

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



European Renaissance Dalmatic

Spain, 16th century (the apparels and orphreys)

Probably Italy, 16th century (the body)

Silk velvet

A striking silk velvet dalmatic, the liturgical vestment worn by Catholic deacons for Mass. The main body of the vestment is made from vibrant golden velvet with red and green decoration, comprising pomegranates, pinecones, acorns, grapes, and leaves sprouting from rococo urns. Such textiles were made in Italy, particularly Florence, Genoa, and Venice, in the 15th to 17th centuries. The predominant motif of these textiles, the pomegranate, was introduced through trade with the Ottoman Empire. Turkish velvets such as the panel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York ([17.22.8a,b](#)), or the textile in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London ([1356&A-1877](#)), provided templates for Italian manufacturers, who targeted the Turkish market with their use of popular Ottoman motifs.¹

The red velvet orphrey bands and apparels, embroidered with split palmettes and curling tendrils in metal threads, are characteristic of 16th-century Spanish work. Very similar vines are seen on a Spanish dalmatic of ca. 1520 held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. [238-1880](#)). Each of the apparels features a roundel containing depictions of religious figures, on one side the Virgin Mary with child and on the other Christ. Another apparel in the Indianapolis Museum of Art (accession no. [2007.101](#)), dated to mid-17th century Spain, features a similar portrait of John the Baptist. A Spanish orphrey in the Art Institute of Chicago (accession no. [1932.239](#)), dated to the 16th century also features religious portraits. It also shares another feature with our chasuble, which is that some of the split palmettes have animal heads, resembling dragons.

Examples of Spanish dalmatics combined with similar Italian velvets are held in the LA County Museum of Art ([M.57.9](#)), dated ca. 1550 and the Victoria & Albert Museum ([T.372-1976](#)), dated 1530–1569. A chasuble in the same museum (no. [603-1884](#)) is made from similar vibrant gold silk velvet produced in Italy in the 15th century.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

[1] Mackie, Louise M., *Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th–21st century*. New Haven/London: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015, p. 325.