

Winter
A.S. XXXVII (2003)

Filum Aureum

Newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild

in the Kingdom of the West (SCA)

Beadwork
embroidery

Sabrina de la Bere
P.O. Box 1809
El Granada, CA 94018

Guild calendar & projects

MARCH CROWN

(March 21-23)

- MENTORS CORNER 11:00am-2:30pm
- GUILD MEETING - 2:30 pm
- CLASS - 3:00 pm

This Saturday class is **Embroidered Beadwork** with Christian de Holacombe. See some great photos, learn a basic method for sewing beads to fabric, and start a bit of beaded border! (As always, it's a good idea to bring scissors and an embroidery hoop to class.)

A bonus at March Crown will be a second class on Sunday morning — **Beginning Cross Stitch** with Jena Whitehart. The kit for this class is \$5. 


MAY EVENTS

CREATIVE ARTS AND TEXTILE SHOW (CATS)

comes to Santa Clara Convention Center May 16-18. This consumer needlework show has lots of national teachers and a shopping mart. If you are interested, visit <http://www.creativeartsshow.com/>

for a complete list of classes. 


PERIOD BLACKWORK COIF CLASS SUNDAY, MAY 18

There are still a few slots left in this stellar class with Linn Skinner (*details, see p.8*). Contact Sabrina de la Bere if you're interested in participating. 

JUNE CROWN

(June 20-22/2)

- MENTORS CORNER 11:00am-2:30pm
- GUILD MEETING - 2:30 pm
- CLASS - 3:00 pm

Needleworkers will again be hosting the A&S pavilion. Display will be "A Year in the Life" — bring anything you have been working on this past year. Class will be "All About Silk Thread Embroidery: A Panel Discussion." 

ARTS & SCIENCES TOURNAMENT

(July 25-27)

There will be a needlework track! We'll post it on the website as soon as it's arranged.

ARTS & SCIENCES CALENDAR

Competitions in 2003 with possibilities for embroidery:

MARCH CROWN: FINE ART

Heraldic Display

MISTS SPRING INVESTITURE: ART

Finishing and Edging Your Garb or Linens

JUNE CROWN: FINE ART

Embroidery: Beading

MISTS FALL CORONET: ARTS

Viking Decoration: Embroidery, Laid Work or Couched Leather

MISTS FALL INVESTITURE: ARTS

Favors

CYNAGUA FALL CORONET: ARTS


Fighting Surcotes/Garb

TWELFTH NIGHT 2004: FINE ART

The Decorated Chemise or Undergarment


GUILD KITS

We have just replenished our stock and have lots of kits for you! Kits are available at all Crown events and A&S. Take advantage of this opportunity to try new techniques. Kits are available for a \$5 donation.

Currently available are Blackwork Needlecase (filling stitches), Whitework bookmark (counted satin stitch), Zigzag pincushion (long-armed cross stitch), Scholhouse Sweet Bag (outline stitch, buttonhole stitch), Fan Pouch (different counted thread techniques), Strawberry pincushion (tent stitch), and Demi-Sun Pouch (applique). There are also a few discontinued kits available. 

THE GIFT CHESTS

The Royals need your handiwork! Consider donating your completed kit, or other needleworked items, to your Kingdom or Principality chests. It greatly pleases the Royals to be able to show largesse to special people by giving a hand made item. Good examples include: napkins, pincushions, sachets, book covers, bookmarks, kitchen-size towels or napkins.

- West Kingdom Gift Chest (*Mistress Jania of Call Duck Manor*)
- Mists Royal Gift Chest (*Sabrina de la Bere*)
- Cynagua Royal Gift Chest (*Judith of Stormholde*) 

GUILD PROJECTS

- KINGDOM ARMS POUCHES: for PENNSIC 2003

A reminder from Isela: all Kingdom Pouches are **due in by June Crown!** These are 8x10 inch pouches, bearing the arms of one of the 17 Kingdoms on a 6x6 inch embroidered square in your choice of techniques. Due to unexpected drop-outs, you can still do one of these, but hurry! Deadline: **June 1**.


- TRAVELING BAGS

Similar to the Kingdom Arms Pouches, but your 6x6 inch embroidered panel is appliqued onto a canvas tote bag (which travels better than a basket!) to contain gifts to other monarchs. Your choice of technique and materials.

- ROYAL ROSE POUCHES


for each Queen of the West, presented as she steps down. A six-inch-square rose panel in your choice of techniques. Ongoing project — the spots for 2003 are taken, but you can still sign up for 2004!

- KNEELING CARPETS

This project is still in the design stage, but contact Sabrina if you're interested. 

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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Beadwork

— by *Christian de Holacombe*

If there is anyone out there still harboring doubts as to whether embroidered beadwork was done in Europe before 1600, perhaps the cover of this issue will be an effective counter-argument! This huge, spectacular and very accomplished piece from the 14th century is embroidered almost entirely in beads.

There is a good reason, though, that medieval beadwork, especially the use of seed beads, is news to many of us. Much of what's available in English about the culture of the European Middle Ages discusses England and France, areas where beadwork did not come into fashion until somewhat later. Where spectacular beadwork is common in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries is in the Germanies and Eastern Europe, areas with which many of us aren't so familiar.

PEARLS, CORAL & GOLD

The earliest medieval “bead” work actually used small pearls, small hand-made beads of red coral, and a lot of gold thread. Interestingly, we can sometimes detect that pearls were once used by their absence — by the appearance of embroidered outlines showing rows of little white bare spots where pearls used to be. We see these on the embroidery of Sts. Harlindis and Relindis from about 850, for instance. We also see them on the tunic of St. Bathilde from the 600s, where there were probably never actual pearls, just white spots as “imitation” pearls. (There are embroidered “jewels” on this tunic as well.)

From the early 1100s we have items with the pearls surviving. The gloves of the Holy Roman Emperor in Palermo (*p.5*) are thickly sewn with tiny pearls, jewels and little gold plaques or spangles. The “seed pearl” tradition clearly continues to develop, in later years. Look at the “lamb of God” on *p.6*, worked for the top of a small box in southern Germany in the mid 1400s, and the panel of a saint on *p.5*, worked entirely in pearls (tiny, tiniest and tiniest!) at about the same period.

GLASS BEADS

Somewhere around the middle of the 1200s, we begin to see colored glass beads



Detail of a heavily beaded altar hanging from Halberstadt, Lower Saxony: 1250-1300

added to, and eventually dominating, pieces of this kind of embroidery. (In German, glass beads are “glasperlen,” literally “glass pearls.”) There is a spectacular altar frontal from Lower Saxony from the middle 1200s (this page) with large figures and motifs solidly embroidered in coral, pearls, and both opaque and transparent glass seed beads in red, two shades of green, blue, turquoise, purple, very deep blue and gold.

The beads are remarkably similar to modern glass seed beads, although generally with rougher edges. They seem to be made by basically the same process as seed beads today; a hollow glass rod is heated and drawn out to form a long thin tube, which is cooled and cut into slices. Seed beads may be rounded and smoothed by re-heating, grinding or some of both. Some beads are ground to have 3 or 6 flat sides, rather than being round. Beads may be oval or round, but in the Middle Ages we don't see the seed beads with silver foil linings or fancy iridescent finishes that are popular types today. Instead, the “sparkle” in medieval beadwork seems to come from faceted beads, metal beads and spangles. The seed beads are plain glass.

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

Much of the beadwork (and descriptions of beadwork) that we have is items from church furnishings and royal palaces. These pieces have the advantage of having been worked with the best materials available, and have also been carefully kept and protected from damage. Many of these rich pieces are worked on silk, often with a backing of parchment or linen for support — beads are quite heavy, and must be well supported so as not to distort the working fabric. Beads can also be worked on linen or canvas, which may be cut out when the beadwork is done and applied to another fabric, or used to cover a small object.

Beads obviously need to be sewn with strong, durable thread. However, countless beads and pearls have been lost from medieval embroideries because the simple laid-and-couched method often used to secure them to fabric has not stood the test of time. In this method, a string of beads is simply laid down on the fabric, following the line of the design, and then “couched,” with a second thread tying down the first thread in between every few beads.

The problem with this is that the individual beads are actually not sewed directly to the fabric; only the connecting thread

(continued next page)

Probably the most common question we get in the Needleworkers Guild is “Is this stitch ‘period’?” This is the fourth in a series of articles exploring the historical uses of needlework and comparing them with modern uses.

(continued)

is sewn down. The beads are held on the fabric only by the fact that they are all strung on this thread. If it breaks anywhere, beads will start dropping off one by one, each one that drops off freeing the broken end of the thread for the next one to come loose, as in the closeup below.



A detail of St. Catherine from the vestments of the Order of the Golden Fleece, early to middle 1400s.

MOTIFS

Because so much of the surviving beadwork comes from palaces and churches, the motifs that appear are often figures of saints and biblical scenes, and occasionally flowers, foliage, symbols or lettering between and around the main subjects. In later centuries we begin to see more floral and purely decorative beadwork. Heraldry is another common source of motifs for secular beadwork, such as the extraordinary belt and cap buried with the young prince Fernando de la Cerda around 1275.

It's clear from the examples pictured here that it's rare for a surface to be completely covered in beads. The beads may be worked solidly to form motifs, but the fabric background usually shows between them— sometimes decorated with gold spangles, scattered beads, or little stamped medallions shaped as flowers, stars etc.

OBJECTS

Beadwork in general seems to appear on almost any object that will stand still to be decorated, including wall or altar hangings, and on ceremonial garments for priests and royalty, such as several bishops' miters.

However it is rare to find glass beads on ordinary clothing. Usually what you see on garments, like the left sleeve of the German lady (above right), is gold thread, gold beads and pearls, used around the edges of embroidered or appliquéd motifs. (There seems to have been a fad around her time for having only one sleeve, or one sleeve and the adjoining half of the bodice, decorated like this.)

Seed-beaded motifs do appear on very rich belts, headgear and other small accessories. While less expensive than pearls and gold, glass beads seem to have been costly

enough that they were used mainly in small quantities or as an accent.

An intriguing group of objects is the half-dozen or so surviving wooden containers covered with beadwork. Again these are church objects, such as the pyx (a small box with a pointed cap) on p.5, used to hold communion wafers, and at least one larger chalice-shaped box used to hold relics. (These boxes were the inspiration for the project on our Pattern Page.)

RESOURCES

Lady Elspeth Grizel of Dunfort ("Griz") from the Middle Kingdom has what it quite possibly the best web page anywhere on medieval beadwork:

<http://www.medievalbeads.com>

This site includes color pictures of many medieval pieces, a guide to seed beads, and detailed, illustrated instructions on bead embroidery.

A FEW GOOD BOOKS

Good discussion and pictures of medieval beadwork are hard to find — one reason Grizel's website is so valuable. Unfortunately many of these books are out of print.

The Conservation of Tapestries and Embroideries, by The Getty Conservation Institute, 1989, ISBN 0-89236-154-9.

Medieval Craftsmen: Embroiderers, by Kay Staniland; University of Toronto Press, 1991, ISBN: 0-8020-6915-0

La Riqueza del Bordado Ecclesiastico en Checoslovaquia (yes, a Spanish book about Czechoslovakian embroidery...) by Zoroslava Drobna & Bohumir Lifka (Sfinx, Praga, 1949, no ISBN). There is also a French edition.

Pictorial History of Embroidery, by Marie Schuette and Sigrid Müller-Christensen, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963,

Stadt im Wandel: Kunst und Kultur des Būrgetums in Norddeutschland 1150-1650. Ausstellungskatalog. Ed. Cord Meckeper. Braunschweigischer Landesmuseum, 1985. ISBN: 392260837x



Portrait of a woman wearing the Order of the Swan, by an anonymous master active at the court of Ansbach (?) c 1490, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. From the book **Early German Painting 1350-1550**.

Below, and on the front cover: Details of an altar hanging from Cheb, Czechoslovakia, from about 1300.



More examples of beadwork



Above: Glove of the Emperor Frederick II. Part of the insignia of the Holy Roman Empire. Sicily, before 1220.



At left, a pyx (wooden box for communion wafers) covered with bead embroidery; Lower Saxony, second half of 1200s.



Above, an Annunciation scene worked on a mitre from Minden, about 1400; pearls and silver-gilt motifs on silk.

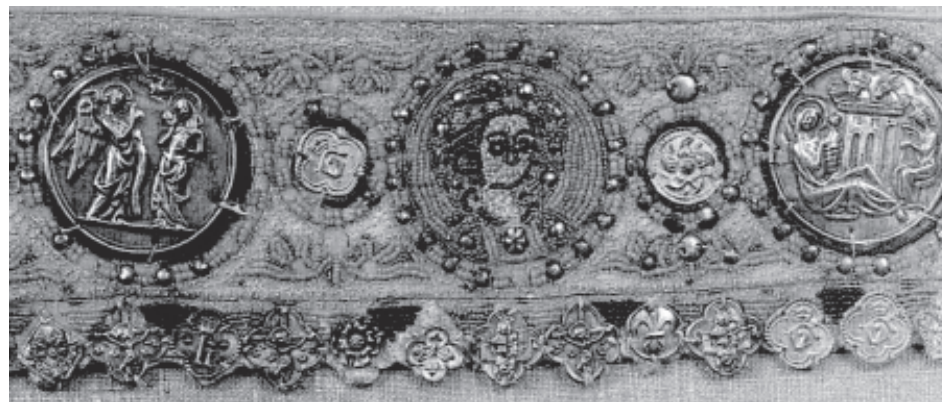


At right, a beaded hat, and below, detail of a belt, both buried with Fernando de la Cerda, who died in about 1275. From the royal tombs at Burgos in Spain.

Below a panel embroidered in pearls, showing a saint; 1350-1375, Prague, Czechoslovakia.



Below, a horizontal border, First half of 1300s, Lower Saxony, in coral, gold and glass beads.



Beaded boxes

While it takes more stitching than the medieval method, Lady Grizel of Dunfort's method for stitching seed beads is so secure that she claims the finished product is actually machine washable. This is what we'll use for our "beaded boxtop."

Grizel's method has three steps. The beads are STITCHED down onto the fabric, then they are LACED together, and finally they are thoroughly COUCHED. By the time we're finished, each bead has three or four independent threads holding it down, and the chances that it will come loose any time soon are minimal indeed. Here are the steps.

STEP 1: STITCHING

Thread your needle, knot the end, and come up through your fabric where you want to start laying down beads. Thread a few beads on your needle — three or four is a good number, you may want to use just one or two in a tight spot or on a curve. Lay the beads down along the design line. Plunge your needle back into the fabric a little beyond the last bead — you don't want to pull the beads so tight they buckle, but neither do you want them loose.

Bring your needle back up at the beginning of your little group of beads, and go through them all again. Now thread a few more beads on your needle. Lay them on the design, plunge your needle, then bring it back up at the beginning of the new group and go through them again. Repeat this — it's called "lazy backstitch" — until the lines of your design are covered, or until you want to stop and secure the beads you've done before going any further.

You'll notice that once all your beads are laid down on the fabric, your beadwork becomes just as portable as any other kind of embroidery, since you no longer need to carry jars of loose beads around with you.

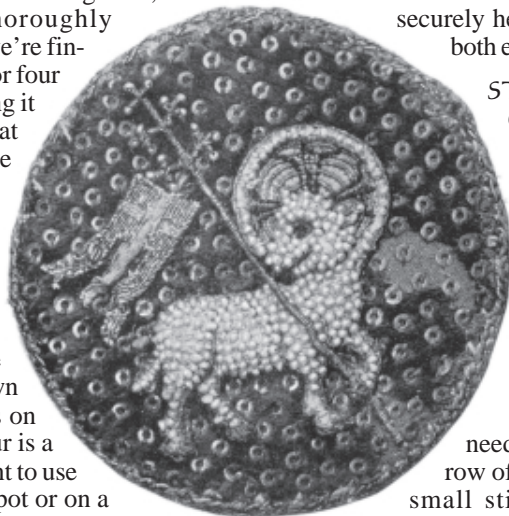
STEP 2: LACING.

With a new thread, working entirely on top of the fabric, you're now going to lace your rows of beads together into a solid unit. Again, take care that you don't pull your thread so tight that the beads buckle or become distorted.

Bring your needle up at the beginning of a row or group of beads and go through them all at once. Go through the next row

of beads in the opposite direction, from right to left. Go on to the next row, left to right again and so forth.

When you're done with this first round of lacing, turn your work around and lace each row again from the opposite direction. Each bead row will have two lacing threads through it in opposite directions. This insures that all the rows of beads are securely held together at both ends of the row.



STEP 3: COUCHING.

Now you're going to go back and do what our medieval forebears did, couch between beads.

Bring your needle up next to a row of beads. Take a small stitch over the row, in between two beads

so that all you're really stitching down is the thread between them. Tug gently on the thread if you need to so that it "pops" down between the beads and is invisible.

You probably don't need to couch between every bead. Every two or three beads is plenty, since you've secured them in two ways already. Griz suggests that when you couch, you take a stitch over two rows instead of one, and that you take your next couching stitch over one of the rows you just did plus one new one. This cross-links the bead rows, making it even less likely that beads will be lost. If you have trouble with your thread showing, be patient with it, and poke it with your needle if necessary to make it pop down out of sight.

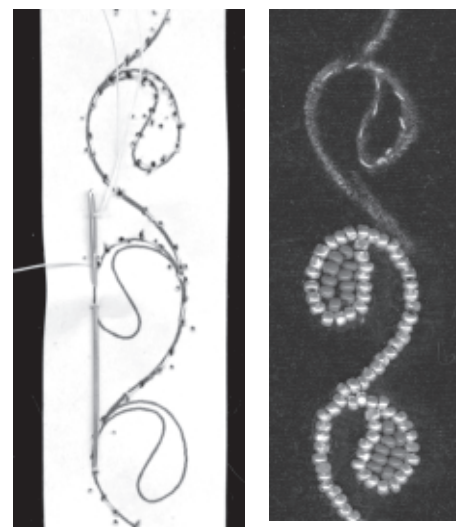
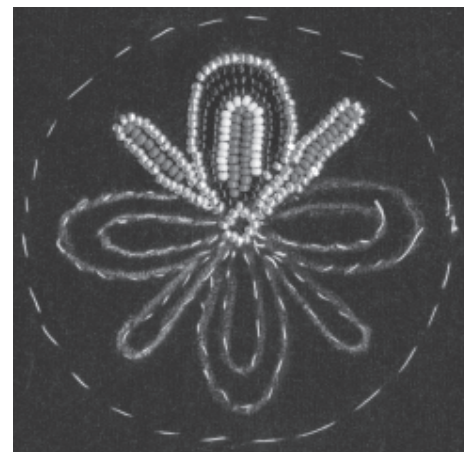
When your beads are thoroughly couched, you're done. Take your work out of the frame, trim it as needed, and apply it to your project using stitching or glue as appropriate.

Finished beadwork can be gently pressed (as long as none of the beads are plastic) by laying the beadwork face down over a thick towel or other cushioning.

When machine-washing garb that has beadwork on it, it's a good idea to put the garment in a muslin bag to keep the beads from hitting the sides of the washing tub and becoming broken or scratched. —*Cl*

The box

For this project, I chose a small cylinder-shaped pasteboard box, about three inches across and a couple of inches tall, from the local craft store. The bead embroidery is for a central motif on the top of the box, and for a border to reach around the bottom half of the outside, below the edge of the lid. I worked the beading in #11 seed beads on washed cotton velveteen, backed



with heavy linen, stretched in a roller frame. This worked very well, except that I made the mistake of choosing a very dark color of velveteen, which meant it was hard to mark the pattern on it, and I needed extra good light to be able to work on it.

I solved the pattern-marking problem by drawing the pattern out on white paper, basting the paper to the cloth (see above), and taking small running stitches along the

(continued opposite)

Exciting times ahead: Words from Sabrina

2002 has sped by, and we are looking at beginning another year filled with wonderful needlework opportunities. However, before we move forward, I would like to thank all the people who made the Guild function and prosper this last year — the volunteers, teachers, and facilitators.

• *Isela di Bari* • *Christian de Holacombe* • *Anahita Gaouri bint-'abd al-Karim al-hakim al-Fassi* • *Aldith Angharad St George* • *Cyneburh of Cantwaraburg* • *Caterina nic Sheamus* • *Francesca von Hesse* • *Mairghread nighean Eanruig* • *Aja du Jardin* • *Octavia Jenon de Treves* • *Kira Leonovna Zemhadushina* • *Catherine*


Lorraine • *Artemesia Rhys* • *Iulitta Rowan* • *Linn Skinner* • *Kareina Talvi Tytär* • *Elrik Skapvarg* • *William Warren*

We have an exciting year ahead of us with new service projects, some exciting new subjects coming in future *Filums*, contests and displays to show your work, classes, classes and more classes. If you want to see a class taught or the Guild undertake a project, let us know. If you want to see the Guild move in a different direction, let us know.

We will be making more use of the email list on Yahoo this year, so please sign up to

ensure you get all the latest announcements: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WKneedle/>

Our new Apprenticeship Program Evaluation Form is up in the Files section of this group for your comments.

We will also be doing a lot more with the official Guild website at <http://www.bayrose.org/wkneedle>, so visit often! 

Sabrina de la Bere



pattern lines. The paper can then be torn away and the lines gone over with chalk or marking pencils.

The top motif and border pattern are both from a book on the enamels of Limoges (1100 to 1300); these motifs were originally enameled on metal, but they seemed appropriate to translate into simple beadwork. The original enamels also inspired my color scheme of turquoise blue, deep blue, gold and white. The outline at right on this page is actual size for the box I used.

The beads I used were ordinary glass seed beads from my neighborhood bead store. There are about 400 beads in a strand; colored beads come in packages of about 12 strands, and the gold beads (which are faceted and plated with real metal), 2 strands for about the same price. The center motif and border take just about 2 strands of gold, one of dark blue and less than half a strand of the other two colors.

Once the pattern was marked, I began at one end of the border, just laying down a line of beads at first. It took a little experimenting to discover how many beads made the right size and shape of "teardrop" (see illustration on facing page) that wouldn't become too fat when outlined with the gold. After I'd done a few border motifs, I started working on the top motif, working from the center outward. I had the same problem here, figuring out how many beads to use where, so I've drawn a diagram at the bottom of this page to give you an idea of approximately how many beads the motif takes and where to put them. Since real beads aren't all exactly the same size, yours won't look exactly like this, but it gives you an idea of where you're going.

Once the beads are all laid down, laced, and couched, the finished beadwork is gently pressed and then cut out (with seam allowances!). The top circle and a narrow straight strip are sewed together to cover the lid. The border and a plain cloth circle cover the box's sides and bottom. The pieces are carefully glued onto the pasteboard with fabric glue and let dry. Last, a cord is glued along the edge of the lid to hide the raw edges.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Grizel's main bead page:
<http://www.medievalbeads.com/>

Nine pages of instructions on Grizel's method of bead embroidery, with abundant illustrations:


<http://www.medievalbeads.com/notes.html>

(available for viewing on line or as a PDF)

Survey of bead types (not all of them period for dates before 1600):

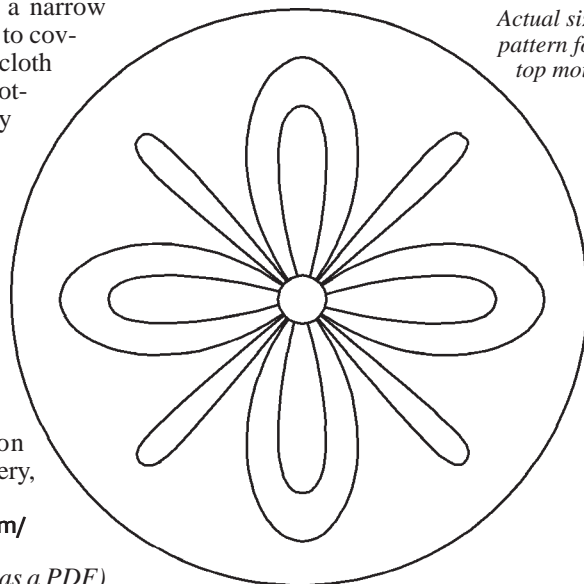
<http://www.medievalbeads.com/notes/article-bead-showtell.html>

My thanks to Grizel and to Mistress Catherine Lorraine for helpful suggestions with this article.

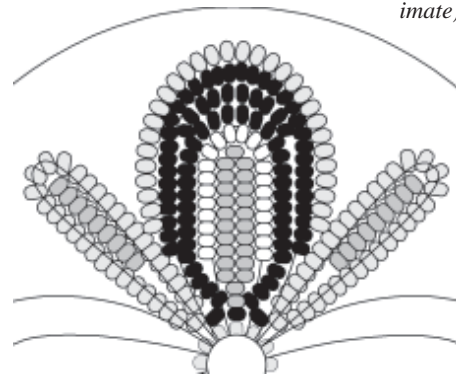
*My thanks also as Guild Chronicler to Maud de Clayton, Juliana Sattler, Jakob der Jude, Wilhelm der Grosse, Ghislaine d'Auxerre, and Her Imperial Majesty Elisabeth Grey, Empress of Adria, for cheerful help with collating and mailing recent issues of *Filum Aureum*.* 

Actual size pattern for border

Actual size pattern for top motif



Bead diagram (very approximate)



BLACKWORK COIF CLASS · MAY 18TH

Guild Minister Sabrina de la Bere is still taking signups for this class. Linn Skinner has graciously agreed to return and do a wonderful hands-on blackwork coif class. The date is **May 18, 2003** (Sunday) and will be from **9:30 am - 4:30 pm**.

You will need a working understanding of basic blackwork techniques. Cost is \$100 for this special class, which is greatly discounted for us. Check must accompany your reservation for class space. Make checks payable to **Linn Skinner** and send to our Guild Minister, Sabrina de la Bere, PO Box 1809, El Granada, CA 94018.

Class participants will learn the different techniques and stitches which were used in making a particular period coif, including free embroidery and counted thread. The plan is to do a reproduction of a blackwork coif in the V&A which has curvilinear tendrils, leaves, flowers, and bugs.

In advance of the class, participants will be given a tracing of the piece, 45 count linen, muslin backing, transfer paper and pre-work instructions. Participants will do the design transfer and fabric mounting (on scroll or slate frame) in advance.

Class time includes a one-hour lunch break: bring your bag lunch or join in the provided deli lunch for \$5.

We are fortunate to have Linn Skinner return as our teacher. Linn is an embroideress and embroidery historian who teaches and exhibits in England as well as in the United States. First taught to embroider by her grandmothers and mother, she continued her study of classic embroidery techniques and embroidery research in England. Linn has studied Blackwork, Goldwork, Jacobean embroidery and Silk Shading at the Royal School of Needlework, Hampton Court and advanced her skills in workshops with master embroiderers in England and the U.S. Linn is a founding member of The New Elizabethans, an international group of embroiderers formed in 1998 to further the development of classic hand embroidery. Her work was included in the New Elizabethans' first exhibit "The Broiderer's Garden," November 1999 at the Museum of Garden History, London and she was featured in a BBC4 Radio program which focused on current embroidery trends and the exhibit. Linn takes her inspiration from the 16th and 17th centuries and interprets historic embroidery techniques and designs aesthetics in a new and refreshing way!

For more information on Linn and to see her web-magazine visit her website:

<http://www.skinneristers.com/> 

🧵 Congratulations to our Guild Minister, **Sabrina de la Bere**, who is now **West Kingdom Minister of Arts**. (Yes, she's still our Guild Minister, too!)



Small decorative panel for priest's vestment, embroidered on parchment with beads and seed pearls. German, late 1100s.

🧵 to **Anahita Gaouri al-shazhiyya** and **Sabrina Goldbender**, recent recipients of the Western Lily;

🧵 to **Sara of Foxhaven**, recipient of a Scutiferus Cynaguae; and to **Kellyn Firesinger**, admitted to the Order of the Wingham Harp.

🧵 At Oertha Coronet in January, **Mistress Anne of Bradford** was received into the Order of the Argent Stylus (for scribing and illumination), and Lady **Angustias McKeown** was received into the Order of the Snowy Owl (for arts).

🧵 In our Apprenticeship Program, welcome to **Allison MacMurray**, who has achieved the Apprentice level with surface embroidery; to **Sorcha Fhionn inghean uiRuairc**, who has completed the Artisan level with Canvaswork; and to **Tamara of Drakeswood** and **Brianna O'Shea**, our newest Needlemasters. (Brianna completed all six categories!)

C R E D I T S & C O N T A C T S

Guild Mentors

These people are here to help you with your needlework questions!

Catherine Lorraine	Sunnyvale	408-732-8581	connnyftz@inreach.com
Aldith St. George	El Cerrito	510-215-5879	aldith@goldenstag.net
Francesca von Hesse	Oakland	510-444-6244	dandemoody@juno.com
Letitia de Scotia	Pinole	510-741-9885	vfrazier@pacbell.net
Kaitlin MacPherson	Sacramento	916-331-8066	carolee@femis.net
Mairghread nighean Eanruig	Colusa	530-458-4144	ettrick@mako.com
Judith of Stormholde.....	Live Oak.....	530-695-3022.....	Ldywyvrn@aol.com.
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