

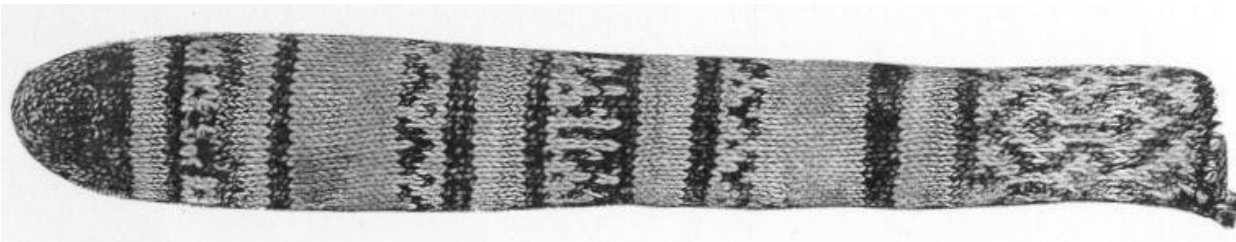
Historical Knitting Examples and Techniques

Lady Ursula de Strattone, Barony of Arn Hold

Asia/Levant/Al-Andalus Origins – earlier examples exist here – many lovely Islamic motifs including words/script, seem to be knit-stitch only & in the round



Fatimid Egyptian (11th c.) colorwork piece including Khufic script, 6 stitches/12 rows per cm. Note that the section at the top has three colors in a single row, which is uncommon and not easy to master. Source: Maurice Bouvier, *Tissus d’Egypte*, Pg. 160



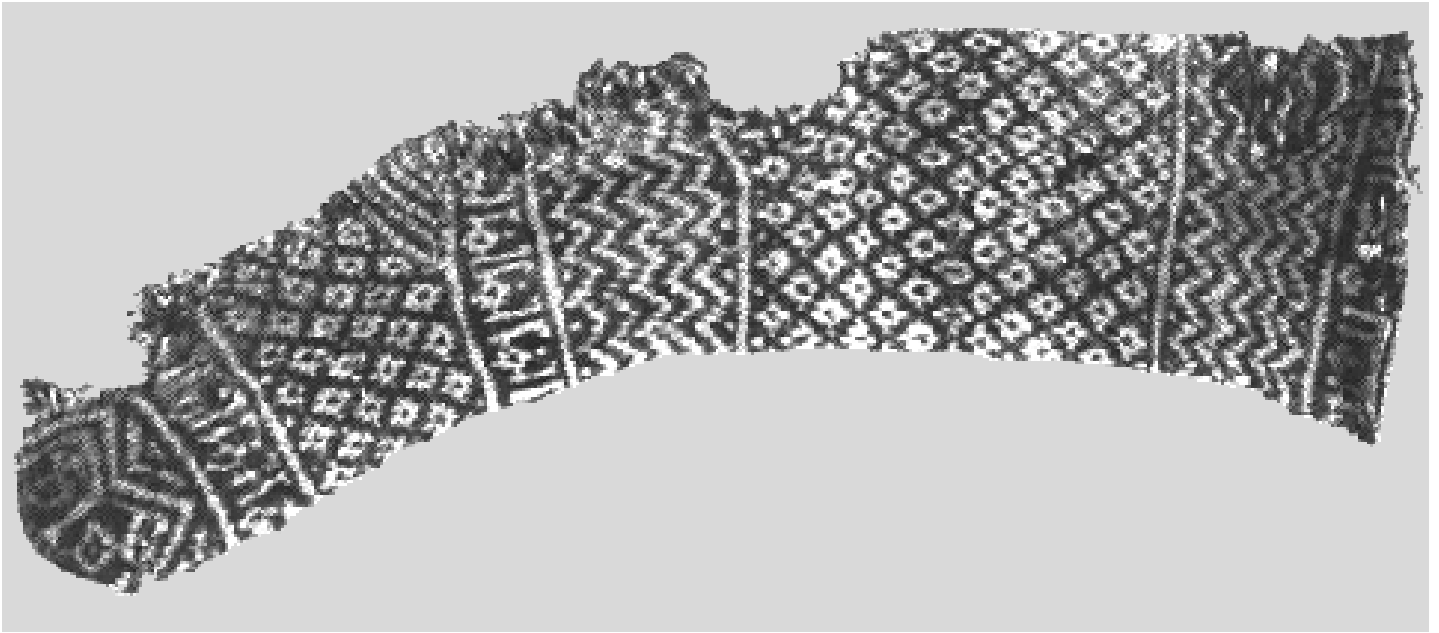
Unknown object, perhaps a purse, cotton (natural and 2 shades of indigo blue), includes Khufic script motif of the word “Allah” c. 11th-13th c. Source: Maurice Bouvier, *Tissus d’Egypte*, Pg. 267



12th. C. sock, possibly from Fustat, Egypt. Cotton. Likely made in India (found with other Indian trade goods). Knitted toe-up with “afterthought” heel allowing it to be replaced separately. Egyptian socks were typically top-down, reinforcing non-Egyptian origin. Source: George Washington University Textile Museum, 73.698



Wool sock, 12th-13th c., Fustat, Egypt. Heel construction looks like short rows with some sort of sideways seaming at the sides. Motif is Khufic script “Allah,” and is seen on many examples (see below). Note the jog in the stripes, this is the beginning of the round. We know how to avoid this now. Source: Met Museum, 27.170.96



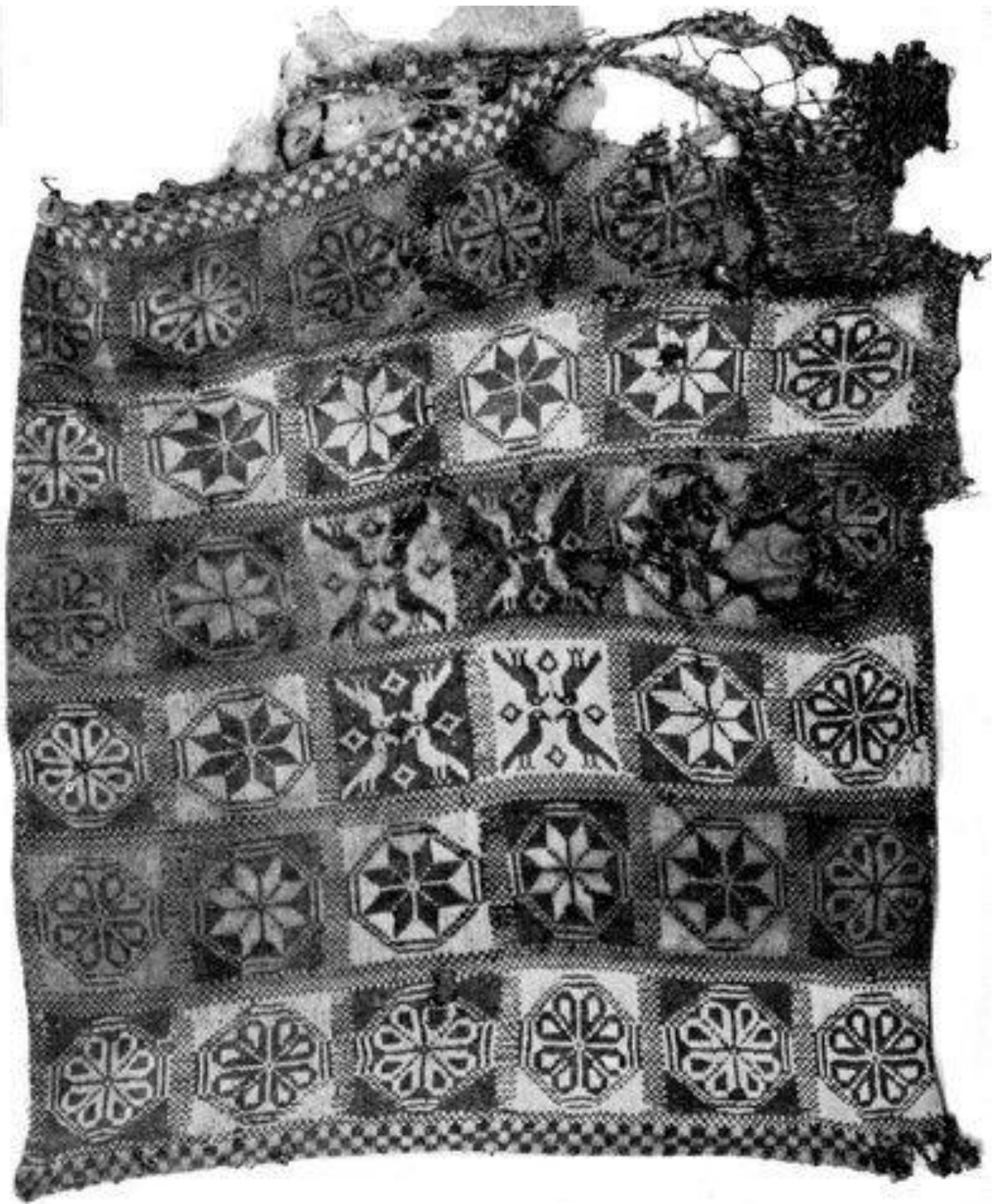
Another 11th-13th c. cotton example. Includes “Allah” motif and more complex designs. Source: George Textile Museum in Washington, D.C

Note: Khufic script patterns are found even in objects given to/made for/used by Christians.

European Origins – Most examples are slightly later (14th c and onward), colorwork shows up much earlier than pattern stitches. Knitting in the round seems to appear far earlier than flat.



Silk glove from grave of Archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada, died 1247 CE. Hand knitted upward from the wrist, cuff knitted downward from the wrist. Source: Historic Knitting group on Ravelry. Pattern published in *Textile Conservation & Research* by Mechtild Flury-Lemberg, 1988. Note Moorish-style geometric patterns.



Knitted cushion from the tomb of Mafalda de Castilla y Plantagenet, late 13th c. Shows use of heraldic images in knitting.
Source: Gomez-Moreno, M. (1946), *El Panteon real de las Helgas de Burgos*, Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, Instituto Diego Velasquez



Early 14th c. knitted cap, shell silk (made from mussel shell silk fiber, catalog specifies singles spun Z, plied S), unknown origins, found during archaeological excavations in 1978 in a waste pit. Earliest known object made from this material. Source: St. Denis Museum of Art and History, no. 11.218.163.



Spanish ecclesiastical glove, c. 1510-1520, silk and metallic threads, cuff lined with pink silk, extremely fine gauge. Note use of text (very popular to imitate Arabic script in knitted items) and St. Jude cross. Needle lace and knotted fringe make this an extremely fine piece. Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 38.1251.



Lightly fulled flat cap, Early 16th c. England. There are lots of variations on the theme of 16th century cap from around Europe. Various gauges exist, sometimes brims are split, as here, sometimes continuous, sometimes double-thick, sometimes covering ears/back of neck. Occasionally a silk hat band or silk ribbon is attached. Cappers Act of 1571 required most non-noble men to wear a wool cap, and imposed penalties for not doing so. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum. The flat cap could be a class on its own... any takers?



Silk Stockings of Eleanora of Toledo, 1562, red silk yarn with knit/purl/yarn over/k2tog patterning and calf shaping, 12 stitches per inch (approx. lace weight and US 00 needles) Source: Realm of Venus



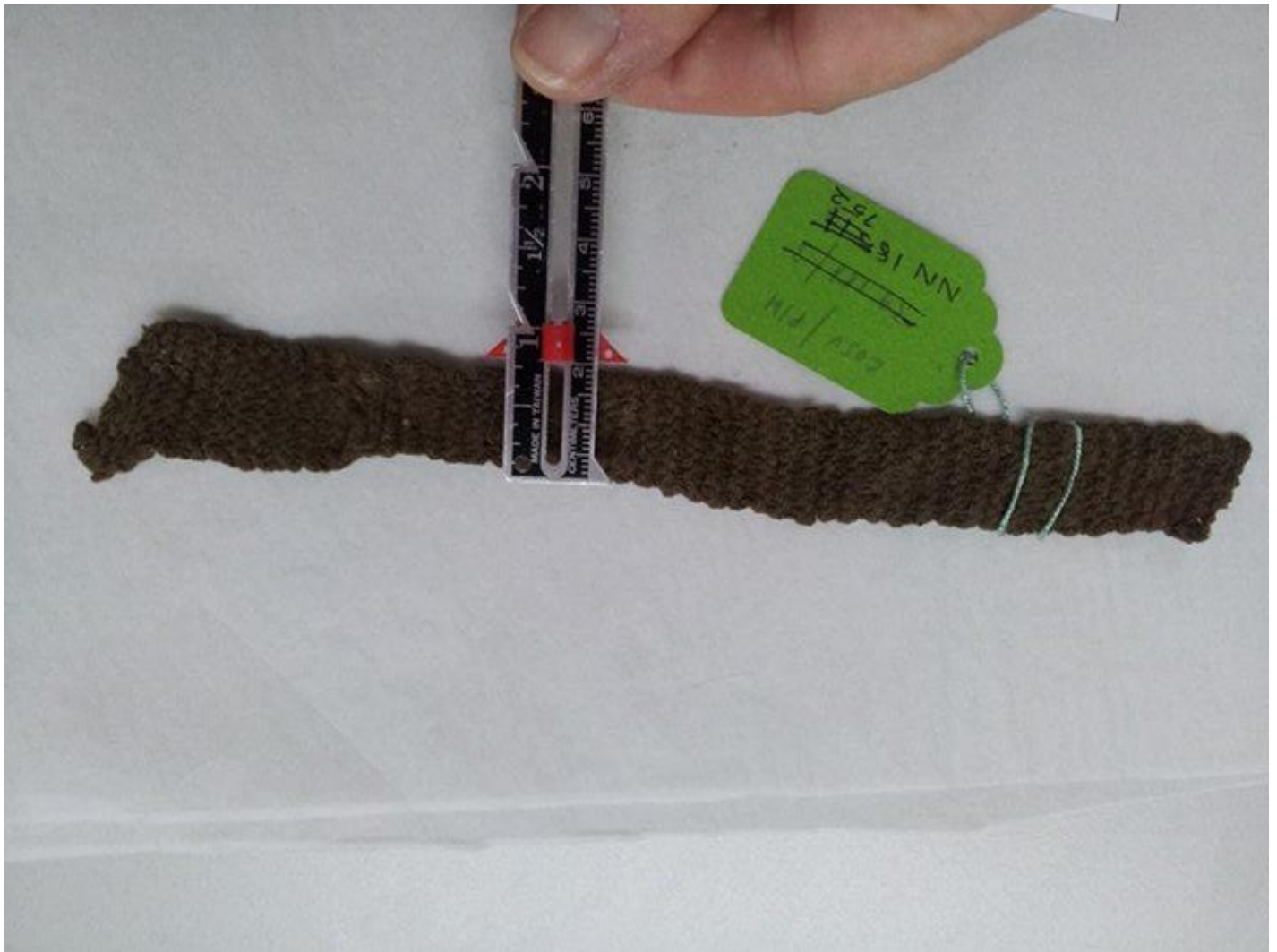
Detail, cuff & stitch patterns, Eleanora of Toledo stockings, 1562 Source: Realm of Venus



Small drawstring knit purse, late 16th c. Augusta Auctions November 2009 textile sale.



16th/17th c. wool gloves, note fringe/thrums (hard to tell which) on the cuffs. Source: Danish National Museum.



Knit garter, 16th c., knitted flat in garter stitch, 9 stitches wide, approx. 13 rows per inch. Material unknown. Source: Museum of London



Woman's knitted silk jacket, possibly English, late 16th c., silk and gold thread. Originally knitted with a straight body but later altered to add flared hips and curved waist, probably in the 17th c. These are far more common in the 17th century. Source: Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland.

Techniques: Round vs. flat knitting, knit vs. purl, other pattern stitches (increases & decreases, bobbles, yarn overs), colorwork (stranded, intarsia, mosaic), cast-on/bind-off techniques, seaming, toe-up vs. top-down, thrums, fringe

Materials: Needles (wood/bone/metal), wool (elastic, warm even when wet, anti-microbial, easy to dye), silk (soft, high status due to price/access, easy to dye, inelastic/droopy, breathable), cotton (inelastic, harder to dye, not available in Europe in most of period), linen (inelastic, harder to dye, easy to grow/get in Europe, little to no evidence of use for knitting), ramie (inelastic, hard to dye, easy to grow/get in Europe, little to no evidence of use for knitting)

Suggested resources:

Ravelry Historic Knitting group <http://www.ravelry.com/groups/historic-knitting>

Nancy Bush, *Folk Socks*, 1994, Interweave Press.

Priscilla A. Gibson-Roberts, *Ethnic Socks*, 1995, Xrx Books.

Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, 1989, Interweave Press.

Piecework magazine, Interweave Press.

Medieval Silkwork Blog, www.medievalsilkwork.com