

A HISTORY OF HANDKNIT SOCKS

A Bibliography

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LIS511 Bibliography

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INTRODUCTION

A collection of books, patterns, and related sources to help the knitter or other interested person with exploring the history of handknit socks. Pattern commentary or suggestions are included when possible to help knitters who would like to learn or to create their own examples of a particular style or technique. The bibliography is presented in three sections: History (general or historical information only), Traditional (Eastern and Western sock knitting techniques, history, and patterns), and Modern (innovations and unventions in sock knitting from mid-20th century to present).

HISTORY

- 1 - Farrell, Jeremy. *Socks & Stockings*. London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1992.

Primarily a costume and fashion history (1600 through 1990) dedicated to hosiery. Farrell does list the stitch and row (or round) gauges, but he clearly is not a knitter nor did he write this with knitters in mind. Even so, there are many inspiring photographs and illustrations. The history section focuses on machine-knitting (the first knitting machine was invented by William Lee in the early 1600s—see Milton and Anna Grass's *Stockings for a Queen*), with a brief discussion of the 16th century English handknit sock industry.

- 2 - Grass, Milton and Anna. *Stockings for a Queen: The Life of the Rev. William Lee, the Elizabethan Inventor*. London: Heinemann, 1967.

William Lee, and his invention, the knitting machine.

- 3 - Rutt, Richard. *A History of Hand Knitting*. London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1987. (Reissued in the US by Interweave Press in 1989 and 2003, and now available as an abridged audio book, 2007.)

The definite source for knitting history. Precursors of and similar techniques to knitting are detailed in the first chapter. Subsequent chapters cover historical periods of knitting from before 1500 to the present, with one final chapter focusing on Eastern knitting. Appendices include a glossary of historical terms, a list of pre-1910 English knitting pattern publications and related literature, and a table of *Weldon's* issues. Well illustrated and documented, socks appear frequently.

- 4 - The Sock Museum. "The Sock Museum." Sock Summit 2009. <http://sockmuseum.com/> (accessed December 15, 2009).

Collection of links and sources for historic and iconic socks from as early as 200 CE. Originally created for volunteers to knit samples for an exhibit at Sock Summit 2009, the first-ever sock-knitter convention.

- 5 - Thirsk, Joan. "The Fantastical Folly of Fashion: The English Stocking Knitting Industry, 1500-1700." In *Textile History and Economic History: Essays in Honour of Miss Julia de Lacy*

Mann, edited by N.B. Harte and K.G. Ponting, 50-73. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973.

Excellent in-depth look at the English stocking knitting industry, which boomed in the mid-16th century after Queen Elizabeth showed preference for handknit stockings. For more than a hundred years, a considerable portion of the English domestic trade was stocking knitting. Thirsk also discusses fashion changes in stockings based on class and region.

- 6 - Turnau, Irena. "The Diffusion of Knitting in Medieval Europe." In *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson*, edited by N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting, 368-389. London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., 1983.

Before exploring the spread of knitting across Medieval Europe, Turnau reviews early sock artifacts and the differences between true knitting and nålbinding (knotless netting).

TRADITIONAL

- 7 - Bush, Nancy. *Folk Socks: The History & Techniques of Handknitted Footwear*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1994.

Bush comes to the attention of (and introduces sock knitting to many) knitters everywhere with this well-researched compendium of socks. About forty pages cover the history of socks (expanded from Rutt's work), and the remainder is full of patterns and traditional sock architecture.

Socks are worked Cuff-Down with double-point needles. Heels include Common (and Shaped Common variation), Balbriggan, Half-Handkerchief (aka V), Dutch, Band, and Peasant. Toes include Wedge (with two variations), Wide (with two variations), Double-Decrease, Round, and Star. 19 patterns; many are based on actual historical examples, the rest are modeled after regional styles.

- 8 - Bush, Nancy. *Knitting Vintage Socks: New Twists on Classic Patterns*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 2005.

With this spiral-bound volume, Bush brings updated versions of English sock knitting patterns from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A brief section covers the history of knitting and socks and has some basis in Rutt's work. Bush reviewed the collected issues of *Weldon's Practical Needlework* and reworked selected patterns for today's fine gauges (e.g. worked with 2 to 3.25 mm needles rather than 0.75 to 1.75 mm). Socks are traditionally worked Cuff-Down with double-point needles. Even though the patterns are updated, sock construction has not changed much from the original Weldon's versions. Heels described are: Dutch (aka Horseshoe), German, Welsh, and French (aka Classic Round). Toe variations explained are: Round, French, Pointed, Flat, and Wide. Bush adapts Weldon's Star Toe of Four or Five Points into her own Star Toe of Three Points version. 24 patterns.

9 - Erlbacher, Maria. *Twisted-Stitch Knitting: Traditional Patterns & Garments from the Styrian Enns Valley*. Translated by Char Dickte. Pittsville, WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2009.

10 - Erlbacher, Maria. *Überlieferte Strickmuster, aus dem Steirischen Ennstal*. 3 Volumes. Trautenfels, Austria: Liezen Arbeitskreis für Heimatpflege, 1982, 1999.

English translation and the original German 3-book collection of the distinctive twisted-stitch patterning from Austria. Primarily a charted stitchionary with sock (and other garment) patterns included at the end(s). *Stutzen*, or stockings intended for wear with *Lederhosen*, feature calf gussets with beautifully incorporated twisted stitches. Guidelines help intermediate to experienced knitters build their own sock designs in three sizes with the 100-plus twisted-stitch motifs.

11 - Fee, Jacqueline. "THE Brewster Stocking." *Piecework*, January/February 2010.

Examination of a handknit stocking remnant thought to have belonged to Elder William Brewster of the Plymouth Colony and made circa 1620-1640. (The original is in Pilgrim Hall Museum's textile collection.) Fee describes how she knit a close reproduction of the original and lists the circling purls stitch pattern used. Instructions for the reproduction are available from Fee via email (listed in article). A modern version with ribbed cuffs (which eliminate the need for garters) in two sizes is given. These use finer yarn and gauge than the Plimoth sock patterns by McGonigle.

12 - Flanders, Sue, and Janine Kosel. *Norwegian Handknits: Heirloom Designs from Vesterheim Museum*. Minneapolis, MN: Voyageur Press, 2009.

An exploration of items handknit by Norwegian immigrants and Norwegian-Americans from the textile collection at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum (Decorah, IA). Contains instructions and charts for a pair of cross-country ski socks with traditional colorwork motifs and calf gusset shaping. No information is available about the original sock in the museum's collection, but it may date from the late 1800s or early 1900s.

13 - Gibson-Roberts, Priscilla A. *Ethnic Socks & Stockings: A Compendium of Eastern Design & Technique*. Sioux Falls, SD: XRX, Inc., 1995.

Primarily a technique book, Gibson-Roberts briefly accounts the foundations of sock and Eastern (as in East Europe and the Middle East) knitting history. She reconstructs traditional Eastern motifs, sock architectures, and techniques. Most of the 26 patterns presented start at the toe and lack gussets, whereas Western socks are started at the top. Many Eastern knitters use double-point needles, but in some areas, the needles have one hooked point to grab the yarn, which allows the knitter to work faster. A chapter provides instructions for spinning one's own yarn. Toe constructions included are: Flat, Pointed, Swirl, Square, and Tufted. Only three heel styles are used: Inserted (aka Afterthought), Flap, and a Hybrid of these two.

- 14** - Gibson-Roberts, Priscilla A., and Deborah Robson. *Knitting in the Old Way: Designs & Techniques from Ethnic Sweaters*. Fort Collins, CO: Nomad Press, 2004.

While discussing ethnic sweater knitting, Gibson-Roberts states that many motifs or designs featured on sweaters were first perfected through sock knitting; some examples are Argyle, Bavarian, Entrelac (aka Basketweave), and Gansey.

- 15** - Gibson-Roberts, Priscilla A. *Simple Socks: Plain and Fancy: A Short-Row Technique for Heel and Toe*. Cedaredge, CO: Nomad Press, 2001.

The Short-Row Heel (aka Peasant or Hourglass) is de-mystified. This construction dates back to early socks found in Egypt, but it has not been utilized much by sock knitters until the late 20th century. It should be recognizable from commercially-made socks. Gibson-Roberts notes how commercial socks use the same short-row technique in their toes, yet handknit socks generally have not. And so, Gibson-Roberts introduces the Short-Row Toe to sock knitters.

A build-your-own-sock book with guidelines for knitters to design their own socks. Several stitch pattern, cast-on, and bind-off options are provided, and the socks can be knit Cuff-Down or Toe-Up. Diagrams show double-point needles in use.

- 16** - McGonigle, Noel M.R. "Knitted 17th-Century Stocking Pattern." Plimoth Plantation, 2004.

- 17** - — — —. "Plimoth Plantation Sock Pattern." Plimoth Plantation, 2004.

Historically authentic reconstruction patterns of what early colonial settlers of New England might have worn. Traditionally very plain, worked Cuff-Down with Common Heel. Purlled faux seam imitate sewn stocking seams. Textural clock decorations above the ankles. Available as paper patterns, \$5 each.

- 18** - McGregor, Sheila. *The Complete Book of Traditional Fair Isle Knitting*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982.

By 1980, as McGregor explains in a very brief section about stockings, socks are rarely handknit in Shetland or elsewhere. Many Fair-Isle motifs included in the book are suitable for sock knitting.

- 19** - — — —. *Traditional Scandinavian Knitting*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004.

(Slightly revised) Dover reissue of McGregor's *The Complete Book of Traditional Scandinavian Knitting*, published by St. Martin's Press in 1984. Covers history of knitting in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, with accompanying illustrations and charted designs.

Chapter 10 focuses on socks with a generic pattern (with French aka Round Heel and Square aka Dutch Heel options), typical colorwork motifs, and some tips for sock knitting. Also useful is a section in Chapter 4, "Norwegian Knitting" which elucidates the traditional Norwegian stocking styles worn by people in regions such as Setesdal or Telemark. A sample chart for each regional feature (texture and cables) is provided.

- 20** - Orsi Landini, Roberta, and Bruna Niccoli. *Moda a Firenze, 1540-1580: Lo Stile di Eleonora di Toledo e la Sua Influenza*. Florence: Pagliai Polistampa, 2005.

Beautifully illustrated collection of 16th-century Florentine fashion with Italian and English text. One chapter focuses on footwear, including the handknit stockings with which Eleonora di Toledo was dressed for her funeral and burial. It is during this century that knitters and the sock-knitting industry arrived and flourished in Europe and England.

- 21** - DesMoines, Anne. "Eleanor[a] of Toledo Stockings." *Georg's Research*. <http://georgresearch.blogspot.com/2007/11/eleanor-of-toledo-socks.html> (accessed December 15, 2009).

Close reproduction of Eleonora's stockings in both patterning and gauge. Uses laceweight yarn. Cuff-down with double-point needles. Free; accompanying chart is not to scale and is only intended to be representative.

- 22** - Felton, Miriam L. "Eleanora Socks." *MimKnits: Unique Designs for the Handknitter*. http://mimknits.com/shop/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=68&products_id=185 (accessed December 15, 2009).

Inspired by Eleonora's socks, but accessible to today's knitters with no folded cuff and a slightly heavier gauge than the original. Cuff-down with double-point needles. \$6.00 PDF download.

- 23** - Özbel, Kenan. *Knitted Stockings from Turkish Villages*. Istanbul: Türkiye İis, Bankasi Cultural Publications, 1981.

(Not able to get a copy of the book.) First author to study Turkish socks.

- 24** - Philiatros. *Natura exenterata: or Nature unbowelled by the most exquisite anatomizers of her. Wherein are contained, her choicest secrets digested into receipts, fitted for the cure of all sorts of infirmities, whether internal or external, acute or chronical, that are incident to the body of man. / Collected and preserved by several persons of quality and great experience in the art of medicine, whose names are prefixed to the book. Containing in the whole, one thousand seven hundred and twenty. Very necessary for such as regard their owne health, or that of their friends. VVhereunto are annexed, many rare, hitherto un-imparted inventions, for gentlemen, ladies and others, in the recreations of their different employments. With an exact alphabetical table referring to the several diseases, and their proper cures*. London: Printed for, and are to be sold by H. Twiford at his shop in Vine Court Middle Temple, G. Bedell at the Middel Temple gate Fleetstreet, and N. Ekins at the Gun neer the west-end of S. Pauls Church, 1655.

Pages 417-419 contain the oldest extant English knitting pattern—one long sentence explains how to knit hose. Refer to Images 213 and 214 at *Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>) or to Pages 9 and 10 in the free PDF download from the University of Arizona's *Digital Archive of Documents Related to Knitting* (http://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/topic_knitting.html). Rutt translates these instructions in an appendix of *A History of Hand Knitting*.

- 25** - *Piecework Magazine Presents a Facsimile Edition of Weldon's Practical Needlework, Volumes 1-12*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, Inc., various copyright dates.

Weldon & Company of London published *Weldon's Practical Needlework* monthly from 1886 until 1915. These are exact reproductions of the collected volumes as assembled by the original publisher. Issue numbers are inferred from the headings, but otherwise no dates or other unique identification were printed on the magazines. Each newsletter was presented as a "Series" focusing on a specific theme such as appliqué embroidery or sock knitting. Rutt's *A History of Hand Knitting* contains a list of each issue with accompanying volume, series, and year. Each volume contains at least one series on knitting, and frequently at least one series on sock knitting.

One of the earliest journals dedicated to knitting and other needlecraft, *Weldon's* reflects the transition to knitting as a leisure activity from one of industry that took place at that time. Early standardization of pattern instructions is present, but might be considered whimsical by today's knitter. See Bush's *Knitting Vintage Socks* for sock patterns updated from *Weldon's*.

- 26** - Shaltz, Holly. "HJS Studio WWI Patterns." *HJS Studio*. <http://www.hjsstudio.com/redsocks.html> (accessed December 15, 2009).

Volunteers received yarn, needles, and patterns from the American Red Cross to knit socks for soldiers, a tradition that continues today. Reproductions of the original patterns from *Modern Priscilla Needlework* magazine, July 1917, with updated instructions available for traditional socks or heelless hospital socks.

- 27** - The Textile Museum. "Sock, 52 cm x 20 cm (Textile of the Month Archives)." The Textile Museum, Washington, DC. <http://www.textilemuseum.org/totm/islamicsockindex.htm> (accessed December 15, 2009).

Islamic patterned sock artifact—one of the oldest known surviving examples of a handknit sock. (Note: older extant socks exist, but they were made with woven fabric sewn together or with the nålbinding technique which resembles twisted knitting.) Knit Toe-Up with an Afterthought Heel. Made of cotton, most likely with indigo dye for the blue color.

The Textile Museum in Washington DC and other museums have a few more examples of these early sock remnants in their collections.

- 28** - Zilboorg, Anna. *Fancy Feet: Traditional Knitting Patterns of Turkey*. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 1994.

— — —. *Simply Socks: 45 Traditional Turkish Patterns to Knit*. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 2001.

Hardcover and paperback editions of the same book. Contains a brief overview on the history of Turkish sockknitting traditions. Generic knitting instructions describe how to knit these socks Toe-Up with Afterthought Heel. Choose from 45 traditional Turkish colorwork motifs (accompanying charts are clear and often generously sized) to feature on the instep and leg. 7 sole pattern motifs are also provided.

MODERN

- 29** - Bordhi, Cat. *New Pathways for Sock Knitters, Book One: 8 New Forms of Sock Architecture, 28 Individual Designs, 8 Master Patterns and All the Elements Needed to Empower You to Knit with Freedom and Joy in a New World of Sock Knitting*. Friday Harbor, WA: Passing Paws Press, Inc., 2007.

- 30** - — — —. *Personal Footprints for Insouciant Sock Knitters, Book Two in the New Pathways for Sock Knitters Series*. Friday Harbor, WA: Passing Paws Press, Inc., 2009.

Brilliant! In the New Pathways series, Bordhi provides thorough instruction on new ways to construct socks. Learn the eight new architectures in the first book with a small sock for practice or the master sock formula for custom fit.

Many of these socks are knit Cuff-Down, and others Toe-Up. Guidelines are included for working with different types of needles. The master patterns are in addition to the 28 designs included. (I have not seen the second book yet, but assume the content is similar.)

- 31** - — — —. *Socks Soar on Two Circular Needles*. Friday Harbor, WA: Passing Paws Press, Inc., 2001.

Using two circular needles to knit small circumferences (instead of double-point needles) was not widely known or documented prior to this slim volume with 11 patterns.

- 32** - Hauschka, Sarah. "The Magic Loop." *Fiber Trends, Inc.*, 2002. http://www.fibertrends.com/product/0/ML/_/Magic_Loop_Booklet (accessed December 15, 2009).

A good example of "unvention" or rediscovery of a technique that may have been used—but not documented—by knitters years ago. 20 page booklet explaining how to use one long circular needle to work small circumferences. 3 patterns, 2 of which are socks.

- 33** - Neatby, Lucy. *Cool Socks, Warm Feet: Six Exceptional Sock Patterns for Printed Yarns*. Orillia, ON: And So Forth Press, 2003.

Colorfully striping yarns can be challenging to work with, as they will often obscure lace, cables, and texture. Neatby designed these patterns to complement and enhance these unique yarns. The thorough technique section includes several cast-on and bind-off techniques ideal for socks. Neatby also gives instructions for her garter-stitch adaption of the Short-Row Heel and Toe. Both traditional Eastern and Western sock constructions make their appearances (Turkish or Afterthought Heel, Square Garter Stitch Toe, Half-Handkerchief or V Heel, Wedge Toe).

Four socks are worked Cuff-Down, the rest Toe-Up. Many include additional cuff options, and the instructions cover both double-point needles and circular needles.

- 34** - Petrovski, Leslie. "Regia: The Venerable Sock Yarn Turns Sixty." *Vogue Knitting International*, Holiday 2009.

Succinct account of the historic impact of Regia sock yarn. In post-WWII Germany, this company debuted a 75% wool and 25% polyamide blend yarn. The addition of synthetic polyamide extended wool's durability and longevity. In 1995, Regia introduced self-patterning yarns in which the color changes were painted onto the yarn. Faux Fair-Isle, stripes and other colorful patterns could be knit into socks without needing to change yarns and weaving in extra ends.