



Fall  
A.S. XXXXI (2006)  
*Filum Aureum*

Newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild

in the Kingdom of the West (SCA)  
Pattern darning

# Guild calendar & projects

## Filum Aureum goes electronic!

Greetings unto the members of the West Kingdom Needleworkers Guild!

For many years now, the Guild has been extremely fortunate to have had the printing part of our *Filum Aureum* newsletter done at no cost to us. However, this wonderful situation has just recently and unfortunately come to an end.

After receiving sage and sound advice from the Advisors of the Guild as to what direction the newsletter should go, as Guild Minister I have decided it would be in the best interest of the Guild to publish our newsletter in a purely electronic format.

In the future, *Filum Aureum* will be posted to the Guild website, and may be downloaded and printed out by all who wish to do so.

Anyone subscribing to our electronic mailing list, "WKneedle," will receive a notice when each new issue is ready — as well as notices of meetings, issues under discussion and other important Guild information. We encourage everyone to subscribe to this list if you don't already, at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WKneedle/>

Yours in service,



Catherine Lorraine, Guild Minister 



### OCTOBER CROWN

SEPTEMBER 30 — OCTOBER 1  
SATURDAY ACTIVITIES

#### MENTORS' CORNER

..... **10:00AM—NOON**  
Bring your projects and questions to the Guild mentors, or just stitch & socialize!


#### GUILD MEETING ..... **1:00PM** & NEEDLECASE EXCHANGE.

Make a needlecase in what ever materials and style you wish, and we will exchange with a fellow needleworker!

#### CLASS..... **2:00PM** FANCY EDGINGS

*Instructor: Caiterina nic Sheamus.*

Come and learn Italian hemstitching and the Four-sided stitch. Bring scissors, and magnification if needed.

NO FEE..... **6 STUDENTS MAX** 

### ARACHNE'S WEB

*the guild for all types of historical lace*

MEETING ..... **2:30PM**

AT OCTOBER CROWN &  
ALL CROWN EVENTS


Meets in the sunshade of Sabrina de la Bere  
— look for the Arachne's Web banner!

### IN MEMORIAM

Good gentles, with a heavy heart I write to you about *Halima de la Lucha*, a lady I knew for many years.

She enriched our Guild for everyone who knew her, as she was generous to a fault with her time and with the sharing of her knowledge in the areas of weaving, tablet weaving, and the art of dyeing wool.

We will miss her.

*Catherine Lorraine, Guild Minister* 



### PROJECT UPDATE


## West Kingdom Kneeling Carpets

The project passed 2 major milestones this year. The first came with the final approval of the design in April by the Regalia Committee. Then Mistress Anne of Bradford completed the changes to the patterns (and yes, she charted each pattern square by square). Based on the final pattern, yarn and supplies were obtained and divided into 10 "kits." The second major milestone happened at June Crown, when all the kits were handed or mailed out to the fabulous volunteers.

This is a big undertaking, and our thanks go to Mistress Anne of Bradford (designer), Sorcha (for the initial thank-you gifts), Catherine Lorraine and the Darkwood Project (for stretcher bars), Anne and Iulitta (canvas wranglers) and the needleworkers who are hard at work on their carpet sections — Aelia Apollonia, Annora de Montfort of Shadewood, Awrabella McHargue, Bjarni Eovaroarson i Jorvik, Brid Hecgwiht, Caiterina nic Sheamus, Christeane McNab, Felicia Margerye Amondesham, Giuliana di Benedetto Falconieri, Iulitta Rowan, Sorcha Fhionn inghean ui Ruairc, Vera Fischer, and Willow Polson.


Once the needlework sections are complete, the sections will be joined and finished by Anne and Iulitta. We still need 2 people to do the labels for the canvas bags that will be made by Iulitta. If you are interested in volunteering, this portion of the project will be done sometime in the first quarter of 2007. We hope to be able to present the completed carpets at June Crown, 2007.

In Service,

*Sabrina de la Bere*  
(project manager and thread wrangler) 

## The Needleworkers Guild of the Kingdom of the West

**All are welcome** to join us in making and enjoying historical needlework, furthering our knowledge, and developing our skills. We meet Saturday afternoon at every Crown Tourney, and we look forward to seeing you and your needlework!

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# Pattern darning: Decoration in dots and dashes

— by Sabrina de la Bere

**P**attern darning is an embroidery technique that follows the warp and weft of the fabric fibers. At its simplest, it is a running stitch that moves in either a horizontal or vertical line. The part designed to show is on top of the fabric and the remainder is behind. Usually done with more than one strand of embroidery thread, it is an extremely versatile form of embroidery.

There are three relatively distinct times and places where pattern darning was used prior to 1600. The oldest is on middle eastern fabrics, primarily Egyptian. In Europe, we see it emerge as part of the embroidery known as *Opus Teutonicum*, mostly in Germany. Then in the 15th & 16th C. it appears on Icelandic embroideries. Each incarnation has distinct characteristics and patterns.

## Medieval Islamic

[AYUUBID 1172 - 1249  
& MAMLUK 1250 - 1517]

Some of the older samplers from Egypt include a wide variety of examples of pattern darning. Ellis<sup>[1]</sup> notes that although the technique was labor-intensive, it was used extensively to decorate light clothing, household linens and soft furnishings for everyday use. Most of the designs are geometric or small figures. Some are wide and some narrow. Frequently they are used as multiple bands of differing designs to create a wide edging or collar. Most of the embroidery is worked on bands and then incorporated into garments.<sup>[2]</sup>

The geometric patterns appear in almost an infinite number of variations. The most common are “S’s”, “Z’s”, diamonds, waves, and rosettes. All are designs that make extensive uses of the voids that are left by the embroidered areas. Some of the embroideries have extremely complex designs built up from combining patterns. The small individual figures are frequently birds or sometimes fish. These, along with some rosettes, may be used as single designs or in an all over pattern.



Some of the designs include short running stitches rather than long runs of thread on the surface. For these designs, the running stitches create a speckled pattern that is sufficiently dense to set off the voided areas. On a couple of examples, the white areas are then outlined by running a thread along the edge.



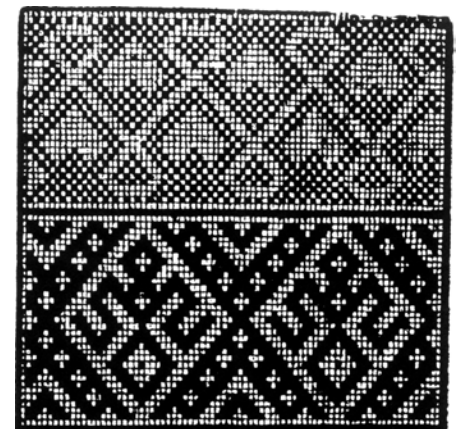
Periodically, you also see motifs based on kufic letters which represent blessings — like “good health” or “success”. When multiple motifs are used, they are often in rows with the motifs offset, making an all-over pattern.<sup>[3]</sup>

Many of these designs traveled to Europe, as we see the same patterns in the early 16th C. *modelbuchen* (pattern books) — as you can see in the illustration at right, from Nicolas Bassée’s *New Modelbuch* (1568). Rosettes, waves, birds, and interlace are the most common.

The Egyptian pattern darning was done on linen, primarily with silk. The most common colors for the silk are dark brown,

blue, red, and green. The thread count on the linen varies from a rougher linen 15/11 to finer linen 24/24. Multiple silk strands are used to make the line of the embroidery approximately equal in width to the base linen threads.

In most of the decorative bands from the Middle East, the embroidery is worked perpendicularly, from one edge of the band to the other. In a few instances it is worked along the band. The motifs most commonly worked along the band are inscriptions, which may be a blessing, a sign of safe passage or other meaningful phrase. Inscriptions with decorative lettering quickly became popular in Islamic cultures because motifs of animals and people were frowned upon as irreligious.



*Above, illustrations from Bassée that may have been copied from pattern darning*

*(continued next page —>)*



Above, *Opus Teutonicum* figures from the Altarnburg altar hanging, photographed to show details of clothing worked in pattern darning

## Opus Teutonicum

Opus Teutonicum refers to a style of embroidery done primarily during the 14th C in Lower Saxony/Germany. It consists of white linen thread embroidery on linen with some definition added by light colored silks or dark colored wool. These embroideries were primarily done for the church and took the form of altar clothes, chalice veils and Lenten veils.<sup>[4]</sup> As such, they tend to have biblical scenes represented, sometimes in great detail.

To create the forms and give the embroidery definition, a large number of different stitch types and patterns were used. Pattern darning, along with satin stitch, brick stitch, eyelet, chain, and herringbone were the primary stitches.

Most of the patterns are variations of diaper patterns, diamond shapes, or basket weave. To increase the patterns and definition, the embroidery was done both vertically and horizontally, sometimes in adjoining sections.



## Icelandic Embroidery

Pattern darning appears on several Scandinavian altar frontals from around 1500, including the one whose detail is pictured (above). The pattern darning is used pri-

marily in interlocking patterns to create borders. In one piece it fills one large section with different interlacing patterns. On another there are also bird patterns similar to the Egyptian textiles.

The Icelandic pattern darning is primarily done in various colored wools on tabby weave linen. The wools are various browns, golds, blues, and greens. The colors are intermixed and do not always follow the pattern lines.

When stitching the Icelandic pattern darning (modernly called *skakkaglit*), Gudjonsson notes that the stitches pass over 1, 3 or 5 threads. Then the next line of the pattern shifts over diagonally 1 thread for the next row.<sup>[5]</sup> This creates intricate and dense patterns.



## Concluding notes

Whether you choose to do pattern darning in the tradition of the Egyptians, the Germans or the Icelandic, it creates a rich textured look to your embroidery.

## Bibliography:

*A Book of Old Embroidery*, by A. F. Kendrick. Published by The Studio, London, 1921.

*A Pictorial History of Embroidery*, by Marie Schuette and Sigrid Muller-Christensen. Published by Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1963.

*Batsford Book of Canvas Work*, by Mary Rhodes. Published by BT Batsford Ltd, 1983. ISBN 0 7134-2669 1.

*Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt*, by Marianne Ellis. Published by Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2001. ISBN 1 85444 135 3.

*Samplers*, by Carol Humphrey. Published by Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0 521 57300 9.

*Embroidery Masterworks: Classic Patterns and Techniques for Contemporary Application*, by Virginia Churchill Bath. Published by Henry Regnery Company, 1972.

*Tissus D’Egypte, Temoins du monde arabe, VIIIc. - XVc. Siecles*. Published by Societe Presence du livre, Musee d’art et d’histoire, Geneve, 1993. ISBN 2-908528-52-5.

*Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, by Elsa E. Gudjonsson. 2nd edition, self published, 2003. ISBN 9979-9202-6-2.

*“Icelandic Medieval Embroidery Terms and Techniques”* by Elsa E. Gudjonsson, pages 133-143. From *Studies in Textile History*, edited by Veronika Gervers. Published by Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 1977. ISBN 0-88854-192-9.

### FOOTNOTES:

[1] Ellis, pg. 24

[2] Ellis, pg. 30

[3] Ellis, pg. 32

[4] Schuette, pgs. XVIII-XIX

[5] Gudjonsson, pg. 27

Center column, an Islamic fragment showing dotted filling with, and without, outlines.



At left, an amusing animal with wrapped outlines from an Islamic fragment.

Below, the back side of the embroidery in the large illustration at the top of page 3.



# Design for pattern darning

— by Christian de Holacombe

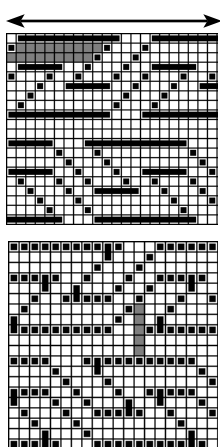
Since pattern darning isn't as well known as some other techniques, there aren't a lot of published patterns for it.

Fortunately, a lot of historical cross-stitch and other "squared" patterns can be used for pattern darning. Some types work much better than others, and sometimes it requires a bit of thought to see how to adapt a pattern for better results.

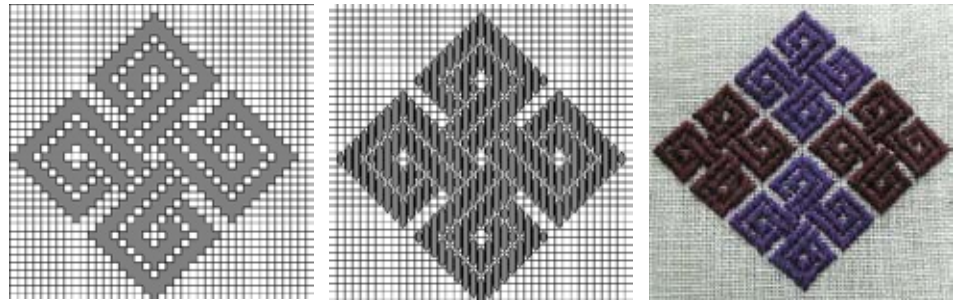
Patterns worked in one color are by far the easiest. In pattern darning, when there are two or three squares the same color next to each other, you will want to take just one stitch across the whole width. Look for patterns that don't have a long horizontal or vertical "run" of stitches in the same color. More than five or six squares of the same color in a row means taking a long stitch or "float" that may be long enough to snarl, catch on things or otherwise become a nuisance, depending on the purpose of the object you're embroidering and what kind of wear and tear it will get. Friction between the thread and the holes in the cloth is also what holds the stitches of pattern darning in place, so patterns with long floats, where the thread passes fewer times through the fabric, may also be more difficult to stitch with a smooth and even tension.

Since pattern darning often has substantial amounts of thread both on the front of the fabric and on the back, you also have to look at the background (uncolored) squares of the pattern in the same way: more than five or six uncolored squares together can mean a long float on the back. If the piece you are embroidering is reversible or unlined -- the border on a napkin, for instance -- the back may be as subject to snags as the front.

In looking for potential patterns, remember that pattern darning can be worked either horizontally or vertically. A pattern that has too many dark squares in a row one way can sometimes be worked quite nicely without long floats if it's worked in the other direction.



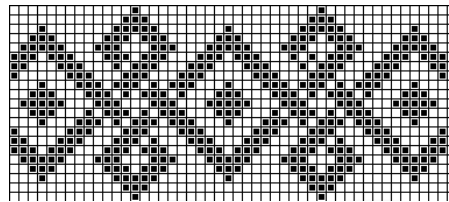
For instance, this pattern has several long floats in every repeat if worked horizontally, as shown in the top picture by the long black and gray rectangles. But if it's worked vertically (bottom picture) the longest float is only five squares.



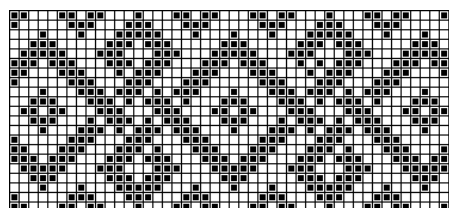
From left to right: a squared diagram, a sketch of how that diagram can be interpreted in pattern darning, and an example of finished stitching by Sabrina de la Bere.

Some patterns become much more workable with really minor changes. A diamond-shaped motif that is too wide, for instance, can be interrupted in the middle with a single dot of the reverse color, turning one stitch that would be too long into two shorter stitches with a short gap between.

Here, for instance, is a pattern that would *not* work well for reversible pattern darning, due to several long floats on the back:



But just by filling it in a bit at the top and bottom, it becomes much more workable:



Pattern darning can look just as good on the back of the fabric as it does on the front (*see picture on facing page*), although usually it won't look the same on both sides. If you want your piece to be reversible, this means taking extra care with your beginnings and endings.


Sometimes you will be able to hide the ends of your threads in seams or hems. One typical use for pattern darning is to imitate the bands of woven-in designs that appear on Italian "Perugia" towels. This kind of pattern darning is worked all the way across the towel from edge to edge. You can start a new thread at one side, work across, and cut the thread at the other side; when you hem the towel later, the ends of your design threads will be caught in the hems.

Other patterns, such as some of the Arabic "medallion" motifs, are worked as

self-contained spots, or as vertical bands in the center of your fabric. Here you have to find a way to hide the ends under the stitching. A trick that's sometimes used in reversible blackwork (double running stitch) is to secure the end of the thread by taking three or four tiny running stitches hidden underneath a longer stitch. In areas of dense stitching, you can also run the end of your thread crosswise under and through several adjacent design threads and cut the end. Both of these techniques are useful too if you run out of thread and have to start a new one before you get to the end of a row or a logical stopping place.

When you're working back and forth on a motif, it's helpful to take some thought for how to manage the turns at the end of each row. The least attractive and least durable type of turn is to go down through the fabric and up again a single thread away; this tends to pull out. Patterns with diagonal, zigzag or irregular edges on the sides where the turns will be are much easier to work back and forth, because the end always passes under at least two threads between the end of one row and the beginning of the next.

It's also important not to pull the thread too tightly when starting a new row. If you look at some of the historical pieces, you can see a row of tiny loops at the ends of the rows where the thread was left just a bit loose at the turns.

"Impossible" patterns can sometimes be made possible by taking a backstitch here and there rather than a straight running stitch: the back of the fabric will not be a perfect reverse of the front in this case, but it's a useful trick to know. And a straight vertical edge can actually be worked with a little creative cheating: simply work every *other* row of the pattern, so that your thread passes under two or more threads at each edge. Then go back and work the rows in between. The only place the difference will show at all is on the straight edges, and then only if someone has their nose right up against your embroidery. 

# Pattern darning in context

— by Christian de Holacombe

When medieval Europeans first saw the clothing of the Middle East, they were fascinated by its colorful, luxurious fabrics and complex ornamentation — and immediately wanted something similar for themselves. But the brocades, lampas weaves and other fabrics they coveted were sometimes far more expensive than they could afford. One solution was to create similar designs on plain fabric with embroidery — a solution Europeans embraced with great enthusiasm.

Pattern darning is a particularly clever way to imitate costly woven patterns. Structurally, it is made by “weaving” thread in and out among the threads of the fabric, just as if it was made that way by weaving in a “pattern weft” while the fabric is still on the loom. In the absence of telltale loose ends or grain patterns, it can be difficult to tell which technique was used to make a given pattern.

## In the Middle East

Due to the dry climate, far more fragments of embroidered fabric survive from the medieval Middle East than in Europe — especially fragments of linen, which often decays in European soils. We have samplers, tunic fragments, and lengths of turban fabric to study, as well as evidence of embroidery on clothing from paintings and documents.

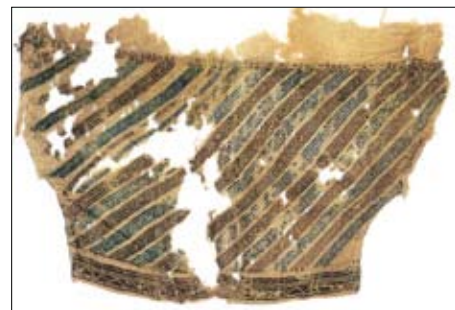
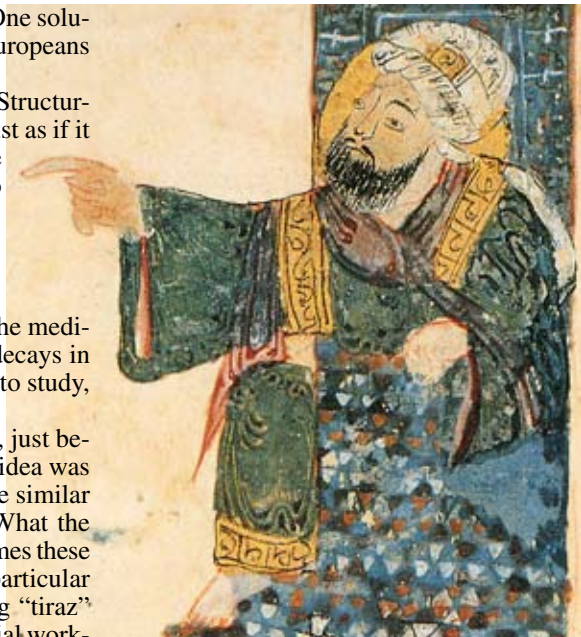
The King’s outfit at right shows bands of ornamentation around each sleeve, just below the sleeve’s junction with the body. This idea was quickly adopted by Europeans, so you’ll see similar bands on European tunics as well. What the Europeans didn’t know is that sometimes these bands, called “tiraz,” were marks of particular favor from a ruler. Garments bearing “tiraz” bands were made in each ruler’s official workshops and bestowed upon officials and nobles the ruler wished to honor. While the word “tiraz” simply means “embroidery,” these bands often included inscriptions praising the ruler by name — now very useful to textile historians, since they enable the fabrics to be dated quite closely. Tiraz bands became so fashionable that they were widely imitated by “unofficial” workshops as well, with inscriptions such as “good fortune” or “health and happiness” replacing the official wording.

Collars and the front openings of tunics (see above) were another traditional place for decoration. Stripes of decoration were also common at tunic cuffs and hemlines. At right is a fragment from the bottom of a pair of trousers, which shows not only a decorated band at the bottom, but pattern-darned diagonal stripes up the leg, probably covering all of the trouser that could be seen below the hem of the garment worn over it.

As the picture of the king shows, as well as the detail of his advisors from the same painting below, the long strip of cloth that formed the daily turban was also decorated. Above the King’s forehead you can see a small square pattern that’s quite common on any turban whose front view can be seen.



The back views of the advisors’ turbans show that there was also a band of decoration above the loose end of the turban cloth, often worn hanging down the back or carefully arranged to show the design. Many of the surviving “samplers” of Islamic pattern darning are thought to be collections of patterns for clients to choose from for a custom turban.



## In western Europe

We don’t have many examples of pattern darning on clothing from Europe; but then, we don’t have as many examples of surviving clothing, period. What we do have is several examples of pattern darning on furnishing textiles.

The most conspicuous examples are church textiles, especially altar frontals — flat hangings used on the front of an altar table. Two such hangings from Iceland are featured in Gudjonsson’s book (Bibliography, p.4).

Another use of pattern darning is on long cloth towels. Medieval table service used a lot of linen towels, both for practical hand drying and for show. Towels, like turbans, often had decorated ends, and since pattern darning is attractive on the wrong as well as the right side, it is quite suitable for this. Such embroidered towels imitated the more expensive towels with woven-in designs, such as the “Perugia” towels fashionable in the Renaissance.

# Pattern bands

**B**and patterns like these can be applied to many uses, both historical and modern. Here and on the next page are examples of bands graphed in a number of different formats from period sources, some more challenging to work than others.

Note that some are worked along the **length** of the band (such as the first two at top right), while others are worked **perpendicular** to the band (the three at the bottom). The diamond border on p.8 has portions worked in *both* directions!

## Materials


Pattern darning can be frustrating with the wrong materials. It's important to choose a background fabric that is not too tightly woven, so there is room for the design threads in between the woven threads. It's also helpful to work with thread that is not too lightweight or slippery, so that it stays put and doesn't snag easily when stitched.

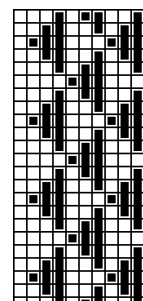
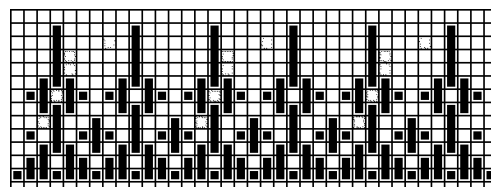
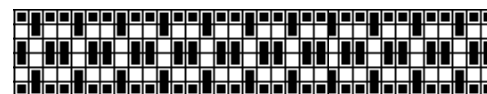
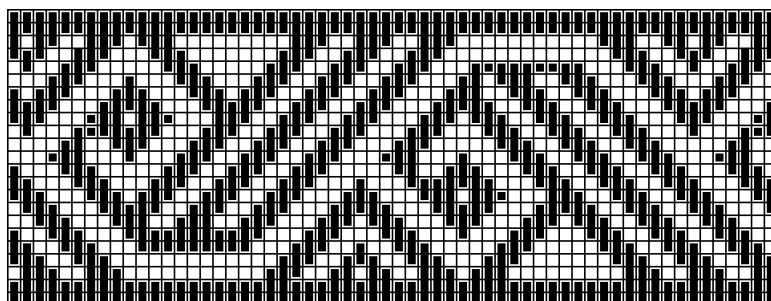
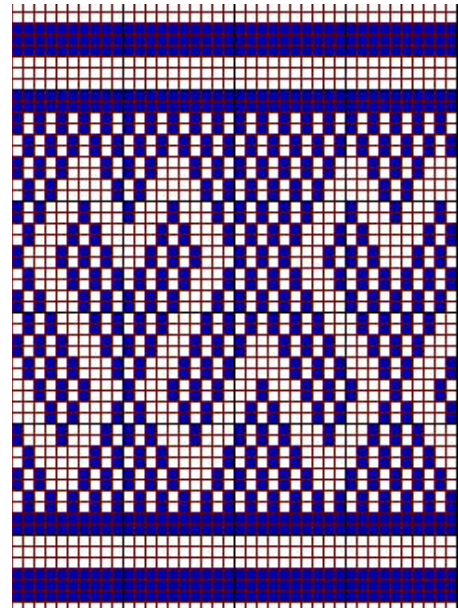
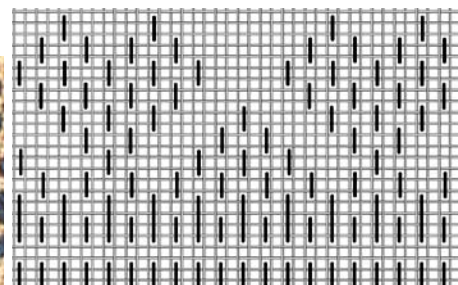
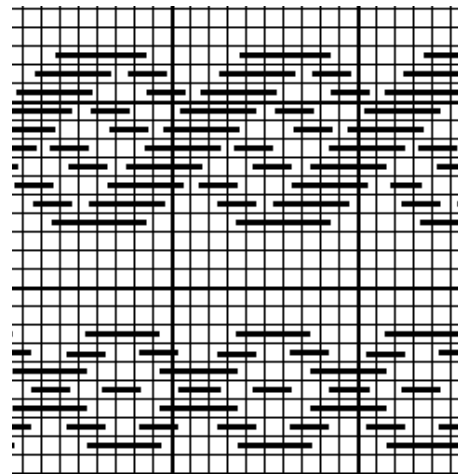
Most of the existing examples of pattern darning are worked in colored silk or wool on a linen or cotton ground. Although it's a counted-thread technique, background fabric for pattern darning does *not* have to be exactly the same number of threads per inch in both directions. As long as the design is a straight band and doesn't turn corners, it may look slightly too tall or too short, but distortion will be minimal. In fact, the large pattern of double zigzags at right is clearly designed to be worked on fabric with more horizontal threads to the inch than vertical threads, as you can see by comparing the photo and the chart. There are certainly plenty of other historical samples worked on linen that is not quite "square," and the small distortion that may result seems to have been regarded as quite normal.

In order to get good thread coverage in pattern darning, it's helpful to use a design thread that is somewhat thicker than the background threads of your fabric. Many of the historical pieces of pattern darning were

worked on linen in a relatively untwisted and fluffy thread, often several strands of silk held together.

One very good combination is 28-count linen with four strands of fine silk. A good — though less authentic — combination for beginners in this technique is 22-count Aida cloth, which looks quite nice worked with 6 strands of cotton embroidery floss, just as it comes from the skein.

Pattern darning is one technique where it's important *not* to pull the thread too tightly, especially if you want it to look attractive on the back as well as the front. It helps to gently stretch the fabric when you finish a row, to let the thread relax. 





For more on Islamic textiles, the book *Islamic Textiles*, by Patricia L. Baker, is a good overview of the history of these textiles, with abundant illustrations. (British Museum Press, 1995, ISBN 0-7141-2522-9)



Joyce Miller has a website on a medieval Icelandic altar hanging worked largely in pattern darning, including complete charts in several sections:  
<http://www.doctorbeer.com/joyce/emb/icealt/icealt.htm>



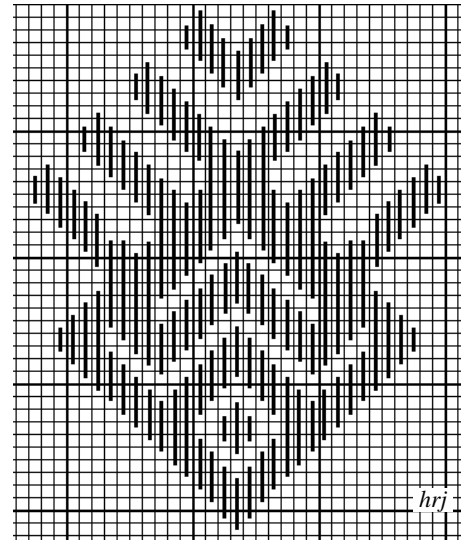
A class handout on pattern darning by Karen Larsdatter of Atlantia is available at:  
<http://aeg.atlantia.sca.org/classes/50308.htm>



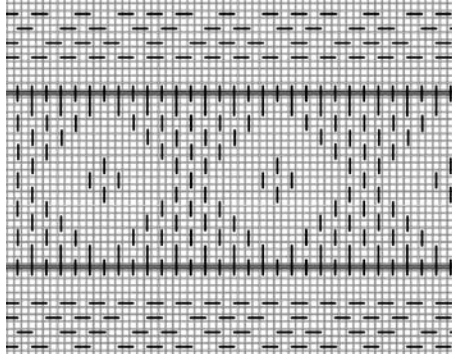
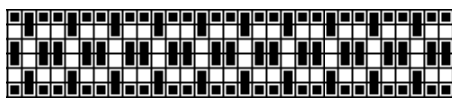
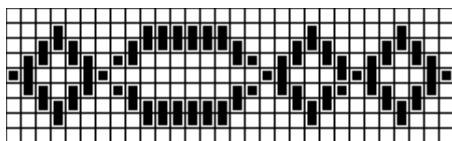
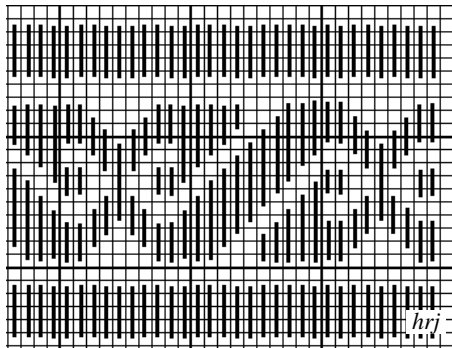
The summer 1994 issue of *Tournaments Illuminated* (Issue #111) has an article on “16th Century Turkish Light Embroidery: Pattern Darning,” pp. 20-25.



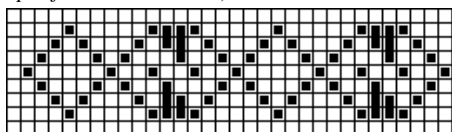
Information by Alionora Munro on the woven **Perugia towels** (which can be, and historically have been, rather successfully imitated in pattern darning) can be found at:  
<http://hometown.aol.com/noramunro/Perugia/index.htm>



Above, a “medallion” spot motif from an Islamic sampler



(See p.3 for a photo of the border above;  
 p.2 for the one below)



Photos in this issue not otherwise credited are from *Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt* by Marianne Ellis (Bibliography, p.4). The diagrams at the top of p.5 are by Joyce Miller from her pages on the Icelandic altar hanging (see POINTERS, above). People pictured on p.6 are from an Iraqi painting by Maqamat al-Hariri, ca. 1237 (Photo Bibliotheque Nationale de France, MS arabe 5847, f.58v) Charts labeled “hrj” were graphed by Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn from a sampler in Ernst Kuehnel’s *Islamische Stoffe aus Agyptischen Graberns* (1927).