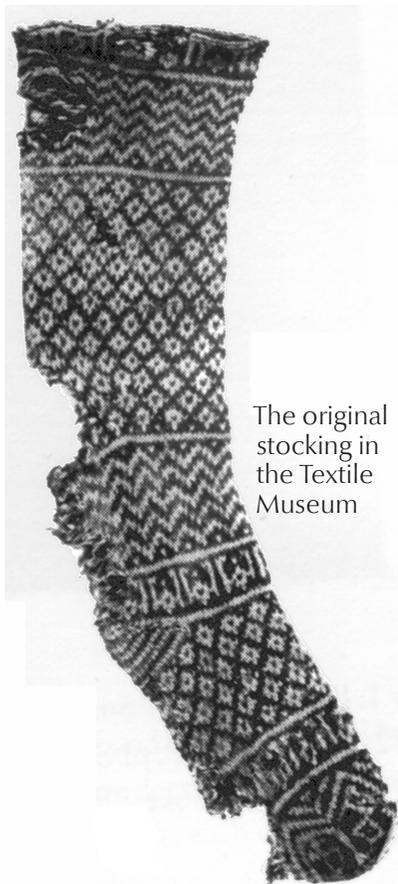


# Medieval Muslim Egyptian Stockings

by Ellen Perlman



The original stocking in the Textile Museum

This pattern is my attempt to re-create an original stocking in the Textile Museum in Washington DC. It was knitted of loosely plied unbleached white and indigo-dyed cotton. Early collectors purchased many of the fragments of early knitting from dealers in antiquities, which means there is no data on what site they were found or in what context. So there is very little information on the original sock, except that it was found somewhere in northern Egypt. While exact dating is difficult to determine, it was probably knit sometime between the 11th and 14th centuries CE.

**Size:** women's small (changes for medium size in parentheses)

**Materials:** Cotton fingering yarn. I used Crystal Palace "Baby Georgia" which has been discontinued. For the small size, a pair of these takes about 275 yards of white and 325 yards of blue.

**Recommended needle size:** US 2 (2.75mm) or whatever's needed to achieve the correct stitch gauge

I prefer to use a set of 5 double pointed needles because it makes more sense to me to knit a tube as a square than as a triangle. Or if you'd rather, use your favorite circular needle technique.

**Gauge:** 8 sts/inch

## TOE

This stocking begins at the toe. Because it was hard to see the toe's details in the Textile Museum's photograph, the toe presented here was reconstructed from a different Medieval Egyptian sock in the same collection.

Cast on 4 (5) sts, using your favorite provisional cast-on or toe-up cast-on. (If you don't have a favorite, try Judy's Magic Cast On: <http://knitty.com/ISSUEspring06/FEATmagiccaston.html>)

If you would like to experiment, one cast-on method used for some historical Egyptian socks was to take a strand of cotton, form a circle with it, leaving a longish tail, and cast on the initial stitches over this single strand. When the sock was done, the tail was pulled tight, and the end worked into the sock to keep it tight.

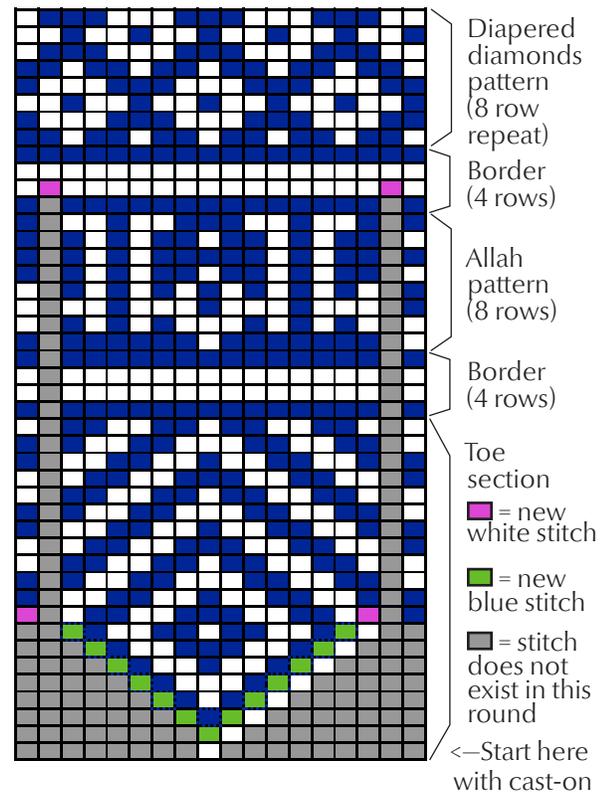
A small sock will have 4 diamonds at the toe and a medium sized sock will have 5 diamonds. Work the first four rounds as follows (also shown on chart):

- 1: \*knit one white, add one blue stitch\* 4 (5) times = 8 (10) sts total
- 2: \*k 1 white, k 1 blue, inc 1 blue, k 1 blue\* 4 (5) times = 16 (20) sts total
- 3: \*k 1 white, inc 1 blue, k 1 blue, k 1 white, k 1 blue, inc 1 blue\* 4 (5) times = 24 (30) sts
- 4: \*k 1 white, inc 1 blue, k 1 blue, k 3 white, k 1 blue, inc 1 blue\* 4 (5) times = 32 (40) sts

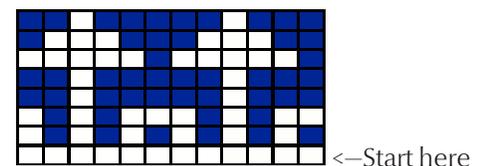
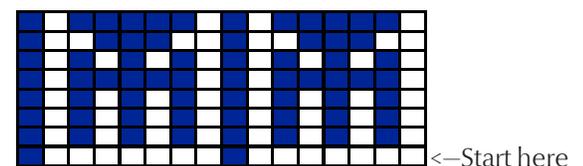
Continue following the chart. Each pattern is separated by a four-row border: 1 round blue, 2 rounds white, 1 round blue.

When you finish the toe diamonds and begin the first border, there will be 64 (80) stitches on the needles. *(continued next page-->)*

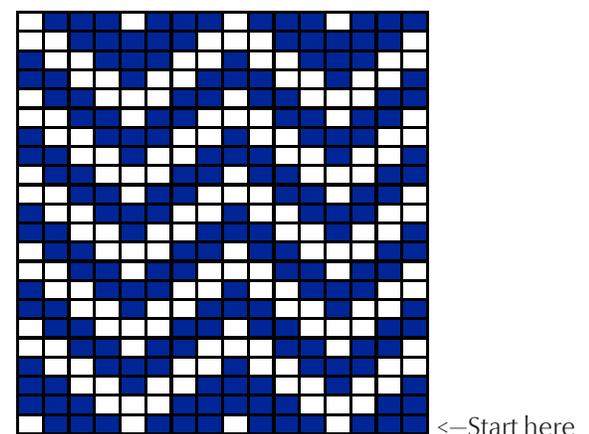
## Chart for toe and foot



## Alternates to the "Allah" pattern



## Zigzag pattern



(continued))

The Allah band is stylized Arabic lettering that can be read as the word “Allah” which means “God.” If you prefer, substitute another 8-row pattern; there are two alternate band patterns given, both of which are “pseudo-calligraphy” and have no meaning.

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## FOOT

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Only one repeat of the Diapered Diamonds pattern is shown on the chart; this should be repeated for the length of the foot. The original has 3 repeats. At the end of the repeats, knit one round all blue.

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## HEEL

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The original stocking has a short-row heel, knitted in stripes -- 2 rows of blue alternating with 2 rows of white until it was deep enough. There are many sets of instructions and video tutorials for short-row heels online; there’s a list at:

<http://www.knitwerk.com/archives/2005/10/28/short-rows-links-and-tutorials>

After the heel is complete, work a four-row border (1 round blue, 2 rounds white, 1 round blue) and then work the Allah or an alternate calligraphy band.

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## LEG

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In the original stocking, the “jog” from round to round is on the side, not the center back. Work 12 rounds of the Zigzag pattern according to the chart (starting at the bottom). Work the four-row border: 1 round blue, 2 rounds white, 1 round blue.

Measure the length of the Allah band and Zig-Zag band, including the four-row border between them.

Begin the Diapered Diamonds pattern and repeat as many times as necessary to fit the length of leg you want, minus this measurement (the length of Allah and Zig-Zag bands). This may be anywhere between 3 and 8 repeats of the diamonds; the original has 6+1/2.

Try the stocking on a few times to make sure it is wide enough through the leg; you may need to increase over the calf. If you do, a convenient way to do so is to work 2 increases at the center back every 4 to 6 rounds until it is wide enough. The original stocking doesn’t appear to have any leg increases.

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## FINISHING

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End with a four-row border, the Zigzag pattern, a four-row border, a repeat of the Allah band, and another four-row border, and bind off. The original is bound off the same way as ordinary modern knitting.

One hundred per cent cotton is not springy, so it won’t stretch and return to shape like wool. And these stockings were made before the knowledge of purl stitches, so it has no ribbed cuff. This means they will not stay up on their own. They were probably originally secured with separate bands of some sort as garters.

We don’t know what these garters looked like, but if you’re not a historical purist you can try a method seen on a number of modern ethnic Near Eastern and Central Asian socks. When you cast off, don’t break the working yarn, but make a length of chain-stitch long enough to wrap around your leg and be tied. I finished the chain with a small tassel of the same yarn.

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## CREDITS

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My version of this stocking