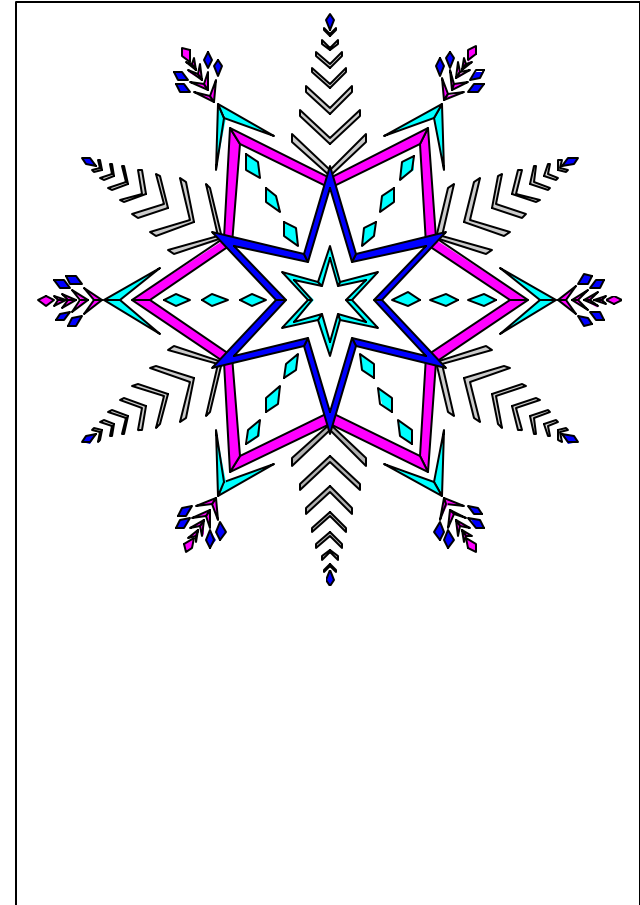
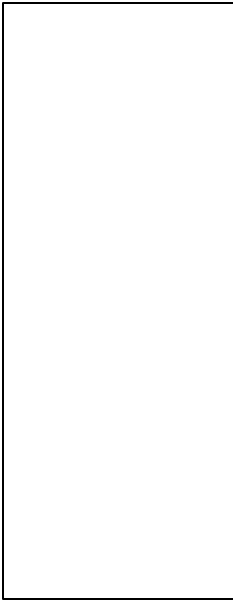



Aire Currents

*Newsletter for the
Canton of Aire Faucon*



*Volume VIII, Issues XI-XII
November-December A.S. XXXVIII
being 2004 Gregorian*




Janet Thompson
515 E. Ohio Avenue
Bessemer City, NC 28016

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<http://aire.atlantia.sca.org/airenoframe.htm>



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

Jonathan	January 18
Bera	January 30
Lydia	February 1
Susanna	February 8
Gaelan	February 16
Katheryne	February 17



MEETING MINUTES

November 8, 2004

Old Business - Lydia reports (via email) that she has an updated Kingdom of Atlantia Event Registration Form just about completed for Inn on the Road, and will have it in the mail this week. The event will have heavy, rapier, and archery activities as it has in the past.

New Business - The Embroiderer's Guild of Atlantia is collecting money for fabric for new cloaks for TRM's and TRH's. Guildmembers have been embroidering roundels with the kingdom arms on them, as well as each of the baronies and the kingdom orders. Seneschal will be happy to forward any donations to Baroness Benefse, the Kingdom Exchequer on behalf of this project. The December meeting will be on Monday, December 13th at Lord Gaelan's home. For those needing directions, please let him know and he will send them to you privately. Lady Brianna will be coordinating this, so please email or call her and let her know whether you'll be bringing cooked veggies, drinks, more desserts, or bread. Question was raised, can we do a small canton event at Golden Valley sometime in the coming year. Much discussion ensued; we can use the bid and plans for Winter Solstice/Faire as the basis. Will discuss this more at December meeting. Vivats to Brianna on her Golden Dolphin, to Keena on her AOA, and to Mieszko on his Opal and Alys on her Coral Branch.

Seneschal: nothing much happening

Exchequer: 3rd quarter report is in, current balance \$1195.04. Four months later, still working on bank change of address.

Chatelaine: still need to fill this position

Herald: Looking for someone to volunteer to conflict check the proposed new heraldry. Brianna volunteered Bran or Gaelan volunteered to do so.

Chronicler: Nothing to report.

Knights Marshal Nothing to report.

MoAS: Had a casting class at Mistress Susanna's home last month. Maeve is embroidering the Sacred Stone roundels for the kingdom cloak project.

Webminister: Not present. No updates submitted to webminister, regnum is now out of date.

December 13, 2004

Old Business - Still searching for a chatelaine and herald for the canton. In order to have our heraldry changed, we will need 50% of the paid canton members to sign a petition to make the change.

New Business - Jonathan was asked to put in a bid for Baronial Birthday as there were no bids yet and the deadline was approaching. He did so, the bid was declined. He has Golden Valley tentatively reserved for the last weekend of August, do we want to use this date for our proposed event? It would be five months after Inn on the Road, which would give us two events for 2005. Estimated \$500 budget, with a 50 person on board feast for \$200. A vote was taken, and everyone present voted yes to have the event. A formal budget will be presented at January's meeting, time allowing. The Baronial Chatelaine was present and he would like to put together a dedicated demo group. Please contact him if you're interested. Several local newspapers and a couple of the local television channels will run free blurbs promoting club meetings. Members voted to pursue this. Katheryne and Jonathan to work on the wording of the blurbs.



Seneschal: Warrant has been renewed for a second term.

Exchequer: Not here.

Chatelaine: Katheryne volunteered to take this position. A round of vivats ensued.

Herald: Susanna thinking of taking on this position.

Chronicler: Last issue of her term is being worked on. One was sent to Cyriac for August thru October to be posted on the website.

Knights Marshal: Not here.

MoAS: Not here.

Webminister: Not here.



THE SENESCHALE'S SENDING

As another year ends, and a new one begins, I wish everyone much happiness and success. I hope we can all enjoy each other's company at what is sure to be an exciting eventing season.

In service,
LADY MAEVE



THE CHRONICLER'S MUSINGS

I have enjoyed my years as canton chronicler, but now it's time to turn the office over to someone new. I hope everyone will submit articles, artwork, stories, etc to Katarina and will support her as she steps into the position.

Always in Service,
LADY MAEVE

KNITTING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Susanna von Schweissguth, OL

The earliest evidence of knitting is in Egypt and the Middle East, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. These oldest pieces of knitting (1000 to 1300 A.D.) are actually more like small tapestries, made with very small stitches and with different colors in one piece (some multicolored, a number with blue and white patterning).

Most of these relics show evidence of having been knit 'in the round' on 4 or 5 needles, much like socks are made today. While there is speculation that larger garments, like shirts, may have been made, the existing fragments and complete pieces only point to pouches, socks, and perhaps small pillows. These small works of tapestry art were made out of linen, cotton, and wool, sometimes combined, and many are still brightly colored.



In Northern Europe, knitted relics, mostly wool, point to a different tradition in knitting. There are competing theories that knitting developed spontaneously in many areas vs. the skill spreading via returning warriors during and after the Crusades.

Regardless of the beginning, Northern European knitting seems to follow the traditions of nailbinding, which pre-existed. That is, wool was used and the stitches were larger, as was the diameter of the yarn. Many of the finished pieces were fulled, adding additional body and warmth to these utilitarian garments: hats, mittens, gloves and socks.

To this day, knitted socks show distinctive differences, which can show whether they were constructed in an "Eastern" (middle Eastern) or "Western" (North European) tradition.

European socks (and this is true of pre-1600 relics) are constructed closely following woven/cut/sewn socks. These models include gussets shaped over the instep of the foot, a seam under the heel and shaping on the sides/bottom of the foot (sometimes omitted.) The European socks, whether knit today or in the Middle Ages are almost universally constructed beginning at the top of the leg portion and ending at the toe.

Middle Eastern socks conversely begin construction at the toe, are shaped to cover the foot and heel, and end with working up the leg.

In the late Middle Ages, extant relics suggest a convergence of Eastern and Western skill, design and materials in Spain, Italy and Southern Germany as evidenced by Eleanora of Toledo's stockings, the Dresden Trunk Hose and the lovely silk multicolored jackets, which blossomed in the 17th century. While we don't know which specific workshops they were designed and knit in, they show an acme in skill and patterning that I don't think as been exceeded to this day!

Interesting aside: When I was in grade school in Toledo, Ohio in the mid to late 60's (1900"s), J.C. Penney sold knee socks that were machine knit in the same pattern as Eleanora's of Toledo (Spain). I really was meant to be a princess as a young girl!

PATCHWORK CLOTHING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Lady Sarah Davies

"Patchwork" is a loaded term in some circles. It is so associated with modern American-style patchwork that it can be a shock to learn that although "written records are few and far between [,] patchwork is a more ancient occupation than can be proved by any record; it must have come before writing."¹ Even more shocking, the technique usually associated with humble housewives piecing scrap blankets for their families was once the means to produce luxury clothing and equipment for European nobility.

¹ Colby, Averil. *Patchwork*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 1985.



The first surviving glimpses of patchwork, like so many textile traditions, were found in Egypt. A tomb painting from Egyptian Thebes from around 2000 BCE shows a boat with an elaborately pieced sail (chevron borders and checkboard center) gliding serenely along the Nile. Although a pieced sail might not be strong enough for the open sea, it certainly would do for river cruising, especially in the interior sections of the country.

Unfortunately, no cloth patchwork has survived from ancient Egypt. However, a patchwork gazelle hide canopy from around 980 BCE is on view in Cairo, its brittle leather protected in a climate controlled case.²

The first surviving examples of patchwork in cloth were found by Sir Marc Aurel Stein in the Cave of Thousand Buddhas in Tan Huang along the Silk Road. The cave had been a major pilgrimage site and was crammed with well-preserved fabric and wood artifacts thanks to the dry climate. Most of the finds were dated to between 600 and 900 CE. The most significant textile finds included votive hangings carefully pieced of rectangular scraps of silk brocade and damask torn from pilgrims' garments, patchwork banners, and a small silk relic bag. The relic bag, pieced in rows of squares and triangles, is so elaborately pieced that it could be Victorian fancywork rather than the labor of a long-dead monk.³

The scraps are remarkably even and seem to have been deliberately cut or torn into regular shapes, possibly by the thrifty monks. The Buddhist monks themselves wore patched robes as a sign of humility and poverty, with some types of vestments deliberately pieced according to a precise sequence that imitated a humble rice paddy.⁴ Silk was considered so precious in Buddhist countries, such as Japan, that the gift of patchwork was considered a wish for a long life. Even the most powerful noble might be honored with a yosegire kimono.⁵

Patchwork clothing as a sign of humility was not unique to Buddhism. The Sufi movement in Islam also encouraged its initiates to wear patchwork garments to show their lack of interest in the material world. The brilliant 13th century mystic Rumi, founder of the Mevlana school of Sufism, prescribed patched garments for his followers until the political climate forced them into plainer clothes.⁶ Several Sufi schools still wear patchwork caftans and robes, including sects in Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa.

Even Christianity had patchwork vestments, although of far finer cloth than the scraps pieced together by Buddhists and Muslims. Orthodox priests in the Balkans began wearing elaborately pieced copes and chasubles as far back as the early 13th century, possibly earlier, with some Orthodox churches continuing to use pieced vestments to this day.

Pieced vestments were particularly associated with St. Sava, largely thanks to an early 13th century fresco allegedly painted from life. The fresco, painted around 1230 in the Church of the Ascension in Mileseva, shows the saint in a robe of pieced black and white squares laid out in blocks resembling garden mazes.⁷ Later paintings of St. Sava invariably show him in such a robe, often accompanied by St. Simeon. A much later church, the Church of the Virgin in Mljet, has frescoes showing both Simeon and Sava in pieced

² Gwinner, Schuppe von, tr. Edward Force. *The History of the Patchwork Quilt*. West Chester, PA : Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 1988, 19-20.

³ Colby, 21.

⁴ Liddell, Jill, and Yuko Watanabe. *Japanese Quilts*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988, 7-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶ Jirousek, Charlotte A., "Quilts and Quilting in Turkey," lecture at "In Search of Origins" conference, 9/13/03.

⁷ Trifunovic, Lazar. *Yugoslavia: Monuments of Art*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988, 167.



vestments, Sava in the usual garden maze sett, Simeon in a pattern later known as Philadelphia pavement.⁸

Although pieced vestments were strongly associated with St. Sava, others were shown wearing them by the 14th century, whether in the royal church of Christ Pantocrater in Decani (pieced vestments of red, white and black)⁹ or in Markov Manastir, where a fresco of St. Basil is so carefully painted that the seams of his red and white patchwork vestment can be seen.¹⁰

Patchwork first seems to have made it to continental Europe by the late 12th century. A French poem, *La Lai del Desire*, describes a bridal bed as being deck with a "quilt...of a check-board pattern of two sorts of silk cloth, well-made and rich...Around appears the new flower" - clearly patchwork, with either an embroidered or appliquéd border.¹¹ Moreover, the poem shows enough familiarity with the British Isles that it may have been written by a resident of Scotland or England.¹² This implies that patchwork was familiar at least in court circles no later than 1200, possibly much earlier.

The next clear evidence of patchwork dates from around a hundred years later. A *Madonna and Child* by the Italian master Cimabue shows not only the Virgin, her Son, and St. John the Baptist and St. Peter, but a crowd of angels floating behind the Virgin's head holding up a cloth hanging of red brocade squares alternating with black and white pieced pinwheels.¹³ It is not clear if the hanging is completely pieced (the pinwheels may have been separately worked and appliquéd to the brocade), but it certainly makes for a striking effect.

Another early European depiction of patchwork might be in Taddeo Gaddi's painting "The Wedding of the Virgin" in the Barroncelli Chapel in Florence. This late 14th century work shows the Virgin's wedding procession in a typical Italian town: piazzas, peasants, beautiful countryside...and what certainly looks like a patchwork hanging of red, white and green squares draped across a façade.¹⁴ The patchwork is only a background motif, and might be painted or woven instead of pieced. However, the effect of piecing was certainly known.

There is no stronger evidence for piecing in medieval Europe than heraldry and heraldic garments. Fields grew more elaborate as more and more families began claiming arms, and what better way to depict countercharged arms on a banner than to piece them? The most famous example of this is possibly the quilted and pieced jupon of Edward, the Black Prince (1330-1375).

Edward was the most famous British warrior of his time. When he died young in 1375, his grieving father had his helmet, sword, shield, and jupon, or quilted jacket, raised over his tomb in Canterbury Cathedral. They remained there until removed for safekeeping during the Second World War, when they were examined, conserved, and replaced with exact replicas in the late 1940s.

The jupon itself had faded badly after nearly six hundred years' exposure to air, sunlight, candle smoke, and a narrow escape at the hands of the Puritans, but close examination proved that it had originally been pieced of quartered dark red and royal blue silk velvet, with the royal arms of England embroidered on linen and

⁸ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-91 *passim*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹¹ Colby, 22.

¹² Janniere, Janine, "Filling in Quilt History: A 16th Century French Patchwork Banner," in *The Quilt Journal*, Volume 3, #3, 1993, 1-2.

¹³ National Gallery of Art web site. www.nga.gov

¹⁴ Soltow, Willow Ann. *Quilting the World Over*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1991, 136.



applied in place. The entire garment was heavily channel quilted and stuffed with cotton for an extra layer of protection during battle.¹⁵

More military patchwork can be seen in the work of the early Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello. The Battle of San Romano (1450s), originally painted for the Medici dining room and now divided among museums in Madrid, Paris, and London, shows warriors wearing pieced and stuffed patchwork torses on their helmets,¹⁶ as well as a warhorse in pieced barding of red, blue, and black.¹⁷ The different colors of the patchwork (black and white on several torses, red, black, gold and white on another, the horse barding)¹⁸ may have served as a quick way of distinguishing one unit from another during the press of battle.¹⁹

The torses may also have been the mark of a commander. Federigo de Montrefeltro, Duke of Urbino, the great 15th century art patron and condottiere, had two primary residences. His primary home at Urbino is renowned for a studiolo, or private study, paneled with astonishingly detailed trompe l'oeil marquetry showing everything from books to personal possessions.

Less known but just as fascinating is a smaller studiolo Federigo commissioned for his second home in Gubbio. This studiolo was removed from the Gubbio villa in the 1920s and reassembled in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It contains many clues to Federigo's tastes and interests (object depicted range from a candlestick to a small portable organ), but most interesting to a patchworker is a small torse sitting on a marquetry bench, just to the left as one enters the studiolo. The torse is almost identical to the pieced torses shown in Paolo Uccello's paintings. The piecing is so perfectly done as to resemble a perspective drawing, yet the torse was almost certainly based on one Federigo himself might have worn into battle.²⁰

Military patchwork was quickly followed by civilian clothing pieced in squares, rectangles, and diamonds, especially in Italy. Raphael, one of the three greatest artists of the Renaissance, included patchwork in religious art (The Mass at Bolsena, 1512 - two soldiers in pieced arming doublets, one red and velvet, one dark blue and gold²¹) and portraits (Elisabetta Gonzaga, early 16th century - woman in gown of black velvet and patchwork bands in a rectangular nine-patch pattern²²), as did the Venetians Carpaccio (Knight in a Landscape, 1510 - a mounted knight in the background wears a black and white patchwork arming doublet;²³ a gondolier in pieced short hose of gray, blue and white diamonds²⁴ witnesses a miracle in The Healing of the Possessed Man, c. 1500) and Lotto (Pieta, 1508 - Mary Magdalene wears stylish gold and white pieced brocade sleeves under her tunic;²⁵ Woman with Drawing of Lucrece, 1530 - woman in pieced silk velvet gown of bright orange and dark green²⁶).

¹⁵ Betterton, Shiela, "Royal Connections: Quilting and the British Monarchy," in *The Quilt Journal*, Volume 4, #1, 1995, 5.

¹⁶ Rizzo, Anna Padoa. *Paolo Uccello: Catalogo Completo dei Dipinti*. Firenze: Cantini Editore, 1991, 66-72.

¹⁷ Roccasacca, Pietro. *Paolo Uccello: Le Battaglie*. Milano: Elletta, 1997, 11.

¹⁸ Borsi, Franco and Stefano. *Paolo Uccello*. Paris: Editions Hazan, 1992, 228.

¹⁹ The torses may not have been exclusively military. Uccello's earlier *Flood* cycle (1425-1432) in Santa Maria Novello, Florence, shows several pieced torses, including one worn as a collar! (Borsi 36-37).

²⁰ Personal observation, November 2003.

²¹ Salmi, Mario, ed. *Raffaello: La Pittura, I Disegni*. Novara: Istituto Geografia de Agostini, 1998, 160-161.

²² http://www.beniculturali.it/Liocorno/r_gonzaga.html.

²³ Humfrey, Peter. *Carpaccio*. Florence: Contini, 1991, 108-109.

²⁴ Hagen, Rose-Marie and Rainer. *15th Century Paintings*. Koln: Taschen, 2001, 176.

²⁵ <http://www.magdalene.org/lamentation/lotto.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.abcgallery.com/L/lotto/lotto6.html>



The greatest lover of pieced clothing in Renaissance art was unquestionably Luca Signorelli (c. 1441-1523). Several of his greatest paintings show men in pieced hose and doublets, including two massive fresco sequences for Monteoliveto Monastery and Orvieto Cathedral. Some of the pieced clothing is so bizarre as to seem like an invention, but most is well within the Italian norm.

The best-known and most readily accessible Signorelli patchwork painting is his *Calvary* (1504), part of the Kress Collection at the National Gallery in Washington, DC. One of the soldiers tormenting the dying Christ wears a relatively subdued pieced doublet of perpendicular gold, white, and black stripes arranged in what today would be called the Split Rails pattern, while his companions are all sporting vertically pieced hose in red, yellow, white, and black²⁷

Signorelli may modeled his soldiers on a mercenary company in the latest *landesknacht* fashions, or possibly on the ubiquitous *condottiere*.

The soldiers in *Calvary* are hardly the only ones he painted in pieced clothing; earlier works such as the 1483 *Conversion of St. Paul* (a man in pieced hose, left leg solid red, right leg green and white to the knee, then red and blue squares, then solid blue to the foot)²⁸ and the 1498 *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (man in red, white and blue hose)²⁹ bear witness to interest in patchwork clothing.

It was in the late 1490s that Signorelli went from showing the occasional bit of patchwork to truly glorying to the artistic potential inherent in the colors and patterns of patchwork. Perhaps the best example can be found in the *Totila Cycle* in Monteoliveto Monastery outside of Florence (1498-1499). The fresco cycle depicts St. Benedict's encounter with the barbarian ruler Totila, and how Totila was converted when St. Benedict saw through his attempts to disguise his identity.

Totila appears throughout the cycle with his band of warriors, dressed in the latest Italian fashions as per the conventions of the time. Their brightly colored and patterned clothing seems to be a deliberate contrast against the stark white of St. Benedict and his monks, and may be a veiled comment on the more extreme fashions of contemporary Italy. The soldiers figure most prominently in the paintings where St. Benedict first discovers his ruse and then recognizes the real Totila.

The former painting shows two soldiers in pieced hose reacting to St. Benedict's fury at being deceived. One wears pieced hose with puffs on the thighs and red and blue squares at the knees, while a companion's hose are diagonally pieced in brown, red, white and blue from waist to just below the knees, then vertically striped to his feet.³⁰ The contrast with St. Benedict and his plainly dressed monks is stark, to say the least.

Signorelli saved the best for the next scene in the cycle, where St. Benedict confronts the real Totila.³¹ No fewer than five soldiers are in increasingly elaborate pieced clothing:

1. Pieced hose of red, gold, white and blue: vertical band of red and gold squares, then a strip of white, then a strip of blue;

²⁷ <http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pimage?41417+0+0>.

²⁸ Henry, Tom, and Laurence Kanter. *Luca Signorelli: The Complete Paintings*. New York: Rizzoli, 2002, 108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ Henry & Kanter, 133.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 133-134.



2. Hose of ochre, black and white, with vertical stripes to below the knee and diagonal stripes below to the foot;
3. Hose of blue, red, black, ochre and white, with vertical stripes to knee and chevron stripes below;
4. Hose of red, blue and white, pieced in a chevron pattern to below knee, then appliquéd or painted flames of red on white down to foot; and, last but not least:
5. A complete outfit, each section pieced separately, as follows:
 - i. Left leg: vertical stripes of red and green to just below buttocks, then a white horizontal band, then red and green vertical stripes to just below knee, then garter band tied with a bow knot, then zig-zag piecing in red and blue on calf to foot;
 - ii. Right leg: clamshell pattern in white, black, green, gold and blue over buttocks to upper thigh, then red, gold and white horizontal stripes to just below knee, garter tied with bow knot, then calf in half red/half white vertical stripes; and
 - iii. Doublet: left back pieced in blue, brown and gray vertical stripes, right back in diagonal stripes, laced together with bow knots at intervals.

The frescoes clearly show that Italians were familiar with at least four basic patterns (stripes, chevrons, squares, and clamshells), and that they had no qualms about mixing and matching colors and designs. The frescoes are so brightly colored that some of the paintings were later altered to show the soldiers in silver plate armor that completely wrecks the contrast between the garish piecing and the severe white robes of St. Benedict's monks. Fortunately the frescoes were restored to their splendid vulgarity so that all can wonder just how anyone, even a battle-hardened mercenary, could possibly have stood to wear scratchy wool clamshells in such a delicate area.

Signorelli's other major fresco cycle, the Apocalypse Cycle in the Brizeo Chapel in Orvieto (1499-1504),³² also depicts pieced clothing, albeit far less gaudy than that in the St. Benedict cycle. The colors are not so bright, nor the mix of patterns so extreme - a man in red, gold, white and blue striped hose watching the "Signs of the End of the World,"³³ another in hose and doublet pieced of red, green, yellow, blue and white present at the "Destruction of the World" and a companion in green and gold pieced hose³⁴ may seem gaudy in context, but compared to Totila's soldiers they are positively subdued.

Northern Europe also had patchwork clothing, although the colder climate dictated less leg and more outer garment. A notable example is the gray and white checkboard cote worn by a fleeing spectator in Hans Holbein the Elder's Retable of the Gray Passion (1498). This series of twelve paintings, now owned by Prince Joachim von Furstenburg, is done entirely in grisaille except for the faces and hands of the figures. The cote appears in a panel showing Christ being flogged by soldiers, and is worn by a figure that may or may not be a thief; the piecing is in even rows of squares and rectangles, and seems to have been done by the yard

³² Paolucci, Antonio. *Luca Signorelli*. Florence: Scala, 1990, 50-51.

³³ Kanter and Henry, 6-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.



rather than the garment.³⁵

The most dramatic example of Northern patchwork was never painted. Katarina von Mecklenburg, Duchess of Saxony, was a devout Lutheran who took the Biblical strictures against graven images so seriously that she refused to have her portrait painted until her husband ascended to the ducal throne. Unfortunately, she wore a red and gold silk gown of horizontal stripes rather than the amazing dress she wore on her wedding day in 1512:

"It was very strange and composed of several hundred pieces; the principal colors were red and yellow and there were lines half an ell in length and a quarter in width set close together, and other lines, two fingers in breadth, going crossways; parts of it looked like a chessboard and in other parts four colors had been sewn together in the form of dice, namely rose red, yellow, ash color and white. Such a dress must have caused much labor and was all patchwork."³⁶

That such a dress would have been extraordinary goes without saying; not only does the description mention simple patterns of squares and strips, it seems to reference the three-diamond pattern now known as Tumbling Blocks, while the combination of red, yellow, "ash" (grayish brown) and white must have made Katarina stand out even in the glittering throng assembled for a noble wedding.

Pieced clothing had reached the Low Countries about the time Katarina married into the Saxon ducal family. Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse, painted a servant wearing a pieced doublet into his 1510-1515 work "The Adoration of the Kings."³⁷ The servant stands just behind Baltasar and wears a doublet of green and white cloth, with broad bands of gold trim at the sleeves and neck. The doublet appears to be pieced of two different weaves of cloth, a smooth white and a texture green similar to a modern faille, with a pieced skirt of the textured green with yet another type of cloth in a blue gray.³⁸

A far more significant painter than Mabuse depicted pieced clothing in his work. In addition to the ubiquitous pieced hose in his paintings illustrating folk sayings, Pieter Brueghel the Elder included a jester in pieced motley in his morbidly great "Triumph of Death" (1568). Unlike most of the revelers in the painting, the jester is well aware of Death sweeping in from the left, and is shown diving under a table in a fruitless attempt to escape. His red and white pieced coat is as bright as a checked tablecloth in an Italian restaurant, and seemingly based on an actual garment; Brueghel carefully painted a separate binding on the edges of the side slits of the jester's coat, which scarcely would have been necessary with a patterned cloth as opposed to pieced fabric.³⁹

The most significant evidence of a patchwork tradition in pre-modern Europe emerged only within the last ten years. Although French needlework books claim that "mosaic work" was done as early as the 15th century, the first written reference to patchwork since *La Lai del Desire* was found in a French memoir of 1522.

³⁵ Prat, Veronique, tr. Michael Edwards. *The Great Collectors: Masterpieces from Private Collections*. New York: Tabard Press, 1990, 61.

³⁶ Kybalova, Ludmila, Olga Herbenova and Melina Lamorova, tr. Chaudea Rosou. *The Pictorial Encyclopedia of Fashion*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968.

³⁷ Sell, Shawn, "10 Great Places to See Artists' Passion for Christ," *USA Today*, Friday, April 9, 2004, p. 3D.

³⁸ Friedlander, Max J., tr. Cecil Gould. *Jan Gossaert (Mabuse): "The Adoration of the Kings" in the National Gallery, London*. London: Percy Lund Humphries & Co., Ltd., 1948, 16.

³⁹ Claessens, Bob, and Jeanne Rousseau. *Brueghel*. New York: Alpine Fine Arts, 1983, 231-232.



Phillipe de Vignuelles was born to a peasant family in 1471 and was apprenticed to a draper in Metz. By the time of his death in 1528, he had learned to draw, play an instrument, read and write (both poetry and prose), and was one of the richest and most respected bourgeois of Metz. He was also an expert needleworker thanks to his background as a draper.

De Vignuelles became ill in 1505 and lost the use of his legs for a time. He wrote his memoirs during this low point in his life as a way to pass the time. And being an intelligent and restless soul, he set out to show off his skill with the needle while exalting his beloved Metz.⁴⁰

The result was what had to have been one of the most astonishing pieces of needlework produced in the entire Renaissance, let alone France. His description of his masterwork cannot be bettered:

"In 1507, I, Phillipe, made a piece of needlework the like of which had never been seen;

it was a piece of cloth cut and sewn together, in which there were more than 8,000 pieces put and joined together, all on the bias and in wool, and it looked like a painting, it was so well done. In the center, there was a picture of Our Lady, Saint Katherine on her right, and Saint Barbara on her left. At the top were the coats of arms of the six Paraiges of Metz, and their names in Roman letters on each one. There were also the coats of arms of our Holy Father the Pope, of the Emperor on the right, and of the very Christian King on the left. Then, all around, there were the coats of arms of all the Lords of Metz, with several beautiful stitches of applied embroidery and braided in 'noux d'amour' of various kinds, each one different. Above the picture of our Lady, inscribed on the cloth itself in beautiful letters, there was the following prayer: (omitted)

"And in the middle of the cloth, at the very bottom, were two men, dressed as in the old days, holding a shield in which was my seal in letters and around which was drawn the inscription: 'Phillipe de Vignuelles made me.' And then, the date in letters and figures. And this piece was put and hung in front of the cathedral, on St. Mark's day, in the above year. Beside it, I put a poem that I, Phillipe, wrote and composed and it said (omitted)

"Under these verses...there was a long letter in prose, where I declared how and why this piece was made and that I, Phillipe, offered to give ten gold coins to anyone who dared undertake such a piece or even half of it. I was willing to offer such a sum to anyone in Metz, in the duchy of Bair and of Lorraine. And this poem, and this letter, and this piece were hung all day long on St. Mark's day of that year, in the Cathedral square, in the view of everyone and no one dared remove them or deposit a coin to take up the challenge."⁴¹

Court tapestries of the 15th and 16th centuries were elaborately woven textiles, frequently based on cartoons by the finest artists of their time. It is likely that de Vignuelles used his skills in patchwork (background), embroidery (faces and details), and appliqué (figures) to create his own version of a tapestry. He boasted that he would willingly "be cut in pieces" if anyone could match his work, and wrote a detailed explanation of exactly how he turned 8,000 pieces of bias cut wool into something as good as a painting. Unfortunately, neither the letter nor the banner seems to have survived, although textile historians can hope that the letter may eventually turn up in an archive in Metz.⁴²

⁴⁰ Janniere, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.



Regardless, Phillipe de Vignuelles has to be counted as one of the great needleworkers of his time. If he was working in an existing tradition, it is possible that other examples may have survived in local museums or churches that do not know what they have. If he invented bias-cut patchwork (most probably in the form of diamonds), then he was even more extraordinary a character he believed himself to be.

There are traces of a patchwork tradition in Scandinavia as well as continental Europe. Most medieval Scandinavian textiles were destroyed centuries ago, either by Viking raiders or zealous Protestants determined to root out all traces of "idolatry" from newly Lutheran churches. What remains seems to be mainly intarsia, or inlay work, a form of patchwork done primarily in wool. The surviving pieces are wall hangings and saddlecloths, not garments.

Patchwork quilts may or may not have been known in medieval Europe, but the skills to piece simple patterns certainly were. The pieced clothing of the late Renaissance had set the stage for the transition from pieced clothing to pieced bedclothes, which is exactly what seems to have happened. Silk patchwork was well established in northern Europe and the American colonies by the early 18th century, and was practiced by everyone from royalty to the burgeoning middle class. Empress Catherine I of Russia, wife of Peter the Great, pieced a silk coverlet in what we now call the Broken Dishes pattern for his oversized bed,⁴³ while the genteel inhabitants of Levens Hall in England pieced a set of finely made chintz bed hangings.⁴⁴ One early English silk patchwork, the McCord quilt of 1726, was pieced of fabrics carefully saved since the early 17th century!⁴⁵ And though patchwork patterns certainly reached their apogee during the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States and Canada, there is no trace of indigenous American patchwork until well into the 1780s, with the vast majority of patchwork patterns originating in the 19th and late 20th centuries.

Although there is no way to be certain, it's very possible that the origins of America's greatest contribution to needlework lie in a votive bag on the Silk Road, or a Crusader's countercharged banner. Phillippe de Vignuelle's letter surfaced only in the 1990s. Who knows what clues to the medieval patchwork tradition may wait in English country house attics, or obscure European museums?

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⁴⁴ Colby, Averil. *Patchwork*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 1985, 19.

⁴⁵ Beaudoin-Ross, Jacqueline, "An Early 18th Century Pieced Quilt in Montreal," in *Racar IV*, #2.



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