

A Brief Overview of Medieval Embroidery

Lady Diane de Arden
Amp33@cornell.edu

Viking Embroidery: 10th Century

Early Viking embroidery was probably not intended for solely decorative purposes. Before the 10th century it was mostly use to strengthen seams and areas of wear on a garment. During the 10th century Viking embroidery was being influenced by their contact with the Byzantine and Anglo-Saxon cultures.

Stitches Used

- Stemstitch
- Couching
- Chain stitch
- Raised herringbone stitch

Where was it used?

- Areas of garments that would get wear.
- Seams to increase strength

Motifs

- Scrolling leaves
- Animal
- Byzantine and Anglo-Saxon influenced
- S curves

Materials

- Embroidery thread/yarn
 - Linen
 - Wool
 - Silk
 - Wire
- Background material
 - Stitched directly on the garment
 - Stitched on silk then applied to garment

England 9th – 12th Centuries

Stitches Used

- stem-stitch
- outline-stitch
- threaded running-stitch
- running stitch
- split-stitch

- chain-stitch
- couching
- surface couching

Materials Used

- Embroidery thread/yarn
 - Linen, wool, silk, some metallic

Motifs

- Celtic and Anglo-Saxon common motifs
- Look at illuminations, tapestries, and paintings for ideas.

14th Century General Embroidery

Stitches Used

- Stem/outline stitch
- Split stitch
- Chain stitch
- Brick stitch
- Underside couching

Where was it used?

Basically... everywhere

- garments
- belts
- chausses
- garters
- horse barding
- banners

Materials

- threads
 - silk, linen, wool, wool/silk, wool/cotton

Motifs

Nature... flowers, birds, animals.

German Counted Thread Embroidery - 14th & 15th C.

In case anybody didn't know... this is my particular favorite. Instead of putting all of the information here, my favorite source is available at <http://www.wymarc.com> in the publication "A Stitch Out of Time".

During this period pieces that look suspiciously like modern cross stitch were produced but actually used a stitch called “long armed” cross stitch.

Black Work - 16th century

Typically found in England and Spain, this style of embroidery is mostly geometric or scrolling patterns done in black or red. There are others much more knowledgeable about this style of embroidery than I and I direct you to talk to them.

Assisi Work 13 th and 14 th c.

“The Holbein stitch is used to outline the figures and it is worked freely.

The long-armed cross-stitch is used to fill the background and it is counted. The process of working the background of the pieces causes a negative effect frequently called voiding.

Second, Assisi work uses specified colors. The Holbein stitch used for outlining is typically done in black. The background of the piece is always monochromatic. The most commonly used color is red; however, green or brown is used occasionally.

Third, certain themes or motifs are typically seen in Assisi work. Animal and plant motifs are the most frequently used. St. Francis is believed to have introduced the style and motifs when he returned from the Holy Land in 1220 AD. It is well known that St. Francis had a special fondness for animals. Frequently, scenes from the Old Testament are used in Assisi work. Biblical illustrations and woodcuts were often the source of inspiration for many styles of embroidery.

Fourth, it is worked with common materials. The embroidery itself is completed with silk thread. The ground material is even weave linen.”

From: <http://www.planetc.com/users/derwyddon/assisi3.html>

Or Nue - shaded gold

Opus Anglicanum - 1250 to 1350

English style of embroidery using split stitch, stem stitch, and surface couching.

http://www.sca.org.au/st_florians/embroidery/opus.htm

<http://members.aol.com/tbyrnes883/armonyembroidery.html>

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