

# Religion and Spirituality

**T**hese textiles reveal the prominence of spirituality and religion in the past. While some tell holy stories, others honour and worship holy figures. The stories told by spiritual and religious textiles expose the politics and principles of the cultures and communities from which they originate.

Religion has dominated society by working alongside political leaders whilst being reinforced through visual imagery and narratives. The relationship between maker and ruler was often symbiotic. Rulers pushed their agendas through spiritual storytelling, commissioning artists to make work which complimented their belief systems. The status and location of the maker influences the way we interpret the symbols found within the work.

# *The Annunciation*



**DATE:** C. 1484-1519

**MEDIUM:** Textiles: Wool, silk, and gilt- and silvered-metal-strip-wrapped silk, slit, dovetailed and interlocking tapestry weave.

**ARTIST:** Circle of Andrea Mantegna (Designer)

**ORIGIN:** Mantua

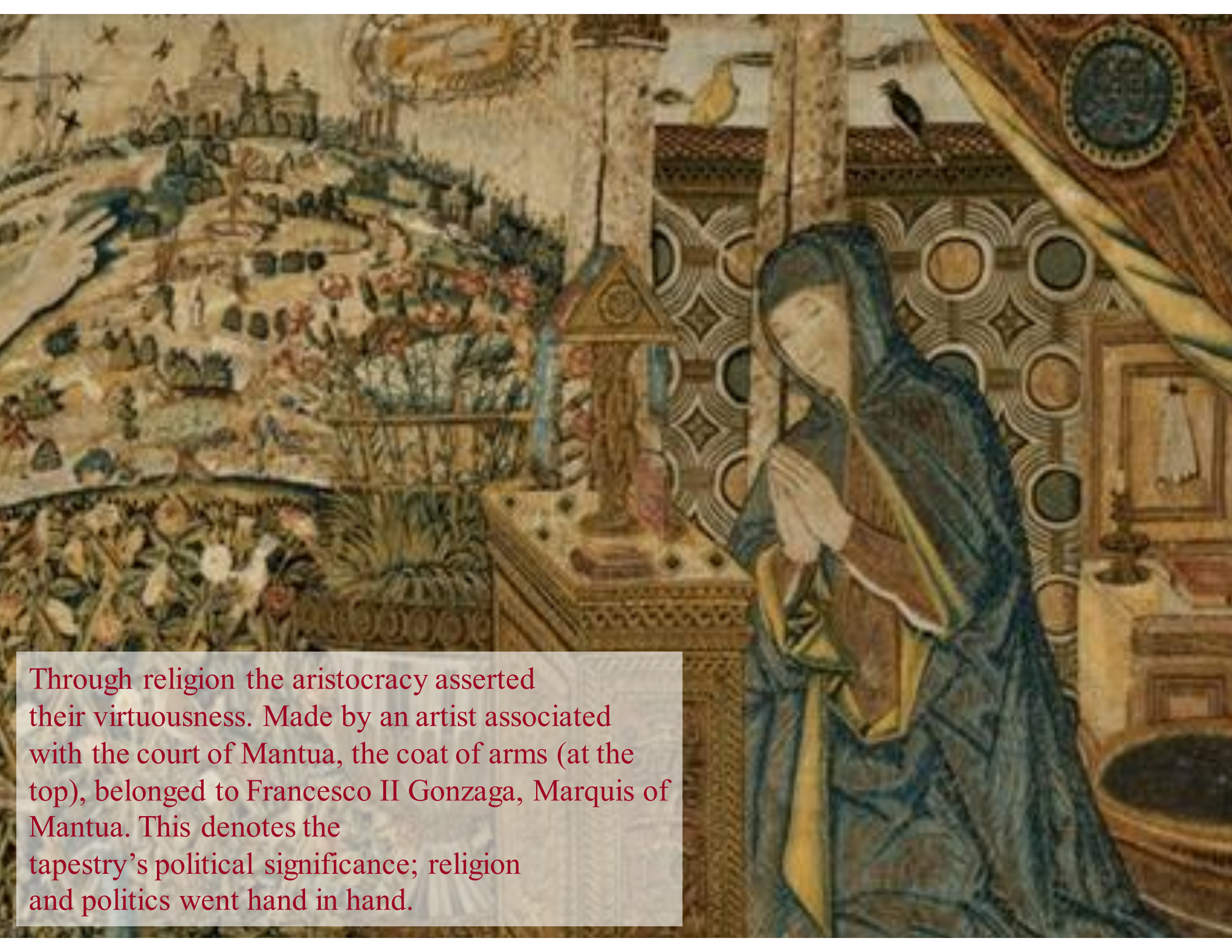
**DIMENSIONS:** 179.4 × 113.7 cm (70 5/8 × 44 3/4 in.)

**CREDIT LINE:** Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson

**REF.NO:** 1937.1099

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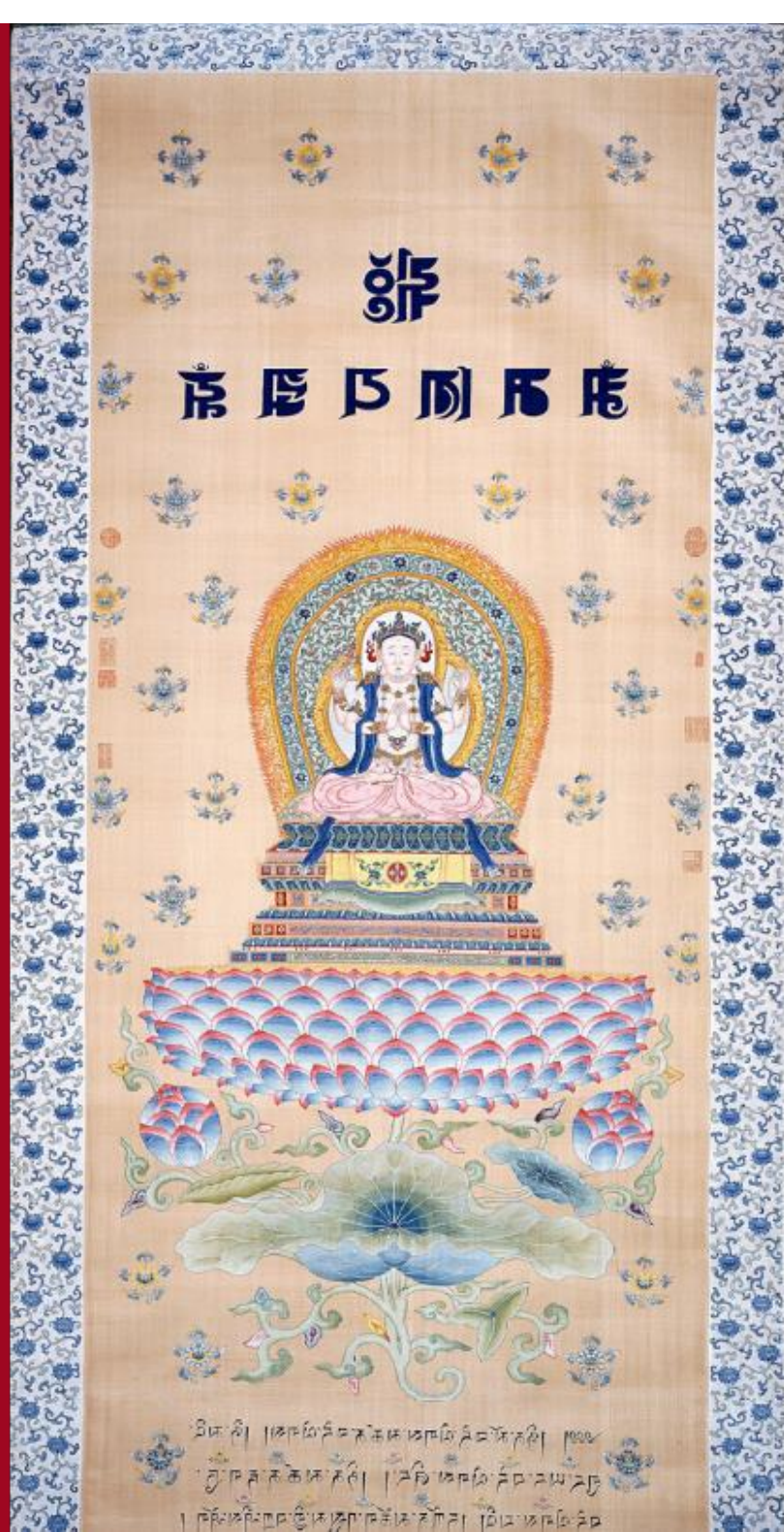


Through religion the aristocracy asserted their virtuousness. Made by an artist associated with the court of Mantua, the coat of arms (at the top), belonged to Francesco II Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. This denotes the tapestry's political significance; religion and politics went hand in hand.

*The Annunciation's* aesthetic qualities and purpose speak to the history of Western faith. Created in Mantua, Italy (a Catholic country) the imagery demonstrates the Church's influence. Catholicism was equally as powerful as royalty, dominating everyday life and behaviour.

Visual imagery was the primary form of communication as much of society was illiterate. In this tapestry, the archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will soon give birth. Common symbolism is used; the dove (Holy Spirit) represents conception; a lily purity; a guinea fowl and peacock immortality. These symbols were easily understood and so reinforced religious teachings, aiming to control the masses.





# Thangka

**DATE:** C. Qing dynasty (1644-1911), 1743/44

**MEDIUM:** Textiles: Silk, slit tapestry weave with interlaced outlining wefts; painted details in colors, black, and with gold leaf; outer scroll top: silk, warp-float faced 5:1 satin weave with supplementary patterning wefts and self-patterned by ground weft floats; scroll wrapper: silk, warp-float faced 5:1 satin weave with 1:2 'S' twill interlacings of secondary binding warps and supplementary patterning wefts and self-patterned by main warp and ground weft floats; rayon and cotton ties; scroll wrapper lined with silk, warp-float faced 2:1 'S' twill weave self-patterned by areas of plain weave.

**ARTIST:** Unknown

**ORIGIN:** Manchu, China

**DIMENSIONS:** 371.1 × 126.2 cm (146 × 49 3/4 in.) Wrapper: 128.4 × 42.1 cm (50 1/2 × 16 1/2 in.)

Cover repeat: 56.4 × 12 cm (22 1/4 × 4 3/4 in.) Lining repeat (width): 16.5 cm (6 1/2 in.)

**CREDIT LINE:** Gift of Mrs Melville N. Rothschild

**REF.NO:** 1958.278

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**INSCRIPTION:** *'Hail to the jewel-lotus May there be the auspicious blessings of the Three Jewels Which [bring] well-being in the daytime, well-being at night, And also well-being at midday—Well-being always day and night!'*

This is an example of a *Thanka*, portable works of art which depict a Buddhist deity or religious scene akin to Asian culture. Commonly comprised of a combination of silk embroidery and painting they are designed to be displayed for brief periods of time on a monastery wall. These textiles served as teaching tools: a form of visual history. Often intended for personal meditation or monastic teachings they provide a starting point for storytelling, bringing faithful individuals closer to Enlightenment.



Do you believe these types of tapestry can be used in political ways?



This *Thanka* shows a Buddhist deity surrounded by lotus flowers. The lotus is one of the eight precious things in Buddhism symbolizing ultimate purity. As well as having religious functions, *Thanka's* have also been commissioned by those who intended to gain merit from its symbolism. These purposes communicate the prominence of faith in society.



# *Chasuble Front with Orphrey Cross*

**DATE:** Made 1401–1500

**MEDIUM:** Chasuble: silk and metal-wrapped thread, brocaded silk velvet with two heights of silk pile, and metal-wrapped thread boucle. Orphrey Cross: silk and metal-wrapped thread, embroidered in flat and padded couching stitches and split stitches on linen plain weave foundation.

**ORIGIN:** Florence

**DIMENSIONS:** Chasuble: 126.6 × 70.5 cm (49 7/8 × 27 3/4 in.)

Orphrey Cross: 112 × 57.7 cm (44 × 22 3/4 in.)

**CREDIT LINE:** Grace R. Smith Textile Endowment

**REF. NO:** 1980.615

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Here we have a section of a Christian priest's outer garment, most probably used in Bohemia or Germany. This piece shows the vital role of imagery in religion. It depicts five saints around a central image of Saint George and the slain dragon. Telling a story of good versus evil whilst symbolizing ideals of honour and bravery, these images acted as a reminder of the virtuous qualities of the Church and set an example of how to act.

An orphrey cross is a cross characterised by the detailed embroidery, it was quintessential to 15<sup>th</sup> Century religious wear. The wealth of the Church is conveyed through the luxurious velvets exported from Italy and the craftsmanship of the textile. This speaks to the significance of religion within Medieval society, money was invested in the adornment of Churches and the clergy to assert their importance and power.