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TITLE

Textiles from LINDISFARNE (1951)

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The textiles from Lindisfarne are of two types, knitted and woven. They seem to be mostly fragments of garments, and show signs of wear and mending as well as decay since burial; they vary considerably in quality. There are also some leather fragments.

1. The Knitted Textiles

These were examined by Mr. James Norbury of Paton & Baldwins, and were divided by him into two distinct qualities, one fine and exceptionally well knitted, the other coarser in style and of poorer quality wool. Some garments can be certainly identified; the pieces are catalogued under six numbers, though some of these may belong together, differences in their present appearance and texture being caused by decay. Samples of all six types (nos. 1-6) were sent to the Wool Industries Research Association, who determined them as all of sheep's wool, though with considerable fibre damage. Some of the fibres they reported to be naturally pigmented (i.e. from a black or brown fleeced sheep), and in one case, no. 6, the wool had been dyed. Enquiry as to the possible dye used was unsuccessful. All the garments are in stocking-stitch, with details and decoration in garter, purl and moss-stitches.

The first group are the pieces of fine quality:

No. 1. Remains of a fashioned jerkin or jacket. There are seven pieces which from style, quality of wool and colour, must come from this garment. The wool, now light sandy brown, was perhaps originally white or natural-coloured. It is all 2-ply, S-spun and then Z-plyed so lightly that the two threads often lie side by side. The knitting is very firm and even, average tension of 3 stitches and 4 rows per cm, with very neat shaping and pattern work.

1.a. Part from an armhole and sleeve. The sleeve portion, c. 14.5 X 10.2 cm, in which the knitting goes at right angles to the body part, is joined to it by a row of picked-up stitches at the seam, which is marked by one rib of garter stitch. Remains of the body part measure 6.0 X 16.0 cm at widest. On this body part there are traces of six ribs in garter stitch, two, each 2 stitches wide, near the armhole, one, 2 stitches wide decreasing to 1 stitch wide, c. 6.0 cm away, and three, two 2 stitches wide and one 1 stitch wide, at the other torn edge of the piece. The sleeve is shaped internally by occasional knitting of two stitches together.

1.b. Part presumably from the body. A large ragged fragment, c. 44.5 cm in depth and 20 cm wide at the widest part. No trace of shaping. In two places there are darns, and at the left hand bottom corner a knitted ornament, a triangular flower in moss-stitch and two leaves in purl stitch (see Mr. Norbury's report).

1.c. Fragment including part of the welt, measuring 14.4 X 15.2 cm at widest. The welt is an edging of two rows purl, one row plain and two rows purl. Part of a side seam, with a

rib of two garter stitches is present. This stops short at least 3.2 cm above the beginning of the welt, but the end of the rib is missing. There is very neat shaping on both sides of the rib, one stitch being decreased every five or six rows, to draw the jerkin in towards the waist.

1.d. Another small piece of the body, c.13.0 X 13.0 cm at widest, with a similar shaping on either side of a garter stitch rib, perhaps from a corresponding piece of the other side seam.

1.e & f. Two fragments, 6.0 X 4.0 and 3.5 X 6.0 cm at largest, with remains of a similar seam.

1.g. Part of a sleeve. Length 20.5 cm, width (folded double) 13.3 cm at widest. This was knitted round, on four needles, and was at first thought to be a stocking leg, but definitely belongs with the other pieces of the jerkin. It has a seam rib of two garter stitches, and is carefully shaped. The piece preserved must be the elbow; the shaping on either side of the seam increases for about 5.0 cm, and then begins decreasing after 5.0 cm without shaping.

No.2. Remains of a pair of fine stockings.

2.a. Most of one stocking foot, c.25.0 X 21.5 cm, the back seam torn away so that it can be spread out flat. This stocking has small clocks, diamond-shaped heads of moss-stitch on a stem of a single garter stitch; the heel-flap and instep shaping, knitted as in a modern sock, are outlined with ribs of garter stitch 2 stitches wide. The turn of the heel is unfortunately torn away. There is a very rough darn as the back of the ankle. The knitting is of fine quality, tension 3.5 stitches and 5 to 5.5 rows per cm. The wool again is S-spun and lightly Z-doubled, but darker than that of no.1, with a slight greenish tinge possibly caused by contacts in the bog.

2.b. A toe piece which probably came from the same pair of stockings, c.9.0 X 11.0 cm at widest, with neat decreaseings at the side folds, and the toe finished by casting off the two rows of stitches together. Tension and wool as in 2.a, but the colour is not so greenish.

The second group are pieces of poorer quality wool:

No.3. Armhole piece from a second jerkin. The armhole seam is present over 15.0 cm with two breaks; there is a small piece of the body, c.6.0 X 8.0 cm at widest. Again there is a garter stitch rib at the junction of sleeve and body, this time 2 stitches wide; it stops short of the armpit, and the sleeve stitches under the arm continue and run down the side of the body, i.e. there is no seam across the armpit. The sleeve part is present c.16.0 X 21.0 cm at widest, very broken. It has the same shaping by occasional internal decreasing as in the finer jerkin. The wool, now dark brown, is again S-spun and lightly Z-plyed, the knitting is not so regular, and there are occasional mistakes; the tension averages 3 stitches and 4 to 4.5 rows per cm.

No.4. Fragment which again seems to come from an armhole, possibly from the same garment as no.3. Measurement 21.0 X 8.0 cm at widest. For 2 cm there is a rib of one garter stitch, and then the stitches part; at this point the fabric is torn and a piece missing; the stitches continue horizontally to left and vertically to right, as in the juncture of a sleeve and armhole. If this belongs with no.3 the garter stitch line probably indicates the side seam of the jerkin body; it cannot be the

armhole seam as there is no indication of picked-up stitches (see fig.). The tension is 3.0-3.5 stitches and 4.5 rows per cm, the knitting fairly even, colour now dark brown; wool as before.

No.5.a,b & c. Three fragments, measuring 19.0 X 19.0, 13.0 X 15.0 and 12.5 X 7.5 cm roughly at widest. The larger fragments are very torn. They are all of dark-coloured wool of the usual S-spun, Z-plyed type, but slightly matted, so that the tension of the knitting is 3.5-4 stitches and 5 rows to the cm. Both the larger pieces have darns, and the largest a patch 4 stitches wide knitted for 11 rows over a small hole.

No.6. Part of a coarse stocking foot, from about half way down the foot to a few rows of the heel-flap (c.16.0 cm). The width of the foot (doubled) is c.10.5 cm. The heel-flap is edged with a rib of garter stitch 3 stitches wide; the instep shaping has no rib and there is no clock. On one side the turn of the heel is present, and indicates a Dutch heel. The wool of the heel, etc. is S-spun and lightly Z-plyed as in all the other knitting; the last 5.0 cm remaining of the foot are in a harder coarse S-spun wool, not doubled; a sample of this was identified by the Wool Industries Research Association as dyed, not naturally pigmented. The tension is 2.5 stitches and 4 rows per cm.

2. The Woven Textiles

These are fragments of eight different textiles, varying from moderately fine to very coarse, all in tabby weave and 2/2 twill. It is impossible to say from what garments they come; some pieces are shaped - one may be part of a coat collar, and one a gusset - one shows signs of having been gathered, and there are selvages on two pieces. Samples from textiles 7-11 inclusive were sent to the Wool Industries Research Association, who reported them all to be wool, though with considerable fibre damage, and all heavily dyed. Enquiry as to the nature of the dye was again unsuccessful. The wool in all pieces, as in the knitting, was S-spun, but in the woven textiles it was unplyed.

No.7. 2/2 twill, colour now bright brown, loosely woven, count c. 10/8 per cm. Selvedge present on one piece, with four warp threads paired. No indication of shape of garment.

No.8. Tabby weave, very dark blackish brown, very hard and much matted or fullled. Regular weave, count 11/11 per cm. One piece has a shaping which might conceivably be the shoulder seam of a coat or waistcoat; stitch-holes are present all along the shaping.

No.9. Tabby weave, very bright brown, regular weave, count 13/10 per cm. Occasional paired threads in weft. No cut edges.

No.10. Tabby weave, reddish brown, spinning uneven, rough surface. Count 11-12/7-8 per cm. Selvedge present with four paired warps for a length of 12.5 cm at one edge; the material has been cut at right angles to the selvedge and gathered and stitched.

No.11. Very coarse tabby weave, dark brown, matted. Count 6-7/4.5 per cm.

No.12. Tabby weave, reddish brown, even weave, c.9-10/11-12 per cm. Some paired threads in weft. One edge is cut on a curve and turned under once; there are stitch-holes, and the turn under suggests a french seam; it might be the top of a sleeve, or a corner from the skirt of a coat.

No.13. Tabby weave, coarse, reddish brown, loosely woven, count 7/7 per cm.

No.14. 2/2 twill, light brown, fullled or matted, closely woven and very regular, count 12-13/12-13 per cm. Two pieces are definitely shaped, with marks of stitches round their edges: (a) a triangular piece, cut across the material, sides slightly curved, measuring 17.0 X 11.5 cm, perhaps an underarm gusset, and (b) a piece torn at one end, cut on the straight of the material, the untorn end curving to a blunt point, the torn end seems to be curving in the same way, measurements 24.0 cm long, 11.5 cm at widest point; if both ends were regular it would have been c.30.0 cm long; the shape suggests a collar band, but there is no fold down the centre so this is unlikely.

N.B.(1977) A collar band of this date probably would not have a fold.

3. The Leather

Together with the textiles there are fragments of dressed leather, stiff, bright brown, perhaps from a wide brimmed hat. Most of the pieces seem to have a definite fold where the hat band would have come, and a curved edge for the edge of the brim.

Conclusions

No evidence of date can be found in the woven textiles. In cloths of greater antiquity S spinning is sometimes taken to indicate spindle as opposed to wheel spinning, but there are exceptions to the rule, as for example when a spinning wheel is adapted for a left-handed person. The character of the weaving is certainly pre-machine, it is regular but with mistakes of a type usual in hand-weaving, i.e. pairing of weft threads, but it gives no other indication of date. The few shaped pieces are difficult to identify as from garments of any particular period.

Fortunately the knitting has more positive characteristics. The method of setting in a sleeve found on no.3 and perhaps also no.4 appears on 17th cent. knitted Italian jerkins (V.& A.) and also on a child's cotton jacket as late as the beginning of the 19th cent (Platt Hall, Manchester); the decoration of seams and welts with garter stitch again occurs from at last the 17th cent. onwards, and exactly similar clocks to those on no.2 are found on a pair of 17th cent. boothose (V.& A.).

Mr. James Norbury was able to date the knitting more exactly on technical grounds, and places it between 1720 and 1750 (see his report). The method of making the stocking stitch he considers could only be English, Flemish or Dutch; the Dutch heel on no.6, and the embossed flower decoration on no.1.b he regards as conclusive evidence

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of Dutch or Flemish origin. This agrees with the strong resemblance of the knitting to the knitted stockings in the Gunnister find, dated by coins to post 1683, and undoubtedly a Dutch or Flemish merchant, which were examined by Mr. Norbury and also reported on by Miss Henshall of the National Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

In view of the reputation of the Holy Islanders as wreckers, Mr. Norbury's suggestion that these rags may represent all that is left of an unlucky Dutch merchant and his servant seems very probable.