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Fascinating and mysterious, this remarkable embroidery is thought to portray the Biblical story of Jephthah and his daughter, which is related in the book of Judges, chapter 11, verses 1 – 40 in the *Revised King James* version of The Old Testament. However, somewhat problematic, this beautifully stitched image, at best is remindful of the two differing interpretations or conclusions the above story suggests. In addition one element of the image—chains binding father

and daughter together—is perhaps meant to symbolize the final fate of these two individuals but there is no such mention in the story.

In brief the account in Judges explains that Jephthah was the son of Gilead and a prostitute; in time his half brothers whose mother was the wife of Gilead disowned him. Eventually Jephthah became a great fighter and when his fellow Israelites began warring with the Ammonites, they begged Jephthah to lead their army. Jephthah agreed on the basis that if he should be victorious, the Israelites would name him head over all their people. In the end Jephthah was successful and as a thank you to the Lord he pledged "whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's and I will offer him up for a burnt offering." (*Revised King James Bible; The New Bible Dictionary*.)

Sadly, Jephthah's only child, his daughter is the first to greet him. Upon hearing what her father had promised the Lord, the daughter emphasized that the father must carry out his promise. As the daughter requested, she was given two months "to wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, I and my companions." (*Revised King James Bible*; and, *The Living Bible*). At the end of the two months she returned to her father "who did with her according to the vow which he had made." (*Revised King James Bible*) The above-mentioned accounts leave little doubt as to what happened to the daughter. In addition, the *Bible Dictionary* disputes the theory that the "father devoted his daughter to a life of celibacy", supposedly first suggested by Rabbi David Kimchi, 1160-1235. The latter is further considered by the scholarly Rabbi Moshe Reiss in his commanding essay printed in the *Jewish Bible Quarterly*. Rabbi Reiss alludes to the fact that for various reasons the term "burnt offering" is ambiguous. Nevertheless he concludes after his arduous discussion "thus the daughter lost her life." (Reiss, p.57) However, various other accounts by scholars and/or students that are on the Internet provide in-depth information that the daughter's "virginity was consecrated to God" thereby sentencing her to a monastery/convent life. Meanwhile, the father was supposedly very upset with himself because his daughter was his only child and with her not being able to marry he would not have grandchildren and his family name would not carry on. At any rate, whatever their fate, the elderly man and young woman portrayed in the embroidery appear bound together, symbolized by the chains, to seemingly a "wilderness" existence, quite removed from the world they have known.

Unfortunately there is no name or date on this embroidery that would provide some indication as to when or even where it was created. However the literature considers several facts that suggest the EAC embroidery may well have been created in the late 18th or early 19th centuries. In fact the general

artistry, skill and style of the EAC embroidery are not unlike those seen in the period embroideries. For example the latter include an embroidery of the Biblical figures Ruth and Naomi based on an 1805 engraving while another embroidery dated 1820 features a harpist (Staples, p. 38) Still another surface stitchery, named Alexandria, circa 1815, is highlighted in the Fall 2011 *Sampler & Antique Quarterly* (Allen, p. 41). Other examples include a needlework picture of Maria and one with the caption "And the Daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river" (Swan. pp. 175, 179). As well as the EAC embroidery appearing to illustrate the early 19th C. classical style, it seemingly is worked in the same fibres—silk and wool on silk ground with a linen back.

However, there may be one minor variation. Although the various sky areas in the latter embroidery examples are painted in watercolours it is questionable as to whether the sky in the EAC embroidery has received any treatment. Nevertheless, the respective flesh areas in all of the embroideries, including the EAC piece are painted. In addition the techniques used in the EAC embroidery are primarily long and short, straight and bullion/French knots, which are featured in the above works and discussed below.

There are at least two other aspects that are noteworthy with respect to dating the EAC embroidery. Firstly, in the early 1800s there was a new interest in classical motifs, even portraying scenes from the Bible. This trend developed into mourning images, which became very fashionable. Even if no one close to the stitcher had died, mourning images encouraged women to ponder the hardships of life and even include such thoughts in their embroideries (Swan p. 181) It was considered a period of enlightenment when women were being encouraged to think beyond pleasant little stories "to themes more progressively sombre" such as mourning pictures. Where once images simply portrayed moral lessons, mourning images became very fashionable. (*Needlework In America*, p. 162) – Secondly, the mid 1800s to the later years featured an abundance of Berlin Work; every thing from small animal, floral and bird designs to landscapes were frequently worked in

bright wools on canvas. In addition, the latter part of the 19th Century was plagued with numerous inexpensive women's magazines which all tended to concentrate on technique instruction with little or no concern for design so that embroidery "reached a low ebb". Projects tended to focus more on smaller items that might even be classified as knickknacks. (Howard, p. 9) Thus it would seem there is in fact a good possibility that the EAC embroidery was created in the early 1800s.

If in fact the EAC embroidery was stitched in the early 1800s, it could well be 200 years old and accordingly, may have been framed several times. However it is apparent that this embroidery was definitely framed, possibly with an eglomised glass, in 1870 due to the fact that when the frame was recently removed from the embroidery, an extremely fragile newspaper found scrunched between the frame and embroidery read as follows: *London Times*, December, 1870. (Thankfully pictures were taken at the outset because as soon as the newspaper was touched, it crumbled into tiny slivers.)

The embroidery has suffered considerable deterioration problems over the years. There's a major worn area in the sky section that appears somewhat like a tear. However, the bits of frayed edges plus other areas where the background silk fibres are separating and pulling away all indicate the unstableness of the fabric. Andrea Reichert, curator of the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library in Winnipeg, MB, after careful examination, has confirmed that the so-called tear and other noticeable worn, deteriorated areas are primarily caused by tension and stress due to the silk being backed with linen. (The latter was a common practise.) As the fibres contract and expand given environmental conditions, the stronger linen fibres pull against the silk.

Further deterioration has been noted in some of the areas stitched in wool. The fibres appear to be pulling apart and again on close examination, these fibres rise off the surface, appearing almost like a fine brush.

Finely executed embroideries are often simply referred to as beautiful but this piece is not only beautiful; the imaginative use of materials and techniques evoke a sense of unrest and emotion. It's not a happy story. Using just silk and wool—such works also include chenille—the embroiderer in masterly fashion has utilized four techniques—long and short, French knots and a "simulation" of Turkey work to create this truly artistic embroidery. Seated in the centre foreground, both the father and the daughter are dressed in classical, flowing robe-like garments. The father's garment is stitched in long and short tones of grey wool with a deeper shade giving shape to a visible arm and the garment in general. His light tan wool cape hangs in well-placed folds of dark brown long and short stitches. (Wilson, pp. 41-2) In contrast, the daughter's gown and

seemingly a shawl are exquisitely stitched in long and short glistening silk threads that shade from light gold to reddish and brown/gold tones defining the fullness of her garment. Even though both figures are dressed in loosely fitting attire and stitched in the same technique, their respective garments appear entirely different, due to the different fibres and the skilful stitching. Whether simply straight stitches or long and short in gold threads, the latter create the father's thinning hair and well rounded, thick beard. Similarly the daughter's elegantly styled coiffure includes a decorated hairband. (Wilson, pp. 41-2)

Although troubling, there is no mistaking the finely stitched chains in a straight stich that appear to hold the old and the young captive. (Bucher, p. 305)

This EAC embroidery is a multi-layered study with one of the most interesting being the skilful use of the long and short technique combined with shading. The foreground, middle ground and background including the hillside on the right side are all worked in long and short technique; distance is achieved with the faraway background hillside being worked in gold and grey silk threads as opposed to both the middle and foregrounds being stitched in shades of brown wool with a hint of grey in the approaching background. The slightly noticeable heavier textured foreground appears to have been stitched in perhaps more than one strand of wool as opposed to the middle area that lies a little flatter and thus more distant, having possibly been stitched in one ply. Similarly straight stitches could be readily mistaken for bark on the shapely little tree trunks in the middle ground. Although the sources used in this research refer only to French knots (Enthoven, p.149) at the outset of the 19th Century, it would appear that some shrubbery around the above mentioned trees could be tiny, tightly nestled bullion knots in mostly dark hues of wool with a sprinkling of green. (Enthoven, p. 151) Similarly the foliage in the nearby trees is again comprised of bullion knots in light tan and gray wool.

Centre front and at the base of this EAC embroidery, an array of colours from orange and dark brown to grey wool are all worked in straight stitches in various directions creating almost a rocky surface, out of which appears to grow some ground greenery and another dark green bullion shrub.

A tree, not unlike the one discussed above although somewhat larger, also has long and short stitches creating its trunk and branches with bullion knots depicting ample foliage that contrasts with the orange coloured wool worked in long and short stitches that tend to sweep up the side of the nearby huge mountain. The orange sets the scene for an adjacent tree whose trunk consists of a streak of orange coloured wool ridges covered in long and short stitches plus a startling pronounced central red streak that widens as it descends to the bottom, directly behind the father. There's no mistaking the red; at the very least, the world, has always seen red as depicting trouble. What better colour than red to portray a questionable, serious pact with God?
Adding to this seemingly stormy, even emotional upset is the somewhat wind blown foliage on the tree that looks like turkey work but on close examination it's the work of an ingenious embroiderer wanting to create a particular effect. Turkey work embroidery (Bucher, p. 312) does not seem to appear until the Berlin Work era, around the middle of the 19th Century. However embroiderers might well have been aware of knotted pile or plush rugs (Bath, p. 138-39) from which turkey work is derived. It's possible that the latter plush work inspired the designer and/or embroiderer to devise her own technique. Three loops of a wool strand are caught or sewn down as the embroidery thread is brought to the surface, taken through all three loops at once in the tiniest of stitches, which goes down through the silk ground to the underside securing the loops. The thread is then returned to the surface to repeat the process many times as the groups of loops are solidly packed.

Finally it can be said because of the theme, design and finely executed embroidery, it is reasonable to think that this piece could have been created at a girl's academy in the early 19th Century. similar to the schools where the above-mentioned embroideries were designed and embroidered under the guidance of a knowledgeable instructor. It is of course also very possible that an individual with substantial embroidery training stitched this sophisticated piece. At any rate it is obvious, this EAC embroidery is the work of a talented embroiderer who in fact created a work of art.

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