

A Ball



1.

I do not understand why Cook insists that I send William to the kitchen with a ball, but she does. Perhaps it is because a ball is one of the easiest ways to keep a small child happy and out from under foot. You can roll the ball across the floor and have the child chase it or throw it across a room if you need just a bit more time to get something done. This appears to be of unending interest to a toddler. There is a lot of evidence that Gothic children played with balls. Manuscripts include directions for games or show illuminations of children playing a game.

Again due to the fleeting nature of toys, I have been unable to find a specific extant example of a ball. I have made a number of balls out of the following materials: felting, linen and wool scrap cloth. Each of the balls has a different weight and feel to it. William has experimented with the toys and he seems to favor the brightly colored felt balls. He seems to really enjoy dumping out the bag full of balls and watching them roll every which way, so far he has shown no interest in putting them away (fortunately my Ladies maid dotes on William and she can pick them up.)



2.

The felt ball was made from wool. I started with a loosely wound ball of clean carded wool roving. I gently poured warm water over it, before adding a little soap. Next I rolled and tossed the ball between my hands for about 10-15 minutes. Every once in awhile I dipped the ball into cold and hot water to shock the fibers, causing them to tighten up. I stopped rolling the ball when it got to the size and density that felt correct.

The balls made from fabric scraps are just as easy to construct. I cut strips of fabric about an inch and a half wide and rolled them into the proper shape. Next I ran a couple of stitches through the center of the ball and on the final layer of fabric. I am hoping that this will prevent William from unrolling the ball. I expect that the ball made from wool scraps will last longer than the ball made from linen scraps, because it will be less likely to ravel or fray. I have chosen a dark color of fabric to hide dirt. Later experiments have found that dark colored balls are easier to lose.



3.

1. Orme, pg.150
2. Virgin and Child 1300-1350, French Little and Husband, pg. 97.
3. Virgin and Child ca. 1250-60 (Paris) Little and Husband, pg. 110