



PLATE XLVII

DETAIL OF AN ENGLISH VESTMENT PRESERVED IN THE VATICAN.  
FROM "ENGLISH MEDIEVAL EMBROIDERY," BY A. G. I. CHRISTIE.

## BOOK REVIEWS

ENGLISH MEDIEVAL EMBROIDERY. By A. G. I. Christie. A brief survey from the beginning of the tenth century until the end of the fourteenth, with a descriptive catalogue of the surviving examples. With 160 plates, two in color, and 153 illustrations in the text. Folio, cloth, 1938.

This is a truly monumental work on one of the great arts of the middle ages, of which too few examples remain. These examples of the *Opus Anglicanum*, however, are not found only in England, but were so well known and appreciated, especially during the time known as their Great Period (1250 to 1350), that they were much desired as precious gifts from kings and prelates to cathedrals and churches all over Europe.

Although many of those that remain have now been gathered into museums, where their conservation is perhaps more assured, even if their surroundings are more prosaic, many are still in the sacristies of ancient and remote churches as well as in great cathedrals.

It is therefore fortunate that such a careful and complete record of these precious works of art has been made while yet there remain some that may be doomed to destruction in this turbulent modern world.

Mrs. Christie has made a careful study of the history of the art as far as it can be known. She cites medieval documents of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries which mention names of ancient embroiderers, records of purchases and quotations from inventories such as those of the Vatican and other great ecclesiastical treasuries like Canterbury or St. Paul's Cathedral.

Her descriptive catalogue begins with the Anglo-Saxon embroidery known as St. Cuthbert's stole, now preserved at Durham Cathedral, and made, according to the inscription worked on it, for Bishop Fridestan at the order of Queen Ælflæd, wife of Edward the Elder. It must have been worked before the year 916, as the Queen died in that year. For intricate and skilful workmanship, and careful use of precious material, this stole could not be surpassed at any period.



DRAWING BY A. G. I. CHRISTIE, FROM  
"ENGLISH MEDIEVAL EMBROIDERY." FIG. 12.

According to Mrs. Christie, this work "reveals what exquisite needlework was being produced in England before the Norman invasion," and proves a previous long-standing tradition. She adds: "It can scarcely be doubted that the Norman conquest was a disaster to Anglo-Saxon art; the existing embroideries of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, although interesting, show a distinct decline in ability when compared with the earlier work." Her greatest emphasis, however, is laid on the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when the art had risen again to its greatest importance and when these English copes and other vestments were among the most highly prized treasures in many parts of Europe. When one thinks of the two marvelous copes still in the little medieval church of St. Bertrand de Comminges (in the foothills of the Pyrenees), to which they were given by the Pope Clement V in 1305, or the group of vestments in the ancient Cathedral of Anagni where they have been since the time of Benedetto Cætani who became Pope Boniface VIII in 1294, one reflects with awe at the survival of these precious and perishable treasures.

Mrs. Christie's lifelong study of ancient needlework has made it possible for her to analyze intricate and laborious techniques, and her very clear style of drawing both for details of design and as diagrams of stitches, add greatly to the understanding and appreciation of the plates.

In beauty and perfection of technique the ecclesiastical embroidery produced by the master craftsmen of the Middle Ages has never been surpassed and the Club is indeed proud to number among its members an author whose valuable work on the subject is so notable a contribution to the history of medieval art.

PERSIAN TEXTILES AND THEIR TECHNIQUE. By Nancy Andrews Reath<sup>1</sup> and Eleanor B. Sachs. Yale University Press, New Haven, Oxford University Press, London. 1937.

This important volume marks a long step forward in the solution of the perplexing question of provenience in the history of Near Eastern textile fabrics.

Published by the Yale University Press, the volume is an attractive piece of book-making and its enlightening text and explanatory diagrams

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<sup>1</sup> It is to be regretted that Miss Reath did not live to see the book published. Her thorough and conscientious work can ill be spared in a field of such widening interest.

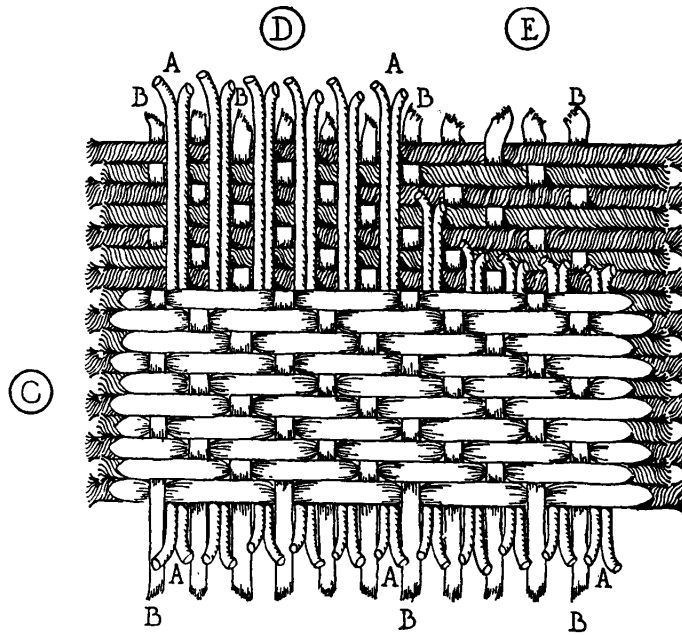


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE TECHNIQUE OF A PLAIN COMPOUND TWILL,  
FROM "PERSIAN TEXTILES AND THEIR TECHNIQUE."

- A. INNER WARPS, WHICH NEVER APPEAR ON THE FACE OR BACK OF THE FABRIC, BUT LIE BETWEEN. A PAIR OF INNER WARPS MAY BE SEEN NEXT EACH MAIN WARP, B.
- B. MAIN WARPS, WHICH BIND THE WEFTS ON BOTH FACE AND BACK.
- C. SECTION OF FABRIC INTACT, SHOWING TWILL WEAVE MADE BY MAIN WARPS AND WEFTS; THE INNER WARPS ARE HIDDEN BY THE WEFTS.
- D. SECTION WITH SURFACE WEFT THREADS REMOVED, SHOWING POSITION OF INNER WARPS WITHIN THE FABRIC.
- E. SECTION WITH SURFACE WEFTS AND INNER WARPS BOTH REMOVED, SHOWING EXTRA WEFTS CARRIED ON THE BACK AND BOUND BY THE MAIN WARP.

will well repay the serious attention of all interested in the fascinating art of weaving.

In planning this work it was not possible, nor was it the purpose of the authors, to include in the study every known piece of importance—such a complete survey it is hoped will be included in the forthcoming publication of the American Institute of Iranian Art and Archæology—but it was their aim to discover, if possible, in a carefully selected group of fabrics chosen from Museums and private collections, the characteristics of Persian textiles by a scientific analysis of the weaves produced in that country from the Sasanian through the Safavid periods; and the ninety-four pieces chosen amply illustrate the technical features under discussion.

Most of the Persian weaves that have survived to this day are of silk, although a few rare fragments of complicated texture and showing strong resemblance to certain early medieval silk textiles<sup>2</sup> are of cotton and wool, a heavy material such as might have been used for the trousers of huntsmen. In the analytic study of the silk weaves it was found by comparing them with textiles from other countries that certain types persisted in Persia throughout all periods and that the remarkable results attained by the skilled craftsmen of the Near East were due to their ability and ingenuity in developing only a few types; as for instance a compound twill and a compound cloth, two weaves that were in constant use from the Sasanian period to the nineteenth century; and two other weaves—double cloth and compound satin—which first appeared in the Seljuk period and continued through the later centuries.

It was, however, in the sumptuous Safavid silks of the seventeenth century that the looms of Persia surpassed all others in the beauty and intricacy of their weaves, fabrics of gold and silver texture reflecting all the pomp and splendor that then prevailed in the court of an Oriental potentate. These weaves, as stated in the chapter devoted to distinctive types, “exemplify in a striking manner the continuation and development in Persia of early weaves, since they are fundamentally of the same structure as the compound twills and compound cloths of the Sasanian and Seljuk periods. The basic form of weave, with the inner warp construction, is identical, although an entirely different effect is produced in the later pieces by the use of metal thread and by brocading.”

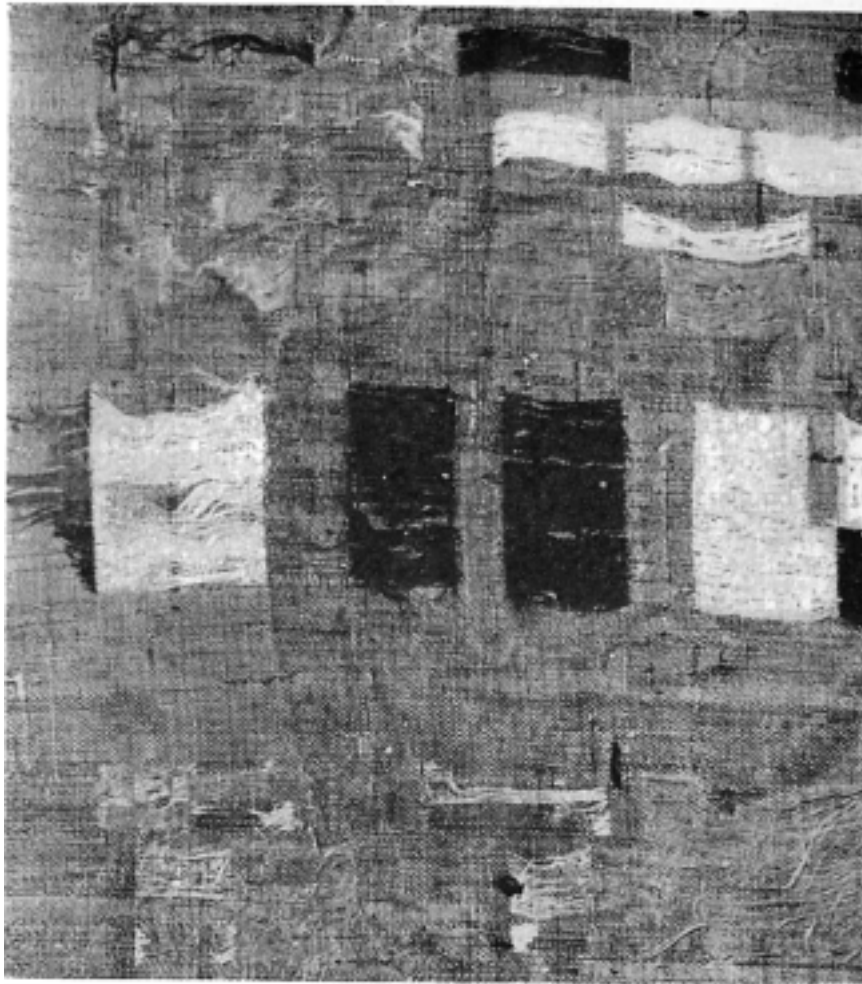
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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lamm, Carl Johan: *Cotton in Medieval Textiles of the Far East*, Paris, 1937, p. 17 ff.



FRAGMENT.

PLAIN COMPOUND TWILL, SASANIAN PERIOD, V CENTURY.  
PLATE 45 IN "PERSIAN TEXTILES AND THEIR TECHNIQUE."



DETAIL OF THE BACK.  
SHOWING FLOATED PATTERN WEFTS.  
PLAIN COMPOUND TWILL, SASANIAN PERIOD, V CENTURY.  
PLATE 45A IN "PERSIAN TEXTILES AND THEIR TECHNIQUE."



These few references to the technical value of the work indicate the thorough and painstaking effort involved in its preparation. As to the illustrations the order followed in the arrangement of the plates corresponds to the classification developed by Miss Reath from an article on weaving by Thomas William Fox, published in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a classification now used in most of the large museums.

Among the early silks reproduced are those from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the famous Gryphon piece; the winged horse fragment from the Musée Guimet; and the precious elephant fabric woven in Khorassan in the tenth century preserved in the Louvre. Of the several treasures from the Museo Cristiano, perhaps the one illustrated herewith is the most important feature of the book for it enables one to see the front and for first time the reverse of the famous cock piece<sup>3</sup> familiar to all students. Other documents from this noted collection are the well-known fragment showing the Sasanian duck-like bird motif holding in its beak a scrolling branch while a second piece is important from a weaving point of view as it shows on the flank of a large animal motif a disk in which an intermediate tone is produced by the use of alternating wefts—a complicated technique clarified by the application of a scientific analysis of the weave. This was made possible, thanks to the cooperation of the Vatican officials, through whose courtesy the precious fabrics here described were made available for study, a study that is now fortunately recorded.

The work which reflects able scholarship combined with patient perseverance and a keenly appreciative art sense, is a valuable addition to the bibliography of textiles.

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<sup>3</sup> Another fabric of this pattern is preserved in the Hermitage Collection.