

Late 19th c. Rank Badges

China

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, men wore an insignia on the front and rear of their robe to explain their rank. Civil and military spheres awarded their own badges of splendid silk, gold thread, and pattern for nine ranks. While military ranks featured both real and mythological animals, civil ranks featured birds. Because the road to wealth and prestige matched one's rank, it was every parent's dream that a son pass various civil and military examinations and ascend to the higher ranks. Only one percent of students passed the examinations.

These matching rank badges were worn by one man. Badges were worn on both the front of the robe and back, so anyone would be aware of the rank of the wearer. In this rank badge a silver pheasant, is depicted — the mark of the fifth civilian rank- in silk and metal threads the Silver Pheasant.

Female Rank Badge

China

Rank badges were worn by the wives of ranked men to identify the family's status in society. The female rank badge was marked by the sun appearing on the right. This badge is worked in couched metal threads on black silk depicting a golden pheasant—the second rank.

Ita Aber donor

Male badge EGA collection 00825; female 00826

Chinese Ranks and Pursuit of Greatness

Achieving rank brought fame to a family, and frequently positions that led to great wealth. Boys who passed an examination were hailed as a hero since only 1% who went through the examination ordeal passed.

Ordinarily, it was the wealthiest boys who succeeded as they had the advantage of a fine education, which began at the age of three years old. Unlike most societies where class determined ones rise to fame, a poor boy who was bright and found a way to study for the exams stood as good a chance to succeed as a wealthy peer.

Education was based upon repetition and memorization. After students had memorized at least a thousand characters, they studied the classics: The Character Classics, The Analects of Confucius, The Book of Rites, and The Book of Changes.

The first civil examination was generally taken at age 18. Those who passed were awarded the Flower of Talent or Hsiu-ts'ai title and were entitled to wear the ninth rank badge, the Paradise Flycatcher - equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts degree). On passing the second degree examination, the student received the title of Chu-jen or Promoted Scholar - equivalent to a Master's Degree. Those taking the third examination traveled to Peking where it was taken under the jurisdiction of the emperor of China. Passing this was a tremendous accomplishment and generally meant great future success, and conferred on the scholar the title Chung-yuan or Laureate, an honor exceeding any Western degree. --Journal of Antiques, Jan 05

Military examinations were based on physical tests, and did not receive the same level of respect as intellectual civil rank.

Civil Rank Badges		
1st Rank	Crane	a red cap on head
2nd Rank	Golden Pheasant	two tail feathers
3rd Rank	Peacock	elaborate tail feathers
4th Rank	Wild Goose	black marks like commas
5th Rank	Silver Pheasant	five tail feathers
6th Rank	Egret	legs in variety of colors
7th Rank	Mandarin Duck	blue tail
8th Rank	Quail	round bird with scales
9th Rank	Paradise Flycatcher	two long tail feathers with single circle in each

Chinese Court Robe dating before 1820

China

In Chinese culture the dragon was considered the king of animals and was often incorporated into lavish costumes. The *jifu*, or dragon robe, was the most common type of dress worn by Chinese court members and officials during the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911).

Court costume, like the rank badges, was based on the Confucian ideal that proper clothing identified persons of virtue. The dragon robe identified an individual's high status, and thus helped maintain the social hierarchy that was so valued in Chinese society. The color of a robe, the number of dragon claws, and the emblem depicted on an insignia badge all conveyed information about the wearer's rank and position.

This court robe is of the Qing dynasty as evident in the distinctive Manchu horse-hoof cuffs. The blue silk ground is embroidered with gold thread couching stitches forming scrolling, clouds and dragons. The fish, frogs and twelve dragons indicate high rank.

Edith John

EGA collection 00146

1798 Miniature Cope

Germany

The cope is the principal vestment worn by priest for ceremonial occasions of the Church. Embroidered designs in these vestments identified not only the wearer, but the occasion being celebrated in the Christian calendar.

This cope identifies both a ceremonial occasion and the church type. The blue silk represented the season of Advent, while the inscription, "Francisca von Schatten, 1798" suggests that the cope was embroidered for a Franciscan church. Several such copes would have been worn both by priests, bishops, and even statues in the church. Miniature copes were traditionally made for adorning figures of saints on holy days. This late 18th century Austrian cope is embroidered on a blue silk ground, and is with silk embroidered flowers, gilt (mirrored) glass stones, and metal rosettes. It has a bobbin lace border with a gilded thread seashell pattern.

EGA Collection 00099

Late 18th c. Chalice Cover

Southern Europe

The chalice occupies the most important of sacred vessels in the Christian church, as it contains consecrated wine, which has been transformed into blood of Christ. Its cover is richly embroidered with images depicting the saint for whom it is dedicated. The Mysteries, Lent, the Purification of Mary, and the Life of Christ are a few of the many images illustrated in these embroidery designs.

This surface embroidered chalice cover of Southern Europe is a fine example of ecclesiastical embroidery that illustrates the Presentation of the Lord, In which St. Simeon holds baby Jesus, and presents him to his people in the Temple. The beige silk has four floral motifs with laid gold thread, plait, satin stitch, and French knots.

EGA collection 00153

Vestment fragment

European

Today it is difficult to imagine the wealth of the Church as an institution prior to the Reformation. The fine embroideries and other treasures made its riches second only to the possessions of European monarchs. In turn, the riches of a nation's churches represented the wealth of the nation.

Indeed, there was little restraint in the use of embroidery and extravagant materials in adorning churches. For the maker, an embroidered gift was a means for acceptance into heaven. It is noteworthy that —there are no signed pieces, suggesting that public recognition of authorship was not as important to the maker as the reward in heaven.

After peasant revolts, and the reformation other religious decorative art became simpler. Church embroideries were targets of anti-monarchical sentiment and the wealth of aristocrats. During these times ecclesiastical embroideries were burned in the streets, and statues and crucifixes were destroyed. This vestment or altar fragment is an example of embroidery that was made purely as an emblem of wealth rather than to mark an event. It is comprised of satin stitch metal embroidery, gilt and silver bullion embroidery; metal thread scalloped in satin stitch, and assorted tassels made from metal threads.

Margaret Gowling donor

EGA collection 00569

1880 Orphrey for chasuble

England

The base fabric and the orphreys (ornamental bands or borders on ecclesiastical vestments) of the 1800s are of exceptional beauty and quality. The Church required chasubles and orphreys to be made of silk, the most expensive and most precious of all fabrics. Typical orphreys were embroidered with pictorial scenes that included lambs, and flowers as well as religious symbols and personal monograms.

This orphrey for a chasuble from the 1880's is made in the shape design of the cross with scrolled vines and flowers. In the center of the cross is the monogram "IHS", the monogram of Jesus Christ, in gold bullion stitch, padded purl stitch and coil.

Edith John donor

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