a covered throne and extends his scepter to Esther, (figs. 4 – 6). Common elements, such as a leopard, lion, and parrot, are found embroidered in the foreground of each embroidery, each one portrayed similarly. In the tent-stitch embroidery from the St. Louis Art Museum (Fig. 1) and the large panel from the Metropolitan (Fig. 3), the entire narrative exists within the confines of the embroidery; the small stumpwork embroidery from the St. Louis Art Museum (Fig. 2) illustrates only the crucial plot detail of Esther going before Ahasuerus. This indicates that the stumpwork embroidery was intended to adorn a cabinet, since the elements of Haman and the procession are not shown. In the St. Louis Art Museum Esther (Fig. 2) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Esther (Fig. 3) Haman is hanging from the gallows in the background as a heralded procession of Mordecai on horseback appears.

Parallels can be drawn between the narrative of Esther and Ahasuerus when viewing this embroidered casket depicting Charles I and Henrietta Maria, found in the

collection of the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (fig. 7). Charles, a Protestant King, chose the catholic Henrietta Maria as his bride. Although her religion was not kept secret as Esther's was from Ahasuerus, Henrietta Maria was still a Catholic in a Protestant country. Looking at the embroidery, Henrietta approaches Charles I, her figure positioned to the right of the King, with a fan in her right hand. She is surrounded by stylized flowers on her side of the casket, but only the embroidered rose found to the left of the King is truly identifiable. The rose, symbolic of England, implies a deeper significance to Charles's welcoming outstretched hand to the French princess.

Analyzing the embroideries individually reveals the differences of the techniques used in each work. The St. Louis Art Museum Esther (Fig. 1) is composed of red, blue, yellow, brown and green silk thread on a natural colored linen ground. In the center, King Ahasuerus is seated on his throne and sheltered under a canopy. In contrast to the two other portrayals of Ahasuerus in the Esther embroideries (Fig. 4 and Fig. 6) where he wears a heeled shoe, in this composition he is shown wearing high shaft boots with thick folds at the top—a style of boot made popular by Charles I who wore them to disguise his physical deformity (Fig. 5). Ahasuerus is cloaked in a white and red cape lined with ermine. At his neck is metal thread stitched to create a chain and a royal pendant. Ahasuerus's facial features are stitched on with single strand threads. The face and hands are tent-stitched in a skin tone color that differs slightly from the white on the cape. His hair and thick beard are made with knotted stitches from multiple shades of brown. Single strands of thread are used to create the hair on his head and beard.

In the stumpwork embroidery from the St. Louis Art Museum (Fig. 2) Esther kneels before Ahasuerus, and he is shown holding out his golden scepter. All of the

figures, except for one female attendant, are completed in stumpwork and have wooden hands covered in white silk. Esther's dress is embroidered with flowers and insects in red, green, yellow and blue silk threads on a white ground. King Ahasuerus wears a gold embroidered crown and a gown that is tent-stitched. His cloak is lined with a fur that simulates ermine. His beard and hair are achieved with a French knot stitch. Stuffed animal figures including a lion, leopard, fish, frog, and a parrot perched on a cherry twig appear in the foreground. A butterfly, numerous insects, and a variety of birds and flowers are all embroidered on the ground with satin and split stitches. A castle is embroidered in the upper right corner of the background; the three-dimensional turret made by ceylon stitch and curtain in the opening of the arched doorway is curved as if it is blowing in the wind. A variety of stitches were used to create the flowers and garments. French knots were used to make the flower centers to create the entire flower of the upper left corner. Rococo stitch was used for bands over the raised portions, for Esther's waist sash, and for the shoelaces of the male servant. The golden scepter of the King was embroidered on the satin ground and a three dimensional scepter has been placed in the hand, made of gilt wire wrapped around the needle to obtain a curl and then secured to the satin ground. The mane of the lion is made through the use of loosely twisted thread tied in loops to the ground. The castle contains isinglass windows, and the lion, leopard, parrot and fish have glass eyes, probably made for doll's eyes if not specifically for the purpose of the embroidery.

The large embroidery from the Metropolitan shows the full story of Esther on a single panel (Fig. 3). Ahasuerus is shown in regal robes with an ermine cape, sitting beneath an impressive domed throne with four lions surrounding the base. Everything

exists within a pastoral landscape. Esther kneels before Ahasuerus on the left of the composition with two female attendants behind her. The composition's backdrop is worked in tent stitch, with Gobelin stitches used for the sky and pool of water. Esther, Ahasuerus, the throne, and some floral elements at the bottom of the panel are three-dimensional. The throne is a combination of satin and split stitches with stuffing to provide dimension. Esther, the stones in the lower left corner, the birds and the flowers are created with ceylon and rococo stitches which also provide dimensionality.

Embroidery subjects that suggest religious and political associations were not limited to the tale of Esther. Another female heroine found in seventeenth-century English embroideries was Susanna. An example found at the St. Louis Art Museum depicts the moment when the Elders accosted Susanna while she was bathing (Fig. 8). Her gauzy attire is transparent, exposing her bosom, and her presence at the pool and fountain point to the moment in her story. Found in chapter 13 of the book of Daniel in the Catholic Apocrypha, Susanna was spied on by two elders while she bathed. She resisted the advances of two old men who intruded on her intimate moment, angering them. She was falsely accused of adultery by the two men, who were also judges in her trial. It was Daniel who came to her aide before she was executed. The maker of this embroidery was most likely Catholic, although the tale of Susanna and the elders was popular in the visual arts. The story would most likely have been used as a precautionary tale, warning young women of the dangers of being female in a male-dominated world.

Another subject with catholic ties was King Solomon, who was often associated with Mary I of England's husband, King Philip II of Spain.¹³ When his father, Charles V abdicated the throne to Phillip II, they were likened to King David and Solomon and Phillip was referred to as the new and prudent King Solomon, his monastery El Escorial influenced by descriptions of Solomon's Temple.¹⁴ The depiction of the Judgment of Solomon from the St. Louis Art Museum (fig. 9) contains elements that strongly echo those found in the three versions of Esther previously analyzed. Solomon sits beneath a domed throne amidst a pastoral landscape full of flowers, insects, birds, and animals. The composition illustrates the pivotal moment in Solomon's reign, when he used his wisdom to reveal the true mother of the child. In the embroidery, a woman kneels before Solomon's throne with her arms outstretched over a dead infant seen at her feet, reaching for the child being held by his foot. The servant holding the child wields a sword, ready to strike. Solomon gives the command to cut the child in two. In his right hand is a golden scepter, much like that found in Ahasuerus's possession in the Esther compositions (fig. 10).

Adam and Eve were another socially relevant subject amongst seventeenth-century domestic embroiderers. In line with the tradition of portraying the narrative through its most dramatic and significant moment, Adam and Eve are nearly always portrayed at the moment they fall into sin. The ideology of original sin is intrinsically misogynistic and supported the superiority of men. Serving as an archetype for Christian

¹³ Carlos M.N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 362.

¹⁴ Groot, Wim de, *The Seventh Window: The King's Window Donated by Philip II and Mary Tudor to Saint Janskerk in Gouda 1557* (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 2005), 170-171.

women, Eve represented the struggles of womanhood. Her narrative provided explanations regarding the pain of childbirth and the hierarchy in which men reigned above women, established by God himself during creation. The narrative particularly resonated with Puritans, as Adam and Eve were constant reminders of the dangers of indulging in one's curiosities and desires. An example found in the Metropolitan collection is that of Adam and Eve at the Tree of Knowledge on the left side of the composition, and Charles I and Henrietta Maria on the right (Fig. 24). This pairing indicates the embroiderer's political associations as a Royalist—comparing the royal couple with the first biblical couple allows parallels to be drawn. Adam and Eve having been selected to be partners by God, and thus Charles and Henrietta Maria were also a divine arrangement. In the example from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection, Eve is embroidered receiving an apple from the serpent wrapped around the trunk of the tree (fig.11). Similarities can be found between this finished embroidery and the pattern drawn by Matthias Mignerak and Pierre Firens in *La Pratique de L'Aiguille Industriouse* (1605) (fig.12).

Symbolic meaning in seventeenth-century embroideries goes well beyond the main figures depicted. The elements surrounding the central narrative provided the viewer with additional information about the characters portrayed and even the background of the woman embroidering the work. The lion and leopard represented courage and loyalty, while the parrot was symbolic of female domesticity. Similarities among the leopards can be found in the Metropolitan Museum Of Art Adam and Eve embroidery (fig. 13), the St. Louis Art Museum stump-work embroidery (fig. 14), and the St. Louis Art Museum tent stitch embroidery (fig. 15). Just as with the leopard, when

comparing the positioning of the lions' bodies, the stylization of the mane, and three figures having the same tail is an indication that the pattern was acquired from similar sources. (figures 16-19). The parrot can be found near Esther in each of the embroideries discussed (fig. 20-22). This repetition reveals a tradition in the practice of pictorial embroidery and ensuring that any contemporary viewer would understand the symbolism of Esther's attribute: her primary role as submissive wife. In each work a castle appears in the background, representing the embroiderer's social and economic class (fig 23 – 29).¹⁵ These women were from wealthy families—either members of the nobility or upper class. The placement of the castle became a tradition for seventeenth-century embroiderers, despite the inconsistencies with the embroidery subjects.

Political subtext within embroidered biblical stories was common during the seventeenth century, with all its dogmatic turmoil. The popular practice of embroidering heroines such as Esther is given of the historical political and social climate of the seventeenth century. The unity these embroideries share because of their subject matter reveals a complicated harmony within the art. For a practice designed to be repetitious, and identical—from the tools used to make the works to the subjects chosen for the compositions—English domestic embroidery production in the seventeenth-century was exceptionally uniform. Through the rigid standards for embroidery, it allowed women a platform on which they could express their own beliefs, albeit in the form of a well-known, traditional biblical story. The similarities among these embroideries may be

¹⁵ Kathleen Epstein, *British Embroidery: Curious Works From the Seventeenth-Century* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; 1998), 23.

understood through the study of the pattern books used by domestic embroiderers. I turn to the pattern books in my final chapter.

CHAPTER 4
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PICTORIAL
EMBROIDERY AND PATTERN DESIGN

Scholars of seventeenth-century embroidery have largely neglected the study of pattern designs. Yet, this primary source for embroidery production is the foundation on which the art exists. Considering the similarities among many compositions in seventeenth-century embroideries, the question of the production of patterns is two-part: Where did the embroiderers obtain the design elements, and why do so many embroideries resemble each other?

Embroidery pattern books such as Richard Shorleyker's *A Schole House for the Needle* (1631) and Peter Stent's *A Book of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies* (1661) were widely circulated across England, providing evidence of their popularity among women embroidering in the home. Scholars have attempted to answer the question of similarity through abbreviated explanations on the relationship between the pattern book and embroideries, but have largely neglected the sustained research necessary to link the two. While pattern books were used as sources of imagery, there is no evidence of a fully designed pattern layout used for these complex embroidery designs. Therefore, female domestic embroiderers must be credited with the compositional layout and design of their embroideries. Many seventeenth-century embroideries are compilations, with elements taken from different sources. Analyzing the pattern books provides new insights on the similarities among pictorial embroideries, and it sheds light on the subject of pattern book usage in the lives of seventeenth-century women in England. Studying the patterns designed as embroidery templates is crucial to

understanding the practice and the art. In this chapter I will analyze the pattern book, compare the patterns to surviving embroideries, and offer supporting evidence that the female domestic embroiderers created their own embroidery compositions.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, only a few pattern books would have been available for English embroiderers to purchase, and only a minority of them were published in England. All other embroidery pattern books bought and sold in England were imported from Italy, France, or most significantly, Germany. *La Pratique de L'Aiguille Industriouse* by Matthias Mignerak (1605), *Neues Modelbuch* by William Hoffmann (1607), and *Neues Modelbuch* by Andres Bretschneider (1619) are just three examples of pattern books used for pictorial embroidery designs.

Illustrations depicting women embroidering are found on the title pages of most pattern books from the seventeenth century. This repetitious imagery was employed contextually to imply what the book contained within its pages, but it also indicated that women were the target audience. Depictions of women employed in shops, upper class women working at their leisure, and goddess-like beings engaged in embroidery adorn the title pages of these books, all of them illustrating a female embroiderer at work. The title page of Mattheus Becker's *Schon Neues Modelbuch* (1599) reveals a group of women diligently working on various textile arts. The woman at the back of the room is weaving on the loom, the figure seated at the bottom right is making lace, while the central figure with her back to the viewer holds out her embroidery for inspection (Fig. 30). On the title page of William Hoffmann's *Neues Modelbuch* (1591) the woman in the far right corner of Hoffmann's title page is shown seated holding out her embroidery for inspection, just as the central figure in Becker's title page (Fig. 31). The title page for

Peter Quintell's *Neues Modelbuch* (1527-1529) has a linear set of vignettes portraying three women working on lace-making, embroidery, and weaving (Fig. 32). This traditional introduction to the pattern book is seen in another publication by William Hoffmann, *Gantz Neue Modelbuch* (1607), showing a fashionable woman engaged in lace-making on the left of the title medallion and a woman embroidering on the right (Fig. 33). The elaborate title page for *Neue Modelbuch* by Andres Bretschneider (1619) also shows two well-dressed women employed with their needlework on either side of the medallion surrounded by undulating foliates, birds, and putti (Fig. 34). The title page for John Taylor's poem "A Needle's Excellency," the forward to *A Schole House for the Needle*, follows the tradition of portraying women at work on their textile productions, but the engraving allows for an expanded presentation (Fig. 35). Three women labeled Wisdom, Industrie, and Follie are placed outdoors. Industrie is seated in the center of the composition, engaged in her needlework, while Follie stands to the right of the diligent embroiderer and beckons for her to abandon her task. Wisdom takes form in the woman to Industrie's left; her erect posture and crossed hands holding her bible convey her disapproval of a woman neglecting her needlework.

The surviving pouncing and scaling page from Schorleyker's *A Schole House for the Needle* provides evidence that women used these pattern books to transfer elements onto their embroidery ground (Fig. 36). Schorleyker explains to the user how the grid is to be used to enlarge or minimize any element in the embroiderer's design: "I would have you know that the use of these squares doth shewe, how you may contrive any work, bird beast, or flower into bigger or lesser proportions, according as you shall see cause. As thus, if you will enlarge your patterne, devide it into squares; then rule a paper as large as

ye list, into what squares you will. Then look how many holes your patterne doth containe, upon to many holes of your ruled paper drawe your patterne.”¹ The intent of the embroidery was to visually convey the subject chosen. In the case explored in this thesis, it was to convey the message of the pedagogic biblical story. The narratives of the embroideries were visually legible, with the center scene serving as the central narrative. Additional elements to the story were to be gathered by reading the bordering vignettes that surround the central narrative. For example, in the embroideries of Esther and Ahasuerus from the St. Louis Art Museum’s collection, the two central figures are King Ahasuerus, depicted crowned and on the throne, with a Esther kneeling before him with her arms outstretched. The similarity of the depictions allowed for easy identification of the story. Interestingly, there is no pattern within the published books of a woman kneeling with arms outstretched.

Two of the most significant and popular English sources for pictorial embroiderers were Richard Shorleyker’s *A Schole House for the Needle* (1631) and Peter Stent’s *The Therd Booke of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies exactly drawn with additions by John Dunstall* (1661). Shorleyker opened his book with “A Needle’s Excellency,” a poem by John Taylor that praised the needle as a magnificent object. In fact, Taylor masculinized the inanimate object and proceeds to give the tool credit for the creation and beautification of garments, samplers, and pictorial images; no credit is given to the woman making the works. Taylor’s opening lines about women offer social advice

¹ Richard Shorleyker, *A Schole-House, for the Needle: Here Folovveth Certaine Patternes of Cut-Workes: and but Once Printed Before Also Sundry Sorts of Spots, As Flowers, Birds and Fishes, and Will Fitly Serve to Be Wrought, Some with Gould, Some with Silke, and Some with Crewell, or Otherwise at Your Pleasure* (London, 1631), 66.

rather than practical instruction. “And for my countries quiet, I should like / That woman-kind should use no other Pike / It will increase their peace, enlarge their store / To use their tongues less and their needles more / The needle’s sharpnesse profit yields and pleasure / But sharpnesse of the tongue bites out of measure.”² The collection of imagery that follows the introduction was widely used by English embroiderers.³

Peter Stent’s collection of engravings, in contrast, appealed to the domestic embroiderer with its quality of imagery. His patterns were not just reserved for domestic embroidery but could be used to decorate exterior shop signs and armory, and were used frequently in children’s education.⁴ The plates from Stent’s pattern book which circulated England during the first half of the century—decades before the book’s third edition publication date of 1661—provided many embroiderers with the tools necessary to create their intricate compositions of their chosen biblical heroine. By 1665, another merchant, John Overton had purchased all of Stent’s copper plates—over 1,500—and continued to use them in publications.⁵ Similarities in the designs found in pattern books have suggested to scholars for multiple sources be credited with imagery employed in seventeenth-century pictorial embroideries. Engravers used images from botanical and emblem books, just as the domestic female embroider would have to gather a diverse

² John Taylor, *The Needles Excellency* (1631): 3-4 published in Richard Shorleyker’s *A Schole-House for the Needle* (London 1631).

³ Shorleyker’s book was first published in 1624 without John Taylor’s poem “A Needle’s Excellency”. It was published with the poem in 1631 and again in 1632.

⁴ Kathleen Epstien, “Peter Stent and His Engravings” in *A Book of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies: Seventeenth-century Patterns for Embroiderers* (Austin: Curious Works Press, 1995), 13.

⁵ Kathleen Staples. “Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage” in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature* (edited by Andrew Morrall et al., 2008), 30.

collection of design elements. In Stent's collection of plates, there is a depiction of a lion among an assortment of other animals and insects (Fig. 37). This drawing of the lion leaping into the air is similar in style to the lion portrayed in the circular plate from the emblem book by Giovanni Ostaus (1591) (Fig. 38). Illuminated books were also a source for inspiration, as seen in the illustrations of Thomas Trevelyon (English, born ca. 1548), a pattern designer and scribe during the Tudor and Stuart era of England. A portfolio collection of his drawings titled *Miscellany* (1608) is in the collection of the Folger Library in Washington D.C. In a page illustrating the triumph of Mordecai, we see a procession in the background behind the central figure, similar to those in many embroidered examples of the story of Esther (Fig. 39).

Compositional elements closely resembling designs from Stent's pattern book can be seen in the Esther embroideries found in the collection of the St. Louis Art Museum (Fig. 1 and fig. 2). The lion seen in both examples of the St. Louis Art Museum's Esther embroideries echo the lion found in the lower right corner of the etching on the title page (Fig. 40). The lion found in the St. Louis Art Museum's stumpwork embroidery (ca. 1660) (Fig. 18) is the same in figural portrayal as the lion seen in the lower left corner of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art casket (ca. 1650) (Fig. 19). It is likely that these two examples were drawn from the same pattern, as the tails, positioning of the facial elements, and paws all match. The lion seen in the upper left corner near the hanging figure of Haman in the tent-stitched Esther embroidery at the St. Louis Art Museum bears a likeness to the previous two lions studied. His tail lies on the ground beside his hind legs; his two front paws are seen beneath his mane (Fig. 17). The lion in the Adam and Eve with Charles I and Henrietta Maria from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1634) is

depicted in a similar manner. The lion found in the composition of the Judgment of Solomon (ca. 1650) is shown with his tail raised, curling above his back (Fig. 16). The leopards found in these embroideries (Figures 14 and 15) resemble not only each other, but also a drawn leopard found in an unfinished embroidery composition in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 41). In comparison, Peter Stent's leopard differs greatly from those found in the unfinished composition and embroideries (Fig. 42). Thus, we see that embroiderers drew upon a range of sources and did not depend entirely on pattern books.

An example of a conventional compositional pattern is that of Adam and Eve below the Tree of Knowledge found in Matthias Mignerak's *La Pratique de L'aiguille industrieuse* (1605) (Fig. 12). Illustrated on a grid, Eve is shown on the right, arm extended towards the Serpent's mouth with her palm open, waiting for the gift of knowledge. Adam is found standing at the left side of the tree, apple in hand. This layout is focused on Adam and Eve's fall, but elements from this design would have been translatable to other stories. Garments could easily be transfixed onto the figures and the botany found around the central scene would have served its purpose for other compositions. The Metropolitan Museum's textile collection includes a remarkable embroidery of Adam and Eve beside Charles I and Henrietta Maria (Fig. 43). This embroidery has strong political connotations, associating the plight of Charles I and Henrietta Maria to that of Adam and Eve. Just as Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden, Charles I and Henrietta Maria fled from England. Charles I and Henrietta Maria were not normally compared to Adam and Eve when embroidered, as can be seen on the front doors of the embroidered casket at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (ca. 1650). The

embroiderer must have been a Royalist, showing her support for the crown through her needlework.

Clearly finished embroideries were not exact copies of the patterns, as Cora Ginsburg and Donna Ghelerter have concluded.⁶ Scholars Kathleen Epstein and Kathleen Staples have also written about the similarities among embroideries spanning distance and decades. Likenesses can be found with embroideries of related subject matter, such as the spatial relationship between two central figures or the scenes found around the border of the embroidery. Although the flora and fauna within the compositions may closely resemble one another, they are not found in the same locations in every embroidery. This study of the relationships between the surviving pattern books and the resulting embroideries contributes a fresh perspective to the discussion of production and usage. The engraver was the initial employer of images found within embroidery design, and once the book was acquired by a domestic embroiderer, she chose the elements for her narrative.

Rozika Parker, Ruth Gueter, and Kathleen Epstein have all recognized domestic embroiderers the contributors to the finished product, but not all English embroidery scholars support this theory. Domestic embroiderers' ownership of the compositions is partially disputed by Staples in her contributing chapter "Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage" in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: Twixt Art and Nature*. Staples attributes some embroidery compositions to professional draftsmen. She writes that designers, or draftsmen, as she refers to them, created the compositions and the domestic female embroiderers purchased

⁶ Ginsburg, *A Book of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies* (1995), 6.

and then worked these templates. However, draftsmen did not create every composition that survives from the seventeenth century, as we know from domestic female pattern book ownership.

Staples suggests that these draftsmen would have sold pre-designed drawn linen with stitching already begun on the ground for the embroiderer to emulate. With the popularity of needlework in the seventeenth century, the existence of a trade specifically to create and distribute pre-designed compositions is logical. One such professional designer, John Nelham, is known to modern historians through the surviving letters of Ms. Brilliana Harley, wife of Sir Robert Harley, knight of Bath, for whom he worked.⁷ Brilliana mentions Nelham once in her letters. During March of 1639, Brilliana was waiting for a package to arrive from Mr. John Nelham. “I have sent him the money for Mr. Nelham, the drawer, and I would have him hasten the sending of the pease of cloth, which he had to drawe.”⁸ Even with the professional draftsmen creating template compositions, however, no two identical seventeenth-century pictorial embroideries have been discovered. The significance of continuous variations of popular biblical and secular stories suggests a desire for individuality by the seventeenth century embroiderer.

Pattern books provided a structure for seventeenth-century English embroideries. Compositions mixed and matched an assortment of elements found from sources the embroiderer had at her disposal. The difference between source and finished product does

⁷ Staples, “Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage” (2008), 28.

⁸ Brilliana Harley and Thomas Taylor Lewis, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley, of Brampton Bryan, Knight of the Bath* (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1854), 35, referenced in Kathleen Staples. “Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage” in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixt Art and Nature* (edited by Andrew Morrall et al., 2008), 28

not discredit the source, but makes way for a new thought on productivity—that of the trained female domestic embroiderer creating her own unique composition with the aide of her pattern and emblem books. While there are examples of professionals producing pre-designed fabrics for women to embroider, this does not discredit the evidence that supports the argument that women owned pattern books and produced pictorial embroideries with their own compositions. The book *A Needle's Excellency* at the Victoria and Albert Museum's library is the last remaining seventeenth-century copy known in existence. The page opposite the title reveals the book's past owner, a young woman Olympia Dury (ca. 1750) (Fig. 45). Her name is written numerous times across the blank page, and she even writes the age of the book at the time of her ownership—115 years. A later owner dates the book in 1839 as 203 years old, but does not write her name. This documentation of female ownership supports the argument that women owned these published pattern books and used them to create pictorial embroideries.

The similarity among the embroideries suggests the need for uniformity in order to effectively and efficiently read and interpret the embroidered narrative. Without the recognized conventional iconography, the subjects would be understood by the viewer. In a manner not so different from painters selecting scenes for religious paintings, embroiderers chose the most renowned moment from the story to illustrate with their needles. All examples of Esther show the moment she kneels before King Ahasurus. The depiction of Esther through embroidery was unique in the sense that included more than the most charged moment of the story; the beginning and end of the tale would be illustrated around the border for the viewer to see. Such inclusions allowed the viewer to distinguish an embroidered story of Esther from other tales similar compositions, for

example the Queen of Sheba visiting King Solomon. The narration of Esther's story through needlework was rather unique including secondary scenes, as many other stories are embroidered with only one scene. It is possible that because of the social significance of Esther to the seventeenth-century embroiderer, the story was treated with more attention than others and, thus, depicted with the additional scenes.

Pattern books available to the seventeenth-century English embroiderer are an important and illuminating source in the study of embroidery. The title pages of these pattern books illustrated women embroidering, signifying that the intended audience was women. The absence of an exact compositional template that resembles a finished embroidery indicates that women created their own compositions. The uniformity among the surviving examples maybe explained by the necessity of legibility, just as other mediums of art utilized conventional types to effectively communicate the chosen subject. The layers of meaning behind the chosen subjects allows contemporary scholars to reevaluate these fine works made by women during a politically charged time in history. They are no longer simply decorative objects, but embroidered produced from loyalty, duty, and pride.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The concept of embroidery as an art form was absent in seventeenth-century England. The definition of art by the standards of the seventeenth century European academies adhered to a hierarchical structure of importance in art. This order of importance certainly related to men's primary role as the painter, sculpture, and architect and omitted the domesticated arts such as textile construction and any form of needlework. Julia Dabbs, however, has assembled a collection of brief biographies on female artists that include some embroiderers. While the book includes mostly European female artists from Italy, the German illustrator Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717) was known for her still life paintings and for being an embroidery designer.¹ Dutch artist Johanna Koerten (1650-1715) learned embroidery, lace making, needlework, music and engraving in addition to being a celebrated paper-cutter. The absence of English female artists listed as embroiderers by their contemporaries indicates that needlework was not something the English considered an art form. The significance of pictorial embroidery to the seventeenth-century English woman is proven by the number of textiles that have survived.

The role of embroidery in seventeenth-century women's lives is supported by the practice's existence within their early education and the surviving embroideries

¹ Julia Kathleen Dabbs. *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800: An Anthology* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 171.

themselves. Not only did women make up a significant portion of embroidery producers in England during the seventeenth century, but they also maintained artistic license over the compositions they embroidered. Influential biblical figures such as Esther, Suzanna and Eve were appropriate, but they adopted subtle meanings in relation to historical events. When lecturing on proper female behavior in *An English Gentlewoman*, Brathwaite used traditionally didactic female figures from ancient history as honorable role models for his contemporaries to emulate.² Bombarded with idols to live up to, women in seventeenth-century England had no choice but to emulate women of the past in order to please the men of the present.

Needlework may have been an obligatory pastime for women in seventeenth-century England, but the surviving embroideries are vestiges of the aesthetic sensibilities of these domestic female embroiderers. However, enough differences exist between finished embroideries to prove that the domestic female embroiderer controlled the composition, and made choices in figures and emblems. Needlework was categorized as a domestic craft and not art by seventeenth-century contemporaries, but the absence of perfect replication indicates choices by embroiderers to create unique objects within the restrictions of the medium.

Through the use of traditional and recognized biblical tales, the seventeenth-century English embroiderer was able to communicate her religious, moral and political outlook. Adam and Eve were often utilized by the embroiderer in conjunction with

² Richard Brathwaite. *The English Gentlewoman, Drawne Out to the Full Body : Expressing, What Habilliments doe Best Attire Her, What Ornaments doe Best Adorne Her, What Complements doe Best Accomplish Her* (London: Printed by B. Alsop and T.Faucet for Mitchell Sparks dwelling in Green Arbor, 1631), 28.

Charles I and Henrietta Maria; their story could be viewed as a wrongful disposal from a kingdom and simultaneously, as just and right. The story of Suzanna was used as a moralizing narrative and as a reminder to young women of the dangers of the world, that even the honest and loyal could be falsely accused. Solomon represented a wise but fallible King, with his judgment being the central focus of his story when embroidered. Through a medium intended to reinforce the feminine ideal, and by the use of these prescribed moralizing biblical tales, women across England were sometimes able to effectively conceal their clandestine beliefs in plain sight.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Esther and Ahasuerus, English, middle of the seventeenth-century. Silk and metal yarns on linen with metal spangles, 12 1/4 x 17 inches, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 2. Esther and Ahasuerus. English, circa 1660. Silk, metallic yarns, isinglass. 10 1/8 x 13 5/8 inches. St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 3. Esther and Ahasuerus. English, mid-17th century. Canvas worked with silk thread. 16 7/8 x 20 3/4 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 4. Detail of King figure, Esther Stumpwork, St. Louis Art Museum



Figure 5. Detail of king figure, Esther embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum



Figure 6. Detail of King figure, Esther embroidery, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 7. Detail of front panels, Charles I Casket, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art



Figure 8. Suzanna and the Elders. English, mid-17th century. Silk and metallic threads on silk and linen ground, 9 5/8 x 14 inches, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 9. The Judgement of King Solomon. English, 17th century. Silk and metal yarns on linen ground, 15 ¼ x 13 ¼ inches, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 10. Detail of King Figure, Solomon Embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.

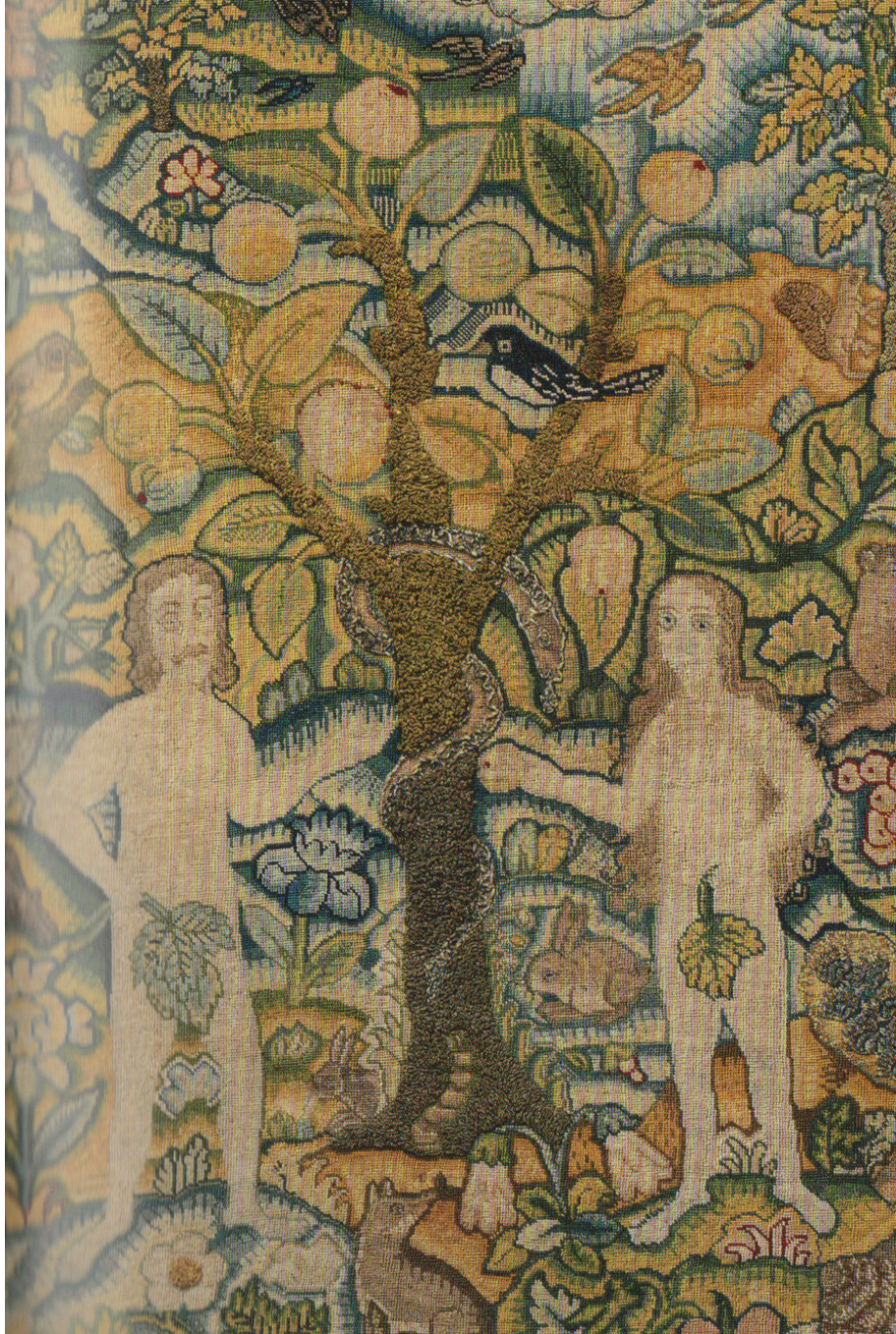


Figure 11. Detail of figures from Adam and Eve embroidery, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

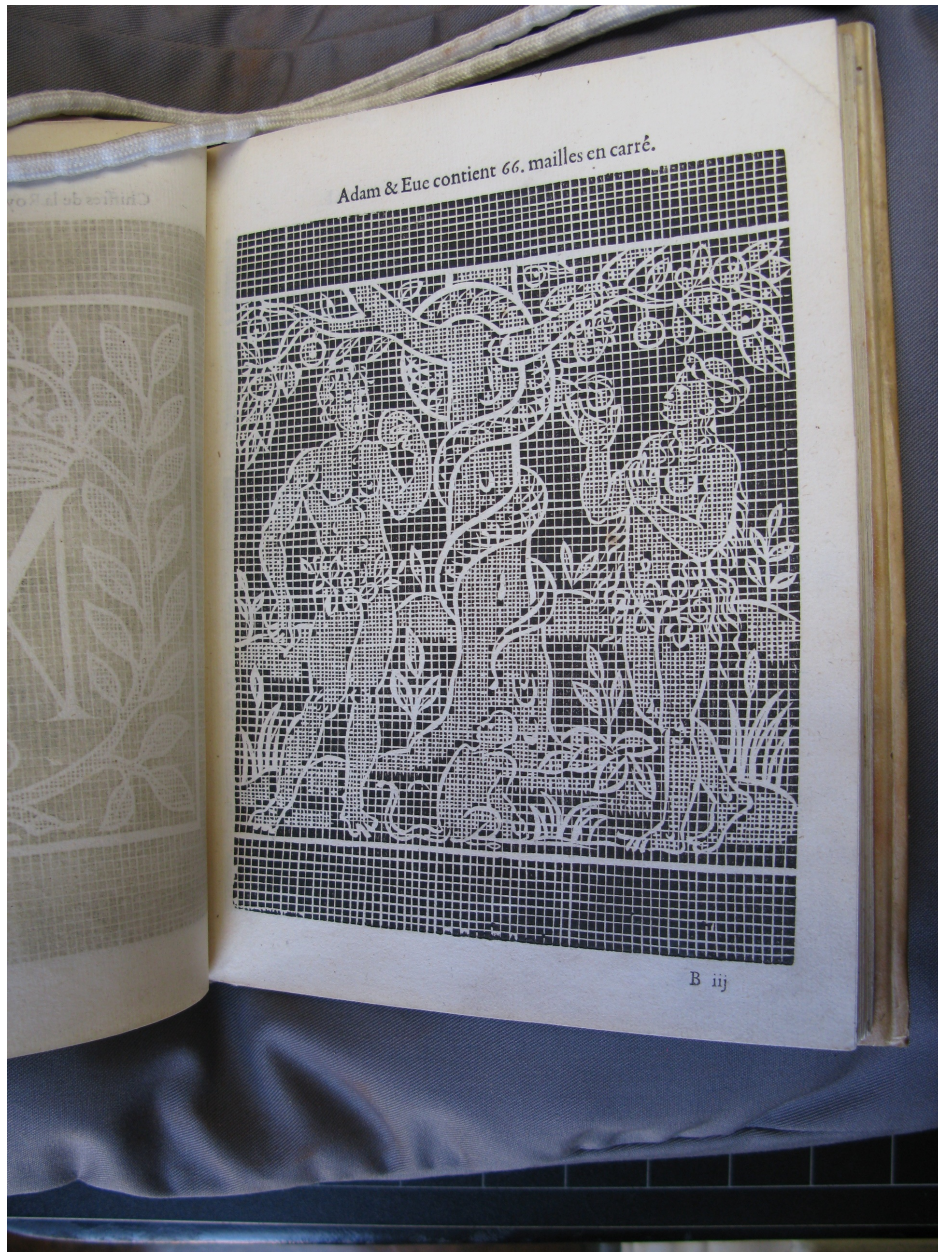


Figure 12. Matthais, Adam and Eve detail, pg. B iij



Figure 13. Detail of leopard from Adam and Eve Embroidery, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 14. Detail of leopard Esther stump-work embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 15. Detail of leopard from Esther tent-stitch embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 16. Detail of lion from Solomon embroidery, St Louis Art Museum



Figure 17. Detail of lion from Esther tent-stitch embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 18. Detail of lion from Esther stump-work embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 19. Detail of lion from Charles I casket lid, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art



Figure 20. Parrot detail from Esther embroidery, Metropolitan Museum



Figure 21. Parrot detail from Esther stump-work embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum

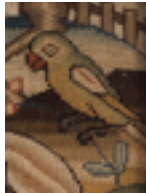


Figure 22. Parrot detail from Esther tent-stitch embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum

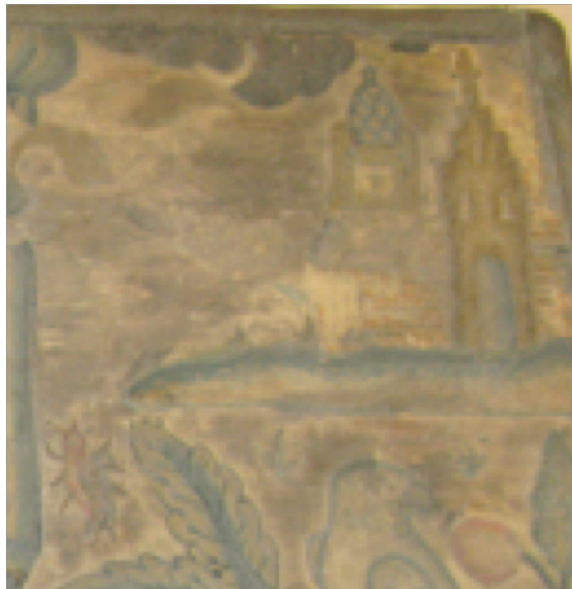


Figure 23. Castle detail from Charles I Casket, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

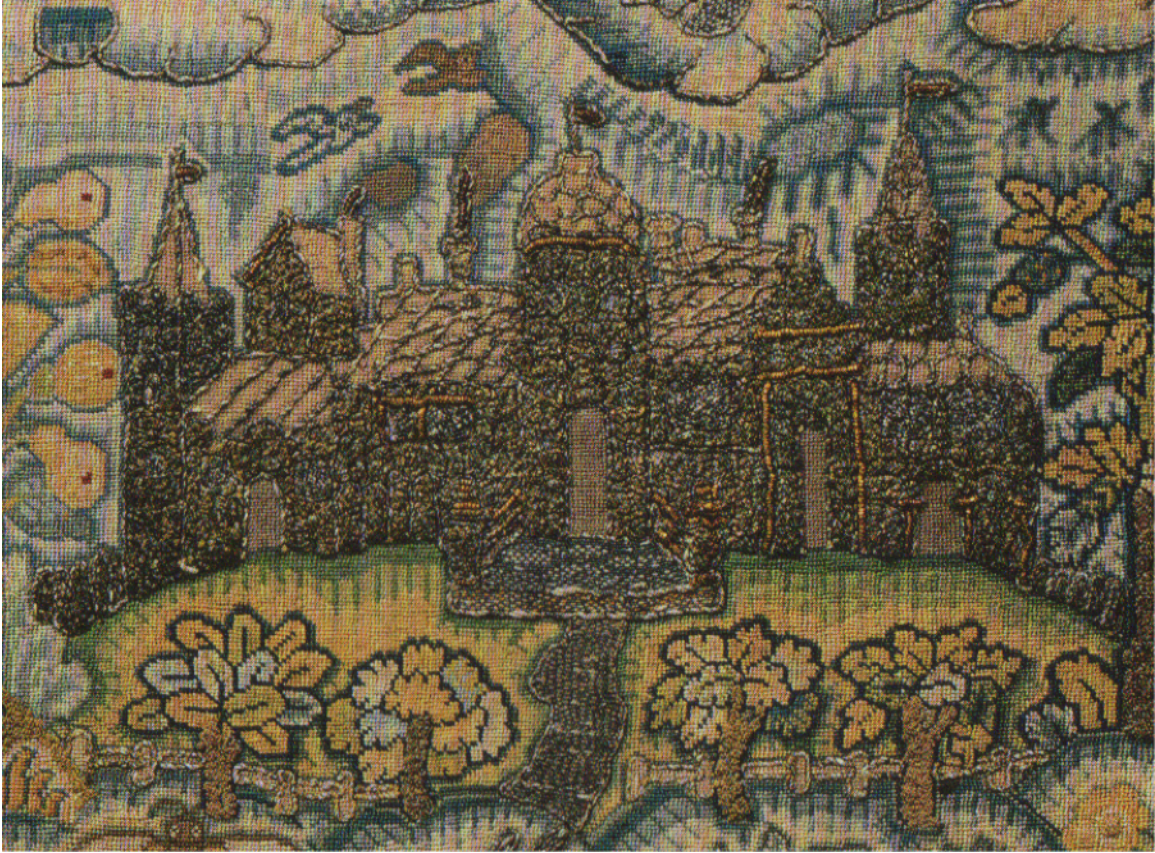


Figure 24. Castle detail from Adam and Eve embroidery, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 25. Castle detail from Esther tent-stitch embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 26. Castle detail from Esther embroidery, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 27. Castle detail from Esther stump-work embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 28. Castle detail from Suzanna Embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 29. Castle detail from Solomon embroidery, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 30. Title page from *Schon Neues Modelbuch*, Mattheus Becker, 1607.



Figure 31. Title page from William Hoffmann's *Neues Modelbuch*, 1591.

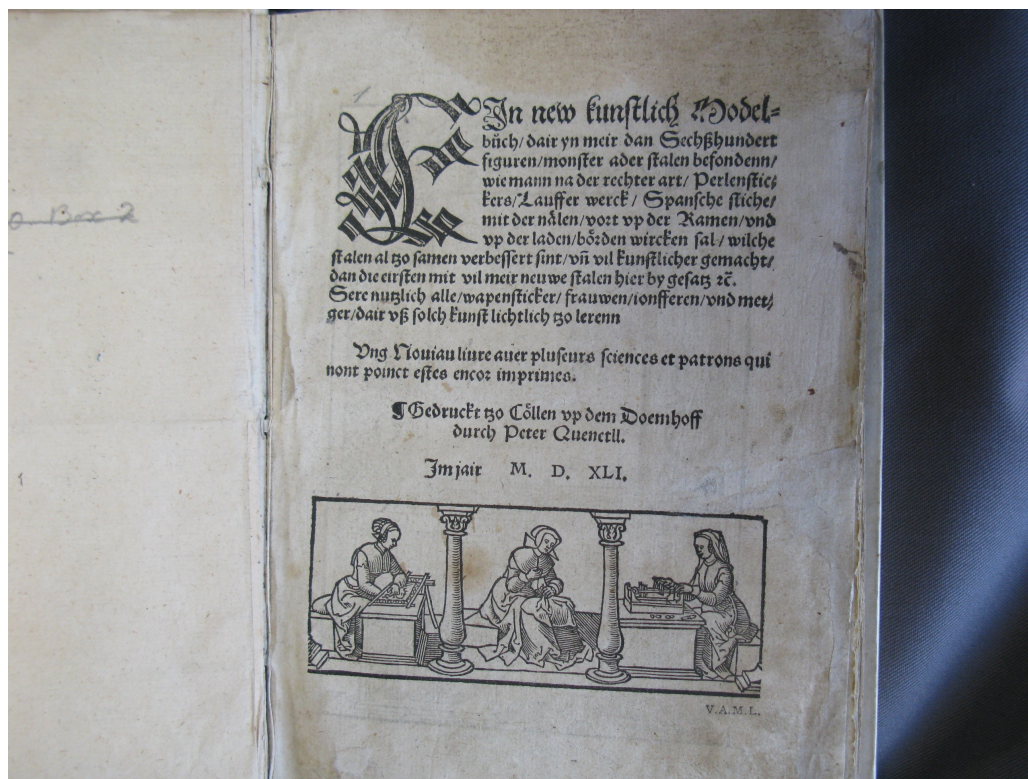


Figure 32. Title page from Peter Quintell's *Neues Modelbuch* (1527-1529)

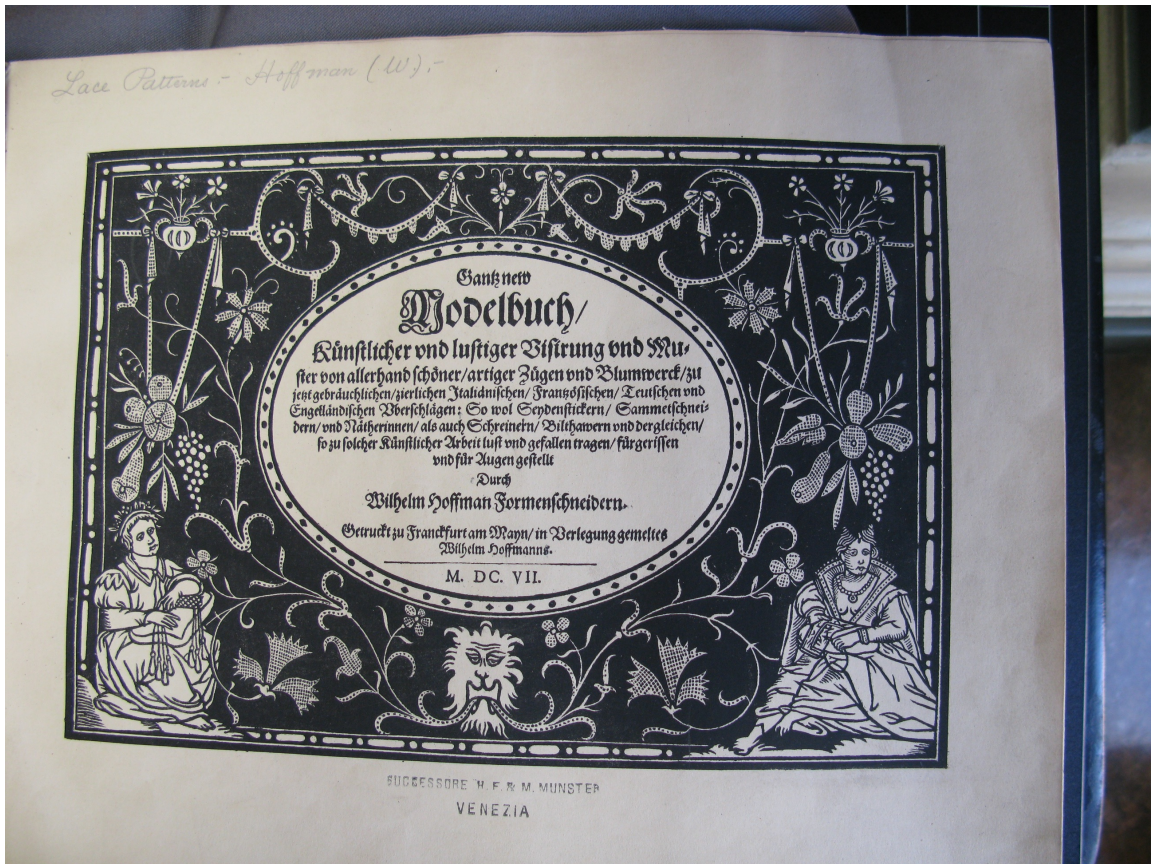


Figure 33. Title page from William Hoffmann's *Gantz Neue Modelbuch* (1607)

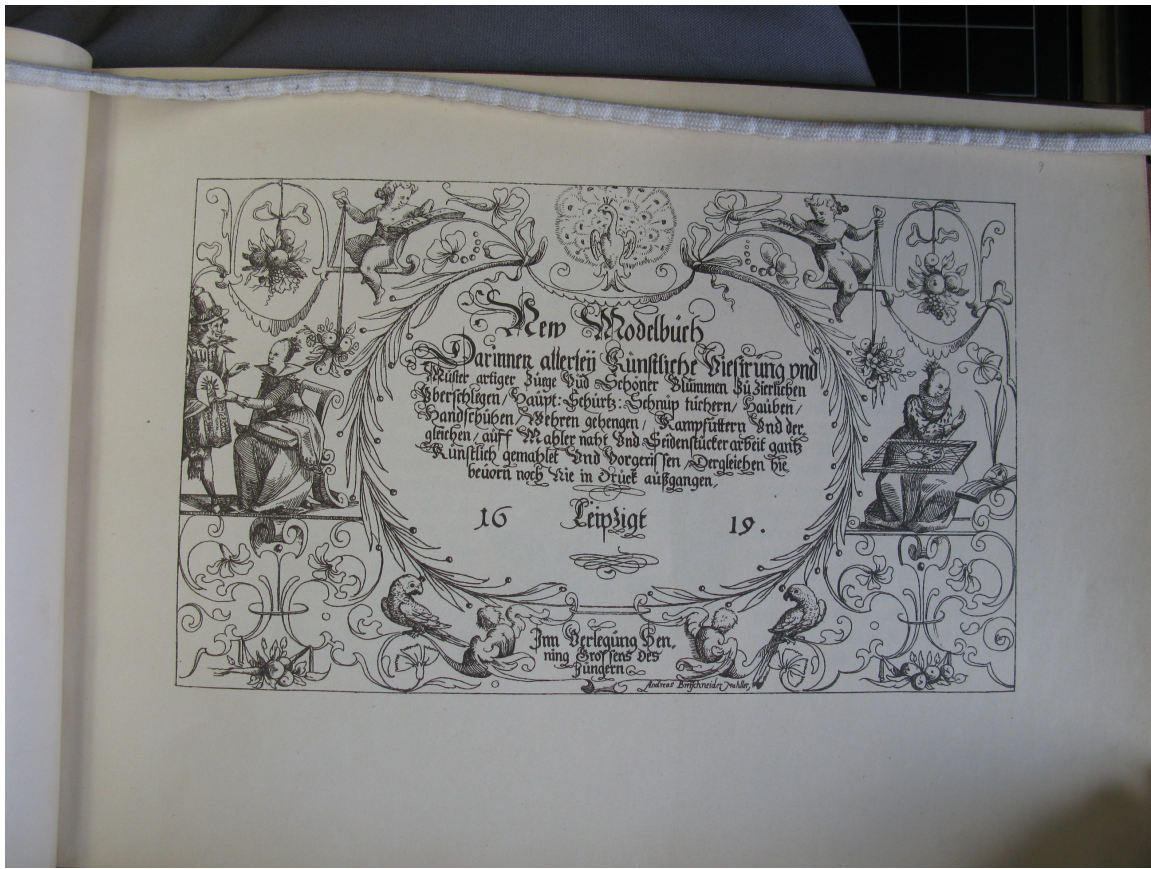


Figure 34. Title page from Andres Bretschneider's *Neue Modelbuch* (1619)



Figure 35. Title page from John Taylor's forward poem *A Needle's Excellency* in Richard Schorleyer's *A School House for the Needle* (1636)

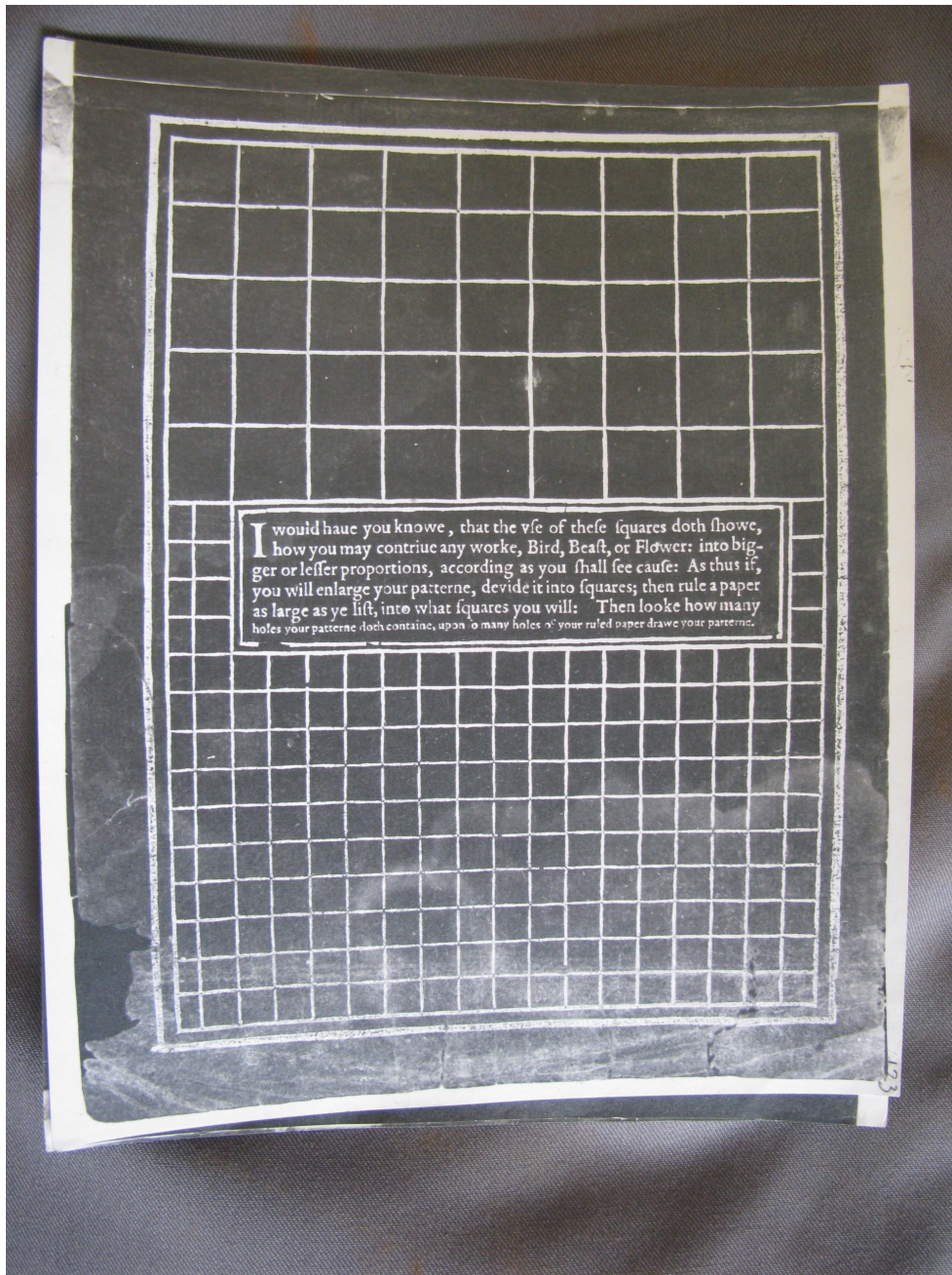


Figure 36. Detail of enlarging page with instructions from Richard Shorleyker's *A Schole House for the Needle*, 1631 (faxscimile at Victorian and Albert Muesum National Art Library's collection.)



Figure 37. Detail of Lion, Peter Stent's *A Book of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies*, ca. 1661



Figure 38. Emblem book etching of lion, found in Giovanni Ostaus, 1591.



Figure 39. Thomas Trevelyon, *Queen Esther* from his portfolio *Miscallany* 1608, Folger Museum, Washington DC.

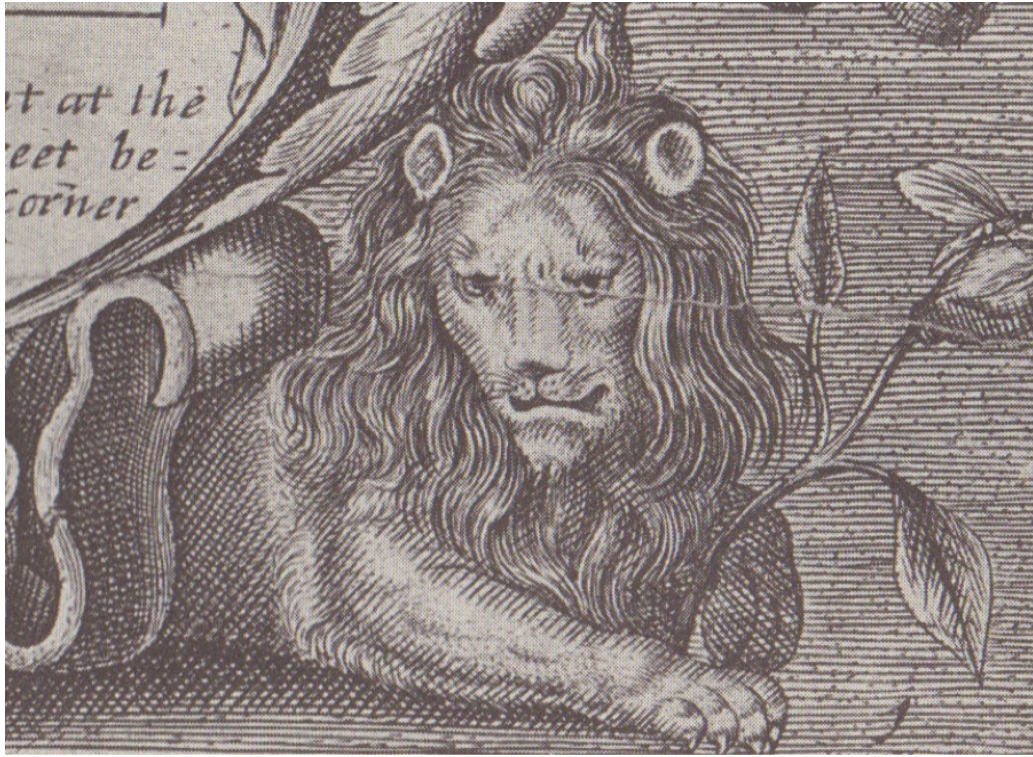


Figure 40. Lion detail from title page of Peter Stent's *A Book of Flowers Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies*, published 1661.



Figure 41. Detail of drawn leopard, unfinished casket panels, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 42. Detail of leopard from plate in Peter Stent's *A Book of Flowers Fruits, Beasts, Birds, and Flies*, published 1661.

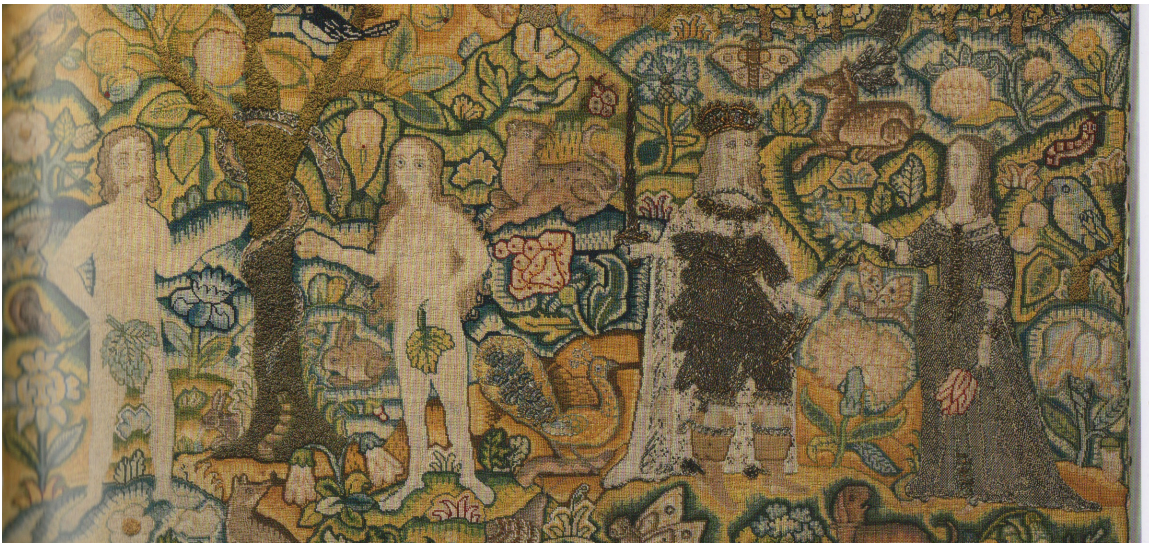


Figure 43. Detail from *Adam and Eve with Charles I and Henrietta Maria*, English 1734, Metropolitan Museum of Art permanent collection

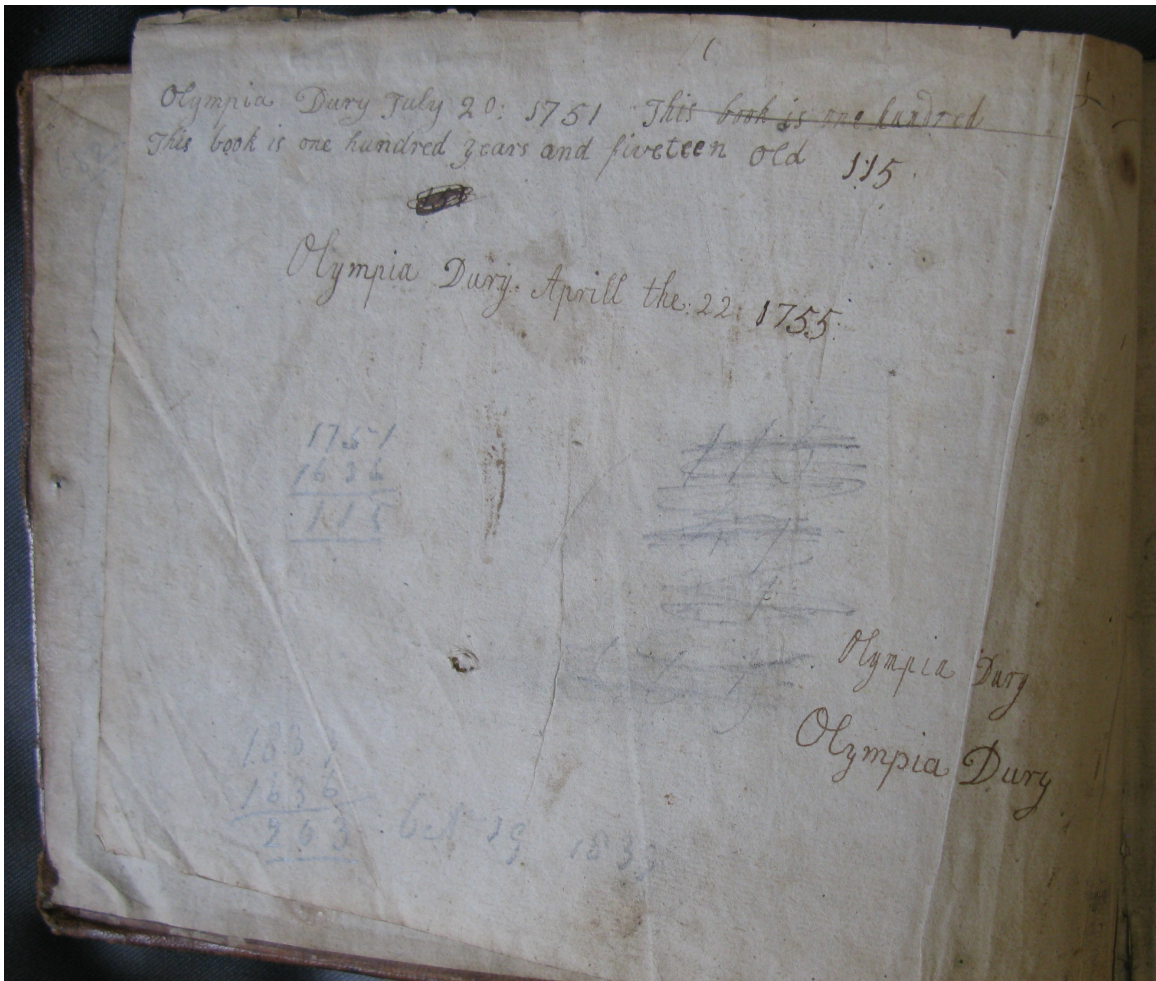


Figure 44. Personal markings of Olympia Dury, owner of *A Schole House for the Needle* (dated 1751, 1755, and by additional owner in 1839)

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Upon completion of her undergraduate coursework, Ms. Poggemoeller interned with the Greenberg Van Doren Gallery in St. Louis, Missouri. She then moved to Kansas City, Missouri to begin a graduate degree in Art History at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. During the summer of 2009, she was the Decorative Arts Intern at the St. Louis Art Museum. After finishing her graduate coursework, Ms. Poggemoeller accepted a position as an Estate Appraiser for Lindstrom & McKenney in St. Louis, Missouri traveling the Southeast of the United States buying antiques. In January 2013, Ms. Poggemoeller accepted a position as a Fine Art Specialist with Ivey-Selkirk Auctioneers. While at Ivey-Selkirk, her areas of expertise included American and European paintings and prints, expanding to Japanese woodblocks and modern furniture. In early 2014, Ms. Poggemoeller and her former colleagues founded Link Auction Galleries, an independent full-service auction house in St. Louis, Missouri. Her roles included Fine Art Specialist, Business Development, Personnel and Database Management, and Auctioneer. In August 2015, Ms. Poggemoeller relocated to Austin, Texas with her husband. She currently works as a Fine Art Specialist and Generalist for Austin Auction Gallery.