

Garb Rehabilitation

Presented by Lady Ursula de Stratone, Barony of Arn Hold, Kingdom of Artemisia

Introduction:

Clothes took a long time to make and were costly. It is easier/faster/cheaper to repair or rework them than to start from scratch. "A stitch in time saves nine"

Medieval examples are hard to find because clothing was worn/reused/worn out and recycled, mends that were made were made to be unnoticeable, and textiles don't survive well in general (plus, the stuff people saved wasn't usually the stuff that had been mended. Major exceptions are holy relics and items accidentally saved (used as stuffing, plugging a leak, from a midden or privy pit, etc.).

Foundational knowledge:

Useful tools: Darning egg/mushroom/dressmaker's ham/something else to hold the shape of the garment (you may want something hard or something soft you can pin to, I find an apple or orange works well, large cowrie shells are traditional in South Africa and probably work great), pins, needles (sharp and dull, varying sizes), thread similar to what you are mending (cotton is better than polyester for linen garb, linen and wool are good too, pulled threads from the fabric itself work as long as they're not weak, consider how fibers wear, age, launder, shrink, etc), scissors/thread snips, fabric for patching/stabilizing.

Modern convenience: wonder under, needle felting needle for wool, interfacing

Terms: Darning, patching, applique, reverse applique

Sewing techniques: Small stitches are stronger than long stitches. Do not use more than a yard of thread at a time. Treat thread with beeswax. Mark your area as needed. Stabilize and support more than you think you need to.

Techniques for knitted goods: Swiss darn, pick up and reknit, woven darn, Scotch darn, examples from 12th c. Egypt of "afterthought heels" and modern practice of removing/reknitting worn heels & toes

Stitches used in period: Running stitch, overcast/whip stitch, herringbone, blanket stitch, split stitch, backstitch, twisted buttonhole, chain stitch, braiding stitch, feather stitch, surface couching, underside couching, Bayeux stitch, darning stitch, pattern darning, etc. Some techniques are universal, others are more localized. Felled, butted, rolled, overlapped, and pseudo-French seams all exist in period.

Stain removal: vinegar (beer/wine, grass stains), peroxide (blood), dish soap or baking soda (chocolate, coffee, cosmetics, juice, oil), rubbing alcohol (ink), borax, oxy clean, etc. Be careful not to use enzyme cleaners on wool or silk. They are made to break down proteins, which is what wool and silk are! Spot test or use a scrap piece of the fabric if possible.

Strategies:

- Cover it up – with trim, dye, stamping/painting, embroidery, beads, applique, etc.
- Recutting/altering shape if fashion has changed, damage is irreparable, or to fit a different person
- Darning – invisible or decorative

- Patches – make them invisible or make them look intentional
- When all else fails – can you scavenge bits for another project?

Mending process:

1. Identify type of damage – tear, worn area, stain, burn, cut
2. Clean the item – You can stabilize beforehand if an area looks like it might get worse
3. Remove anything beyond help that will compromise structure (or prepare to cover it)
4. Support and reinforce as needed – paper, interfacing, a patch (with or without adhesive)
5. Make it look invisible, or...
6. Make it look pretty – symmetry is your friend, and remember, more is more! Add dye, fabric painting/printing, embroidery, beads, applique, lace, etc. as appropriate for the period and style of the garb.

Resources:

Great tutorial on neat patching and mending in period garb (note – no period sources given, but then, there may not really be any)- <https://thedecavershamhousehold.wordpress.com/2018/06/01/tutorial-how-to-mend-clothes-and-other-fabric/>

Stitches & seam techniques from early medieval garments – New Varangian Guard
<http://nvg.org.au/documents/other/stitches.pdf>

Visible mending tricks - <https://www.interweave.com/article/spinning/visible-mending-7-tricks-know-sew>

Pattern darning tutorial on the Compleately Dressed Anachronist -
<http://edythmiller.blogspot.com/2013/12/pattern-darning.html>

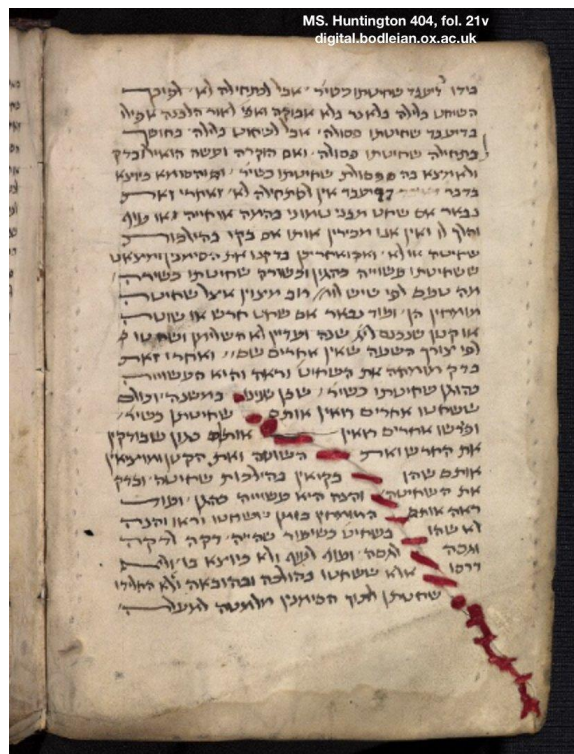
Darned Embroidery from Textile Research Centre Leiden - <https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-needles/techniques/embroidery/general-embroidery/darned-embroidery>

Bayrose Pattern Darning - http://www.bayrose.org/AandS/pattern_darning.html

Show & tell time! What did you bring?

Final thoughts aka Ursula's soapbox – Lots of things were repaired in period, not just clothing. I'm interested in this because it shows the medieval relationship with material objects, a different relationship than many of us have now with our possessions. We can learn a lot about how items were used, valued, and maintained in period by looking at these details. In period, items were costlier to make and acquire, so the time and work of repair was more worthwhile. In our modern industrial world of sweat shops, throwaway culture, overflowing landfills, climate change, fair trade vs. low costs, etc. it may be time to reexamine and reintegrate these skills, both with clothing and with other objects, and to think about the whole life cycle of our possessions, including their sources and their inevitable end.

Appendix 1 - Period examples:



13th c. Hebrew text repaired with red silk thread, Bodleian Library MS Huntington 404



Darned embroidery detail, Mamluk Period, Egypt (From Textile Research Centre Leiden article above)



Elizabethan knitted silk jacket, 1630s, originally knitted straight then altered to fit a the waist, Burrell Collection 29.126



Child's wool tunic thought to be cut down from an adult's, patched and darned repeatedly, neck and sleeves decorated with applied wool and linen bands, 7th-8th c. Egypt, Whitworth Art Gallery T.8505

Appendix 2 – Modern images:

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Darning

DO'S AND DON'T'S

A neat darn is a real badge of honour these days—and, done in good time, it can lengthen the life of a garment by months and months. Here are some hints on everyday darns and how to set about them; with some general rules for your guidance.

Do darn on the wrong side directly a thin place appears.

- tack a piece of net on a large hole and darn across it for extra strength (see linen darn)
- darn well beyond the weak place.
- leave loops at the turns to allow for shrinking.
- settle yourself comfortably in a good light before you start.


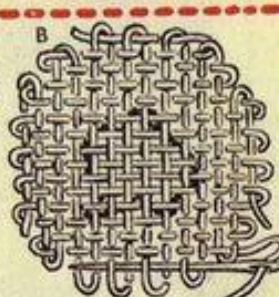
Don't wait for a hole to develop.

- use thread too coarse or too fine
- make straight edges to your darn; a little irregularity distributes the strain.
- pull the thread taut or it will pucker.
- expect to make a success of a job by hit-or-miss methods.

To darn a Hole


A. Weave the needle in and out to make a darn of an irregular diamond shape, working well beyond the thin area surrounding the hole.

B. Turn darn round and work across the hole in the opposite direction, remembering to leave tiny loops at the end of each line of stitching and to weave in and out of the first strands across the hole.

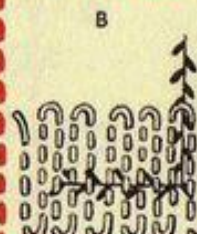



To darn a tear

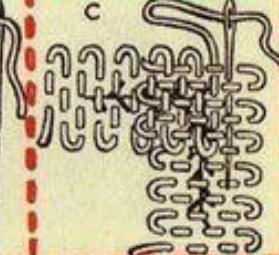
A. First tack a piece of paper behind the tear, to hold edges in position. Then fish-bone stitch the edges of the tear together. Use fine thread of same colour.



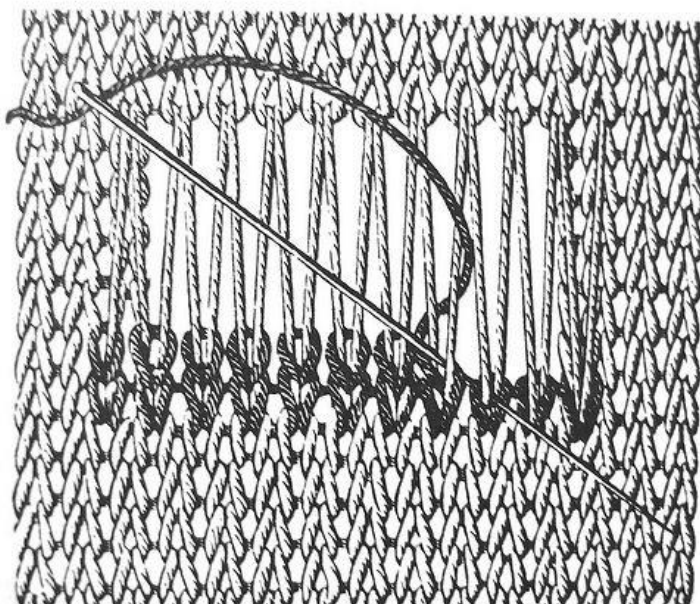
B. Take darning stitches well beyond tear, right across base, forming a rectangle.



C. Turn work round and darn in the same way across the other part of the tear. A solid square will be formed at the corner. Now remove tacking thread and paper.



Swiss Darning:



Scotch Darning:

