

Manuscript Title (14 pt)  
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Text body is Times New Roman, 12 pt, flush left with no hyphenation. The text should be single-spaced with one line between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs.

Many varied types of textiles were available for purchase throughout the colonies during the eighteenth century. Newspaper advertisements and probate inventories for Charleston attest to the wide range of cloth available and imported from England. "Textiles, in fact, were frequent and vital imports into eighteenth century Charleston. The weekly *South Carolina Gazette* listed them regularly." The volume, different varieties, and value of these textiles are difficult for twenty-first-century Americans to comprehend. They ranged from coarse and heavy osnabrigs and woolens to sumptuous silk brocades and fine linens. Among the plethora of fine and expensive textiles, white linen damasks were imported for tablecloths and napkins. Robert Pringle, a Charleston merchant who dealt in imported textiles and other fine goods, wrote to an English shipper in 1738 that among "Goods Proper for So. Carolina" were Diapers and Damasks for tables and napkins.<sup>1</sup>

The diapers and damasks mentioned were at the higher end of the spectrum of imported textiles, "footnote like this if it is from a quote."<sup>2</sup> The term "diaper" referred to an overall geometric pattern that would have been woven into cotton or linen (Illustration One). The term "damask" also referred to the weave structure of fabric, but it was generally limited to either silk or fine linen. Damasks were both a more complicated weave structure and better fabric than diapers, and would thus have been more expensive. They were reversible patterned fabric, the patterning being effected by a contrast between the warp-float and weft-float faces of a satin weave (Illustration Two). Designs such as flowers, ribbon valences, wreaths, baskets, and urns were commonly woven into damasks used for table linens.<sup>3</sup> Louise Conway Belden determined that fine damasks would have been twice as expensive as diapered linen.

Six linen damask tablecloths in the collection of MESDA complement a study of the elite culture of late eighteenth-century Charleston because of both the monetary investment they would have represented and the inherent social positioning they would have conveyed. "During the last fifty years of the eighteenth century a shift in acquisition habits occurred in America, from seeking objects that served a useful purpose to those that might on occasion serve a purely ornamental purpose." The tablecloths attributed to the Alston family represent but one element of the

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<sup>1</sup> Warren T. Woodfin, "Presents Given and Presence Subverted: The Cunegunda Chormatel in Bamberg and the Ideology of Byzantine Textiles," *Gesta* 47, no. 1 (2008), 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Woodfin, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Woodfin.

increasingly consumption-conscious and socially active culture of this socially and politically active family. There were many ways to spend lavish amounts of money on social department. Dining in large groups to entertain and impress peers and visitors represented one type of expenditure that could be made expensive and lavish in an unending variety of ways. Fine damask tablecloths was one such accoutrement that conveyed wealth and prestige.



*Center caption, Times New roman 9 pt, Italicized, collection of author*

The importation of damask and diaper table linens was advertised in Charleston newspapers as early as 1733.<sup>4</sup> In the *South Carolina Gazette* for July 28 of that year, William Logan & Company advertised as just having imported from London “...diaper and damask Table Cloths and Table Linnen in suits.” It is possible the earlier set of damasks tablecloths in the MESDA collection came from a London shipment advertised in the *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* on November 17, 1797.<sup>5</sup> “Lewis’s in Broad-street” offered, among other textiles, “A very compleat Assortment of Diaper and Damask Table Cloths, of all sizes & prices.” Two of the Alston tablecloths were marked with the year 1797, they are of both a different size and design.

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<sup>4</sup> Woodfin, “Presents Given,” 33.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *American Colonial Women and Their Art* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 19-22.

## Bibliography

The bibliography should have author's last name first and be arranged in alphabetical order.

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