

Marie D. Webster

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By
Marie D. Webster



INDIANA WREATH

Made in 1858. Colours: red, green, yellow, and pink

INTRODUCTION

Although the quilt is one of the most familiar and necessary articles in our households, its story is yet to be told. In spite of its universal use and intimate connection with our lives, its past is a mystery which—at the most—can be only partially unravelled.

The quilt has a tradition of long centuries of slow but certain progress. Its story is replete with incidents of love and daring, of sordid pilferings and generous sacrifices. It has figured in many a thrilling episode. The same type of handiwork that has sheltered the simple peasant from wintry blasts has adorned the great halls of doughty warriors and noble kings. Humble maids, austere nuns, grand dames, and stately queens; all have shared in the fascination of the quilter's art and have contributed to its advancement. Cottage, convent, and castle; all have been enriched, at one time or another, by the splendours of patchwork and the pleasures of its making.

In its suitability for manufacture within the home, the quilt possesses a peculiar merit. Although exposed for a full century to the competition of machinery, under the depressing influence of which most of the fireside crafts have all but vanished, the making of quilts as a home industry has never languished. Its hold on the affections of womankind has never been stronger than it is to-day. As a homemaker, the quilt is a most capable tool lying ready at the hand of every woman. The selection of design, the care in piecing, the patience in quilting; all make for feminine contentment and domestic happiness.

There are more quilts being made at the present time—in the great cities as well as in the rural communities—than ever before, and their construction as a household occupation—and recreation—is steadily increasing in popularity. This should be a source of much satisfaction to

all patriotic Americans who believe that the true source of our nation's strength lies in keeping the family hearth flame bright.

As known to-day, the quilt is the result of combining two kinds of needlework, both of very ancient origin, but widely different in character. Patchwork—the art of piecing together fabrics of various kinds and colours or laying patches of one kind upon another, is a development of the primitive desire for adornment. Quilting—the method of fastening together layers of cloths in such a manner as to secure firmly the loose materials uniformly spread between them, has resulted from the need of adequate protection against rigorous climates. The piecing and patching provide the maker with a suitable field for the display of artistic ability, while the quilting calls for particular skill in handling the needle. The fusing of these two kinds of needlework into a harmonious combination is a task that requires great patience and calls for talent of no mean order.

To our grandmothers quilt making meant social pleasure as well as necessary toil, and to their grandmothers it gave solace during long vigils in pioneer cabins. The work of the old-time quilters possesses artistic merit to a very high degree. While much of it was designed strictly for utilitarian purposes—in fact, more for rugged service than display, yet the number of beautiful old quilts which these industrious ancestors have bequeathed to us is very large. Every now and then there comes to light one of these old quilts of the most exquisite loveliness, in which the needlework is almost painful in its exactness. Such treasures are worthy of study and imitation, and are deserving of careful preservation for the inspiration of future generations of quilters.

To raise in popular esteem these most worthy products of home industry, to add to the appreciation of their history and traditions, to give added interest to the hours of labour which their construction involves, to present a few of the old

masterpieces to the quilters of to-day; such is the purpose of this book of quilts.

Marion, Indiana

March 18, 1915.

CHAPTER I

Patchwork in Antiquity

THE origin of the domestic arts of all nations is shrouded in mystery. Since accurate dates cannot be obtained, traditional accounts must be accepted. The folklore of any country is always exceedingly interesting and generally has a few kernels of fact imbedded somewhere in its flowers of legend, although some of our most familiar household objects are not even mentioned by tradition. Spinning and weaving, however, are very generously treated in the mythology and folklore of all nations. Nearly every race has some legend in which claim is made to the discovery of these twin arts.

In Biblical lore Naa-mah, a sister of Tubal Cain, belonging to the seventh generation after Cain, is said to have invented both spinning and weaving. This tradition is strengthened by the assertions of some historians that the Phrygians were the oldest of races, since their birthplace was in Armenia, which in turn is credited with having the Garden of Eden within its boundaries. The Chinese also can advance very substantial claims that primeval man was born with eyes aslant. They at least have a fixed date for the invention of the loom. This was in 2640 b. c. by Lady of Si-Ling, the wife of a famous emperor, Huang-ti.

The Egyptians who, according to their traditions, sprung from the soil, and who despised the Greeks for their late coming into the human arena, were probably quite as ancient as the Phrygians. It is known positively that in the wonderful valley of the Nile there has lived for more than six thousand years a race remarkable for its inventive faculties and the developing of the industrial arts. In the first dawn of human progress, while his nomadic neighbours roamed carefree about him, the Egyptian toiled steadily, and left the records of his achievements beside his God, the Nile.



SECTION OF FUNERAL TENT OF AN EGYPTIAN QUEEN

Made in a patchwork of coloured goatskins



OLD ENGLISH APPLIQUÉ

Figure of a knight on horseback. Thirteenth century

When investigating any subject, the ability to see the actual thing itself is more helpful than pages of description. In Egypt are preserved for us thousands of wonderful tombs which serve as storehouses of facts concerning the early civilization of this land. The mummy wrappings reveal very distinctly the development of the textiles and decorative arts. The Egyptians, since the earliest historical times, were always celebrated for their manufacture of linen, cotton, and woollen cloths, and the products of their looms were eagerly sought by surrounding nations. The fine linen and embroidered work, yarns and woollen fabrics of both upper and lower Egypt, were held in the highest esteem.

Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson, in his history of "Ancient Egypt," tells of their knowledge of dyeing and of the nature of the fabrics found in the tombs: "The quantity of linen manufactured and used in Egypt was very great; and, independent of that made up into articles of dress, the numerous wrappers required for enveloping the mummies, both of men and animals, show how large a supply must have been kept ready for the constant demand at home as well as for that of the foreign market."

"The actual experiments made, with the aid of powerful microscopes ... on the nature of the fibres of linen and cotton threads, have shown that the former invariably present a cylindrical form, transparent, and articulated, or joined like a cane, while the latter offer the appearance of a flat riband, with a hem or border at each edge; so that there is no possibility of mistaking the fibres of either, except, perhaps, when the cotton is in an unripe state, and the flattened shape of the centre is less apparent. The results having been found similar in every instance, and the structure of the fibres thus unquestionably determined, the threads of mummy cloths were submitted to the same test, and no exception was found to their being linen, nor were they even a mixture of linen and cotton."

“Another very remarkable discovery of the Egyptians was the use of mordants. They were acquainted with the effect of acids on colour, and submitted the cloth they dyed to one of the same processes adopted in our modern manufactories; and while, from his account, we perceive how little Pliny understood the process he was describing, he at the same time gives us the strongest evidence of its truth.”



FIFTH CENTURY APPLIQUÉ



ARMENIAN PATCHWORK

Illustrating the story of St. George and the dragon, and other Christian subjects "In Egypt," he says, "they stain cloths in a wonderful manner. They take them in their original state, quite white, and imbue them, not with a dye, but with certain drugs which have the power of absorbing and taking colour. When this is done, there is still no appearance of change in the cloths; but so soon as they are dipped into a bath of the pigment, which has been prepared for the purpose, they are taken out properly coloured. The singular thing is, that though the bath contains only one colour, several hues are imparted to the piece, these changes depending on the natures of the drug employed; nor can the colour be afterward washed off; and surely if the bath had many colours in it, they must have presented a confused appearance on the cloth."

The ability of the Egyptians to have a variety of colours for use in their embroideries and patchworks contributed much to the beauty of these arts.

Embroidery in various forms, applied to all sorts of objects, was commonly practised throughout ancient Egypt, and the Israelites, at the time of the Exodus, carried their knowledge of the textile arts with them to India. Ezekiel in chapter twenty-seven, verse seven, in telling of the glories of Tyre, says: "Of fine linen with brodered work Egypt was thy sail, that it might be to thee for an ensign." In "De Bello Judaico," by Flavius Josephus, another reference is made to ancient needlework:

"When Herod the Great rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem nineteen years before our era, he was careful not to omit in the decoration of the sanctuary the marvels of textile art which had been the chief embellishment of the tabernacle during the long wanderings in the desert. Before the doors of the most sacred place he hung a Babylonian tapestry fifty cubits high by sixteen wide: azure and flax, scarlet and purple were blended in it with admirable art and rare ingenuity, for these represented the various elements. Scarlet signified fire; linen, the earth; azure, the air; and purple, the sea. These meanings were derived in two instances from similarity of colour: in the other two from their origin, the earth yielding linen and the sea purple. The whole range of the heavens, except the signs, was wrought upon this veil or hanging. The porticos were also enriched with many coloured tapestries ornamented with purple flowers."

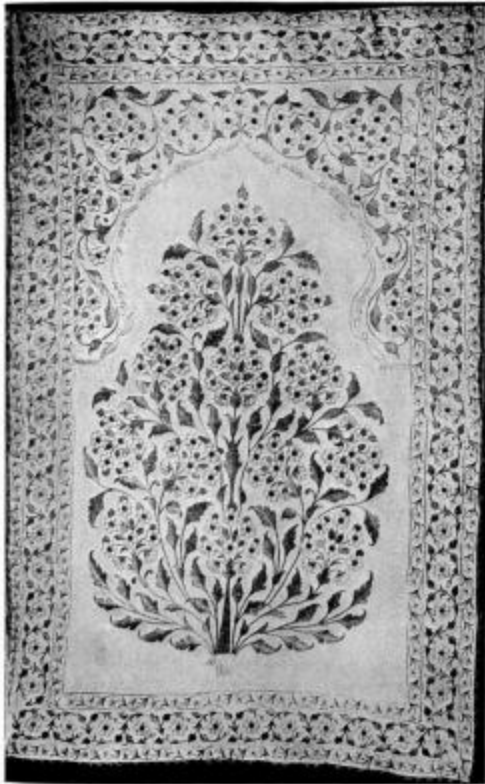
There is very meagre information concerning the character and style of tapestry in Egypt during the rule of the Pharaohs. MM. Perrot and Chipiex, in their "Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité," publish a painting containing a hanging of purely ornamental design formed of circles, triangles, and palm leaves reversed. Wilkinson describes an Egyptian hanging—an original, not a reproduction—found in an English collection: "In the centre, on a green ground, stands a boy in white, with a goose beside him; and around this centre a border of red and blue lines; then white figures

on a yellow ground; again blue lines and red ornaments; and lastly red, white, and blue embroideries." This is a very ancient example of true applied work combined with embroidery. In the Psalms it is said that Pharaoh's daughter shall be brought to the king in a raiment of needlework and that "her clothing is of wrought gold."

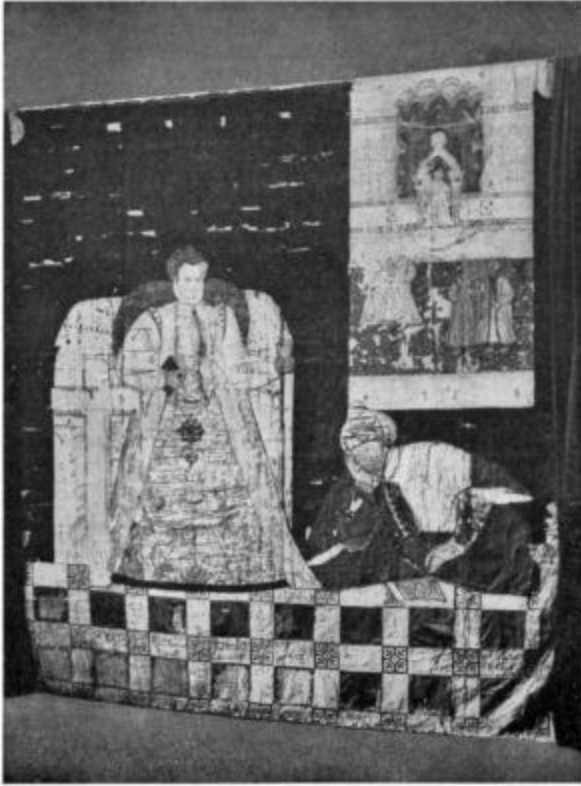
The huge columns, bas-reliefs, and the various architectural details of the early Egyptian buildings were all decorated in vivid colours. The interiors of their temples were also covered with gayly coloured scenes which have preserved for us a most extensive knowledge of their life and customs. Their mummy cases were painted in the most brilliant hues, and often the wrappings of the mummies themselves bore brightly coloured portraits of the deceased. Since the Egyptians lived in an atmosphere of brilliant colour, with ever-shining sun, the bluest of skies, and the purple glow of the desert always before them, it is not surprising that they used their brushes with lavish hand. Every plane surface called for ornamentation, whether on temple or shroud. Their pigments, both mineral and vegetable, were remarkable for their permanence.

The crude and childish way in which the Egyptians applied their paint in distinct patches would lead one to believe that patchwork was included in their earliest needlework, even if no actual proof existed. But all nations have at some period used the needle to copy the masterpieces of great artists. The English, as a typical example of this spirit of imitation, sought on a background of cloth of gold to embroider the saints from the canvas of Fra Angelico. Also the French, in the manufacture of their tapestries, copied the works of many of the old masters. Positive proof of the existence of patchwork, or as some choose to call it, "applied work," in Egypt at a very early period is found on a robe belonging to an early sovereign. This article of apparel was of linen and, in general design, resembled a modern apron. According to Wilkinson, it was

“richly ornamented in front with lions’ heads and other devices, probably of coloured leather; and the border was formed of a row of asps, the emblem of royalty. Sometimes the royal name with an asp on each side was embroidered upon it.”



PERSIAN QUILTED LINEN BATH CARPET
Seventeenth century



OLD ENGLISH HANGING WITH APPLIQUÉ FIGURES

The most ancient example of patchwork is a coloured gazelle hide presented in the Museum of Cairo. The colours of the different pieces of skin are bright pink, deep golden yellow, pale primrose, bluish green, and pale blue. This patchwork served as the canopy or pall of an Egyptian queen about the year 960 b. c. She was the mother-in-law of Shishak, who besieged and captured Jerusalem shortly after the death of Solomon. On its upper border this interesting specimen has repeated scarabs, cartouches with inscriptions, discs, and serpents. The lower border has a central device of radiating lotus flowers; this is flanked by two narrow panels with cartouches; beyond these are two gazelles facing toward the lotus device. Next to the gazelles on each side is a curious detail consisting of two oddly shaped ducks, back to back; then come the two outer compartments of the border, each of which enclose a winged beetle, or scarabæus, bearing a disc or emblem of the sun. The other main division of the field is spotted in

regular order with open blossom forms. There is decided order in the repetition and arrangement of these details, which gives a rather stiff and formal look to the whole design.

To-day Egyptians are making patchwork that is undoubtedly a development of the very art practised in the days of Ptolemy, Rameses, and Cleopatra. They do not use their patchwork to adorn quilts, since these are unknown in the warm Nile valley, but as covers for cushions, panels for screens, and decorations suitable for wall hangings. Generally but two kinds of material are employed in its construction: a rather loosely woven cotton cloth, and a firm, coarse linen. The cottons used are all gayly dyed in plain colours, and the linens are in the natural shades, with perhaps a slight mixture of white. The patchwork designs are typically Egyptian, many pieces being covered with replicas of paintings found on tombs and temples. These paintings are copied as faithfully in colour as in design, even the hieroglyphics being exactly reproduced, and altogether make very striking and effective decorations.



MODERN EGYPTIAN PATCHWORK
Four cushion covers

