

A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE PLACE OF ICELANDIC
MEDIAEVAL COUCHED EMBROIDERIES IN
EUROPEAN NEEDLEWORK

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EUROPEAN NEEDLEWORK

by

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE PLACE OF ICELANDIC
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study was concerned with a group of little known embroideries, the laid and couched ecclesiastical embroideries of mediaeval Iceland, attempting through analysis of technique and comparison of design to determine their place in European needlework of the middle ages. Special studies of these embroideries, valuable but of limited aspects, were made by Wandel¹ and Kalf,² while Engelstad³ and Digby⁴ referred to them for comparison in their work on, respectively, Norwegian mediaeval wall hangings and the Bayeux tapestry. No comprehensive study of the embroideries was available, and it was,

¹Gertie Wandel, "To Broderede Billedtaepper og Deres Islandske Oprindelse," Fra Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark (Kobenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1941), pp. 71-82.

²E. J. Kalf, "Een Interessant Borduursel in het Rijksmuseum Twenthe," Textilhistorische Bijdragen, 1:50-70, 1959.

³Helen Engelstad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld; Middelalderens Billedtaepper i Norge (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1952), 117 pp.

⁴George Wingfield Digby, "Technique and Production," The Bayeux Tapestry. Frank Stenton, editor. (New York: Phaidon Publishers Inc., 1956), pp. 37-55.

therefore, necessary to collect basic data for a thorough description of the group, if the purpose of this paper were to be achieved.

The embroideries, twelve in all, the dates of which are believed to range from the 13th century to the middle of the 16th century, are kept today in the National Museum in Reykjavik, the National Museum in Copenhagen, the Cluny Museum in Paris and the State Museum in Enschede, Holland. They form a natural group for study, since all were worked in the same general technique with only slight variations in the complementary stitching. They also form the largest single group within the mediaeval embroideries of Iceland, comprising perhaps more than half of all the embroideries still extant from that period.⁵ This alone, while rendering them

⁵Other Icelandic mediaeval embroideries known to this author are eight in all. Of these, five are altar frontals, four of which are in the National Museum in Reykjavik (inventory numbers 1997, 2371, 4797, and 10885) and one in the National Museum in Copenhagen (inventory number 15313, 1855). They are all worked predominantly in darning stitch with the exception of one which is appliqued. Besides these there are in the National Museum in Reykjavik an altar cloth worked in outline stitch, and a burse worked in chain stitch (inventory numbers 2028 and 11008); and the National Museum in Copenhagen possesses another Icelandic burse (listed in the inventory as number 909, 1813) which appears to be worked in split stitch.

Two other Icelandic embroideries could belong to the mediaeval period but are of uncertain date. One is an altar frontal in the National Museum in Reykjavik (inventory number 3552) referred to in the museum catalogue merely as being old. The other, also an altar frontal, is in the National Museum in Copenhagen (inventory number ~~15313, 1855~~) and has been dated there 16th or 17th century. Both these embroideries were worked in darning stitch.

interesting to the native Icelander, might not, however, suffice to make a study aimed at foreign readers worthwhile were it not for the fact that they were worked in the laid and couched technique (refilsaumur) of the Bayeux tapestry, a technique rarely found on embroideries of the mediaeval period. Apart from the Icelandic group of embroideries⁶ and the Bayeux tapestry, there are known fragments of only three Norwegian mediaeval embroideries done in this technique, the largest of which is dated as being from about 1200.⁷

In order to realize the objectives of this study it appeared feasible to touch briefly upon the history of mediaeval Iceland, its culture and its relation to foreign countries. Documents, for the most part church inventories, were searched for information regarding couched embroideries, in an attempt to establish their number and their distribution within the country.

Before proceeding to describe the embroideries, it was found necessary to define clearly the terminology to be used with regard to embroidery stitches. Each piece of embroidery was then described in as great detail as the available data

⁶Two Icelandic laid and couched embroideries, not included in this study because of their late date (17th century), are shown and described briefly in the appendix (pp.161, 162, Figures 78, 79; p.163 , Figure 80.)

⁷Engelstad, op. cit., pp. 80-82, 100-101.

allowed. The pieces in the National Museum in Reykjavik and the two small fragments of the church hanging⁸ in the National Museum in Copenhagen were examined in the hand. The other embroideries in Copenhagen could be examined only through the glass of their cases in the museum. For information on the two embroideries kept in the Cluny Museum and the Museum in Enschede, secondary sources had to be relied upon entirely since there was no opportunity to see them. Upon the completion of the description of the Icelandic pieces, related embroideries of other countries were mentioned and described briefly.

In the discussion which followed, findings on the possible origin and diffusion of laid and couched work in mediaeval times were examined. The Icelandic embroideries were compared among themselves and to related foreign embroideries as to material, technique, and design. Similarities in design shared by the Icelandic embroideries and foreign mediaeval art in general were pointed out and discussed.

The author is aware that the study here presented is not as inclusive as the material warrants.⁹ It is presented, however, in the hope that it may prove of use in future studies

⁸Cf. Figure 11, p. 30.

⁹For example, the basic work on Swedish mediaeval embroidery by Branting and Lindblom could not be obtained.

of historic embroidery by making more readily available information about the laid and couched embroideries of mediaeval Iceland.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In studying the Icelandic laid and couched embroideries of the middle ages and attempting to find their place among European embroideries, it is of importance to examine the various influences introduced into Iceland during that period. These furnish clues to, or evidence of, possible relationships between Icelandic and foreign embroideries whether in the nature of design, technique or material employed in their production. The following, therefore, is a brief account of the various connections Iceland had with the rest of Europe during mediaeval times, giving first some highlights of the history of the country and adding notes concerning native art and artists of the period.

Iceland was settled largely from Norway in the period from 874 to about 930 A.D. At that time the first republic was established, lasting until 1262, when the Icelanders submitted to the king of Norway. Iceland remained under Norwegian rule until about 1380, when together with Norway it became subject to the Danish Crown. Acquiring partial autonomy in 1918, it was not until 1944 that Iceland gained complete independence from Denmark with the establishment of the second republic.

Christianity was adopted as a state religion in Iceland in the year 1000. A bishopric for the country was established

in 1056 at Skalholt; a second bishopric for northern Iceland was founded at Holar in 1106. Iceland remained catholic until the middle of the 16th century, but since 1550, when the last catholic bishop was ^{executed} beheaded, the state church has been Lutheran. The date 1550 marks the termination of the middle ages in Iceland.

It is generally considered that the majority of the settlers of Iceland were from Norway; others came for the most part from the Scottish isles and Ireland. Scholars do not agree on the extent of Celtic racial and cultural influences in Iceland; evidence from customs, language, and racial traits, however, point to a considerable admixture of Celtic blood in that of the early Icelanders.¹

There were several channels through which foreign influences might and did reach Iceland during the middle ages. One of these was through trade and travel. At first the Icelanders owned ships themselves on which they crossed to Norway, the British isles, and the Continent to seek fame and fortune, as it was called, i.e., to trade, to obtain admittance to the courts of kings or nobles, or to take part in viking raids. Travels abroad of this kind were at that time considered part of the necessary education of young men

¹Knut Gjerset, History of Iceland (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), pp. 23-26.

Jon Johannesson, Islendinga Saga (two volumes; Reykjavik: Almenna Bokafelagid, 1956, 1958), I, pp. 27-38.

of quality. From the early 11th century, i.e. with the advent of Christianity, young adventuresome Icelanders also joined the Varangian guard in Constantinople and, later the armies of the Crusades.²

With no lumber for shipbuilding available in the country, the acquiring of new ships was difficult, and by the 12th century the Icelanders had all but ceased owning ships.³ They became almost entirely dependent upon others for supplying their country with necessary tradegoods as well as for passage to and from the country. For the remainder of the middle ages only a very few Icelanders owned ships. According to annals of the 13th and 14th centuries, as well as later sources, the bishoprics of Skalholt and Holar each owned one ship for part of the time at least; only three chieftains were known to have been shipowners between 1412 and 1547.⁴

Until the beginning of the 15th century the Icelanders traded primarily with Norway and Norwegian merchants, although there are records of some direct trade with England and the Continent during the 11th and 12th centuries.⁵ Evidence of direct trade with England during the 13th century was not found,

²Johannesson, op. cit., I, p. 188.

³Ibid., I, pp. 118-119. ⁴Ibid., II, pp. 152-153; 185.

⁵Diplomatarium Islandicum (Copenhagen and Reykjavik: Hid Islenzka Bokmenntafelag, 1857-), I, p. 481. This reference is hereafter referred to as D. I.; Johannesson, op. cit., I, pp. 368, 388.

but it might be noted that all through that century as well as earlier, trade flourished between England and Norway.⁶

At the beginning of the 15th century English merchants began to sail to Iceland to trade.⁷ The German (Hanseatic) merchants who during the previous century had bought Icelandic export goods (mainly dried fish and fish oil) through Norway (Bergen), soon followed suit.⁸ The trade in Iceland during the 15th and the early 16th century thus became quite lively, with even a few Dutch merchants entering into the picture.⁹ The English continued to trade in Iceland in the early 16th century, but the German (Hamburg) merchants steadily gained power, and during the first half of the century Hamburg was the center of connections with Iceland.¹⁰ In 1547, however, the king granted the city of Copenhagen permission to trade with Iceland, in an effort to curb the power of the Germans. This action marked the beginning of the decline of the Hanseatic trade in Iceland.¹¹

⁶Aron Andersson, English Influences in Norwegian and Swedish Figure Sculpture in Wood 1220-1270 (Stockholm: no publisher, 1949), p. 98.

Johannesson, op. cit., I, pp. 373-387.

Cf. also p. 113, note 13.

⁷Johannesson, op. cit., II, p. 152.

⁸Ibid., pp. 139, 152.

⁹Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹Ibid., p. 184; Arnor Sigurjonsson, Islendingasaga (Akureyri: Thorsteinn M. Jonsson, 1948), p. 146.

Directly and indirectly the catholic church must be considered the major factor in bringing foreign influences into Iceland during the middle ages. In the late 10th century missionary efforts were carried out at various times by four missionaries, two of whom were Icelanders who had traveled extensively abroad and received baptism; the other two were of German origin, a missionary bishop and a priest. The main power behind the Christianization of Iceland was, however, the Norwegian king, Olaf Tryggvason.¹² In order to aid the struggling Christians his successor, Olaf Haraldsson (Saint Olaf), sent an English bishop to Iceland,¹³ probably around 1020.¹⁴ In the early days of Christianity the few priests in Iceland were all foreigners, and till the end of the seventh decade of the 11th century a number of foreign missionary bishops, English, Irish, and German found their way to Iceland.¹⁵ They brought with them varied foreign influences. In the earlier part of the 11th century English influences predominated within the church although little by little they were in some instances superceded by German influences.¹⁶

From the founding of the bishoprics until 1238, the bishops of Iceland were Icelandic, elected by Icelandic

¹²Gjerset, op. cit., pp. 49-62.

¹³Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹⁴Johannesson, op. cit., I, p. 169.

¹⁵Ibid., I, pp. 169-72.

¹⁶Ibid., I, pp. 172-73.

chieftains and clergy. After 1238 and until about 1380 the bishops of Iceland were elected by the archbishop and the cathedral chapter in Nidaros in Norway,¹⁷ while from about 1380 to the middle of the 15th century the pope appointed the bishops.¹⁸ From 1238 to 1380 there were eight Norwegian bishops in Iceland as compared to six Icelandic. During the period from 1380 to about 1450 Skalholt had one bishop each from Norway, England, Holland, Germany, and Iceland, besides four Danish bishops. At the same time at Holar there were three English and two Norwegian bishops.¹⁹ From then on, to the end of the middle ages, the Icelanders were again permitted to elect their own bishops, during which period all bishops, with the exception of two from Norway, were natives.²⁰

As Christianity established itself in Iceland it became customary to go abroad to study at the European universities. In the earlier middle ages, i.e., the 11th and 12th centuries, such travels were not limited to bishops and higher ecclesiastics but included also monks and laymen, who later devoted their learning and ability to teaching and writing in the monasteries or on their estates.²¹ Some studied in Germany,

¹⁷Johannesson, op. cit., II, pp. 110-13.

¹⁸Ibid., II, p. 115.

¹⁹Ibid., II, p. 114.

²⁰Loc. cit.

²¹Gjerset, op. cit., p. 133.

France, and England, some perhaps in other countries.²²

Most, if not all, the bishops of Icelandic nationality had studied abroad, often for many years, and some even in more than one country. The first bishops at Skalholt and Holar organized schools at the bishops' seats.²³

During the times of the foreign bishops the custom of studying abroad ceased, to be revived only in the latter part of the 15th century.²⁴ The foreign bishops, as a rule, took little interest in the education of the clergy, even to the extent that the cathedral schools were closed for long periods of time, the school at Skalholt from 1236 to 1491 and the school at Holar for several decades during the 13th century.²⁵ Fortunately the schools at some of the monasteries remained open, giving instruction for both clergy and laymen.²⁶

As elsewhere during the middle ages, the Icelandic monasteries were centers of culture, learning, and artistic activity, and played an important part in diffusing foreign influences. Ten monasteries and two convents were established, the first in 1133, the last in 1493.²⁷ They followed either

²²Johannesson, op. cit., p. 187.

²³Gjerset, op. cit., pp. 66, 68.

²⁴Ibid., p. 252.

²⁵Loc. cit.

²⁶Johannesson, op. cit., I, p. 235.

²⁷The monasteries were the following: Thingeyrar (1133), Munkathvera (1155), Hitardalur (about 1168), Thykkvibaer (1168), Helgafell (1184), Keldur (late 12th century), Saurbaer (about 1200), and Skrida (1493). The convents were these: Kirkjubaer (1186) and Reynistadur (1296). Cf. Johannesson, op. cit., I, pp. 228-36.

the Benedictine or the Augustinian rule. None of the Icelandic monasteries was directly connected with foreign houses, but abbots and monks might travel abroad, and sources relate instances where foreign monks and nuns entered monasteries and convents in Iceland.²⁸ The monasteries at Thingeyri, Thykkvibaer, and Helgafell were most renowned as centers of learning.²⁹

Still another important link wrought by the church between mediaeval Iceland and continental Europe was the pilgrimages, which became popular at an early date. Pilgrimages were made to various shrines in Europe such as the shrine of Santiago of Compostella or the grave of St. Thomas a Beckett at Canterbury, or to Rome, Constantinople, and even to Jerusalem. The pilgrims traveled either through France or Germany and found lodgings in religious houses along the way.³⁰ Thus for instance thirteen Icelandic pilgrims, men and women, apparently stopped at the monastery at Reichenau on the Rhine in the 12th century.³¹ In the 12th century also the abbot of Thvera monastery had a guide written for pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. Pilgrimages are mentioned in sources from the 13th century as well as the 14th and 15th centuries.³²

²⁸Ibid., I, p. 231; D.I. IV, p. 603.

²⁹Gjerset, op. cit., p. 253; Johannesson, op. cit., I, p. 229.

³⁰Johannesson, op. cit., I, p. 188. ³¹Loc. cit.

³²Gjerset, op. cit., pp. 176, 194-95, 250-51.

Inventories and extant ornaments from Icelandic churches of mediaeval times provide evidence that all through the period great importance was placed upon decorating the churches and providing fine vestments for the clergy. These ornaments were both Icelandic and foreign, and there can be no doubt that the imports served the native artists as inspiration and models. The Icelandic artists of the middle ages seem predominantly to have been clerics, monks or priests, working in the monasteries or under the patronage of the bishops, although lay artists are also mentioned.³³ Thus a saga of an Icelandic bishop tells of a priest decorating with paintings the ceiling and gable of a new bell tower at Skalholt about the year 1200,³⁴ and of his contemporary, a renowned carver of wood and walrusbone, who was the wife of a priest at the same bishop's seat.³⁵

In another bishop's saga a cleric of the first half of the 14th century is mentioned as having been proficient in both goldsmithing and engraving as well as drawing,³⁶ while documents from the same time reveal the existence of a lay

³³Matthias Thordarson, "Islands Middelalderkunst," Konst. Nordisk Kultur XXVII, Haakon Shetelig, editor (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Forlag, 1931), p. 336.

Halldor Hermannsson, Icelandic Illuminated Manuscripts (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1935), p. 14.

³⁴Thordarson, "Islands Middelalderkunst," op. cit., p. 336.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 229-30.

³⁶Sigfus Blondal and Sigurdur Sigtryggsson, Alt-Island im Bilde (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1930), p. xi.

Lactinius saga.

[Sj' lika Nijs annal 1405: Vilcliu bps.]

artist who worked as an illuminator and painter in both Iceland and Norway.³⁷ The illumination of *Flateyjarbok*, one of the finest extant Icelandic manuscripts (cf. Figure 52, p.117) is known to have been executed by a certain priest toward the end of the 14th century.³⁸ There also exists an Icelandic sketchbook from the first half of the 15th century, believed to have been the work of a cleric, perhaps a monk. This book contains models for illuminations, paintings, engravings and embroideries.³⁹

From the preceding it is evident that during the middle ages Iceland had more or less constant connections of one kind or the other with parts of Europe, predominantly with Norway but also with England, Germany, France, Denmark, and the Low Countries, and, to a lesser extent, even with Spain, Italy, Byzantium, and Palestine.

³⁷Thordarson, "Islands Middelalderkunst," op. cit., pp. 340, 349.

³⁸Ibid., p. 340; Hermannsson, op. cit., p. 22.

³⁹Thordarson, "Islands Middelalderkunst," op. cit., p. 337.

Kristjan Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art (Reykjavik: Almenna Bokafelagid, 1957), p. 10.

The sketchbook is the only mediaeval one extant in Scandinavia. It was published in 1910, cf. Harry Fett, En Islandsk Tegnebog fra Middelalderen (Christiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1910), 29 pp.

CHAPTER III

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF LAID AND COUCHED EMBROIDERIES IN ICELAND

Written sources about mediaeval church furnishings in Iceland consist predominantly of church inventories written or collected at the instigation of the bishops.¹ ^{Most} Churches were small (cf. Figure 1) but comparatively numerous in mediaeval Iceland,² the inventories representing in all about 450 churches.³ The inventories date back to the days of the first republic, to the beginning of the 12th century; these early inventories are not very numerous, however.⁴ The largest number of extant mediaeval inventories date from the 14th century, while fewer have survived from the 15th and 16th centuries.⁵

The furnishings listed in the inventories were rarely described; if they were, the description was very brief and

¹Matthias Thordarson, "Islands Kirkebygninger og Kirkeinventar i Middelalderen," Nordisk Kultur XXIII (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Forlag, no date), pp. 288-289.

²Ibid., p. 289.

³F. B. Wallem, De Islandske Kirkers Udstyr i Middelalderen (Kristiania: Grondahl og Sons Bogtrykkeri, 1910), p. 8.

⁴Only somewhat over fifty in all. Cf. ibid., p. 8.

⁵Loc. cit.

uncertain.⁶ For this reason it has often proved difficult or impossible to identify extant objects with articles listed in the inventories.⁷ Such is the case with the laid and couched embroideries, which, although certainly from mediaeval times, were not found in inventories of the period. The only known Icelandic ^{mediaeval} word for laid and couched embroidery, refilsaumur, first appears in an inventory from the cathedral church at Holar in 1550,⁸ the year which terminates the middle ages in Iceland. The word refilsaumur literally means embroidery on a hanging, refill.

From the earliest days wall hangings were a part of the interior decor of Icelandic secular dwellings.⁹ With the advent of Christianity this custom was commonly adopted in churches as well, and all through the middle ages hangings of various types, such as refill, bordi, ^{brun}dukur, and tjald, were listed in the inventories. From the usage of the terms, tjald seems to have been an inclusive term for different kinds of wall hangings, while dukur¹⁰ in this connection may have

⁶Thordarson, "Islands Kirkebygninger og Kirkeinventar i Middelalderen," op. cit., p. 289.

⁷Loc. cit.

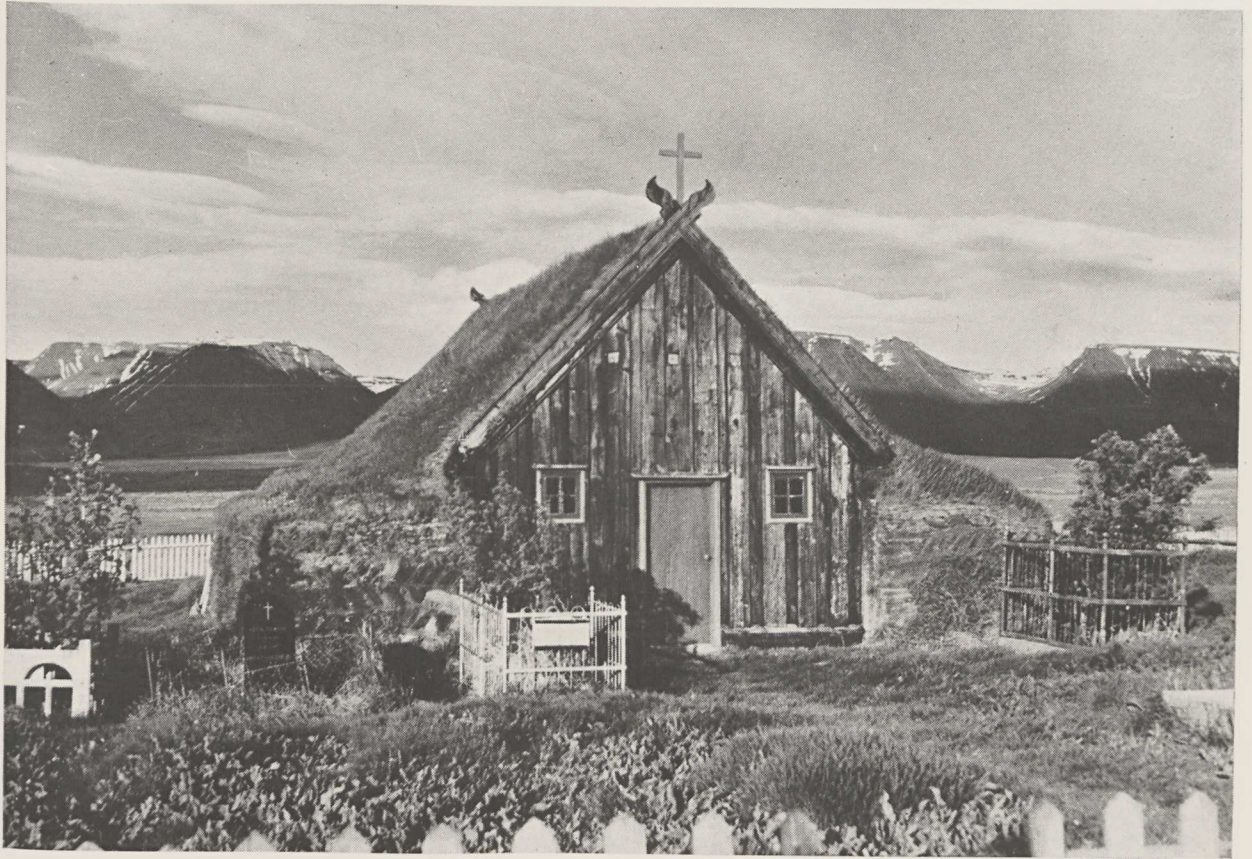
⁸D. I. XI, pp. 852, 853.

⁹Blondal and Sigtryggsson, op. cit., p. xi.

Hjalmar Falk, Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde (Kristiania: no publisher, 1919), p. 201.

¹⁰Dukur is (mainly) a general term for cloth; cf. altarisdukur: altarcloth.

Figure 1. Church at Vidimyri in Skagafjordur County built
1834. Photo: Gunnar Runar.



been a more or less plain hanging draped below a decoratively woven or embroidered bordi^{brun} or refill.¹¹ Apparently both bordi,^{brun} and refill were long, narrow horizontally emphasized wall-hangings; it has been suggested that bordi was narrower and decorated with woven designs, while refill was embroidered.¹² It seems rather likely that bordi¹³ and refill were used about similar hangings worked in different techniques, although research in this matter has not been conclusive.

As mentioned above the term refilsaumur was not found used until 1550, while other types of embroidery were mentioned earlier.¹⁴ This absence of the term refilsaumur might indicate

¹¹Falk, op. cit., pp. 201, 204. 214-215.

Engelstad, op. cit., p. 19. In three instances a refill decorated with pictures was found listed in the Icelandic inventories, in 1360 a refill with pictures from the story of Charles the Great (D.I. III, p. 174), in 1406 a refill with pictures of St. Nicholas (D.I. III, p. 710), and another with pictures of St. Martin (D.I. III, p. 747). 711

¹²Engelstad, op. cit., pp. 17, 80.

Falk, op. cit., pp. 202, 214-15. Falk does not make distinction between refill and bordi as to the one being embroidered, the other woven.

Wandel, op. cit., p. 80, believes that refill was more likely embroidered than woven.

¹³Bordi was found mentioned in only five instances (Falk, op. cit., p. 202, quoting Njal's saga, chapter 3; p. 215, quoting a bishop's saga. D. I. III, pp. 289, 517 [1394], and 566 [1394]); in none of these the techniques used in its decoration was indicated.

¹⁴Such as sprang and glit, terms which in mediaeval times in Iceland probably indicated respectively white cut or drawn work and colored embroidery worked in a darning stitch. Glit: D. I. III, p. 108 (1355); D. I. IV, p. 78 (1397); and D. I. XIII, p. 553 (1548). Sprang: D. I. III, p. 482 (1392); D. I. X, p. 629 (1541). Other embroideries mentioned were

but were decorative mentioned?

that before 1550 the technique had been called by a different name or been grouped with other techniques under a joint heading.

However, a third explanation is perhaps the most likely. It was observed that in the inventories there was never a hint of a technical description used in conjunction with the word refill, although other church textiles listed at the same time were to some extent described as to technique. This fact and the emergence in 1550 of the term refilsaumur may indicate that this embroidery technique was so intimately tied in with the refill, that no term was needed to describe it, i.e. that the word refill in itself implied a wall hanging executed in laid and couched work.

This explanation does not satisfy the complete lack of technical description indicating laid and couched altar frontals in the inventories. But as already mentioned, the most common form of the inventories was a simple enumeration of items; only occasionally were descriptions of apparently exceptional pieces found. Of the altar frontals, therefore, none rated special description except those of rarity and high

veandasaumur (darned embroidery imitating weaving?), cf. D. I. V, p. 283 (1470); silkisaumadur (embroidered with silk), cf. D. I. IV, p. 99 (1397); D. I. V, p. 283 (1470); and gullsaumadur (embroidered with gold), cf. D. I. IV, pp. 139 (1397) (854). It must be noted that no conclusive study of old Icelandic embroidery terminology exists.

value, such as frontals of fine foreign stuff, silk embroidered or laid with gold braid.¹⁵ Altar frontals executed in native wools in a common technique were of no such importance and may therefore have remained anonymous until the close of the mediaeval period. When at that time inventories became more detailed, more descriptive, the word refilsaumur, (^{perhaps} probably) in oral use earlier, found its way into the written language. ? *llc*

193 R A search through Icelandic church inventories from the reformation until the early 19th century revealed that for various lengths of time at least twenty-seven churches possessed one or more laid and couched embroideries.¹⁶ Also laid and couched work exists from two churches, the inventories of which did not list them.¹⁷ Altar frontals were most frequently mentioned but other church textiles such as wall hangings, superfrontals, dossals, and riddles were also listed.

It is of interest to note that twenty-five, out of a maximum of twenty-nine churches, belong within the see of Holar. Investigations into post-reformation inventories have not progressed far enough to allow conclusions to be drawn from the findings. As yet several possibilities are indicated. One is, that a center for or a school of embroidery

¹⁵Falk, op. cit., pp. 220-21, lists a variety of altar frontals found in Diplomatarium Islandicum.

¹⁶Cf. Table I in the appendix.

¹⁷Loc. cit.

specializing in laid and couched work was located in the see of Holar during the later middle ages, perhaps in the convent at Reynistadur, perhaps at the bishop's seat itself.

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However, the reasons for more evidence of laid and couched work in the see of Holar than in the see of Skalholt may be of quite a different nature. It is generally contended that in the see of Skalholt a much more widespread destruction of papish church furnishings took place in the years following the reformation. Still another factor, perhaps of great importance, may be the climate of northern Iceland, which is much drier than other parts of the country. These climatic conditions which are generally accredited with the superior preservation of the old turf-and-wood built farm buildings and churches (Figure 1) in northern Iceland, would without doubt also have influenced the preservation of interior furnishings, laid and couched embroideries included.

CHAPTER IV

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The embroideries under discussion in this paper were, as mentioned previously, worked mostly in couching of a certain kind with the addition of five different stitches used for outlining and occasionally for filling in small areas as well.

As the study progressed it became evident that authorities differed in the terminology used to designate identical stitches found in these and related embroideries. In order to avoid confusion it therefore appeared feasible to define and illustrate the meaning of terms to be employed before proceeding to describe each piece of needlework in detail.

For this purpose several authorities¹ on stitches and historic embroideries were consulted, their definitions

¹Mary Symonds Antrobus and Louisa Preece, Needlework through the Ages (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1928), p. 175.

Mrs. Archibald Christie, Samplers and Stitches: A Handbook of the Embroiderer's Art (London: B. J. Batsford, Ltd., [1920], pp. 7, 38, 40, 50, 129, 133.

Engelstad, op. cit., p. 80.

Agnes Geijer, "Broderi," Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder (Kobenhavn: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1957), II, 263.

Renate Jaques, Deutsche Textilkunst (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, no date), pp. 62, 139-44.

Betty Kurth, "Mediaeval Embroidery," Ciba Review, 50:1799-1800, December, 1945.

Louisa F. Pesel, Stitches from Eastern Embroideries

examined and compared,² and the following terminology decided upon.

Laid and Couched Work

Differentiation between two kinds of couching was necessary: the couching found on the Icelandic embroideries and the couching of the German mediaeval woollen embroideries.³ For the couching on the Icelandic embroideries, refilsaumur, it was decided to use the term laid and couched work. The method of working this stitch, which is shown in Figure 3, is as follows: A thread is laid from one side of the design to the other, back and forth covering the ground completely, small stitches being taken at each side to fasten it down (Figure 2,a).⁴ Across this ground other rather evenly

(second edition; London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., Ltd., 1921), Plates 47, 55, 56, 61.

Louisa F. Pesel, Stitches from Old English Embroideries (second edition; London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., Ltd., 1921), Plates 1, 2, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21.

Digby, op. cit., pp. 38-40, 42, 54.

Mary Thomas, Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1935), pp. 32-33, 54-56, 154, 186, 189-90.

²Cf. Table II in the appendix, p.159.

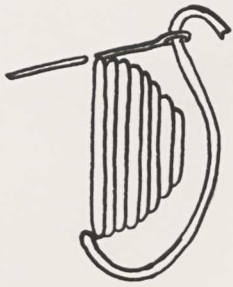
³Cf. p.105.

⁴It should be pointed out that in the couching of the Icelandic mediaeval embroideries which could be examined closely, the ground threads are laid in one procedure, not in two as done in some couching, where alternate ground threads are laid going one way, the spaces being filled up coming back (cf. Figure 2,b). Only in one instance is this latter type of couching observed in Iceland: in the laying of the silk ground of the crucifix of a chasuble from 1677 (cf. appendix, Figure 80, p.163).

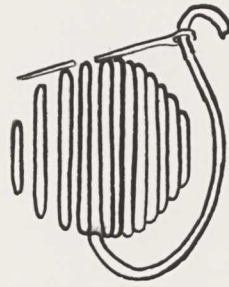
Figure 2, a and b. Methods of laying ground threads in laid and couched work.

Figure 3. Laid and couched work.

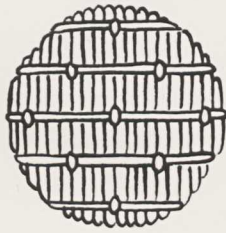
Figure 4. Roumanian couching.



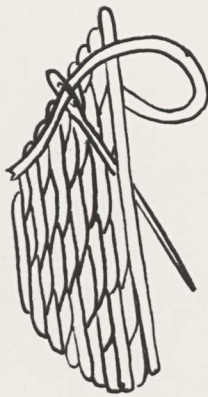
2 a



2 b



3



4

spaced threads are laid and fastened down at intervals with small, somewhat irregularly spaced, stitches (Figure 3).

Roumanian Couching

For the couching on the German mediaeval woollen embroideries to which reference will be made, the term Roumanian couching was decided upon. In German this stitch is called klosterstich. The stitch, shown in Figure 4, is worked in the following manner: A thread is laid from one side of the design to the other and is sewn down with loose slanting stitches which become almost indistinguishable from the thread they are fastening down. The procedure is repeated, care being taken that the threads cover the ground closely.

Other Stitches

Another filling stitch, surface satin stitch (Figure 5) was in a few instances found covering small areas. In addition, four types of outlining stitches, used variously for outlines or small area fillings were observed in the Icelandic embroideries. Three of these, chain stitch, split stitch, and couching used as outline (Figures 6, 7, and 8) together with the surface satin stitch presented no difficulties as far as terminology was concerned.

The fourth outlining stitch, the two variations of which are shown in Figure 9, a and b, was found, however, to be called variously stem stitch, outline stitch, crewel stitch

Figure 5. Surface satin stitch.

Figure 6. Chain stitch.

Figure 7. Split stitch.

Figure 8. Couching used as outline.

Figure 9, a and b. Stem stitch.



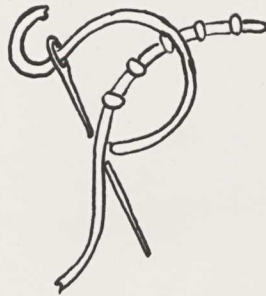
5



6



7



8



9 a



9 b

or stalk stitch.⁵ For the purpose of this paper, it was decided to use the term stem stitch. As indicated by the diagram, the stem stitch is worked with the thread lying at the same side of the needle whether to the right or the left, and the needle should emerge from the cloth at the point where it entered in the preceding stitch.

⁵Christie, Samplers and Stitches, op. cit., p. 7.
Pesel, Stitches from Old English Embroideries, op. cit.,
Plates 1, 2.
Thomas, op. cit., pp. 154, 189-90.
See also Table I in the appendix, p. 158.

CHAPTER V

EXTANT ICELANDIC LAID AND COUCHED MEDIAEVAL EMBROIDERIES

Wall Hanging from Hvammur

The wall hanging (refill) shown in Figures 10 and 11 is from the church at the farm Hvammur in Dalir county in Western Iceland. It is now preserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen; its inventory number is CLII, 1819.

All → No reference to a hanging in laid and couched embroidery has been found in inventories from the Hvammur church or neighboring churches. All that is known of its history is that in 1819, following a request from the Danish archaeological commission, it was sent from Hvammur to the museum in Copenhagen where it has remained since.

Refillinn er hins vegar nefndur í brefi til Fornleifafélagsins dónska snemma á 19. öld.

The hanging is believed to date from the 13th¹ or the 14th² century. Its main design consists of fantastic animals (such as lions, a horse or unicorn, a griffin, and a stag) framed by circles which are linked together by smaller circles. Along the lower edge runs a border of small strange creatures framed with half circles.³ The border at the upper edge, now

¹Middelalder og Nyere Tid. Nationalmuseets Vejledninger (Copenhagen: no publisher, 1938), p. 27.

²Blondal and Sigtryggsson, op. cit., p. vi.

³Whether part of the lower border is missing at the left corner is not known; details of the design leave the impression that the border originally consisted of half circles rather than full circles (cf. Figure 10).

Figure 10. Wall hanging from Hvammur; the two main parts. National Museum, Copenhagen.

Figure 11. Wall hanging from Hvammur; the two small pieces. They may belong together. National Museum, Copenhagen



partly destroyed, is formed by leaf scrolls. Scrolls of foliage also fill the spaces between the circles and, to some extent, the spaces within the large circles.

The hanging is not complete either in height or width. It is preserved in four parts, two of which are exhibited in the museum (Figure 10). These two have a maximum height of about 65 cm. (25 5/8 inches) and a length respectively 80 and 255 cm. (31 1/2 and 100 5/8 inches). The two other pieces (Figures 11 and 12), which are kept in storage, measure about 34 x 36 cm. (13 1/2 x 14 1/4 inches) and 30 x 23 cm. (11 7/8 x 9 1/8 inches).

The ground fabric of the hanging is blackish brown natural (saudsvart) wool, rather loosely woven in an extended tabby with two concomitant single Z spun threads in both warp and weft (i.e. basket weave). It has a thread count of 9.5 x 8 per cm.² (24 x 20 per square inch), the warp threads being the lengthwise threads of the cloth. The left side of the smaller of the two exhibited pieces appears to be the original termination of the hanging. Whether the lower edge at the left side corner is original as well is not certain.

The hanging is partly covered with embroidery, the background being embroidered while the design is left void. The embroidery is worked entirely in wool of a grey color, originally natural white wool.

Figure 12. Detail of the wall hanging from Hvammur.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 13. Detail of the wall hanging from Hvammur
(Figure 11). National Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 14. Detail of the wall hanging from Hvammur, showing the reverse of Figure 13. National Museum, Copenhagen.



All fillings are executed in laid and couched work, the first stage of which is worked with coarse loosely spun two-ply, S spun and Z twisted yarn, while the second and third stages are worked with finer and more highly spun two-ply, Z spun and S twisted yarn. The threads of the second stage are closely although irregularly spaced with an average of about 0.25 cm. (less than 1/8 inch) between the threads. The stitching of the third stage is very irregular although closely spaced also, averaging five stitches to the centimeter (3/8 inch).

The outlines, which are sewn before the filling, are worked in couching, coarse loosely spun threads laid and fastened down with finer, more tightly twisted yarn. The stitches are irregular but on the whole rather close. The yarns used for the outlines appear to be of the same kind as those used for the filling.

Altar Frontal from Reykjahlid

Figures 15 and 16 show an altar frontal (altarisklaedi) from Reykjahlid at Myvatn in Sudur-Thingey County in northern Iceland which is preserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen. Its inventory number is CLV, 1819.

This altar frontal is first mentioned in an inventory of the church at Reykjahlid from about 1661.⁴ In 1819 it was

⁴Bps. B, III, 6. (Footnotes of this kind refer to documents [church inventories] in the National Archives in Reykjavik.)

Figure 15. Altar frontal from Reykjahlid.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 16. Altar frontal from Reykjahlid. National
Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 17. Detail of the altar frontal from Reykjahlid.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



(5) the Nativity of Christ; (6) the angel announcing the Nativity to the shepherds; (7) the presentation of Christ in the temple; (8) the adoration of the Magi; and (9) the flight into Egypt.

The frontal has a maximum height of ^{100,5}100 cm. (39 3/8 inches), its maximum width being ⁸⁸86 cm. (33 3/4 inches). The coarse ground fabric is ^{woollen}unbleached linen of an extended tabby weave with two threads concomitant in both warp and weft (i.e. basket weave).⁷

The altar frontal is completely covered by embroidery. All areas are executed in laid and couched work, with the exception of faces and hands which are worked in stem stitch and, in a few places, in split stitch. The couching is worked rather carefully with even spacing of the laid threads of the second stage and quite regular stitches of the third. All outlines are done in couching.

The embroidery is executed in two-ply woollen as well as single and two-ply linen yarn.⁸ Only white linen thread is found;⁹ ^{also blue} it is used in all white areas, most notably the backgrounds of the roundels, and in outlines. It also ^{the blue linen, faded} appears to be used frequently in the second and third stages, as well as the third stage only, of the blue areas. Whether

⁷The frontal could be examined through glass and from the right side only; information on the threadcount and presence of selvage was not available. ^{10-11 x 12-14 pt/cm²}

⁸Wandel, op. cit., p. 71.

⁹Loc. cit.

*linen of silk, in the drops in the back
up. white count & quality*

this thread was originally white, or blue faded to white on the surface¹⁰ *is now* is not known. The woollen embroidery yarns are of *nine* (five) colors: natural blackish brown (saudsvart), yellow, red, green and blue.¹¹

Altar Frontal from Grenjadarstadur

The frontal shown in Figure 18 is from Grenjadarstadur in Sudur-Thingey County. It is now preserved in the Cluny Museum in Paris, having been transferred there from the Louvre Museum sometime after 1941.¹²

In old inventories from the church at Grenjadarstadur, the frontal can be traced back to 1659.¹³ In the inventory from that year are mentioned a frontal and a dossal (brikarklaedi) executed in laid and couched work. It is likely that these are the same ones mentioned in inventories from 1595 to 1631 although no reference is made to their being embroidered.¹⁴ In the inventory from 1748 the dossal is said

¹⁰Cf. pp. 58, 70, 79.

¹¹Wandel, op. cit., p. 71, distinguished between two blue colors, a dark blue and a light blue. She also noted that the green had faded to medium blue on the surface.

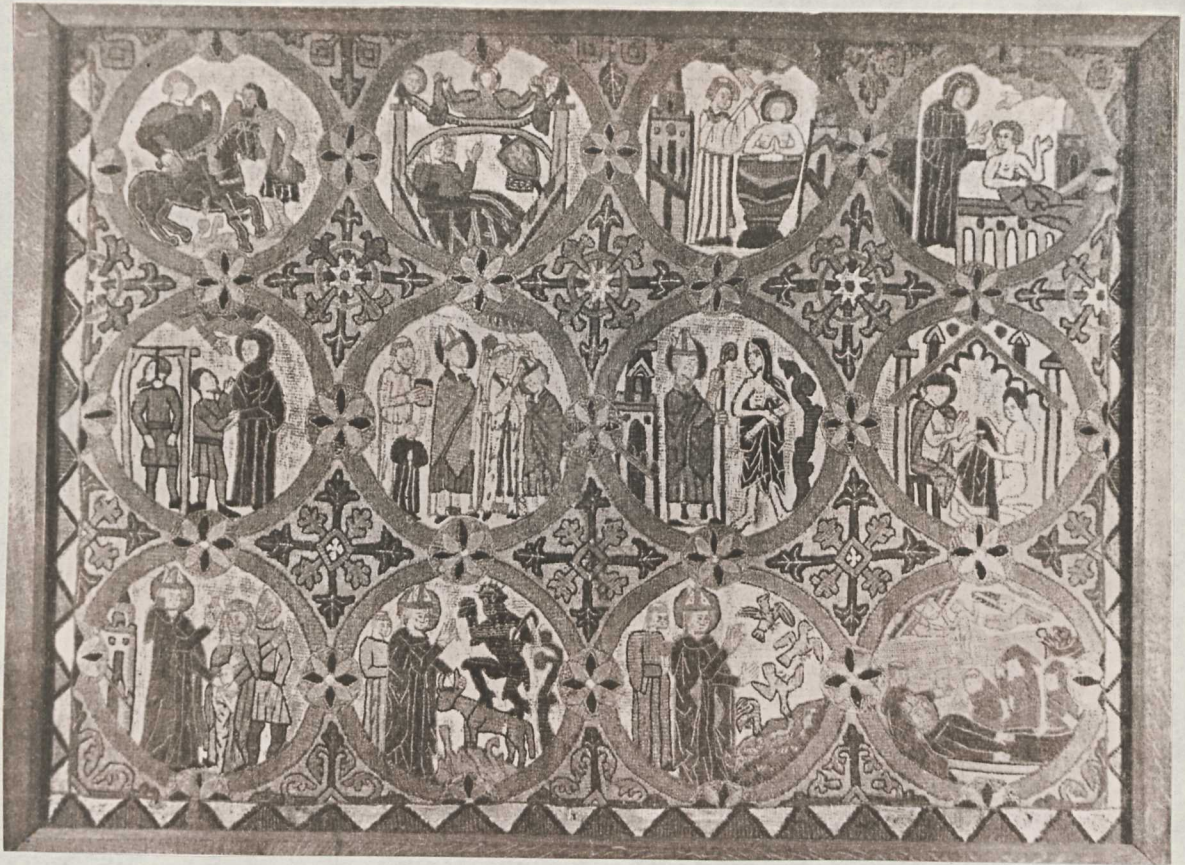
¹²Ibid., p. 73.

Kristjan Eldjarn, "Marteinsklaedi fra Grenjadarstad," Timinn (Icelandic daily newspaper), Sunday, December 23, 1956.

¹³Bps. B, III, 6. As mentioned earlier, however, a wall hanging with pictures of St. Martin, i.e. Marteinsrefill, is listed in the inventory from 1406 (D. I. III, p. 711); *it seems, however, to have belonged to the secular furnishings of the parish house.*

¹⁴Bps. B, III, 2; p. 2; and Bps. B, III, 5; pp. 15-16.

Figure 18. Altar frontal from Grenjadarstadur.
Cluny Museum, Paris.



THE CONTENT
GOLD SPRINGS BOND
The content

to be used as a wall hanging.¹⁵ The hanging in laid and couched work is last mentioned in 1787.¹⁶ In the next inventory, from the year 1811, it has disappeared, whereas the church has acquired a cushion with a cover, the top of which is executed in laid and couched work,¹⁷ for use in a new confessional installed in 1775.¹⁸ The top of this cushion cover may have been made from the dossal (hanging). The cushion and the altar frontal are last found mentioned in 1828.¹⁹ The cushion apparently disappeared, while the frontal was acquired in 1836 by the French traveler, Paul Gaimard, and brought to France.²⁰ Exactly how the frontal found its way to the Louvre Museum is not known, since it was listed there as having been purchased from M. Revoil in 1829 and exhibited as a German tapestry.^{21a}

¹⁵Bps. B, III, 16.

¹⁶Kirkjustoll Grenjadarstadar 1768-1826 (church inventories in the National Archives, Reykjavik), XIX, 9, A, 1; p. 2, a.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 65, ^a2.

¹⁸Kirkjustoll Grenjadarstadar 1747-1846, XIX, 9, A, 2; p. 43, b.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 88, b - 89, a.

²⁰Eldjarn, "Marteinsklaedi fra Grenjadarstad," op. cit. The frontal, although somewhat mistakenly rendered, is pictured in Plates 122 and 122 bis in Paul Gaimard, Voyage en Islande et Groenland. Atlas Historique (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1838/7), and described as being a tapestry from the church at Grenjadarstadar.

²¹Wandel, op. cit., p. 74.

^{21a}Ibid., p. 72-73.

The date of the altar frontal from Grenjadarstadur has been set as the 13th century.²² The main design of the frontal consists of twelve roundels each depicting an episode from the life of St. Martin, bishop of Tours and patron saint of the church at Grenjadarstadur. The tangent points of the roundels are covered with small roundels with rosettes, the spandrels being filled with stylized radiating leaf and flower designs of slightly varied forms. A chevron border frames the frontal on three sides. The episodes shown from the saint's life, which follow the story as it is related in the mediaeval Icelandic version, are the following: (1) St. Martin gives a beggar half of his cloak; (2) Christ appears to St. Martin in a dream, wearing the part of the cloak which St. Martin had given to the beggar; (3) the baptism of St. Martin, (4) St. Martin raises a man from death; (5) St. Martin revives a slave who had hanged himself; (6) St. Martin is consecrated bishop of Tours; (7) and (8) St. Martin removes his tunic and gives it to a naked man; (9) St. Martin, while preaching to the heathen, raises a mother's only son from death; (10) St. Martin exorcises

²²Louis De Farcy, La Broderie du XI Siecle Jusqu'a Nos Jours (two volumes; Angers: Belhomme, Libraire-Éditeur, 1890), II, Plate 24.

Museum officials in the Louvre, cf. Wandel, op. cit., p. 74.

LJ
*Mis-
taken
copy*
Ibid., p. 81, would like to affix an earlier date (i.e. 12th century) to this frontal as well as to the frontal from Reykjahlid (cf. p. 38). However, the angels in the twelfth roundel appear to be wearing papal tiaras of a type which did not come into use before the 13th century. Cf. Herbert Norris, Church Vestments (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1950), p. 110 and Figure 142.

Englamin em mto vangi?
1015

an evil spirit (the devil) from a cow; (11) St. Martin drives away cormorants from a river where they were feeding on the fish; (12) the death of St. Martin.²³

This altar frontal²⁴ is the second largest extant Icelandic mediaeval frontal, its height being 95 cm. (37 1/2 inches), its width ¹³⁰128 cm. (50 1/2 inches).²⁵ The coarse ground fabric is of unbleached ^{wool}linen loosely woven in an extended tabby with two concomitant threads in both warp and weft (i.e. basket weave).²⁶

The frontal is completely covered with embroidery, with the exception of a few places where the stitching has worn off, for instance in parts of the right half of the lower border. The main areas are executed in laid and couched work, while faces, most hands, and some uncovered body areas are done in stem stitch and possibly split stitch.²⁷ The couching is worked with evenly laid threads in the second

²³Wandel, op. cit., pp. 75-78.

²⁴The description of the frontal from Grenjadarstadur is based entirely upon secondary sources and examination of black and white pictures of the right side of the embroidery. The information available was very incomplete.

²⁵According to a letter from the Cluny Museum, dated April 21, 1961. The measurements were inside measurements of the frame; one to two cm. should possibly be added to the above figures.

²⁶Wandel, op. cit., pp. 71, 74; Kalf, op. cit., pp. 59-60; De Farcy, op. cit., I, p. 124.

²⁷Wandel, op. cit., pp. 71, 74; Kalf, op. cit., p. 60.

stage, and closely spaced stitches in the third. All outlines are executed in couching.²⁸

The embroidery yarns used are wool and linen.²⁹ The colors are the same as those found on the altar frontal from Reykjahlid; the wool yarns are natural blackish brown (saudsvart), yellow, red, green, dark blue, and light blue.³⁰ Only white linen thread is used; it is found in the backgrounds of the roundels, in unclothed body areas, and in some outlines.³¹ The triple outlines around the inside and outside of the roundels, where not worn off, are worked in wool and linen, one wool thread couched between two couched linen threads.³²

The color distribution³³ in the frontal is largely as follows. The frames of the large circles are red, outlined with blue, and enclosing varicolored designs on off-white backgrounds. The small connecting roundels are medium blue with

²⁸Kalf, op. cit., p. 60.

²⁹Wandel, op. cit., pp. 71, 74.

³⁰Loc. cit., cf. p.

³¹Kalf, op. cit., p. 60.

³²Loc. cit.

³³Related in a private letter dated May 27, 1961, from Blanche Payne, Professor in Home Economics, University of Washington, who had just examined the embroidery in the Cluny museum. The information was received after the completion of this study but before its final processing.

rosettes of alternating dark blue and greyed yellow petals. The ground of the spandrels is greyed yellow, with foliate ornaments in tones of blue. The small circles in the upper spandrels are red, outlined with white, and enclosing a white star. The border at the bottom consists of three green triangles alternating with three brown ones on the outside edge; the triangles on the inside are white. On the side borders the outside triangles are blue, the inside ones white. The colors used in the scenes are white, red, purple (reddish purple), blue green and brown.

Altar Frontal from Svalbard

Figures 19 and 20 show another altar frontal with designs in roundels. It is originally from Svalbard on Svalbardsstrond in Sudur-Thingey County, but is now preserved in the National Museum in Reykjavik, where its inventory number is 10933.

The earliest certain mention of the frontal is found in an inventory of the Svalbard church from 1674.³⁴ In 1847 it was sent to the National Museum in Copenhagen³⁵ where it remained until it was returned to Iceland in 1930 and deposited in the museum in Reykjavik. The 14th century is the date set

⊗ Bps. B, III, 5, Mc. 38 (1631)

³⁴Bps. B, III, 6. n.p.

³⁵Cf. the inventory of the National Museum, Reykjavik.

5/22009

for this altar frontal.³⁶ The design of the frontal consists of twelve roundels joined together by small roundels containing rosettes of slight variations. The spandrels are decorated with stylized radiating foliage designs. A chevron border apparently framed the main design on three sides, although parts are now missing.

The pictures in the large roundels had never been satisfactorily explained,³⁷ until recently, when it was suggested³⁸ that they, or at least some of them, depict the story of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist,³⁹ patron saint of the church at Svalbard.⁴⁰ From available references the pictures in the

³⁶Thorkell Grimsson, Summary Guide to the Exhibition Rooms (Reykjavik: The National Museum of Iceland, 1960), p. 28.

The inventory of the museum gives the date of the frontal as not later than the 15th century.

³⁷In the inventory of the museum they were partly unexplained, partly described as depicting scenes from the Nativity (Roundels 5 and 6) and the Passion of Christ (roundels 2 and 3), and scenes from the life of a bishop (roundels 9, 10, and 11). Wandel, op. cit., p. 79 and Figure 6, described the pictures as being scenes from the life of an unknown female saint. None of these explanations seemed convincing.

³⁸In a private letter, dated April 4, 1961, from Gisli Gestsson, Curator at the National Museum, Reykjavik.

³⁹To the author the pictures had appeared to show scenes from the life of a youthful, male saint. Because of the cock held by the saint in the first roundel, the possibility that the pictures illustrated the story of St. Vitus was being considered (the cock is one of St. Vitus' attributes), especially since some of the other scenes also apparently coincide with the legend of that saint. For lack of time and Icelandic references, further research into the matter had been suspended, when the above mentioned information was received.

⁴⁰Gudbrandur Jonsson, Domkirkjan a Holum (Vol. V, 6 of Safn til Sogu Islands: Reykjavik: no publisher, no date), pp. 29-55.

Figure 19. Altar frontal from Svalbard.
National Museum, Reykjavik. Photo: National
Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 20. Altar frontal from Svalbard.
National Museum, Reykjavik.



Command
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The frontal is covered almost entirely with embroidery, the main areas being executed in laid and couched work. Many small areas, however, are worked in parallel rows of chain stitch, a few even in stem stitch. Probably by accidental omission, a few small areas have been left void of stitching, such as the cap of the man to the left in the third roundel, one of the bishop's hands in the eleventh roundel, and several others. The outlines, which are worked before the filling, are all couched, the couching stitches so closely placed as to cover the laid thread almost completely.

While wool is used for all outlines, the filling is worked in both wool and linen. The entire background as well as the hands, faces, and other white details are done in linen, the remainder in wool. The linen threads used are rather coarse, two-ply, Z spun and S twisted.

Six different colors of woollen yarn are used in the embroidery: dull yellow (appearing as tan on the surface), red, blue, blue green, green, and reddish purple. The purple, which is used in parts of the design in the twelfth roundel has faded on the surface to a yellowish tan.

Altar Frontal from Draflastadir

In 1893 an altar frontal from Draflastadir in Fnjoskadalur, Sudur-Thingey County, shown in Figures 21 and 22, was acquired by the National Museum in Reykjavik. Its inventory number in the museum is 3924.

Figure 21. Altar frontal from Draflastadir.
National Museum, Reykjavik.



Figure 22. Altar frontal from Draflastadir.
National Museum, Reykjavik.



Mention of an altar frontal in laid and couched work at Draflastadir is found in inventories from 1631⁴³ to 1828.⁴⁴ In the inventory from 1748 the couched altar frontal is described as having a canvas lining.⁴⁵

The frontal is dated as being probably from the 14th century.⁴⁶ The main design consists of nine barbed quatrefoils enclosing pictures of the Virgin and Child, saints, and sainted (?) bishops. The spandrels are filled with rosettes, and different kinds of leaf and scroll borders frame the frontal on all sides. The pictorial content of the barbed quatrefoils is as follows: (1) St. John the Baptist and an unidentified bishop; (2) the Virgin and Child and St. Catherine of Alexandria (?); (3) the Virgin and Child and St. Anna; (4) St. Andrew and St. Paul; (5) the Virgin enthroned; (6) St. John the Apostle and Evangelist and St. Peter; (7) unidentified saints, perhaps the ^{Nordic} (Norwegian) saints ² Hallvardur and earl ¹ Magnus; (8) unidentified bishops, perhaps the Icelandic saints Jon and Thorlakur (or Jon and Gudmundur); and (9) St. Dorothea and St. Catherine of Alexandria.

The frontal is almost square in shape, its maximum height being 109 cm. (43 1/8 inches), its maximum width 117 cm.

⁴³Bps. B, III, 5; p. 31.

⁴⁴Bps. C. I, 1; p. 70.

⁴⁵Bps. B, III, 16; p. 12.

⁴⁶Kristjan Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art, op. cit., Figure 56.

(46 1/4 inches). The ground fabric which is unbleached, tabby-woven linen, has a thread count of 9.5 x 9 per cm.² (24 x 22 per square inch). Very uneven selvages are present at both the upper and lower edge of the frontal, whereas remnants of narrow hems, 0.3 cm. (1/8 inch) wide, appear on parts of both side edges.

Remains of a canvas lining (the one mentioned in the inventory from 1748 ?) appear in the lower left and upper right hand corner. The natural colored canvas is tabby-woven with a thread count of 12 per cm. (30 per inch) in both warp and weft. The edge of the canvas is folded under and sewed to the frontal with natural white two-ply Z spun and S twisted woollen thread.

On the reverse of the upper right hand corner there are remnants of a loop braided of three strands of woollen yarn. Two of the strands consist of two two-ply, S spun and Z twisted yarns.

The frontal is covered entirely with embroidery. All fillings are done in laid and couched work executed mostly in wool. The outlines, which are sewn prior to the laid and couched work, are worked in chain stitch with the exception that the outlines of the third and sixth frame are couched.

The embroidery threads vary greatly in fineness. The first stage of the laid and couched work is laid with two coarse single yarns threaded in the needle at the same time;

Figure 23. Detail of the altar frontal from Draflastadir, showing the third barbed quatrefoil with the Virgin and Child and St. Anna. National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 24. Detail of the altar frontal from Draflastadir, showing the reverse of Figure 23. National Museum, Reykjavik.



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only occasionally a heavy two-ply thread is used. When the ground has been laid with the coarse threads, the second and third stages are worked with very fine two-ply threads, used singly or two together in the needle. More often than not the second and third stages are worked with the same color yarn as the first, but sometimes contrasting colors are used. The single woollen yarns are mostly Z spun, the two-ply yarns Z spun and S twisted. Some of the yarns used in the border around the main design are, however, S spun and Z twisted.

Linen yarn is used only in the white areas of the main design of the frontal, and in the second and third stage in the couching of St. Dorothea's basket (in the ninth frame) as well as in small parts of the third and the eighth frame band. In these latter places the thread, originally blue, has faded to near-white on the surface. The linen thread is of even fineness, two-ply and Z spun and S twisted.

Nine colors of wool yarn are found on the frontal: natural colored blackish brown (saudsvart) and white (appearing as light tan on the surface), yellow (faded to tan on the surface), red, yellowish brown, dark blue, light blue, dark green and light blue green. While the yellow forms the ground color of the main design of the frontal, the natural white is used for background in the borders;⁴⁷ on the surface the difference between the two colors has become very slight.

⁴⁷The border at the upper edge is similar in color to the one at the lower edge.

Miklagardi

Altar Frontal from Hrafnagil

Figures 25 and 26 show an altar frontal generally considered to be from Hrafnagil in Eyjafjordur County. It is preserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen, its inventory number being 15379, 1856.

This frontal may not have belonged to the church at Hrafnagil originally, although it was sent from there to the museum in Copenhagen in 1856. No alter frontal embroidered in laid and couched work is listed in the inventories of the church, only a frontal in darning stitch (glitsaumur), which is listed as early as 1662⁴⁸ and as late as 1761.⁴⁹ The only laid and couched embroidery listed in inventories from Hrafnagil is an old superfrontal (altarisbrun) attached to a printed altar frontal; it is listed but once, in 1761.⁵⁰ In the inventory from 1833 an old altar frontal executed in nun's stitch (nunnusaumur) is listed.⁵¹ This entry probably refers to the altar frontal in darning stitch listed in 1761. Admittedly, the meaning of the term nunnusaumur is not certain, but from the way it is used in the inventories of seven other churches, where it has been observed,⁵² it seems to be a term

⁴⁸Bps. B, III, 6.

⁴⁹Bps. B, III, 17; pp. 274-75. ⁵⁰Loc. cit.

⁵¹Kirkjustoll Hrafnagils 1749-1839, VIII, 12, A, 1.

⁵²*Nunnusaumur i 7 kirkum*
Grund (1769), Mikligardur (1761), and Modruvellir (1769), all in Eyjafjordur County, Reynistadur in Skagafjordur County (1742), Hals in Fnjoskadalur (1760, 1786, 1796, 1828,

Figure 25. Altar frontal from Hrafnagil.
National Museum, Copenhagen.

Xu oem tam exnat son' eoz: in fual orbis terre

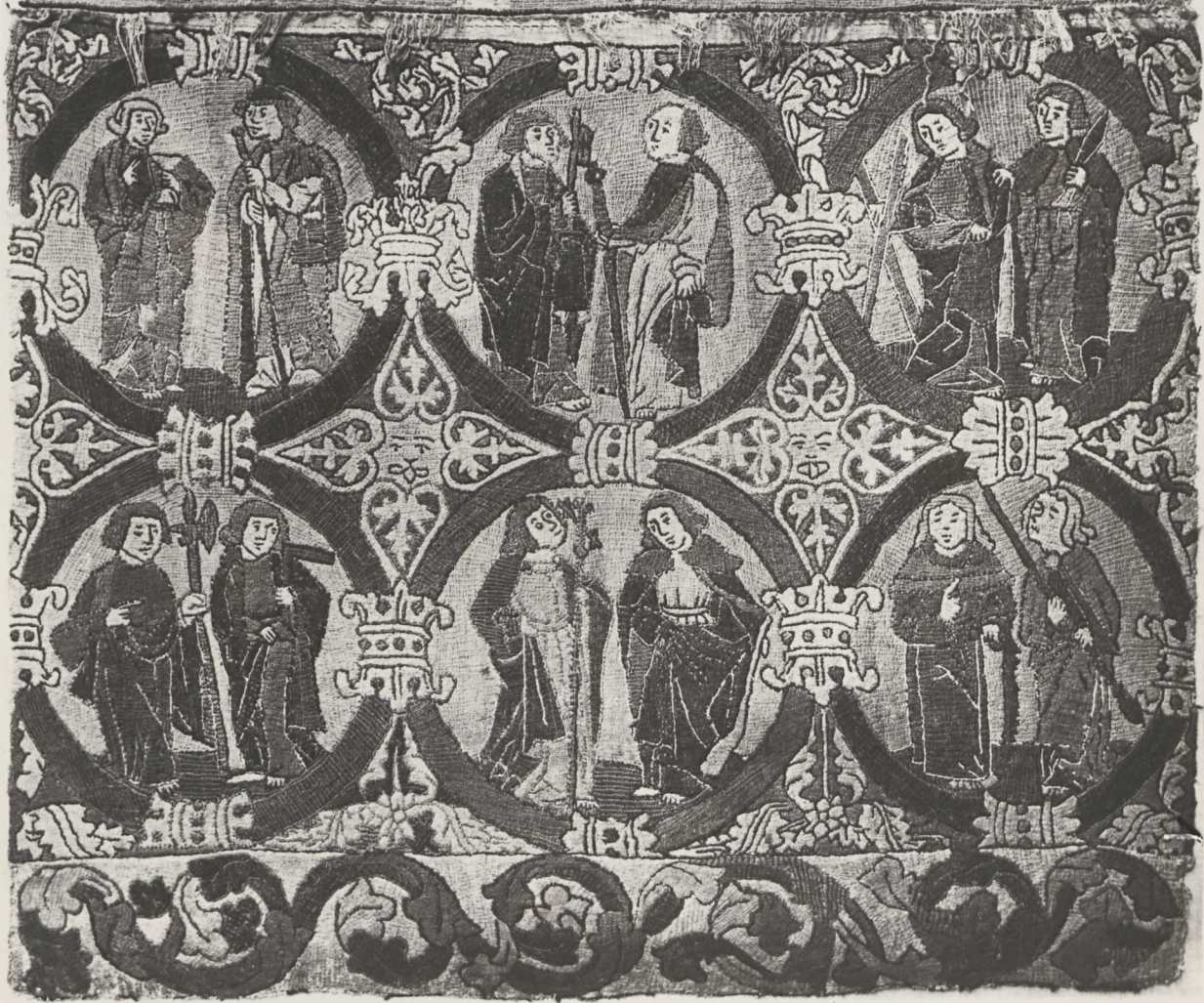


Figure 26. Altar frontal from Hrafnagil.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



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applied in the 18th and 19th centuries to old embroideries of various techniques, probably believed to have been worked by nuns in the convents of mediaeval times. In inventories of four of the seven churches the term seems to refer specifically to embroideries described in other inventories as worked in laid and couched work;⁵³ this may perhaps be indicative of the term being mainly used synonymously with refilsaumur, but this cannot be ascertained.

Surmising that the altar frontal listed in the inventory from Hrafnagil is not the one in the Danish National Museum, where, then, did the frontal originate which was sent to Copenhagen in 1856? It may have come from the church at Mikligardur, a neighboring church to Hrafnagil.⁵⁴ Six successive inventories for that church, from 1685 to 1758,⁵⁵ list an altar frontal in

1849) and Muli in Adaldalur (1804), both in Sudur-Thingey County, and Thykkvibaer in Vestur-Skaftafell County (1848).

⁵³In the three other instances the term nun's stitch seemed to refer once to darned embroidery, once to cross stitch embroidery, and in one instance to embroidery in general.

⁵⁴Hrafnagil was the seat of the archdeacon in the district, and since it was customary for the archdeacons to ship the church treasures requested by the Danish archaeological commission, it would seem natural that the frontal be sent from Hrafnagil, even if it belonged to the church at Mikligardur.

- ⁵⁵1685: Bps. B, III, 9; p. 5, b.
 1695: Bps. B, III, 11; p. 50, a.
 1718: Bps. B, III, 13; p. 74, b.
 1731: Profastsvisitazia 1725-1747, XVIII, 1, A, 1.
 1749: Bps. B, III, 16; p. 298.
 1758: Profastsvisitazia 1752-1762, XVIII, 1, A, 2.

laid and couched work having a fringed superfrontal with embroidered lettering. In one dated 1761 an old altar frontal worked in nun's stitch is listed; in another dated 1791 an altar frontal is recorded as a very old tapestry (tjaldvefnadur)⁵⁶ with pictures of people and a fringed superfrontal with lettering attached to the upper edge. It seems most likely that the altar frontals listed for 1791, 1761, and earlier, are one and the same,⁵⁷ and the descriptions fit the Hrafnagil frontal exactly. Supporting the above is the fact that the church at Mikligardur was consecrated to All Apostles, while the Hrafnagil church was consecrated to St. Peter.⁵⁸

The frontal dates from the 15th century.⁵⁹ Its main design consists of six roundels with two apostles in each. The tangent points of the roundels are covered by ornaments some of which are reminiscent of the fleur-de-lis while others are more like wide decorated bands. The spandrels are filled with more or less stylized leaf designs, the two spandrels near the centre of the embroidery containing masks as well. A leaf scroll forms a border at the lower edge while at the upper edge a fringed superfrontal with a band of lettering

⁵⁶Literal translation: tjald = hanging; vefnadur = weaving, textile.

⁵⁷This would not be the only instance of mistaking the laid and couched work for tapestry; cf. p.43.

⁵⁸Jonsson, op. cit., pp. 29-55.

⁵⁹Middelalder og Nyere Tid, op. cit., p. 56.
Wandel, op. cit., p. 74.

is attached. The inscription, which is in Latin, reads as follows: In oem tram exnat son eoy: Z in finis orbis terre, i.e., in omnem terram explanatur sonus eorum et in finis (f. - es) orbis terre (f. - ae), from the Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 10, Verse 18.⁶⁰ it.??

The roundels depict the following apostles: (1) St. John and St. James Major, (2) St. Peter and St. Paul, (3) St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew, (4) St. Jude (Thaddeus) and St. Thomas, (5) St. Philip and St. James Minor, and (6) St. Simon and St. Matthias. (Matthew?)

The frontal which as already indicated is actually a combined frontal and superfrontal, has a maximum height of 96 cm. (37 7/8 inches), of which the super frontal accounts for about 10 cm. (4 inches). The maximum width of the frontal is 104 cm. (41 inches). The ground material is unbleached linen of tabby weave. It consists of at least two pieces of fabric; the ground of the superfrontal being a separate piece, apparently of the same fabric, however, joined to the top of the frontal proper. [The ground fabric of the lower border may also be a separate piece. ^{no}] 1780

The frontal is completely covered with embroidery, with the exception of a narrow strip at the seam below the superfrontal. The void strip has originally been covered by

^{1918, M.F.}
⁶⁰Catalogue in the National Museum, Reykjavik, of Icelandic articles in the National Museum, Copenhagen.

fringe, 6 cm. (2 3/8 inches) wide, now worn off to a great extent. All areas of the embroidery are executed in laid and couched work; outlines are done in couching. The laid and couched embroidery appears to be somewhat carelessly worked. The spacing of the threads in the second stage is uneven, and their direction, for instance in the frames of the roundels, shows little attempt at the uniformity so evidently aimed at and achieved in the frontals from Reykjahlid and Grenjadarstadur, and even from Svalbard.

The embroidery is done mainly in wool, linen and gilt metal thread being used only for outlining the pictures of the apostles. In those outlines the threads, whether linen or metal, are laid double and fastened down with a linen thread. Woollen outlines are couched down with wool threads. The fringe consists of linen and, predominantly, woollen yarn.

In the embroidery only white linen thread is used, while there are six colors of wool yarns: grey (originally natural white), natural blackish brown (saudsvart), yellow, red, green blue and dark blue. The colors are unusually bright.⁶¹

Altar Frontal from Hofdi

Figures 27 and 28 show an altar frontal from the church at Hofdi in Hofdahlverfi in ^{Suðurland - Thingeyri} Skagafjörður County. It

⁶¹The frontal had been cleaned recently, when examined in 1956. This may account for some of the brightness of the colors.

Figure 27. Altar frontal from Hofdi in Hofdahlverfi,
after the restoration in 1960. National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 28. Altar frontal from Hofdi in Hofdahlverfi,
before the restoration in 1960. National Museum, Reykjavik.



is now preserved in the National Museum in Reykjavik; its inventory number is 10886.

With certainty this frontal can be traced back in old inventories of the church to 1665 when it is mentioned as an altar frontal of blue linen embroidered with laid and couched work, worn but in usable condition.⁶² The inventory from 1715 relates that the figures from the old couched frontal have been appliqued on to a new frontal of yellow linen (Figure 28).⁶³

In 1819 the frontal, by request from the Danish archaeological commission, was shipped to Copenhagen where it remained in the keeping of the Danish National Museum until it was returned to Iceland in 1930. In 1960 the frontal was restored to what was possibly its original look (Figure 27); the embroidered figures and the tablet woven band which formed its lower border were transferred to a somewhat larger blue linen ground, while the brocaded tablet woven bands (Figures 28 and 29) at the top were removed to be exhibited separately, as they showed no evidence of having been part of the frontal prior to 1715.

The original pieces of the altar frontal probably date from the 15th century.⁶⁴ The design shows Christ on the Cross with the Virgin and St. John. The greater part of the cross

⁶²Bps. B, III, 6; p. 91.

⁶³Bps. B, III, 13; p. 30, a.

⁶⁴Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art, op. cit., Figure 45.
In the inventory of the National Museum in Reykjavik the date is given as not later than the 15th century.

has been lost as have parts of the cruciferous nimbus around the head of Christ. Leaf and scroll borders terminate the frontal on either side, while, as already mentioned, the bottom edge is finished with a woven band.

The altar frontal as it hangs today measures 94 cm. (37 inches) in maximum height and 127 cm. (50 1/8 inches) in width.⁶⁵ The original blue linen ground is of tabby weave with a thread count of 20 x 14.5 per cm.² (50 x 36 per square inch). As there is no selvage present warp and weft cannot be ascertained, but the finer threads which run lengthwise in the frontal (i.e. across the width) may be assumed to be the warp threads.

In this frontal, only the design is embroidered, the ground being left void. The filling is done in laid and couched work, whereas all outlines are stem stitched. The embroidery threads are mostly woollen, linen being used only for unclothed body areas, as well as for the second and third stage of part of the couching of the Virgin's mantle (i.e. the lower right side).

The embroidery yarns used vary greatly in fineness. Coarse threads are used for the first stage of the couched and laid work. Comparatively fine threads, frequently two strands threaded in the needle simultaneously, are used in the second and third stages of the couching.

⁶⁵Before the restoration it measured 90 cm. (35 5/8 inches) in maximum height, 115 cm. (45 1/2 inches) in maximum width, cf. the inventory of the National Museum in Reykjavik.

Figure 29. Detail of the altar frontal from Hofdi in Hofdahlverfi, before the restoration in 1960. National Museum, Reykjavik.



On the surface (the reverse side was not accessible for comparison) the wools appear yellowish brown, reddish brown, and dark brown, green and green blue of varying kinds. The linen thread used is white and blue. The white is employed in all exposed body parts, the background area between the Virgin's face and left hand (filled in by mistake?), and a narrow band around the Virgin's left wrist. The blue linen thread (faded to a near-white) is found only on a part of the Virgin's mantle as already mentioned.

The tablet woven border at the bottom of the frontal is woollen, 9 cm. (3 1/2 inches) wide, striped and slightly patterned in blue, black, and light, medium, and reddish brown. Although the band is believed to have belonged to the original altar frontal, it may not have been designed for it. It has been suggested by Matthias Thordarson⁶⁶ that the border is of an earlier date than the frontal and was originally made and used for some other purpose.

Altar Frontal from Stafafell

The altar frontal shown in Figures 30 and 31 is from the church at Stafafell in Lon in Austur-Skaftafell County. It is now preserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen, its inventory number being CXCVIII, 1820.

⁶⁶Cf. the inventory of the National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 30. Altar frontal from Stafafell.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



Figure 31. Altar frontal from Stafafell.
National Museum, Copenhagen.



The inventories from the church at Stafafell from 1641⁶⁷ and 1677⁶⁸ both list an altar frontal executed in laid and couched work (refilsaumur). In the inventories from 1706⁶⁹ and 1727⁷⁰ an altar frontal with bresk(s)saumur is listed. This word has not been found elsewhere, but it may be presumed, in view of the evidence afforded by the extant frontal, that this term is used in reference to laid and couched embroidery. The altar frontal is not mentioned in later inventories. It was sent to the museum in Copenhagen in 1820.

The frontal dates from the 14th century.⁷¹ The design consists of an archade with four columns. Under the centre arch the Virgin Mary sits on a cushioned chair nursing the Child. The two apostles, St. Peter and St. Simon, stand under the left and right arch, respectively. The columns at the sides are surmounted with towers. At the upper edge the frontal is finished with a band of Latin inscription which reads: S PETRUS APIS SCA MARIA MR XPI S SIMON AP, i.e. Sanctus Petrus apostolus Sancta Maria mater Christi Sanctus Simon apostolus.⁷²

⁶⁷Bps. A, II, 10; p. 334, a.

⁶⁸Bps. A, II, 11; p. 209.

⁶⁹Bps. A, II, 15; p. 104 in the first part.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 31, in the second part.

⁷¹Middelalder og Nyere Tid, op. cit., p. 26.

⁷²Inventory of the National Museum, Copenhagen.

The altar frontal is much worn, large pieces are missing in the upper part as well as along the bottom. The maximum height of the frontal is ^{92,5}92 cm. (36 1/4 inches); the maximum width ¹⁰⁶105 cm. (41 3/8 inches). The ground fabric is tabby-woven, unbleached linen. Neither the threadcount nor the presence of selvage on the ground material is known.⁷³

The surface of the frontal is entirely covered with embroidery. All areas are executed in laid and couched work except the hands of the figures which are worked in parallel rows of stem stitch, and the swaddling bands of the Child and the hair of the apostles which are worked in close rows of couched outlining, the rows following the outlines of the bands and the waves of the hair. All outlines are done in couching, the laid threads being fastened down in most places with very closely spaced stitches.

The embroidery is executed in linen and wool. All white areas are done with linen thread, the rest with wool. The outlines are mostly woollen; only the white outlines which are found in several places running parallel with the wool outlines for emphasis, are linen. Seven colors of wool yarn can be distinguished in the embroidery; natural medium brown and blackish brown (morautt and saudsvart), yellow (now faded predominantly to tan), red, light blue, dark blue, and green.

⁷³No information on the matter was available and the embroidery could be examined only through glass and from the right side.

Altar Frontal from Holar

The altar frontal shown in Figure 32, now in the National Museum in Reykjavik, was originally from the cathedral church of the bishop's seat at Holar in Hjaltadal in Skagafjordur County. It was acquired by the museum in ¹⁸⁹⁷1910; its inventory number is 4380, b.

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Mention of this particular altar frontal was not found in the inventories from Holar. The inventory from 1550⁷⁴ lists seven altar frontals and six wall hangings executed in laid and couched work, but none of these is described as to design. In succeeding inventories couched altar frontals and wall hangings are listed without further specifications.⁷⁵

The frontal has been dated variously as being from the 14th century,⁷⁶ from probably the 15th century,⁷⁷ or not later than the 15th century.⁷⁸ The design shows the three Icelandic sainted bishops, Beate Gudmundur, St. Jon, and St. Thorlakur, between two censing angels. The design is framed by a chevron border at the sides and the lower edge, while the upper edge

⁷⁴D. I. XI, p. 852. This is the earliest found reference about refilsaumur, cf. p. 17.

⁷⁵Research on church furnishings from Holar could not be completed for this study, however.

⁷⁶Grimsson, op. cit., p. 26.

⁷⁷Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art, op. cit., Figure 67.

⁷⁸Blondal and Sigtryggsson, op. cit., Figure 77.
Matthias Thordarson, Leidarvisir. Thjodmenjasafn Islands (Reykjavik: Joh. Johannesson, 1914), p. 6.

Figure 32. Altar frontal from Holar.
National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 33. Altar frontal from Holar, partly
folded to show the change in color through fading of
the right side. National Museum, Reykjavik.



is finished with a band of lettering with the following Latin inscription: : angelvs : dni : beate gudmunde : sancte iohannes : ora : p : n : sancte thorlace : or : angel, i.e. angelus Domini, Beate Gudmunde, Sancte Johannes, ora pro nobis, Sancte Thorlace, ora [pro nobis], angelus.⁷⁹

The Holar frontal is the largest extant Icelandic mediaeval frontal, its maximum height being 99 cm. (39 1/8 inch), its maximum width 182.5 cm. (72 1/8 inch). The ground fabric is unbleached linen of tabby weave with a thread count of 8 to 9.5 per cm.² (20 to 24 per square inch) in both warp and weft. A selvage is present at the lower edge and most likely also at the upper edge although this could not be ascertained. The frontal is faced with a narrow strip of linen fabric across the top; tattered remnants of lining appear at the other edges.

The frontal is completely covered with embroidery except for three minor places. The main body of the embroidery is done in laid and couched work predominantly with woollen yarn. Linen thread is used in the following places: all faces, the gloves and white sleeves of the bishops, and the alb of St. Jon; it is also used in the second and third stages of couching all blue areas. The eight small jewel like spots on the mitre of St. John are worked in surface satin stitch with four woollen threads in the needle simultaneously.

⁷⁹Loc. cit.

Two kinds of outlining stitches are employed, stem stitch and couching. Stem stitch of both variations⁸⁰ worked at times in wool, at times in linen, occurs in most of the outlines. The stem-stitched outlines are worked before the laid and couched embroidery; threads of the latter frequently split or pass over the stem stitching.

Where couching is used as outlining, it, in most places, supplements an outline of stem stitch, lying either beside the stem stitching or on top of it. The couched outlines are worked in gilt metal thread of the kind where a narrow strip of metal is wrapped around a core of thread. Two gilt threads are laid side by side and fastened down simultaneously with white linen thread. This couching is used to emphasize the outlines and designs of the pictures of the three bishops: the bishops' hair, the chasubles, mitres, maniples, and heads of crosiers, as well as the ends of the stole of St. Jon and the apparel on his alb.

The woollen embroidery yarns used appear to be of two kinds: single S spun yarn and two-ply Z spun and S twisted yarn. They vary considerably in fineness but are on the whole rather coarse. For working the first stage of the couching four single threads are apparently sometimes used in the needle at a time (cf. Figure 32). 36
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⁸⁰Cf. pp. 26, 28.

The linen embroidery threads are two-ply, Z spun and S twisted, and quite coarse. They are of two colors, white and blue. The white linen is used in the white, the blue linen in the blue areas as already mentioned. It must be noted, however, that the blue linen thread has faded to white on the surface.

Eight colors (cf. Figures 32, 33, and 34) of woollen yarns are used: medium brown and blackish brown natural colored wool (morautt and saudsvart), natural white (appearing as light tan), yellow (faded to tan on the surface), red, slightly green blue, slightly red purple (faded on the surface to a very greyed red), and slightly yellow green (changed to blue on the surface).

The green is used only in the first stage of the laid and couched work on the **crozier** of bishop Gudmundur. The purple is found on the mitre, the infula, and the ends of the stole of St. Jon, on the infulae^x and maniples of bishop Gudmundur and St. Thorlakur, and the book held by the angel standing beside St. Thorlakur.

As mentioned previously, the frontal is completely covered with embroidery except in three small places: the tip of the mitre of St. Jon (cf. Figure 34) and the rings on the hands of St. Thorlakur and bishop Gudmundur. These three places show no traces of embroidery, but on the reverse side, especially on the tip of the mitre, the linen appears to have darkened and to be perhaps somewhat worn. It does not

seem unlikely that originally jewels were set in these places, having been removed perhaps during or after the reformation about 1550.

The frontal is finished on all four sides with a narrow woollen band having the appearance of woven braid (cf. Figure 33). So far as is known, it is the only altar frontal finished in this way and the edge finish seems to be original with the frontal rather than a later addition.⁸¹

The width of the band is 0.6 cm. (1/4 inch). It is produced by a method combining weaving and sewing. Into a warp consisting of eight threads, alternately natural brown and white, two-ply wool yarn, a white or brown weft thread is woven. The weft, threaded into a needle is inserted into the warp in tabby weave from one side only; the needle with the weft then passes back through the cloth at a distance from the edge slightly less than the width of the band. On the surface the warp covers the weft completely. In this way the braid is woven and attached to the edge at the same time. This method of edge finishing is called slynging.⁸²

⁸¹An edge finish of this kind appears to have been added to a mediaeval orphrey of foreign make, preserved in the National Museum in Reykjavik (inventory number 699).

⁸²This technique may be unique for Iceland; it has not been found described elsewhere. It was used on insoles up to the present time.

Figure 34. Detail of the altar frontal from Holar showing change of colors from fading. National Museum, Reykjavik.

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Figure 35. Detail of the altar frontal from Holar. National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 36. Detail of the altar frontal from Holar, showing the reverse of Figure 35.



Altar Frontal of Unknown Provenance

The altar frontal shown in Figures 37 and 38 is preserved in the Twenthe Museum (Rijksmuseum Twenthe) in Enschede, Holland, where it is exhibited as having originated in one of the convents in Lower Saxony. In a recently published study, E. J. Kalf,⁸³ however, arrives at the extremely plausible conclusion that the embroidery most likely is of Icelandic origin, belonging to the group of Icelandic mediaeval laid and couched altar frontals. The embroidery, which was purchased from a private owner in Munster in Westphalia in Germany, was acquired by the museum in 1933 or 1934; nothing is known of its earlier history.

Assuming the embroidery to be Icelandic, where would be its place of origin in that country? As mentioned earlier,⁸⁴ a number of churches possessed altar frontals of laid and couched embroidery which, it seems, have not survived to the present day. Indications point to the church at Muli in Adaldalur in Sudur-Thingey County (not far from Grenjadarstadur) as the most likely place of origin. A laid and couched altar frontal was listed in the inventories there as late as 1828,⁸⁵ and in mediaeval times the church was consecrated to Our Lord,

⁸³Kalf, op. cit.

⁸⁴Cf. pp. 21.

⁸⁵Kirkjustoll Mula i Adaldal, 1748-1849, XIX, 10, A, 1; p. 84,a.

Figure 37. Altar frontal of unknown provenance.
Twenthe Museum, Enschede, Holland.

Figure 38. Altar frontal of unknown provenance.
Twenthe Museum, Enschede, Holland.



the Virgin Mary, and St. Nicholas.⁸⁶ Other churches, such as Miklibaer in Blonduhlid in Skagafjordur County and Storidalur in Eyjafjordur County must also be considered as possible places of origin. Since, however, conclusive evidence cannot as yet be produced, further discussion of the possible provenance of the altar frontal in the Twenthe Museum will not be attempted.

In the museum in Enschede the frontal is dated as being from the 14th century.⁸⁷ Kalf⁸⁸ does not seem to refute this date openly, although she apparently considers other, later dates probable. Judging from a detail of the design on the frontal, i.e. the longsleeved coat or gown with the wide flat collar worn by God the Father, the date of the frontal cannot be set earlier than about 1485, the date of the earliest appearance of a garment of this cut in western fashions.⁸⁹

The main design of the frontal shows the Trinity, the Father supporting the crucified Son, with the Dove flying between them. The Father has a cruciferous nimbus around the

⁸⁶Jonsson, op. cit., pp. 29-55.

The church at Muli is not far from Grenjadarstadur. Could it be that Gaimard (cf. p. 43) acquired two laid and couched altar frontals on his travels in Iceland in 1836?

⁸⁷Kalf, op. cit., p. 63.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 66. Kalf's discussion of the dating was not quite clear to the present author.

⁸⁹Millia Davenport, The Book of Costume (two volumes; New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), I, p. 343. Cf. also p. 389, Figure 1031.

C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, Handbook of English

head; the throne is decorated with leaf ornaments. This picture is enclosed by a lozenge shaped band, which again is placed in a square frame. In the four resulting triangles are the signs of the Evangelists, St. John, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Matthew. The frontal is framed on all sides by a border with the following Latin inscription: Venite : benedicti : Patris : mei : possidete : : paratum : vobis : regnum : acon, i.e. Venite benedicti Patris mei possidete paratum vobis regnum acon [scilicet: a constitutione mundi], from the Book of St. Matthew, Chapter 25, Verse 34.⁹⁰

The frontal⁹¹ is ⁹¹90 cm. (35 5/8 inches) high and ⁸²76 cm. (29 7/8 inches) wide. The ground fabric is coarse, loosely woven linen of a tabby weave (Figure 39).⁹² The surface of the frontal is completely covered with embroidery. All fillings are executed in laid and couched work, with a spacing of about 0.5 cm. (less than 1/4 inch) between the threads of the second stage. The outlines are couched.⁹³

Mediaeval Costume (Philadelphia: Dufour Editions, Albert Saifer, 1952), p. 142.

⁹⁰Kalf, op. cit., p. 56.

⁹¹Of necessity the following description of the frontal is based upon the study by Kalf, op. cit., pp. 54-59, combined with the examination of pictures of the embroidery.

⁹²Neither threadcount nor presence of selvages was mentioned.

⁹³Kalf, op. cit., p. 57, states that the outlines are embroidered after the laid and couched work. Cf. pp. 35, 52, 56, 78,

Figure 39. Detail of the altar frontal in Figures 37 and 38, showing reverse of the upper left hand corner.



The embroidery threads used are of wool and linen. The color range is comparatively limited, consisting in all of only five colors. Blackish brown (probably saudsvart), rose, medium blue, and dark blue woollen yarn is used, beside tan (originally white?) linen thread. In Figure 38 the distribution of the colors is clearly discernible.

Frontlet
Superfrontal from Miklibaer

Figure 40 shows an altar cloth (altarisdukur), a superfrontal (altarisbrun), and an altar frontal joined together to form a single altar covering. This covering, which is from Miklibaer in Blonduhlid in Skagafjordur County, is now in the National Museum in Reykjavik, the inventory number being 10895. The three parts do not seem to have belonged together originally; and laid and couched embroidery is found only on the superfrontal while the altar cloth and frontal are executed in other techniques (stem stitch, mostly).

In the inventories from Miklibaer the superfrontal can be traced back only to 1781,⁹⁴ when also is found the last mention of an altar frontal in laid and couched work, first listed in 1693⁹⁵ or, possibly, in 1663.⁹⁶ However, in an inventory from 1757⁹⁷ of the neighboring church at Vidivellir, a

⁹⁴Bps. B, III, 17; p. 433.

⁹⁵Bps. B, III, 10; p. 53, b.

⁹⁶Bps. B, III, 6. Cf. p. 158.

⁹⁷Bps. B, III, 17; p. 54.

Figure 40. Altar covering from Miklibaer,
consisting of a superfrontal joined to an altar cloth
and an altar frontal. National Museum, Reykjavik.



Sancta +  Trinitas +



superfrontal joined to a frontal and cloth is found mentioned, the description of which fits the altar covering from Miklibaer. The superfrontal is mentioned as early as 1677,⁹⁸ and in 1685⁹⁹ it is listed as attached to a yellow altar frontal embroidered in stem stitch. The use of the church at Vidivellir was discontinued in 1765;¹⁰⁰ and in the inventory from Miklibaer from 1781 there is mention of a chasuble from Vidivellir. In view of the above it seems plausible that the superfrontal from Miklibaer originally belonged to the church at Vidivellir. The combined altar covering was sent to the National Museum in Copenhagen in 1826, but returned to Iceland in 1930.

The date of the superfrontal (and the altar cloth) has been estimated as not later than the 16th century.¹⁰¹

The design of the superfrontal consists of a small central roundel with the letters ih̄s; the roundel is flanked by the Latin inscription: sancta trinitas, both words followed by a small cross. This main design is framed by a border of flower and leaf scrolls.

⁹⁸Bps. B, III, 6.

⁹⁹Bps. B, III, 9; p. 30,a.

¹⁰⁰Sveinn Nielsson, Prestatal og Profasta a Islandi (second edition; Reykjavik: Hid Islenzka Bokmenntafelag, 1950), p. 250.

¹⁰¹Inventory of the National Museum, Reykjavik. The altar frontal is there attributed to the 18th century, while in the inventory in the National Museum, Copenhagen, it was placed tentatively in the 17th century.

The superfrontal, attached at the upper edge to an altar cloth and at the lower edge to an altar frontal (see Figure 40), has a maximum height of 18 cm. (7 inches) and a maximum width (length) of 100 cm. (39 3/8 inches). The ground fabric is a tabby-woven, unbleached linen with a thread count of 15 x 14.5 per cm.² (38 x 36 per square inch). A selvage is present on the left edge; the right edge is finished with a narrow (0.3 cm., 1/8 inch) hem. Part of the embroidered border on the right side is missing, part of it is folded into the hem. The original edge has apparently become worn at some time and been refinished in this manner, narrowing the width of the superfrontal somewhat, or perhaps it was fitted to the frontal in this way. Besides this, the lower right hand corner has been patched with a piece of tabby-woven linen, 6 cm. (2 3/8 inches) high and 4 cm. (1 5/8 inches) wide. It has a threadcount of 15 x 11 per cm. (38 x 28 per inch), with the finer threads, probably the warp threads, running lengthwise.

The superfrontal is only partly covered with embroidery, the design being embroidered while the background is left void. Only in the roundel in the centre is the ground filled in with stitching. The embroidery is executed in laid and couched work, stem stitch (of both variations), and chain stitch. The lettering and the crosses on either side of the central roundel are worked in wool in laid and couched embroidery, stem stitch being used only in the outlines and for filling in narrow parts.

The central design of the superfrontal is worked in wool and silk with chain stitch for a filling stitch, and stem stitch in all outlines with the exception of remnants of a fine chain stitch outline in linen inside the outer line of the roundel frame. The outlines of the letters in the centre as well as the ground around them are worked in wool, whereas silk is used in the filling of the letters and the main outlines of the roundel. The border framing the entire superfrontal is embroidered with stem stitch in wool (except for some minor reparations worked in linen).

*floral
2004*

The woollen embroidery yarns used are two-ply, mainly S spun and Z twisted, although yarn of the opposite spinning direction does occur. The embroidery silks are two-ply also, Z spun and S twisted. The linen found in the outline of the roundel is a single S spun thread of a light tan (originally white?) color.

^{Three} Four colors of silk threads can be distinguished, ^{well} (brown in the outlines of the letters,) brownish red in the outlines of the roundel, and green (changed to yellow green) and light blue (changed to light blue green) in the filling of the letters. The main colors of the woollen yarns which vary considerably in shades and intensity, are the following: yellow, light tan (natural white originally?), greyish brown, rose, blue, blue green, light and dark green, and orange. The distribution of the colors in the lettering is quite irregular; in the border the leaves are blue, the flowers red and green.

all

Arnesbæði

Altar Frontal from Klausturholar

The frontal shown in Figure 41¹⁰² is from Klausturholar in Arnes County in southern Iceland. It is now preserved in the National Museum in Reykjavik, where its inventory number is 4279. No reference to this altar frontal has been found in the inventories of the church. The frontal differs from other Icelandic mediaeval laid and couched embroideries in that it is worked entirely in silk with the exceptions of a few out-lines executed in metal thread.

The altar frontal is dated as not earlier than the 14th century.¹⁰³ The design of the altar frontal consists of a large central roundel and four small roundels, one in each corner, all of which are framed by leaf scrolls twining around narrow bands. On the four sides, between the small roundels, the spaces are filled with leaf scrolls and large fantastic flowers. The design in the large roundel shows the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven, standing on the crescent moon, crowned as a queen, with a nimbus and five stars over her head, and surrounded by a radiance. The four small roundels contain the symbols of the four Evangelists: St. John, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Matthew. The maximum height of the frontal is 91 cm. (35 3/4 inches), its maximum width 95 cm. (37 1/2 inches).

¹⁰² For a clearer picture, cf. Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art, op. cit., Plate 5.

¹⁰³ Loc. cit. In a new revised edition of this book, Icelandic Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., no date), Plate 5, the author has changed the dating of the frontal to the 14th century or earlier.

sp. þetta misstíðað ljón má? 1865
nei, summa i. evan. stj. 1. e. vil laccu þigti; i. isl. stj. x/par. Com. on. 103. tilv. 1924

Atte 1865

Figure 41. Altar frontal from Klausturholar.
National Museum, Reykjavik.

Figure 42. Detail of the altar frontal from
Klausturholar. National Museum, Reykjavik.



Actually it consists of an embroidered center panel framed on all sides with pieces of a woollen, twill woven fabric with a printed floral design. The woollen cloth is not an original part of the frontal. The embroidered panel has a maximum size of 62.5 x 69 cm. (24 5/8 x 27 1/8 inches).

The ground fabric of the embroidery is tabby-woven linen with a thread count of 22.5 x 21.5 per cm.² (56 x 54 per square inch), the higher count threads running lengthwise in the frontal. These may indicate the warp, but no selvage is present. The whole of the frontal is lined with light blue, tabby woven linen with a thread count of 14 x 13 per cm.² (35 x 32 per square inch). The lining consists of three vertical panels: a wide centre panel and narrower side panels. The centre panel, the maximum width of which is 64 cm. (25 1/8 inches), has selvages on both sides where it is joined to the side panels.

In this frontal the design is embroidered while the ground is left void. The embroidery is quite worn; in many places the stitching has disappeared exposing tracing of the design on the ground fabric. Laid and couched work is used predominantly, with the threads of the second stage being spaced closely, at intervals of about 0.25 cm. (less than 1/8 inch). A number of areas are worked in split stitch, such as the Virgin's tunic, hair, and nimbus, and the radiance surrounding her; also the uncovered body parts of the Virgin and the Child, the circles in the frames of the five roundels, the

flower stems, and parts of the signs of the Evangelists. The split stitches are quite long, about 0.5 cm. (somewhat less than 1/4 inch), and irregular, appearing frequently as stem stitch. Small areas, for instance in the signs of the Evangelists, are worked in surface satin stitch. The hair of the Child is worked by fastening down tightly twisted (coiled) loops of silk of irregular length.

A few outlines and areas are worked in couched outlining stitch with gilt or silver metal thread, consisting of a strip of metal wrapped around a core of silk. The areas worked with metal thread are the crown of the Virgin and the halos of the Evangelists' symbols. The outlines, worked with two strands of metal threads couched down with silk thread simultaneously, are found on the halo and around the garments of the Virgin as well as the yellow rays of the aureole. The twisting leaf scrolls on the five roundel frames were apparently also thus outlined originally, although only traces remain in a few places. The stars over the Virgin's head are outlined with silver thread.

The silk embroidery is worked in silk floss except the hair of the Child which is executed in tightly twisted two-ply silk. Ten colors of silk thread are used: white (cream), yellow, red, purple red, light blue, medium blue, blue green, light green, light brown, and dark brown.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER COUCHED WOOLLEN EMBROIDERIES OF MEDIAEVAL EUROPE

Laid and Couched Embroideries

The Bayeux Tapestry. As mentioned in the introduction very few mediaeval laid and couched woollen embroideries are known to have survived outside of Iceland. Of them only one, the Bayeux tapestry, is complete (or nearly complete), while the others, all Norwegian, are extremely fragmentary.¹

The Bayeux tapestry (Figures 43 and 44) is the earliest known laid and couched embroidery. It is now generally dated between 1066 and 1082, but it has not been possible to determine whether it is of Norman or English workmanship.² The story which it relates, i.e. the story of the battle of Hastings 1066 and the events leading up to it³ makes its French origin more likely, while for instance design details,

¹That the technique was known in mediaeval Sweden is indicated by one (Figure 81, p. 164) or possibly two extant Swedish laid and couched embroideries from the late 16th century. Cf. Ingegerd Henschen, Svenska Broderier (Stockholm: Forum, 1950), pp. 48-49, and p. 46 (cf. Digby, p. 54, note 29).

²Francis Wormald, "Style and Design," The Bayeux Tapestry, Frank Stenton, editor (New York: Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1956), pp. 29, 33-34.

³A short, clear resume of the story is given in Eric Maclagan, The Bayeux Tapestry (Penguin Books, 1953), 32 pp.

Figure 43. Part of the Bayeux tapestry.

Frank Stenton, general editor, The Bayeux Tapestry
(London: Phaidon Press, 1957), Plate 13.

Figure 44. Detail from the Bayeux tapestry.

Stenton, op. cit., Plate 29. Phaidon Press.



strongly linked with English illuminations of the time and English influence in some of the inscriptions indicate that it is English.⁴

The Bayeux tapestry, worked in wool on tabby-woven linen, measures 70.34 m. x 50 cm. (230 feet 10 1/4 inches x 19 3/4 inches).⁵ Only the design is embroidered, the ground being left void. While laid and couched work is used for all fillings, stem stitching is employed in the outlines. The number of colors has been somewhat disputed; most frequently eight are recorded: buff, yellow, terra cotta red, blue green, sage green, dark green, blue, and dark blue.⁶

Norwegian Mediaeval Laid and Couched Embroideries.

As stated earlier, there exist five fragments from three Norwegian laid and couched woollen embroideries; all are believed to be from mediaeval times.⁷ Three pieces are from the Urnes church in Sogn, possibly from a pictorial hanging called locally "The Loom of Signe."⁸ The pieces measure 23 x 15 cm. (9 x 5 7/8 inches), 5 x 6 1/2 cm. (2 x 2 5/8 inches), and

⁴Wormald, op. cit., pp. 29-33.

⁵No information was available about the threadcount of the ground material.

⁶Digby, op. cit., p. 40.

⁷Engelstad, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

⁸From the romantic legend of Hagbart and Signe; ibid., p. 81.

18 x 17 cm. (7 x 6 5/8 inches). Of the last piece (Figure 45) only the embroidery remains, the ground having disappeared completely. The two other fragments have a ground of unbleached linen woven in an extended tabby with two concomitant threads in warp and weft (i.e. basket weave). The threadcount of the fabric is 16 x 14 per cm.² (40 x 35 per square inch). The embroidery is worked with two-ply, S twisted woollen yarns in laid and couched work outlined with stem stitch. The colors used are yellow, brown, red, blue, yellow green, and natural dark brown.⁹

Also from the Urnes church in Sogn is a fragment from another embroidery executed in laid and couched work as well as darning stitch and stem stitch (Figure 46). The design of the darned embroidery consists of enlaced geometric patterns, while the laid and couched work and the stem stitching form a colored background for voided animal or foliage designs.¹⁰ The fragment which measures 17 x 13 cm. (6 5/8 x 5 1/8 inches), has a ground fabric of fine unbleached linen woven in an extended tabby with two concomitant threads in warp and weft (i.e. basket weave). The threadcount of the fabric is 38 x 24 per cm.² (95 x 60 per square inch). The embroidery is executed in fine two-ply, S twisted woollen yarns, in red, blue, yellow green, and dark natural brown colors.¹¹

⁹Ibid., pp. 100-101.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 101.

¹¹Loc. cit.

Figure 45. Fragment of laid and couched embroidery from Urnes church in Sogn, Norway. Engelstad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld, op. cit., p. 79, Figure 57.

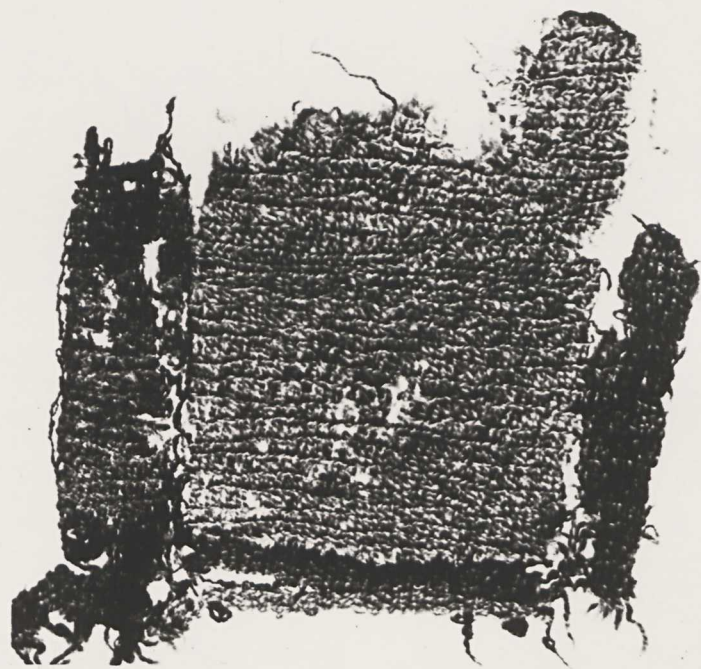


Figure 46. Fragment of embroidery from Urnes church in Sogn, Norway, partially executed in laid and couched work. Engelstad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld, op. cit., p. 80, Figure 58.



The third Norwegian laid and couched embroidery is a very mutilated fragment of a presumably horizontal wall hanging (refill) from the Ron Church in Valdres (Figure 47).¹² It has been dated to about 1200.¹³ The design shows parts of two pictures divided by a tree. To the left is the front part of a mounted horseman, to the right seven slain (?) men, one of whom wears a bishop's mitre. Parts of three swords are seen at the lower right. The piece measures 64 x 63 cm. (25 1/8 x 24 3/4 inches). The ground is a coarse, unbleached linen fabric of an extended tabby weave with two concomitant threads in warp and weft (i.e. basket weave). The thread count is 12 x 9 per cm.² (30 x 22 1/2 per square inch).¹⁴ The laid and couched work is done in two-ply woollen yarn in several colors (dull yellow, brownish red, dark reddish brown, and dark blue). The outlines are executed in couched outlining with unbleached linen thread.¹⁵

In addition to the laid and couched embroideries a small fragment with outline couching exists from the Borgund church in Sogn. It is dated as 12th to 14th century. The piece which measures 9.5 x 7 cm. (3 3/4 x 2 3/4 inches) is

¹²Ibid., p. 81.

¹³Loc. cit.

¹⁴Loc. cit. Ibid., p. 101.

Plu

¹⁵Loc. cit. Some outlines, such as details of faces and of the leaf border at the lower edge are worked in colored wool in an outlining stitch, perhaps back stitch. No information about this was given.

Figure 47. Part of an embroidery from Ron church in Valdres, Norway. Presumed to be from a horizontal wall hanging (refill). Engelstad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld, op. cit., Plate 3.



embroidered with two-ply Z twisted wool yarn of a brownish red color. The ^{linen} ground fabric is an extended tabby weave with two concomitant threads in warp and weft (i.e. basket weave); it has a thread count of 16 x 16 cm.² (40 x 40 per square inch). ^{15a}

Embroideries Executed in Roumanian Couching

Closely related to the laid and couched embroideries are the mediaeval German woollen wall hangings executed in Roumanian couching (klosterstich).¹⁶ These hangings, some of which are long and horizontal ^(Figure 49) while others are rectangular, were produced mostly in convents in northern Germany from the early 14th to the 16th centuries.¹⁷ Perhaps the best known works came from the convents Wienhausen and Lune. The rectangular hangings, some of which are of a spectacular size,¹⁸ are frequently divided into horizontal bands one below the other, while at times the designs are in roundels (Figure ⁵⁹ 49). Most of the embroideries are decorated with pictorial renderings of saints' lives or romantic legends. They are all worked on

^{15a} Loc. cit.

¹⁶ Cf. Figure 48; p. 26; and Figure 4, p. 25.

¹⁷ Marie Schuette, Deutsche Wandteppiche (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut A. G., 1938), pp. 48-50.

¹⁸ A Tristan's hanging from Wienhausen, about 2.30 x 4 m. (7 feet 6 1/2 inches x 13 feet 1 1/2 inches) may be considered average. Cf. Marie Schuette, Gestickte Bildteppiche und Decken des Mittelalters (two volumes; Leipzig: K. W. Hierseman, 1927) I, Plate 7.

Figure 48. Detail of wall hanging from the convent
 Wienhausen, Germany. ^{First half of the 15th century.} Jaques, op. cit., p. 151, Figure 93c;
 p. 15~~x~~1.

Figure 49. Wall hanging from the convent Ebstorf,
 Germany. 13th or 14th century. Jaques, op. cit., p. 62.
 Figure 38.

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0.43 x 3.155 m

coarse linen fabric with slightly twisted woollen yarns of various colors.¹⁹

¹⁹Schuette, Deutsche Wandteppiche, op. cit., p. 48.

CHAPTER VII

COMPARISON OF THE ICELANDIC EMBROIDERIES UNDER STUDY WITH EMBROIDERIES OF OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AND POSSIBLE SOURCES OF TECHNIQUE AND DESIGN

The Origin of Laid and Couched Work

As stated earlier, the Bayeux tapestry is the oldest known extant laid and couched embroidery. The origin of this technique has not been established. It has been implied that it was a method common to all nations,¹ that little laid and couched embroidery survived the ravages of time, and that at the end of the Romanesque period it declined in favor of Roumanian couching.²

On the basis of the provenance of laid and couched woollen embroideries, and the traditions related in the Icelandic sagas of using long horizontal, pictorial hangings (refill) in secular dwellings and churches in Scandinavia, it has, however, also been suggested that the technique executed

¹Digby, op. cit., citing Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., p. 175. Antrobus and Preece, in discussing laid work, include all forms of couching, not only laid and couched work as here defined (cf. pp. 24, 26, 159).

²Digby, op. cit., pp. 41, 51.

in wool was characteristically Viking, Anglo-Saxon or Norman, or common to the Norse people.³

The simplest form of couching⁴ was known and used by the Copts in Egypt; an example worked in colored wools on linen exists.⁵ The various techniques of couching are especially well suited and therefore much used for gold embroidery. Byzantine textiles and embroideries of gold and silk began to come into north western Europe during the Viking age. Perhaps in this way the technique of laid and couched work first became known to the northern people, who found it expedient also for work executed in their native materials, linen and wool. Laid and couched work executed in gold and silk is found in subsidiary parts of English 15th and 16th century church vestments and it occurs in ecclesiastical embroideries of the Netherlands, France and Italy during the 16th and 17th centuries. However, an eastern origin of the technique seems to be supported by the fact that from the 16th century onwards, laid and couched silk embroideries were executed in Turkey.⁶

³Ibid., pp. 48-52; cf. also Phyllis Ackerman, Tapestry the Mirror of Civilization (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 43-52.

⁴Of the kind shown in Figure 8, p. 27, i.e. couching used for outlining, called 'laid work' by Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., p. 128.

⁵Ibid., p. 128 and Plate XVIII, 3.

⁶G. von Palotay, "Turkish Embroideries," Ciba Review, 102, Figure on p. 3665.

A. J. B. Wace, Mediterranean and Near Eastern Embroideries (two volumes; London: Halton and Company, Ltd., 1935), p. 39, and plates CXVIII, CXIX, CXX, and CXXI.

Comparison of the Various Icelandic Laid and Couched Embroideries

Although the embroideries described earlier have characteristics of their own, a close study shows that each has some details in common with one or more of the others, thus uniting the pieces into a group. Only the frontal from ^{Annabali} Klausturholar seems to stand somewhat apart from the rest. When the dates attributed to the individual pieces are compared, it appears as if in a few instances they might be somewhat arbitrary. Thus it would seem that the frontals from Reykjahlid and Grenjadarstadur should be placed in the same century, perhaps in the 14th century rather than the 13th; at least not earlier than 1250.⁷

In comparing the design these are the two frontals which seem to be most closely related. The roundels are linked with small circles decorated with similar rosettes, the radiating leaf and flower ornaments in the spandrels of the frontal from Reykjahlid is repeated in some of the spandrels on the Grenjadarstadur frontal. The borders differ, however. Foliage scrolls similar to the borders on the Reykjahlid frontal are found on the hanging from Hvammur and the frontals from Draflastadir and Hofdi, while the chevron border on the Grenjadarstadur frontal is repeated on the Svalbard and Holar frontals. Again most of the spandrel ornaments on the Grenjadarstadur frontal may be seen on the Svalbard frontal, although clumsily traced and

⁷Cr. pp. 38, 44.

executed. In both the Grenjadarstadur and the Svalbard frontals the hand of God in benediction is depicted, although more frequently in the latter. The frontal from Draflastadir also ties in with the one from Granjadarstadur in minor details such as the trees in the third barbed quatrefoil and the seventh roundel. Again, the frontal from Stafafell shows close relationship with the Reykjahlid frontal, for instance in the rendering of the Virgin in the eighth roundel.

As could be expected, the sizes of the frontals varied somewhat, especially in width, whereas the height of eight of ten frontals lay between 90 and 100 cm. (about 35 1/2 and 39 1/2 inches).⁸ The available threadcounts revealed a considerable variation in fineness of the fabrics used; only two frontals, those from Holar and Draflastadir, had a somewhat similar threadcount. The fabric used for all the frontals except two was tabby-woven linen. The Reykjahlid and Grenjadarstadur frontals were made of ^{woollen} ~~linen~~ fabrics woven in extended tabby (i.e. basket weave), and the Hvammur hanging of woollen fabric of the same weave. The threadcount for the material of the frontals from Reykjahlid and Grenjadarstadur was not available; therefore no comparison with the fabrics of the Norwegian laid and couched embroideries was possible.

⁸Where the frontals could be examined it was found that their height equalled the width of the fabric.

The color schemes of the frontals were simple and did not vary greatly from one piece to the other. It was interesting to note that in perhaps the oldest frontals, those from Reykjahlid, Grenjadarstadur, Svalbard, and Stafafell, white linen thread was used for backgrounds. Wool of a yellow color was used for backgrounds on the Holar and Draflastadir frontals.⁹ Gray or tan wool, probably natural white originally, formed the background of the Hrafnagil frontal and the frontal preserved in Holland, the two which may well be the most recent ones of the wool embroidered pieces.

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Comparison of the Designs of the Laid and Couched Embroideries with Icelandic Illuminations

Before attempting a comparison of the Icelandic laid and couched embroideries with foreign embroideries it is of interest to note their close relationship in design with Icelandic illuminations of the 14th and 15th century. Most likely in Iceland, as was the case, for instance, in England¹⁰ and Germany,¹¹ artists undertook to draft embroidery patterns; illuminated manuscripts also served as pattern books, from which

Little was seen in the past

⁹These two frontals, which were both examined in the hand, also appeared very similar in the execution of the embroidery, and the coloring of the yarn.

¹⁰Alfred Frank Kendrick, Exhibition of Embroidery Executed Prior to the Middle of the XVI Century (London: The Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1905), pp. 16-17.

¹¹Kurth, "Medieval Embroidery," op. cit., p. 1813.

illustrations of Gospel history and saints' lives were copied. Icelandic illuminations are considered to show little originality, being mostly imitations of foreign illuminations, although skillfully made.¹² They are said to show traces of early 13th century French influences (through Norway), and similarities with English illuminations, although direct influence cannot be ascertained.¹³

The following Icelandic illuminations, all from the 14th century, show a few instances of similarities between the illuminations and designs of the laid and couched embroideries. In Figure 50¹⁴ compare the rendering of Bathsheba(?) with the Virgin in the Hofdi frontal, the grotesques with the fantastic animals in the lower border of the Hvammur hanging. In Figure 51¹⁵ compare, for instance, Isaac's chair with the thrones in the Stafafell and Reykjahlid frontals, and the lion with the fantastic lions of the Hvammur hanging.

¹²Hermannsson, op. cit., p. 14.

¹³Ibid., p. 14.

Tryggvi J. Oleson, "Book Collections of Mediaeval Icelandic Churches," Speculum, 32:503, July, 1957, states, however, that the considerable number of English books listed in the Icelandic church inventories, assembled in the year 1318 by bishop Audunn at Holar, testify to close relations between Iceland and England at the height of the middle ages.

¹⁴Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 27. Stjorn, AM. 226, fol. Second half of the 14th century.

¹⁵Ibid., Plate 18. Stjorn, AM. 227, fol. 14th century.

AM 226 fol. 1
Stjórn

3. 14. 14. add. St. Kalmar
1974.
Helsingell, Od. Hald

Figure 50. Icelandic illuminated manuscript page.
Second half of the 14th century. Hermannsson, op. cit.,
Plate 27.

f. 96v A

icapir auz uistadur gud har vrtu y godleik. o leg
 laudi at dauid. Sau ielle gir plect u at nuni vha.
 Dauid kr v pa lxx. ana er h andadit. h helle x xl. m
 ra. h v fit kr ieban p p s juda at ems. vj. ar. en si
 dan i ierlm. helle h m. ar z xxx. em valthz. s p p alla
 iltis. h v. en h var xxx. pa e h v k at zikia ietnon ok



Saul kgr var pallin. Her byriat
 om ok leu pta Salamon kgr er h
 ter drega adnna brodoz sin s. v rta lot

T pr am huanu huuuu dyr dar pu
 lid dauid kgr af su lvi. sette sa
 lomon sin h s p h alacti ko h s.
 z gredie skort hui vndilgset h
 ofdingi. A sin tina sem dauid

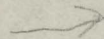
Er andadit getk atomas til fundu v her labe. dimungu.
 z had ha heidat af Salomone sym pnu. at h gypri hui til
 egnukonu abisach hma pdu mey. e pnuad hafin dd. i
 ellu. En m: fir at hvgli settadi h p s a kuanfangs at h
 xcladi s at uoi knu m: p lerd lamhig vel. fr s muntm
 alle folk vna ef h fengi abisach at sa vi maekthgætt at
 sira i soti dds e vni v at hgg ihs seuy. z i sin pnuu se
 dd. hafin helgad m: seahpu s. p xcladi h z sem va mud.
 at hredz abisach z allur hui fund. mdu heer vna hui ko
 ef h fengi ha hellez en hui m e ecki vaxi vanda hunde
 m vid pa. Hv pott dimung vaxi gaduhug z hallat med
 reinn hundi z p lerd laulu. pa kerdi h x vni hvgan ok
 p lerd atome. z tok v mudi h. pa peg til fundat vid
 Salomon kgr. Ok sem h kom thallna. thid kr vpp. z geck
 paguandi mott mad s h lant he. z leiddi ha t sents m:
 z p velt huti dimung omda lit. z taladi s. Er hef ei
 valda han at p lora t pdu m m hvi. z vil ek x mtra
 ha fr en pu vett m adz. Er sv. hu et mad imm. thaz
 m x at spua p. z vil ek gina at pu pogg s e pu heid
 m: skynsemd en p hvi: p at qugterda at pu bid ps
 euf e m se vel vettanda. pa m. dimung. Er vil p lidia
 at pu gipt abisach. adama huod pnu til eyin konu.
 Er sat peg hui undir lno han atome z sv xcladi. Hv
 p pta madir at lidia hui abisach t eyin konu nca pu
 vif hui heer hvg tomhus. pa bid qm hellez sklus. f pu
 at pu vettz at adomas huodir imm e elri en ek. Ok
 gaf s seahp k m m: kalmigi hma agieruettu hvgdm
 gva. fr en pad' m m: sion m m: til kgr at. v vha. Hv e
 fi somu en idag idollu fultuugi m: hui. Jaab hui gi



AM 227 fol Skjinn

Figure 51. Icelandic illuminated manuscript page.
14th century. Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 18.

f. 38^v N



lofum þau nāight geyt. Sva sem af þau er ver
 fiamu hū. Sem hū grasurinn uirðiz & algvok
 & sem hū stæf sūk um sūn þr hū ap & stæf hū ē ber
 fæf hū & stæf t þeramar & fullkominnar umbo
 ta ekki þi sūð at sa lofði sem ekki sūm fīa. har
 k' nu & fua t at bkann þfarar romute v flegum
 m; s' mikilli tik þr at hon fā s' mōgær kamife
 of mād at hon man fā omugum fialþ ekki ve
 ta vinnu.



u er fæf t mall at taka
 sem þyr v þ hōpft ad
 vīach sūm abrahāmf
 hāpdi tektr rebethā
 tott' lurtuð fīa tī a
 gmfar hufþru þau tī
 ma sem hū v fōngtr

at alton. Þā s' sem hū þau & þropaði v langa
 tinnu ngr um xv. ar at hūm var kōma vþyrta.
 en hū unsi þio raian stad gud þ hert v þad hū
 abrahām at þ fīafþan sūk þlyðtr & mýndi þans
 kým & ap kien; þyþgar & mōþalþdæ. þa þad hū
 t gudt at fīa þlyðtr með hū þilla fīa sū þyr
 hert. Gud þeyrði hū þen. þau rebetha fī ngr at
 tūm. þurð hāpdi þyrta. með hūm. Ok er v
 langt t þf sem von v at þ mýndi þad a. þapān
 hūm at huar genadēm gekk & givdi þdum i ge
 gn s' sem hþandī sūm mīthi thertat kundi með
 þrī grem at þrdam; vrdūæ. s' vmtēga & þoia
 þn þkptēga sem þvak viltōi þdū þyr þedaz
 & þam kōma & þ þau þlyðtr sem nokktr um
 hāpa þkitt at þr hōpdi & þar nogt rum; & þegtr h
 mīar mōþtr kundi sem þr voru kōmū. utan þe
 tto var þ s' ap gudt mīthā ok t þapān þr sem þat
 þyrði þa þegar & þrta. með þm oþomūm tē þdr
 kōm þrām m; þm þeddum & full kōmūm þm
 at þau þrām gremat oþladre anar & þekk þ gud
 tēga mīthūm & gremt sem anar at þ f' alþof þaker
 & natmtr v þau a þkitt & þkitt hū þa þeg með
 þm v þeddum; sem longu sūak þrām kōm & full
 kōmadre með fīafþ þm apþur ingi & t mīm. Hū
 sem mōþm þmadre & v hāp haldm umþ þm &

Su xx

hāpa geud nokkurn þurð t þr at fīa kōmū erþ.
 Ok er þ fōmþadiz þm gūm & þortiz & utta hūsv
 hōnar hagr mūndi gūvaz þa þōr þ at vād þret
 vax ap gudt qd þr hūsv ūda mūndi & hōm kōmū
 þa var emgi fīad þa en eþ nokkurt kým fīatr
 t þr at þkittēga þpādē & þ hūna er mīm mēat
 þkittēga fīta vūtr vada. þat tēga seg tōmēttō at þ
 þō t fīatēant mōia þar sem abrahām givdi
 gudt afþart & hāpdi þar gudt þōmþer & legtr
 a þkittum er ap þm kōmēndum v flegm sem þ
 gþþdi & hāpdi hēn s' i fūepmūm gudt an fūp v
 tēat vtr. þ ma & vā at hāp; nē; þm manar sem
 þ fa með sūm þed; gōr laurnm þ sem þr fēgia
 þrī kōmtr vā lagtr s' vnd hōpft ap hūm erū
 er þ trūz at enr qd fōgn þm tōp; at alþōgū; fīar
 þ ue grandī þr nokktr eþōm; & hāp legtr þar
 mōz a kōmtr þōr tēf sem hert at t' þat at þ
 þlyðtr & vūz nokktr at hōm þm þōgar vō vā
 meðan er hōm fūp; Oja & t mēthi fēdēh þa
 þr þa þlyðtr & hāp; hōm vūz hūm gōngtr t þr
 ta. fūm með hūm hert er hōm hōp þ gōr þa v
 hēn vmtat an þōr ap gudt s' fēg mīdī. þm mūm
 kōmtr erū nu v þōd; þ er at þkittā tūgū; þōd
 a þed; & ap þmū kōmtr man tūtrā handa þyð
 ut gāngā. mūm þr gremāz & s' fūnd; hūnd vā
 þa sūm mīthi at þr manū þīaz man anar þa þy
 dī anar fīgr; & hūm mōtr man hūm mīna þio
 na & t tēat vtrā. hūat er þo er & ankan tēga ap
 fīafþum þm fūapīstūmū s' þkittānda þar sem
 hūm eþr vīkō rapmūm hūmū þngūa hēttō ap
 þm þōdum sem þ þm kōmū þr idūmā ap þr
 mīl vūm eþau vūdu longu sūak þkittēgtō þa
 vnd kōi er kōmū v at lūg þōdga tūh þ iacob.
 utan með þm þkittēgi segtr at eþau hāp þōnat
 iacob þa er hūm givdi hūm hūm vþd sem þrī þōm
 tarūm þau tūma sem þr fōpft & tēnt. & þust kō
 mū. eþr oþm raudu gūllū. Ok s' sem tūm kōm at
 hūm þlyðtr þadā þa þr; s' t' at þar kōmū
 v; þat ar þrām. þa sem þyrī þeddre var vād
 & lodm ad; sem erþ þān & þ þa fōk v hū kalla
 dē fēv þr eþk; nūm kalla tēron hāp eþ; fōkk
 en þo var eþau hū ngrt nāp; Ok þegar t fād
 þeddre anar s' at hūm hēft um sūnt þōdtr if ok



Figures 52,¹⁶ 53,¹⁷ 54,¹⁸ and 55¹⁹ contain many details of which similarities are to be found on the embroideries, such as leaf scrolls, fantastic animals, and details of furnishings and architecture.

In the early 15th century Icelandic sketchbook, mentioned previously,²⁰ many points of likeness to the embroideries may also be observed. For instance, in Figure 56²¹ scenes from the Creation are enclosed by barbed quatrefoils of the kind found on the frontal from Draflastadir; in addition, the spandrel ornaments are ^{of a} similar ^{nature}. Details of furnishings and architecture in Figure 57²² resemble details in the frontal from Stafafell and in the fourth and eighth roundel of the frontal from Reykjahlid. Allen

¹⁶Ibid., Plate 6. Flateyjarbok, Gl. Kgl. Sml. 1005, fol. 1387 to 1394.

¹⁷Ibid., Plate 8. Jonsbok (Svalbardsbok), AM. 343, fol. First Half of the 14th century.

¹⁸Ibid., Plate 28. Stjorn, AM. 226, fol. Second half of the 14th century.

¹⁹Ibid., Plate 24. Stjorn, AM. 226, fol. Second half of the 14th century.

²⁰Cf. p. 15.

²¹Fett, op. cit., Plate 32.

²²Ibid., Plate 25.

*Flateyjarbók
A. Ryf. Sm. 1005 fol
GKS 1005 fol.*

Figure 52. Details from Icelandic illuminated manuscript pages. 1387-1394. Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 6.

*Plate 6a: Col. ~~272~~ H
21*

on Plate 6b?

AM 343 fol
1320-1340
jónsbók, Snalbandsbók
Registre (1989), Ms. 441

Figure 53. Details from Icelandic illuminated manuscript pages. First half of the 14th century. Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 8.

2006
1330-1340
Snalbandsbók
Elfu Halldóttir 1904
OK
Registre 1989
Ms. 441


Plate 8a f. 2r F
" 8b f. 63v H
" 8c f. 84r b

okkar nýsamhigo i þokkum
 aller varum hja ihu & hns m
 se blezar man enda am. h hep
 punda h
 lok m þy
REI
 blezan m
 hja ihu &
 ok ar nai
 varar þi
 In marie ok hnt helga olape
 kgs hnt helga thoulakt bps o
 allm halagra mana se med
 hnt loghngit morn m ok
 pnan. En ver skolan logh
 vnt rga ar om m a þingit



Handwritten note in bottom left corner:
 Hja þy
 aa þ


mar sem eadi skulv. En ep skop þ
 inz iqual þm. þa m sa ar iðne
 ma iarn hual sem uclv þyr. W
 þeupr mab skv i alvinngr. e
 sa uedi bndir eða and úki þa
 sear hñbrm malkum mð kg
 ok m gilldi þm er hñ vendi þ
 ok ren sñ epur lagha dnm
 þ er heyr reka þant ok grein
 r huat hñr av ep nija oðr bi
 vti. eða iord grepr capitalmng
 ner m sa reka
D allan þ i andi h
 m mðar ok hñ
 ala. sela. þilla
 ok þugla ok þa
 ra nema m loghum m þ honm



so þetta mð
 þ. En ep u
 re skap eða
 er mðm sk
 m þetta e
 upp uedi
 þyrgriz sak
 spjoll úð
 e þong sm
 engi aðdr
 þar uamr
 m þ skm
 þyrgriz hñ
 þiomu. e
 a ep u m
 ap uedis so
 us m mð

ullu ið naum sem sa e m t. en
 da aðyrgriz hñ e þo ar hñ dia
 gi m. Ret er s ar þe þetta skap
 þar m. toep. eða grioti s um
 þ m lör hns þ er hñki spalli a
 þ ne eng. s mni hñmm engan
 skala. þ þer þ m
 mð. her heyr upp
 hñ m mnd hñ
 tokar er heyr þ
 iopua. þalkk. ~

Dat er nu þi nest ar uak ken
 gi amnan stela. Un er þe gra
 nanda. ar ep sa m stela mat er
 þa þer ser mmmu t postos s helpr
 so þy þinn þ hungri sakir. þa er
 sta stuldi m. engu morn restunð



Handwritten notes in right margin:
 þ m
 þe ar
 uam
 epur
 aðr
 þaop
 þ ken
 eða
 þid

AM 226 fol
 3. 1/4 14th c.
 St. Kolumb
 Op. Huld
 (1370-1375)
 1260-1270

Figure 54. Icelandic illuminated manuscript page.
 Second half of the 14th century. Hermannsson, op. cit.,
 Plate 28.

J. HON M

Sva seg sebalhus i sin þfogu. Ek mun þær áaz rit
 a. er romuuar holou i moti þugcha Egi ap ymudia.
 þ er ultr i eþpa. ok kalaz serkto hcr nukla. Ok tæa
 þ þi þau tændi at þra áaz h' ur sua. ok miklar. ok en þ þ
 at þit v' i moti þit tagn' mæu romuua luert. af ap dindi kll m
 m; agirua skins ok opund sin thullu. þæt h' ur bædri
 hanni ok ai iudu skadlamiget. ok þæ þ þi m; unklh v
 væku. at áaz mæn h' m. aleyvdu næt áltt k' þalue h'æ
 Eñ þr cu ek legi vþþaz þar þraþagi. m ek tæa þa luti er
 þr ádur til þs at þa iudi sklin þ fognu eþt þ er romuuar
 hoydu sigð slumbillen h'g veltan af cartaga eg. a apþra
 hñ agæra. Pupuus apo h' sa jarl' er þ ádi. h' v' hñ yu
 an m; þ nafni. þon það h' h'afni z þ nafn. þr v' agæt m
 ok v' puphus þri kolin til tagn' en h' heþm áltot' at rom
 útkem loquu. Þ v' kallaz eþt þ apþæmus. her þvriaz



vpp romuua loq ap apallmilla h
 áttmilla þ þer i muidia. h' v' m
 kall um puph. þ tok h' unkm mer
 nati ap romuuum. s at þr sem h
 hoþning ok h'g vþ all þau z e pap
 lus tipo h'afni mtr. ok s' þau z
 er elmbal h'afni at. ok en þs k's
 er seluahu þ. ok h' h'afni at i app
 ca. Með þsu gællmilla v' þa

stanz puphus apo. er h' v' þvriaz i manni þu sem loaz er h'
 þaz i ageto bio. ok unkl speki v' i. Eñ v' þvengi ok trulek
 h'afni h' alla z þi vidi þa. Áttlepa h' son maðlmille. e h'g
 ioui tok eþt h'. Eñ áaz þv' h's ándiduz mng. g' a' valtalste
 ok gullgulla. gullepa þr at a y. þ. at balem. ok h'vencalem.
 Son maualbante h' þugurtha. h' v' i opphafi bædri unkl ok
 eþt at apli. ok þm þm. ok þo unklu þkari. i tænti ok at
 um. ok þozuhalek allu. Eñ með þ at h' v' þllu son. þa v'
 u gullepa þr eku z gæpa hñ. Eñ þvodi h' vpp s' sem hua i.
 su v' nati. ok verna þugur at h' þalli s z i leu ne eþt laci
 h'kamans. h'illu g' u hñ þu þer h'vencat. at ræda i skaga
 ein reyna leud u iapnallo hua. ok v' h' z þvætt i allu hñ
 ok þu h'ut h'gu h' umikn h'vencika. þvriat v' auz h' at v'
 va lea z áz tæz nyr. v' h' z þvætt i allu v'vencikap. ok h' þo
 lealþr mtrer hol a. Áz þum h'ut v' u gullepa þr glæz.
 ok æcladi hñ z unkl h'vencika ok h'vodi v'na iudu at at gu
 þugurde. Eñ er þer mæthe or ap alld ok iþm. tok h'g at
 þvngia ap elli. en hñ h' v' h' þm kam u at alld ok at g
 m. tok h' þa at áaz eþt h'ð sona h'ua er þz v' umi t' væz

ok manan en þugcha. Eñ þ h' h'vencat h' meit. at þ er namna
 mng u. at ginnaz rik eþ narke þick koltr ai lva ok þr h'vgn þa
 mlok rataru at þylla oha hñ. Þ sa ok at þugcha hñ. va til
 þaz eþ h' unklu k' daz at heþvæz upp t' kll. en þu hñ næzia
 mega at va meðal m iollum h'ut. Eñ h' þau at alþvoad um
 hñ. Ok þa at h' leni v'pa h' meiz nacturu h'vgn. þa v' hñ
 h'vencat um at þ' g'ur u þoz ap. Ok sa at z munda h'vna at
 h'vencat i ardar iapn unklum m ap doli þalki. ok mium
 meira k'ed at oia hñ morkn unkm h'alka. h' g'ur ap

M þu tina þ romuuar i þpania m; h' hñ þvriaz
 þ sem her mmanua. v' puphus apo hoþning þ h'
 þm. Romuuar setna m oia mellepa kgi. at h' þu
 m þm h'. h'vodi k' ok þoz gongu u. ok s' g' u h'. h' sem þugcha
 hoþning þ h' þu ok h'vnam m; s at h' munda i þu h'alka þa
 lla s' þu g'ur sem h' v' i allum maðm romuuum. Ellig munda of
 veltor h'vencat h'vnam h's. ulla munda tævælt vna at þ ho
 ma hñ. Eñ þra g'ur áza leid en h' h'vgn. þr þa er þugcha
 kom til romuua. þm h' þvri arædis ok g'ur v'laufi. Skamt
 ádi h' s' k'ungz ikaplytu puph apo. ok s' h's mtr h'vodi u.
 þvæz v' h' s' k'væz þurho at h' kallam þugcham til allt þvri.
 ou h' v' lum til alle h'alka þs er h'vodi. þugcha v' nukla ai
 h'væz þ h' h' v'væz þ h'ellz. ga er romuuum v'væz meit þvri
 k' at. ok þal h'vri h' h'vri val ne eþvæz ok z h'vri h'alka. s'
 kom h' s' ikærlæka v' h'vnam ok alla áza romuua. Eñ ou
 u h's h'vencat h' allra meit. h' v' hñ tævæz til g'apns. ok
 hñ skioæti t' arædis. en ap þ v'lam puphus þugcha þ til
 sem meit þvri. at h' v' k'væz þvri. ok h' þau at alld v'væz z
 zæd h's ne æclan v' h' ap þsu meit eþkæz. ap hñ ok doli
 h'vnam. v'væz ok s' allur at h' v' hñ hñ meit h'vgn. h' v' ok h'
 u v'væz ap þe. ok hñ h'vencat v' alla m. þm Romuua
 þna tina v' h' romuua mng ugn' m ok mng þz ok þvri
 er meit um murtugurua en maðkotti ok v' h'væz ok v'væz
 þvri. þr v'væz iapnau þ þugcho of gullepa þr ándam m
 munda at eugm v'væz iapnau til þalli at þvri. þvri þvri sem
 þugcha. ok h'vodi h' h' alla h'vri ok at va þvri h'vri þvri.
 ok v'væz þ m; þm at i roma h'g e allur mtr þvri v'væz þe.
 Eñ h'væz er um v'væz mmanua. s'væz allr h'vri ap til k'væz
 h'g. ok at h'væz þ allar puphus apo. þugcha i hñ a ræga.
 ok g'ur hñ tævæz h'væz. ok iapnau hñ hñ þvri.
 z þvri. ok loþam h' mlok þ ollum roma h'g þvri þvri er
 þ v'. Sidan leiddi puph h' ai emmæli. ok v'væz hñ h'vri
 ræd. ok mtr s'. Ellka þu v'væz romuua ap m'væz
 en g'ur þm z tævæz þvri. ok mtr h' þ v'væz at þvri
 z g'ur at kaupá at þvri er mng egn. Eñ eþ þu v'væz
 v'væz meit þvri h'væz at s' sem þu h'vri all h'vri þa er
 þ v'væz h'vri. Eñ eþ þu v'væz þ v'væz þm tævæz ap
 v'væz þm gullepa kgi. ávæz þa mtr þu þvri.



1350-1375

Figure 55. Icelandic illuminated manuscript page.
 Second half of the 14th century. Hermannsson, op. cit.,
 Plate 24.

f. 1^v A Christ in Majesty

AM 226 fol.

2nd 1/2 1/4 line

3. 1/4 1/4 line

Figure 56. Page from Icelandic sketchbook; early
15th century. Fett, op. cit., Plate 32.

178 So Kid.
1450-1475
MM 693

hera hama fligland ma nor e daga hi van 99 h



with the dragon of the north

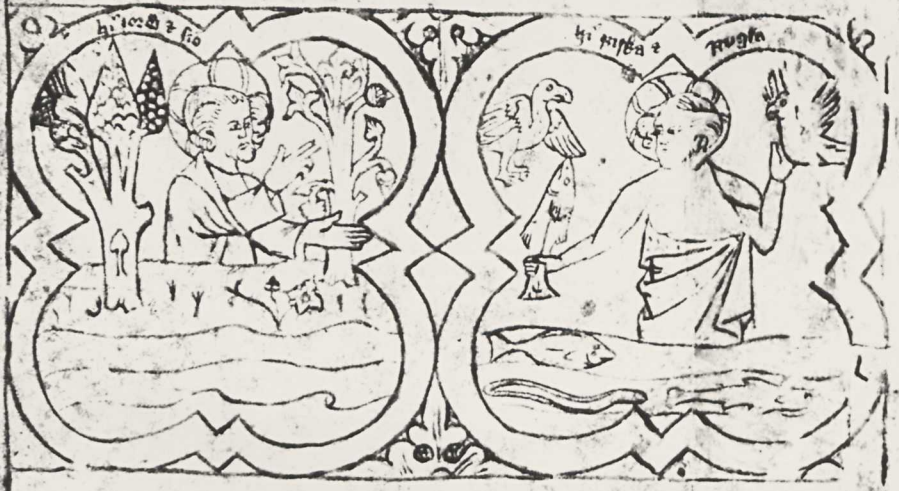


Figure 57. Page from Icelandic sketchbook;
early 15th century. Fett, op. cit., Plate 25.

2006 fol. 9v
"g. mustari"



balla hūhū
su oltre
se hūhū
i hūhū
ua su hū
hū hū
hū hū

Comparison of the Designs of the Icelandic Embroideries with Other European Designs

The design feature immediately noticed with respect to the Icelandic laid and couched embroideries is the repeated roundel with pictorial content. This type of design is usually associated with Byzantium, its fine brocaded silk and gold fabrics with roundels enclosing biblical scenes or real and fantastic animals.²³ This form of ornamentation was also carried out in Byzantine embroideries, an example of which is the early 11th century gold-embroidered mantle of Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor, showing mounted horsemen in roundels.²⁴ The tangent points of the frames are covered by small decorated roundels, a manner of joining roundels frequently seen in Byzantine fabrics.

Of the five Icelandic embroideries with roundels, three have roundels joined in this manner, i.e. the frontals from Reykjahlid, Grenjadarstadur, and Svalbard. On the fourth, the 'Hrafnagil frontal, a decoration different from the small roundel is used,²⁵ while on the fifth, the hanging from Hvammur, the roundel frames are linked together by small circlets.

²³Cf. Ethel Lewis, The Romance of Textiles (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 107-110.

²⁴Theodor Muller, Erich Steingraber, and Sigrid Muller-Christensen, Sakrale Gewander des Mittelalters (Munchen: Hirmer Verlag, 1955), p. 20, Figures 19, 20, 21, Plates II, III. The mantle is preserved in the cathedral treasury at Bamberg.

²⁵Cf. p. 63.

Designs in roundels may be seen on both German and English mediaeval embroideries as well as on a few Swedish pieces, but the modes of joining the circles are different from those found on the Icelandic embroideries. In the German mediaeval embroideries, the white linen work of the 13th and 14th centuries²⁶ and the multicolored woollen hangings of the 14th to 16th centuries,²⁷ the roundels are placed side by side without being held together, as in Figure 58, or they are linked either in the manner shown in Figure 59, or by placing small roundels between the large ones. In the English embroideries the roundels are usually placed side by side, occasionally joined by an ornament placed between them (Figures 60 and 61). In the Swedish embroideries the roundels are either separate or joined by small interspersed roundels.²⁸ ^{would seem} It seems, therefore, that in the mode in which the roundels are joined on the frontals from Reykjahlid, Grenjadarstadur, and Svalbard, these Icelandic embroideries are directly influenced by Byzantine models, rather than intermediaries.

In search for a design comparable to the linking of the roundels in the Hvammur hanging, no embroidery or textile was

²⁶Cf., for instance, Jaques, op. cit., Figure 37.

²⁷Cf. p. 105.

²⁸Cf., for instance, Henschen, op. cit., Figures on pp. 14, 37.

Figure 58. Altar frontal from the Bamberg cathedral, Germany. It is executed in multicolored silk in satin stitch. 14th century. Jaques, op. cit., pp. 138-139, Figure 85. *and gold thread*

Figure 59. Wall hanging from Wartburg, Germany, from the third quarter of the 14th century, executed in Roumanian couching in wool on linen. Jaques, op. cit., p. 161, Figure 100.

Figure 60. Reconstruction from fragments of an apparel of an alb. Vestments of bishop Walter de Cantaloupe. English, early 13th century. Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit., Plate XXI, ~~A~~.



Figure 61. Apparel of an amice from the tomb of Archbishop
Hubert Walter. English, about 1200. Christie, English Mediaeval
Embroidery, op. cit., Plate XI.

*Canterbury Cathedral
Archbishop Hubert Walter*



ath. hundi
Kaleleppi
Miklaba. Uuung
doyel partionk
ial.
yngr

found resembling it. An Icelandic illumination depicting Christ in Majesty (Figure 55)²⁹ showed the same manner of linking. The only true counterpart of this design element was found in a Norwegian mediaeval church fresco (Figure 62),³⁰ which no doubt shows an ornamental ^{wall hanging} refill ^{border or frame} surmounting plain draperies. In two French miniatures³¹ from about 1230 large roundel frames were directly linked with each other as were the frames of the barbed quatrefoils on the Syon cope, which dates from about 1300.³²

Ornaments resembling those used to cover the tangent points of the roundels on the Hrafnagil frontal were observed in the woven design of the English Saddlers' pall, made of late 15th century Florentine brocaded velvet.³³ Similar ornaments were seen on an English 16th century hanging or carpet.³⁴

²⁹Cf. p. 120, and note 19, p. 116.

³⁰Observed by Engelstad, op. cit., pp. 21 and 23, Figure 7.

³¹Jacques Dupont and Cesare Gnudi, Gothic Painting (Geneva: Skira, 1954), Plates on pp. 28, 29. From the Psalter of Blanche of Castile.

³²A. G. J. Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), Plate XCV.

³³Exhibition of English Mediaeval Art (London: The Board of Education, 1933), Plate 96. About 1500. Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., p. 237. Wandel, op. cit., p. 72, remarked upon the strong resemblance between these ornaments and Italian 15th century brocades.

³⁴Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., Plate XXXIX.

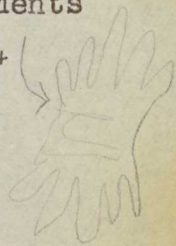


Figure 62. Wall painting in Nes church in Telemark,
Norway. Mediaeval. Engelstad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld, op. cit.,
Figure 7.

14. old



*cf. leusinger,
Kaleidoskop
for Uddelata
(efjinn)*

A design resembling the lower border of the Hvammur hanging, i.e. fantastic animals in half circles, was not found in any foreign embroidery. Borders made up of half circles enclosing busts of angels or apostles, were, however, observed on two German arm reliquaries and a casket, dated from about 1175 to 1200,³⁵ and a border of half circles with foliage designs was found in an interesting church wall painting in Sweden from the year 1323 (cf. Figure 63).³⁶ The wall painting consists of long horizontal bands with figurative scenes and apostles under Gothic arches, divided by a leaf scroll and finished at the lower edge by the aforementioned border of half circles. Below the border are painted draperies as in the Norwegian church mentioned above; likely the pictorial bands represent long wallhangings.

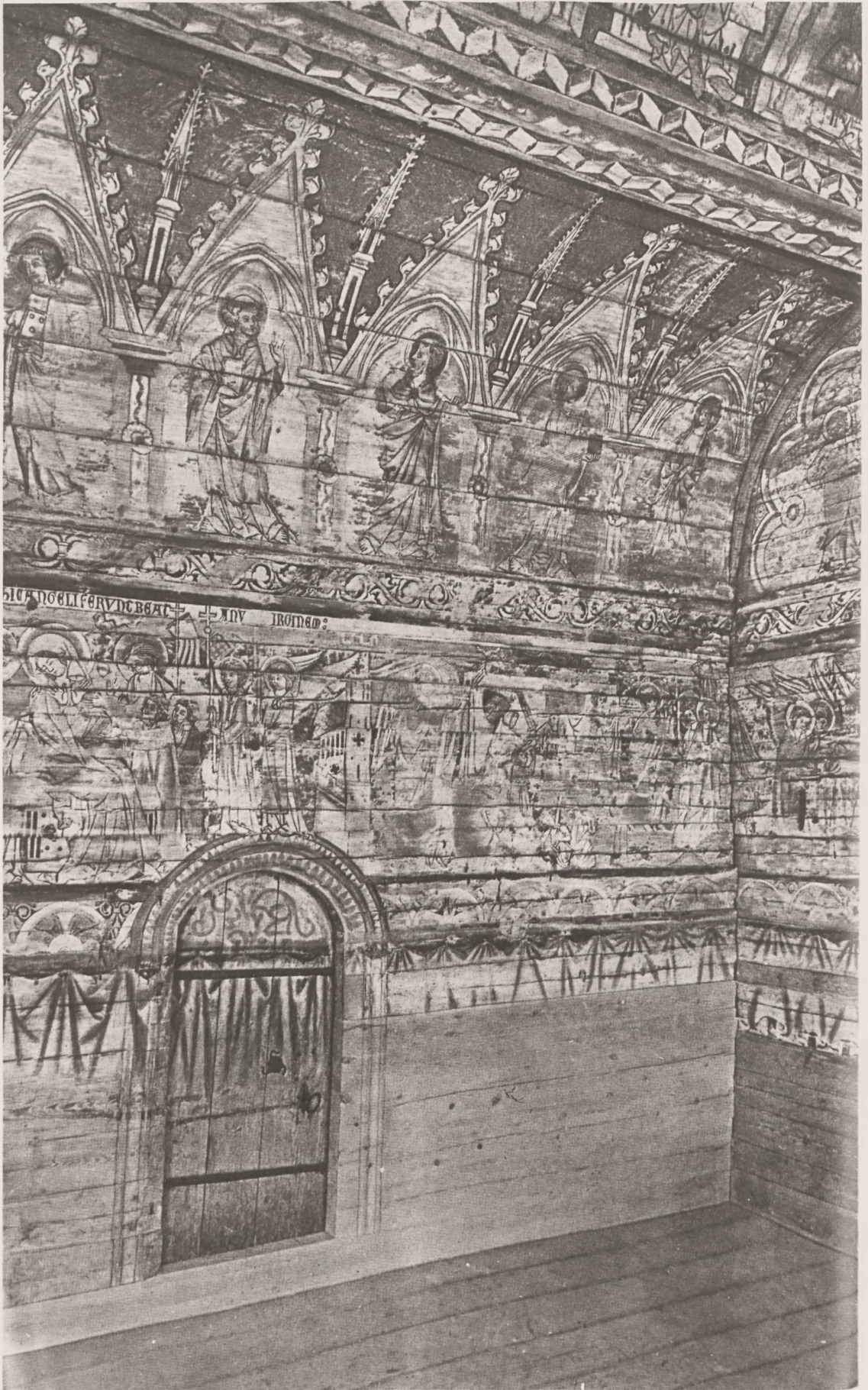
Outside of Iceland, the closest parallels to the fantastic animals in the roundels and half circles of the Hvammur hanging were found in English embroideries and other art

³⁵Hanns Swarzenski, Monuments of Romanesque Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), Figures 496-498, 499.

Middelalder og Nyere Tid, op. cit., Plate 8.

³⁶Andreas Lindblom, Sveriges Konsthistoria (three volumes; Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1944), Vol. I, Plate facing p. 225, pp. 212, 225.

Figure 63. Wall painting in Södra Råda church,
in Varmland, Sweden, from the year 1323. Lindblom, op. cit.,
Plate facing p. 225.



objects (Figures 64,³⁷ 65,³⁸ 60,³⁹ 66⁴⁰). Nothing comparable to the creatures with human hands and animal claws of the type indicated by the design in the last roundel of the hanging (Figure 10) and the two small fragments (Figure 11) could be found. The grotesque animal shown in Figure 67⁴¹ has, however, some points of likeness to them, especially the large hands. This feature is also found on the two centaurs in the Bayeux tapestry (Figure 43, p.98); the centaurs may furthermore be compared with the creature in the eighth half circle of the hanging.

As already mentioned the various stylized foliage ornaments in the spandrels of the roundel patterned frontals varied somewhat; on the whole, however, they seemed to be most closely related to English design. Compare for instance the spandrel ornaments on the Reykjahlid frontal with the tile design in the right center row of Figure 65,a, or some of the spandrel designs on the Hvammur hanging with those on the amice in

³⁷Lawrence Stone, Sculpture in Britain. The Middle Ages (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), Plate 31, B. Early 12th century.

³⁸E. Eames, "A Decorated Tile Pavement from the Queen's Chamber, Clarendon Palace," The British Museum Quarterly, 22: Plate XII, February, 1960. 1250 to 1252.

³⁹Cf. p. 126.

⁴⁰Stone, op. cit., Plate 144, B. About 1386 to 1393.

⁴¹Geoffrey Webb, Architecture in Britain. The Middle Ages (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1956), Plate 40, B. First quarter of the 12th century.

Figure 64. Stone font from Topsham in Devon,
England; early 12th century. Stone, op. cit.,
Plate 31, B.



Figure 65. Parts of a decorated tile pavement from Clarendon palace, England. 1250-1252. Eames, op. cit., Plate XII.

Reykjahlíðspandrið

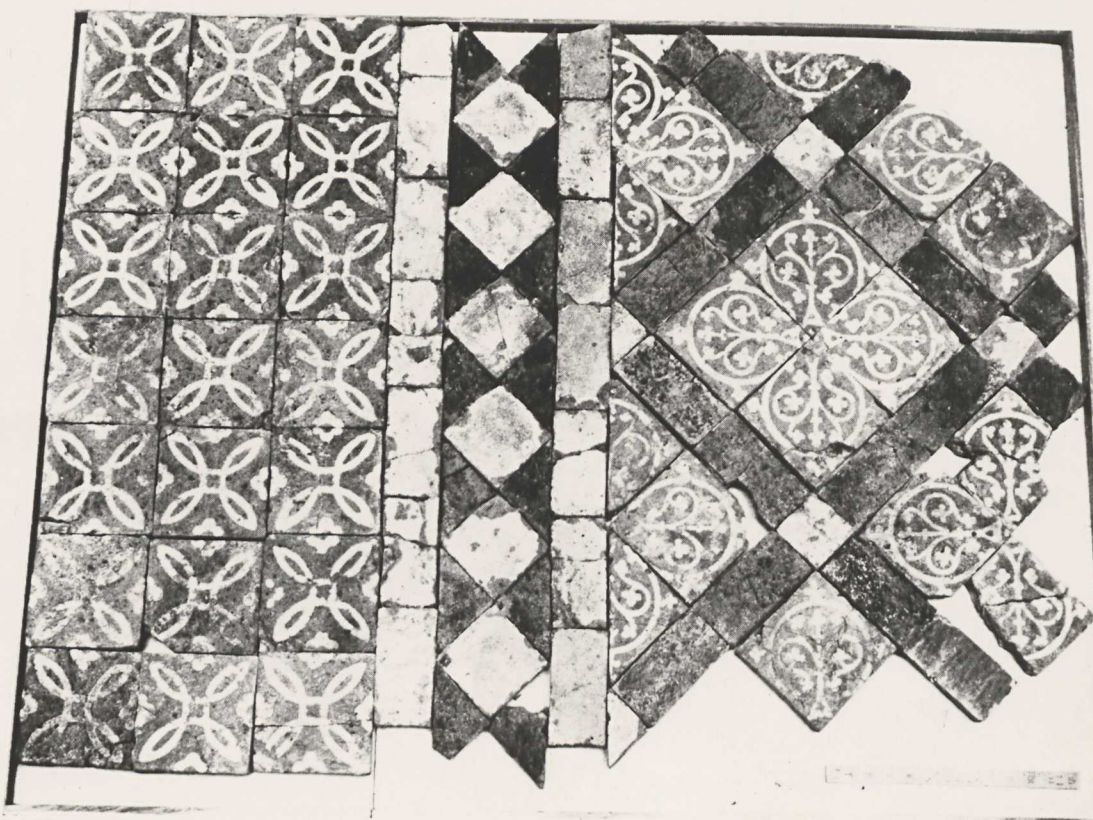


Figure 66. Misericord from New College, Oxford, England, from about 1386-1395. Stone, op. cit., Plate 144, B.

Figure 67. Capital in the Canterbury cathedral from the first quarter of the 12th century. Webb, op. cit., Plate 40, B.

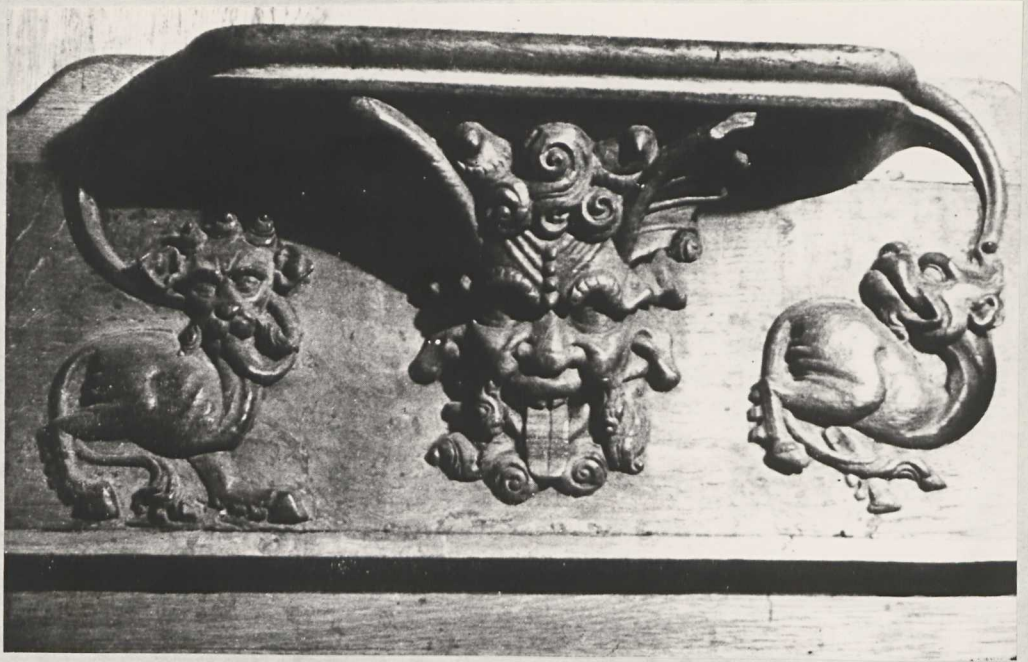


Figure 61, p.127. The leaf and flower motif in the lower spandrels on the Hrafnagil frontal show considerable resemblance to those on the alb apparel in Figure 60, p.126. Again the formal mask and foliage design of the centre spandrels of that frontal was not found, but masks, set at junctions in arcade designs, were observed on English embroideries from the first quarter of the 14th century.⁴² Lions' masks were also found incorporated in the designs of two Venetian silk fabrics from the first half of the 15th century.⁴³

The small, stylized flower ornaments in the spandrels of the Draflastadir frontal were rather vague in design, and none exactly like them was observed elsewhere. The arrangement of the barbed quatrefoils, already found in Icelandic illumination (cf. p. ¹¹⁶53), was, however, found in French miniatures from 1350 to 1380.⁴⁴

Of the frontals executed in wool on linen only the one from Hofdi had a blue background completely void of embroidery. It has been suggested that early (Romanesque) laid and couched embroideries were executed in this manner, i.e. without embroidery in the background (cf. the Bayeux tapestry and the piece

⁴²Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit., Plate LXXX, showing a cope from about 1300; Plate CXXVI, showing a cope from the first quarter of the 14th century.

⁴³Ernst Flemming, An Encyclopaedia of Textiles (London: Ernest Benn, Limited, no date), Plate 77.

⁴⁴Dupont and Gnudi, op. cit., Plates 40, 41.

from Ron), while the filling in of the background was a late development.⁴⁵ The current dating of the Icelandic frontals does not corroborate this theory, with the Grenjadarstadur frontal dated as 13th century and the Hofdi frontal as 15th century. In general composition, however, the design of the Hofdi frontal is reminiscent of a group of English orphreys and panels from about 1300,⁴⁶ especially of the one shown in Figure 68.⁴⁷ The crucifixion scene on the ^{Agnani} cope from the late 13th century bears perhaps still greater resemblance to the Hofdi design in the renderings of the Virgin and St. John.⁴⁸ Kalf,⁴⁹ however, gives an example of relationship of the Hofdi design with north German art of the late 13th century.

The frontal from Stafafell found its closest counterpart in the embroidery shown in the upper half of Figure 69,⁵⁰ a portion of an orphrey from the second quarter of the 13th

⁴⁵Englestad, Refil, Bunad, Tjeld, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴⁶Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit., Plates CVI, CVII.

⁴⁷Catalogue of English Ecclesiastical Embroideries of the XII to XVI Centuries (London: The Board of Education, 1930), Plate XI.

⁴⁸Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit.,
 LI Plate ~~XLI~~ [51] 2000

⁴⁹Kalf, op. cit., pp. 66 and 67, Figure 13. (A north German silver hostie from about 1280 with an engraving of the crucifixion on the lid.)

⁵⁰Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit., Plate XXX. (Figure shows the upper two thirds of the piece.) Note also the border of contrasting triangles of the type found on three of the Icelandic frontals.

Figure 68. Embroidered panel showing Christ on the Cross with the Virgin and St. John. English, from about 1300. Catalogue of English Ecclesiastical Embroideries, op. cit., Plate XI.



Figure 69. Part of an orphrey (upper two thirds)
 from the second quarter of the 13th century. English or
 French. Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, op. cit.
 Plate XXX.

King, 1963: 1240-1270; pls. 18-19; of a chasuble
 Cluny: CL 2158

Odile Bod-Bordaz
 Broderies d'Ornements
 liturgiques Paris 1982
 pl. 13., - byz. 14. alder; 1. mynd
 [1987]



century, believed to be either English or French.⁵¹ The resemblance of the frontal to French church embroideries of the 13th and 14th centuries had earlier been commented upon.⁵² A small detail in costume, the pointed elongations of the sleeves of the Virgin's tunic, was not observed in any western fashions of mediaeval times. One instance of a comparable sleeve was observed in an illumination from Czechoslovakia from the first half of the ^{ca 1340} 14th century, depicting elaborate dresses of young women.⁵³

The date of the frontal preserved in Holland was discussed earlier, and was set tentatively at about 1500.⁵⁴ However, as early as the 12th century the frontal's framework of design was observed in a textile (Figure 70),⁵⁵ and its main composition, the Trinity, was rendered in art in the same general manner⁵⁶ (Figure 71). In foreign renderings of this motif God the Father most frequently supports the Cross in the manner shown in Figure 72,⁵⁷ while in some ^{He} he holds

⁵¹Ibid., p. 76.

⁵²By Wandel, in Ellen Andersen, Gertie Wandel and T. Vogel-Jorgensen, editors, Berlingske Haandarbejds-bog (three volumes; Kobenhavn: Berlingske Forlag, 1943), Vol. II, p. 92.

⁵³Olga Sronkova, Gothic Woman's Fashion (Prague: Artia, 1954), p. 37, Figure 15.

⁵⁴Cr. p. 85.

⁵⁵Ackerman, op. cit., Plate V.

⁵⁶Kalf, op. cit., p. 65.

⁵⁷The Luttrell Psalter. Introduction by Eric George Miller (London: The British Museum, 1932), Figure (J)f.44. About 1340.

Figure 70. German tapestry in the Halberstadt cathedral from the 12th century, showing Charlemagne and four philosophers. Ackerman, op. cit., Plate V.

Figure 71. French miniature from the second half of the 12th century, showing the Trinity. Emile Male, L'Art Religieux du XII^e Siecle en France (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1953), p. 183, Figure 140.

Figure 72. Miniature from the Luttrell Psalter, English illuminated manuscript from about 1340. The Luttrell Psalter, op. cit., Figure (J) f. 44.

Figure 73. Late 15th century English alabaster retable. Exhibition of English Mediaeval Art, op. cit., Plate 67.



up his hands in Benediction, the Cross standing in front of Him (Figure 73).⁵⁸ ^{This} The combined gesture of Benediction and support of the Cross was found only on the altar frontal and in one, perhaps two, Icelandic illuminations.⁵⁹ In an illumination from 1363 the details are not entirely clear (Figure 74),⁶⁰ but there can be no doubt about Figure 75,⁶¹ although the arms of God are drawn rather awkwardly.⁶² On the frontal another feature of design, ^{perhaps} (apparently) peculiar to Iceland, was noted, the human face on the winged lion, symbol of St. Mark. This was found in the illumination referred to above (Figure 75), but was ^{observed} (seen) nowhere else in European art.⁶³

⁵⁸Exhibition of Mediaeval Art, op. cit., Plate 67.

⁵⁹In addition the motif, the Trinity, was found in Iceland engraved on a paten from the late 13th century, and in an illumination from the early 15th century (cf. Eldjarn, Ancient Icelandic Art, op. cit., Plate 57; Fett, op. cit., Plate 18). In both instances God the Father supports the Cross by His hands.

⁶⁰Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 60, Jonsbok (Skardsbok), AM. 350, fol. 1363.

⁶¹Ibid., Plate 79, a (right half), Jonsbok, AM 43, 80., 1507.

⁶²Kalf, op. cit., pp. 67-68, suggested that the artist had had two models for the composition of the frontal, one of the Trinity with God holding the Cross, and one of Christ in Majesty. She compared the design of the frontal with an English illumination from 1020 of Christ in Majesty (p. 68, Figure 14).

⁶³Hermannsson, op. cit., p. 15, mentioned that in Icelandic illuminations fantastic creatures ("nondescripts") with human faces were seen more than in manuscript illuminations elsewhere.

frequently

Figure 74. Icelandic illuminated manuscript page
with initial showing the Trinity. 1363. Hermannsson,
op. cit., Plate 60.

[Í *Islandica*, Vol. XXVIII, leiddi H. H. nedanmála 6s. 12 og
saga, að mynd þess og þrenningarmynd, en eldi
"Christ as Majesty" of visa i Burlington Magazine, LXX, 1937,
p. 48.]

Skarðabók

AM 350, fol. 1^a 2^r F
1363

Litmynd
ljá S. J. Þóroki 1967
Rok 1965

þröfadr. Næst mannhelgi er erþda tal
 með þui fletra sem þui heyrir z heyr þ
 með kvenna giptingum. þui at miklu
 uardar þin er til arfaða kalla at þr se
 i logligum hulkap getur. Ept erþda
 tal heyr landa brigði þui at þu tina
 er maðr er þr nokkuar iardir þa heyr
 þm at skoda um þin aðul z aþaka m at
 þ halli wog m odulum m; logu sotti
 z kuu sealy fins aðul m; logu at hoda
 Ept landa brigði er landz leigu halkr
 þr þm heyr m; logum þin iardir at þy
 ggja. er ept logum hafa at komur. Ept
 t landz leigu halk er kaupar halkr. þr
 s þ ept laga soknu lausa ara sokia. se
 ept landa brigði loud z iardir. Ept ko
 þa halk e þar m log. þr þm hof med te
 rum kaupskilu at þa. er þm inha med
 kaup þm auarta. Ept þar m log e þu
 þa halkr þr engum heyr þ þra odum
 at taka sem eigandi heyr m; logum at
 komur. Ept sa er aðum m; gal. a lagha
 reþing þyr at hafa. Sidar t i haki
 þu ero kgs reitar þerr. at sakv sem til er
 skipað ept at þea logumum ept domu
 þina þuwellu at þu at hugga þina þu
 þana þegna með hulkum z keit þaru
 en at reþpa usþaka m; þuringh ok

logligum reþingum. Erþdr þær sem
 til hafa þallt um iarda brigði. z uga
 þu z oll oñur laga mal. um þu m m
 gum er þau urðu þa þs oll um þem
 logum ueta er þa gengu i land þar er
 þau mal gordin. ez eigi er að loglig
 þpan a komin. Bidum uer at þer
 uarkynnir oll þat sem at skottir þm
 at meyr heyr uollot þollskyltaw
 at z uankunnandi sem reða ma þa
 at uer heþum manna ued þer. ok
 oll teki þetta ept sealtanax en oll
 tekr. þmuz ok nokkur nyt samlight
 i þokum þat allir drottin uarum
 þesli arto. þans nagn see þlezad
 itan enda. þi þer þing þat halk
 þu þina þu logu
 þok m leudingha
 z se þst um eud
 þollu manna z um
 þepud þing m.
 RIDR z þlezan
 uars þra þþz z arnadar að uakar
 þ se marie. z þins þelaga ollas kgs.
 þadolaks þis z allra guds þellagra m
 se m; ollu os log þingis m m nu z þgn
 an. Ept uer þin log þingi uart eiga at
 þe at a þingtað retriun. at þy manaðu



Figure 75. Miniature from an Icelandic manuscript showing the Trinity in a mandorla with the Evangelists' symbols in the spandrels; from 1507. Hermannsson, op. cit., Plate 79,a (the right half).

AM 43 8^{vo} 1507

GOLD SPINES BOND

Decorative



The general design of the frontal from ^{Amorbach} Klausturholar, i.e., a large central roundel placed in a rectangle with four smaller roundels, one in each corner, was observed, for instance, in the centre panel of a 14th century Swiss altar frontal embroidered in silk on linen (Figure 76). The most distinctive feature of the frontal, the large fantastic flowers encircled in meandering vines, as well as the leaf scrolls twined around the roundel frames, both appeared to belong to the ornamentation found in embroideries and illumination in western Europe from the fifteen century through the first half of the sixteen century, perhaps more to the latter part of that period (Figure 77).⁶⁴

⁶⁴Cf. also Figures on pp. 1812 and 1813 in Kurth, "Medieval Embroidery," op. cit., showing two 16th century Swiss worsted embroideries.

Figure 76. Part of a Swiss 14th century altar frontal, embroidered in silk on linen. Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., Plate XXXIV (centre part).



Figure 77. German 16th century linen hanging
embroidered with gold, silver, and silk thread.
Antrobus and Preece, op. cit., Plate XLVIII.

Sh. Am ar bali



CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

From the comparison of the extant Icelandic mediaeval laid and couched embroideries it seems apparent that ^{most of them} (they) belong together in a group, being perhaps examples of the production of one locality (or even centre) over a period from approximately 1250 or 1300 to about 1550. The entries in the inventories and the original distribution of the embroideries provide evidence that this centre ^{suggest} must have been ^{was located} in northern Iceland, perhaps as already mentioned, in the convent at Reynistadur or at Holar.¹

The saga of the first bishop of Holar relates how, at ^{in the early 12th c} about the year 1200, a woman named Ingunn attended the school at the bishop's seat. She stayed on there teaching Latin and correcting Latin books which were read to her while she embroidered, wove, or in other ways wrought pictures of the lives of the saints.² Thus a tradition for native pictorial church embroideries may have been established at the bishop's seat at Holar in the very beginning. With the establishment

¹Cf. pp. 21-22.

²Thordarson, Islands Middelalderkunst, op. cit., p. 344.

of the convent at Reynistadur near by in 1296, the nuns no doubt carried on and developed any such tradition, acting as teachers for lay women as well.

The foreign influences discernable in the designs of the embroideries could be due to the use of foreign art objects and, especially, illuminations in foreign manuscripts for patterns or inspiration for patterns. These influences might also to some extent have resulted from direct contacts made by Icelandic artisans with the arts of other countries through travels and studies abroad.

Although the majority of the extant laid and couched embroideries seem to belong to a closely interrelated group produced in the see of Holar, needlework of this technique was in all probability also practiced elsewhere in the country during mediaeval times, such as in the convent at Kirkjubaer. It was suggested early in this study that the Icelandic word refill might in mediaeval times have meant, specifically, a wall hanging decorated with laid and couched embroidery; this seemed to be supported by the fact that the Icelandic word for the technique is refilsaumur.³ The word refill apparently was used in mediaeval inventories from all parts of the country, although this premise cannot be substantiated since specific studies of the diffusion of the

³Cf. p.20.

word remain to be made. As already mentioned, the effects of the reformation together with climatic conditions may have been responsible for more destruction of laid and couched embroideries in southern than in northern Iceland.⁴

In this study it was hoped to establish the place of Icelandic mediaeval couched embroideries in European needlework by comparing them with the embroideries of other countries of that period. It was observed that of the extant embroideries from mediaeval times, the Bayeux tapestry and a few Norwegian fragments, possibly from wall hangings, were executed in the same general technique and material, while only a few points of similarity in design were noticed. In northern Germany a large group of extant embroidered wall hangings, from roughly the same period as the Icelandic ^{embroideries} ones, were found, some showing similarities in general design, and all executed in the same material but in a different, although related, technique. All of these examples seemed to indicate a common north European practice of executing large embroideries (wall hangings) in coarse woollen couching, the Germans having preferred one technique, the Norse people another.

The use of the Byzantine (Near Eastern) design feature of repeated roundels enclosing pictures, much favored in the Icelandic embroideries, was seen frequently in mediaeval German, English, and Swedish needlework. As was pointed out,

⁴Cf. p. 21.

however, the mode of joining the roundels in the Icelandic embroideries might indicate direct Byzantine influence rather than an influence coming through other countries.

Extant English mediaeval embroideries (other than the Bayeux tapestry if this be regarded as English⁵) were minutely executed in the fine media of silk and gold. This resulted in works of a delicate appearance very different from the Icelandic embroideries, although various couching techniques, at times even laid and couched work, were employed in their making. In comparing design elements it seemed apparent from the sources consulted, that the Icelandic embroideries showed, on the whole, a closer relationship to English embroideries and other pictorial art than to those of other European countries.

In spite of the various similarities with foreign works, the study made it very clear that as a group the Icelandic laid and couched ecclesiastical embroideries stand alone, that the manner in which material, technique, and design were utilized, combined to produce needlework of a kind found nowhere else.

It remains for future studies to disclose the exact extent and nature of foreign influences on Icelandic embroideries as well as the specific channels through which these influences reached Iceland.

⁵Cf. pp. 97-98.

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APPENDIX

TABLE I

ICELANDIC CHURCHES LISTED IN INVENTORIES AS POSSESSING
LAID AND COUCHED EMBROIDERIES FROM 1550 TO ABOUT 1840^a

As in Kelduhverfi in Nordur-Thingey county
 Bakki in Oxadalur in Eyjafjordur county
 Bard in Fljot in Skagafjordur county
 Draflastadir^b in Fnjoskadalur in Sudur-Thingey county
 Grenjadarstadur^b in Sudur-Thingey county
 Grund in Eyjafjordur county
 Grytubakki in Sudur-Thingey county
 Hof in Hofdastrond in Skagafjordur county
 Holt in Rangarvellir county
 Holar in Hjaltadalur in Skagafjordur county
 Hrafnagil^b in Eyjafjordur county
 Hofdi^b in Hofdabverfi in Sudur-Thingey county
 Hofdi in Hofdastrond in Skagafjordur county
 Hoskúldsstadir in Austur-Hunavatn county — — er það ómúst? ja
 Ljosavatn in Sudur-Thingey county
 Miklibaer^b in Blonduhlid in Skagafjordur county
 Mikligardur in Eyjafjordur county
 Munkathvera in Eyjafjordur county
 Muli^c in Adaldalur in Sudur-Thingey county
 Modruvellir in Eyjafjordur county
 Osland in Oslandshlid in Skagafjordur county
 Reykjahlid^b in Sudur-Thingey county
 Reynistadur in Skagafjordur county
 Stafafell^b in Lon in Austur-Skaftafell county
 Stordalur in Eyjafjordur county
 Svalbard^b in Svalbardsstrond in Sudur-Thingey county
 Vidivellir in Skagafjordur county

^aThis table is based on preliminary investigations. It must not be considered final. Consult the map (Figure 82) for locations.

^bLaid and couched embroideries are still in existence from these churches. In addition, there exists laid and couched work from Hvammur in Dalir county and Klausturholarⁱⁿ in Arnes county; they were not found listed in inventories.

^cThe laid and couched embroidery preserved in Enschede in Holland is possibly from this church.

3/1/2006
 Kladdi er frá
 Danabali, söng
 skráningu í þjóms.

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF TERMINOLOGY USED BY AUTHORITIES TO DESIGNATE LAID AND COUCHED WORK, ROUMANIAN COUCHING AND STEM STITCH^a

AUTHORITIES ^a	LAID AND COUCHED WORK ^b	ROUMANIAN COUCHING ^b	STEM STITCH ^b
Antrobus	Laid and Couched Work ^c		
Christie	Laid and Couched Work ^c	Roumanian Couching	Stem Stitch Crewel Stitch Outline Stitch
Engelstad	Dobbel Leggsom ^d Refilsom	Leggsom ^e Refilsom	Kontoursting ^f
Geijer	Dubbel Laggsom	Laggsom	Stjalk Styng ^g
Jaques		Klosterstich ^h	Stielstich ⁱ
Kurth	Arabian Technique	Convent Stitch	Stem Stitch
Pesel	Filling Laid and Couched by a couched thread Italian couching Mantarle work ^j	Laid Oriental filling	Stem Stitch ^k Crewel Stitch ^k Outline Stitch ^l
Digby	Laid and Couched work	Laid Oriental Stitch Convent Stitch	Stem Stitch ^k Outline Stitch ^l
Thomas	(Not listed)	Roumanian Couching Laid Oriental Stitch Figure Stitch	Stem Stitch ^k Crewel Stitch ^k Stalk Stitch ^k Outline Stitch ^l

^aFor complete references on ^aauthorities cited see note 1, Chapter IV, p. 23.

^bTerminology adopted for this paper. Cf. pp. 24-26.

^cAntrobus and Christie use this term as a general term including all couching, give no specific term for this particular type.

^dIn English translation: Double couching

^eIn English translation: Couching

^fIn English translation: Outline stitch

^gIn English translation: Stem stitch

^hIn English translation: Convent stitch

ⁱIn English translation: Stem stitch

^jWorked in Macedonia

^kThe thread is kept to the right of the needle

^lThe thread is kept to the left of the needle

Figure 78. Portrait of Thorlakur Skulason, bishop at Holar 1628 to 1656. The embroidery, worked in wool, linen, silk, and metal thread on linen, is executed in laid and couched work, Roumanian couching, stem stitch, split stitch, and, possibly, chain stitch. ^{(Probably ab. 1650 to 1656) X} ~~Second quarter of the 17th~~ century (embroidered by the bishop's daughter). National Museum, Reykjavik; inventory number 3110.

E. J. 1638

X 1976:

? Probably 3rd quarter 17th c. Prior to 1677 (cf. inventory of Viðvelli 1677, Bps. B, III, 6, 1677) Nei, myndin falin

X ~~not believed to be~~ gerðin um fr. d. 1656 285/78
sv. líl. um 1650 - 1656



De Witt

Figure 79. Reverse of portrait of bishop Thorlakur Skulason, shown in Figure 78.



Figure 80. Chasuble with embroidered crucifix,
executed in silk and wool on linen in laid and couched
work (cf. p. 24, note 4), stem stitch, chain stitch, and
satin stitch. 1677. National Museum, Reykjavik;
inventory number 4500.

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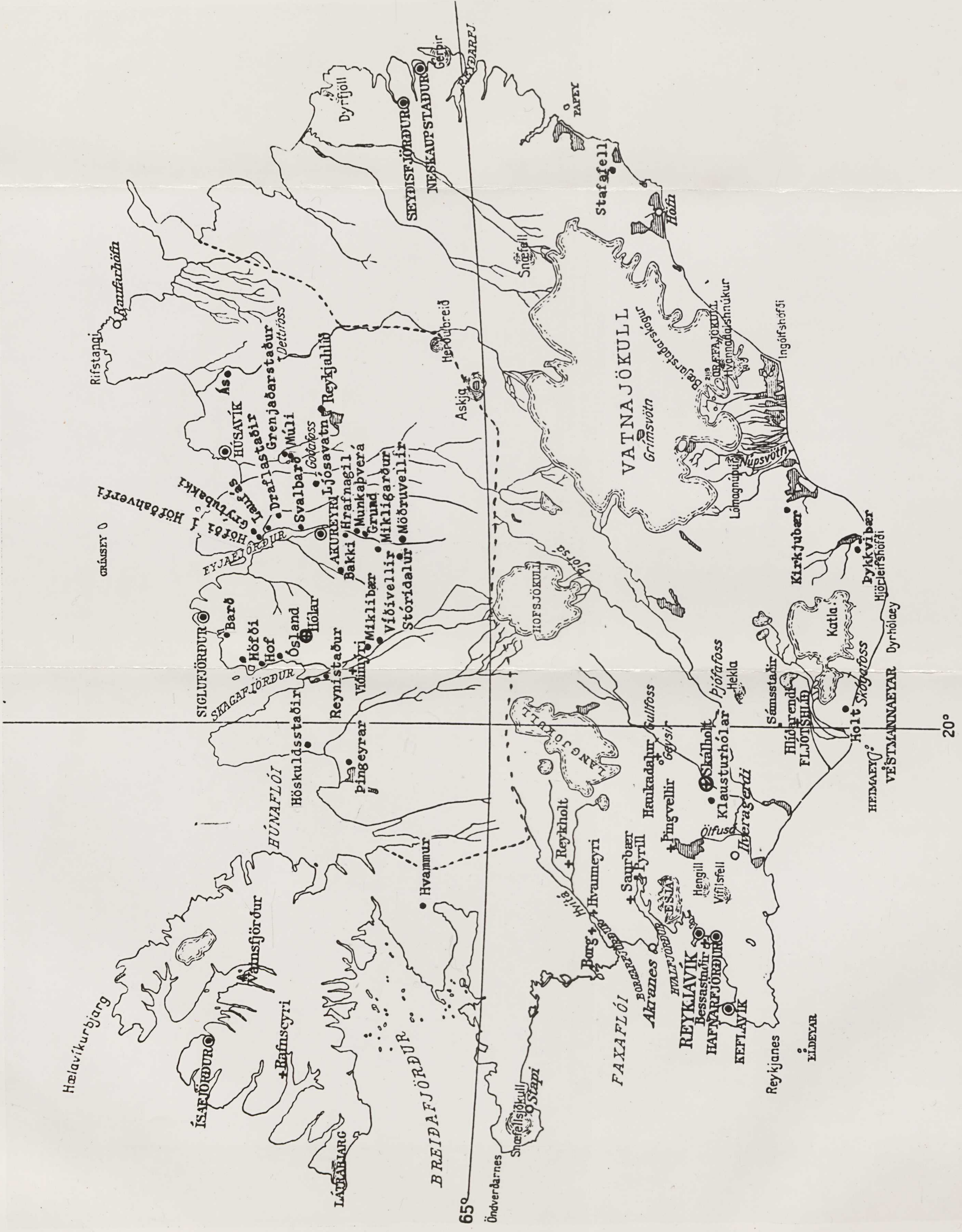
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Figure 81. Detail (centre part) of a valance from Delsbo Parish in Halsingland, Sweden. It is believed to have once formed part of the decoration of an altar. The laid and couched embroidery is worked in unbleached linen and colored wool on a woollen ground, the couched outlines consisting of narrow strips of leather. 16th (or 17th) century. Emilie von Walterstorff, Swedish Textiles (Stockholm: Nordiska Museet, 1925), pp. 59-60; Plate 147.



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Figure 82. Map of Iceland. Dots mark the churches possessing laid and couched embroideries. Encircled crosses mark the bishops' seats at Holar and Skalholt. A heavy broken line marks the boundary between the sees. The map was prepared from the map in Erik Andersen and others (editors), Island (Copenhagen: Norden, no date), p. 10, and Westermann's Atlas zur Weltgeschichte. Teil II. Mittelalter (Braunschweig: Georg Westermann Verlag, 1956), p. 57.



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ELDEYAR

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