

# Spring A.S. XXXIX (2004)

# *Filum Aureum*

Newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild in the Kingdom of the West (SCA)  
Quilting

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# Guild calendar & activities

## JUNE CROWN (June 11-13) TRES PIÑOS FAIRGROUNDS

The Needleworkers Guild will again be hosting the A&S pavilion. Please bring the items you have been working on this past year to display!

### Saturday

DROP OFF DISPLAY ITEMS

10:00AM

MENTORS CORNER

11:00AM - 2:30PM

Bring your projects, stitch and chat! Guild mentors will be available to answer your questions.

GUILD MEETING - 2:30PM

CLASS - 3:00PM

### WHAT STITCH IS PERIOD?

*Instructor: Sabrina de la Bere*

A survey of what Sabrina has found so far in the process of putting together a database of historic items and the stitches found on them. We will discuss some of the threads used, colors, patterns, and what stitches are used in conjunction with other stitches. Survey results will be webbed.

CLASS FEE: NONE ..... LIMIT: NONE.

PICK UP DISPLAY ITEMS - 5:00PM

PRESENTATION of Kingdom Pouches for Pennsic! (Evening Court)

### Sunday

CLASS - 10:00AM

### CORD EMBROIDERY

*Instructor: Christian de Holacombe*

Designs worked in cord or ornamental braid are a quick, easy, and spectacular way to ornament clothing, accessories, and furnishings. Learn how easy this is & make a small interlaced knotwork design.

CLASS FEE: \$5 ..... LIMIT: 10

### THE EYES HAVE IT!

Please remember to bring an **embroidery hoop & scissors** to any class where you will be stitching. Also, take care of your eyes: if you need special glasses or magnifiers to do needlework, bring them too! —

## ARTS AND SCIENCES TOURNAMENT CLASSES

(July 30 - August 1)

### DARKWOOD (FORT ORD)

#### FRUITS, FLOWERS, & ELIZABETHAN EMBROIDERY

*Instructor: Isela di Bari*

We will learn how these popular motifs were used by English embroiderers in the mid-to-late 1500's. We'll discuss stitches, fabric, & resources, and learn an intermediate level stitch commonly used in these embroideries.

CLASS FEE: \$7 ..... LIMIT: 10

#### TRAPUNTO

*Instructor: Jaida al-Rakshanda*

Discover the needle art of trapunto, also known as Italian quilting. Basic cord quilting will be taught and methods of filling flat space with batting will be explored.

CLASS FEE: NONE ..... LIMIT: 6

Please bring: **Sharp** scissors and needles!

#### THREE BASIC STITCHES, PART 2

*Instructor: Caterina nic Sheamus*

This class assumes the students know the three basic stitches previously taught: chain, stem, and satin. (They will not be used specifically in this class, but might be of use for "prior knowledge" purposes.) The stitches covered in this class will be back stitch (the reverse of stem stitch), buttonhole stitch, and French (and maybe Colonial) knots. The class project will be a small pouch or similar item.

CLASS FEE: \$2 ..... LIMIT: 12

#### BEGINNING PULLED-THREAD

*Instructor: Caterina nic Sheamus*

This class assumes you have basic embroidery knowledge: threading the needle, stripping floss, etc. The class will focus on 6 pulled stitches, executed in white thread on white linen. If you know buttonhole stitch, you'll be able to edge your rose motif, cut it out and apply it to fabric.

CLASS FEE: \$2 ..... LIMIT: 8

#### SHADING WITH LONG & SHORT SPLIT STITCHES

*Instructor: Sabrina de la Bere*

A hands-on look on how to get shaded detail and coloration when doing surface embroidery.

CLASS FEE: \$3.... LIMIT: 10

#### MEDIEVAL QUILTING

*Instructor: Christian de Holacombe*

Medieval quilting is a one-color art, created with fine stitches on solid colored fabric. The technique is simple and elegant and the materials inexpensive. Learn the stitches on a small piece of quilting, and take home some period quilting patterns.

CLASS FEE: \$5 ..... LIMIT: 10

(Please bring a thimble — even if you don't use one otherwise, you'll need one for this!)

## GUILD KITS

Kits, kits, & more kits! The Guild has kits available at all Crown events and A&S. Take advantage of this opportunity to try new techniques. Kits are available for a \$5 donation. Please make a donation of \$5, plus \$1 for shipping to the Guild per kit. Checks should be made out to SCA Inc and sent to Sabrina de la Bere (address below).

### CURRENT KITS AVAILABLE:

- Blackwork Needlecase
- Whitework Bookmark
- Sens Cross-Stitch Pincushion
- Counted Stitch Fan Case
- Schole House sweet-bag sachet
- Canvaswork Pincushion
- West Kingdom Populace Badge
- Demi-Sun Appliqué Pouch

(The Fan Case and Canvaswork Pincushion are being discontinued this summer to make way for more new kits!) —

## 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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# Quilt counterpoint

— by Christian de Holacombe, Guild Chronicler



Quilting is one of those arts whose origins are lost in time. It seems to have been invented independently at several times and places. And the practical probably came before the beautiful: stitching two layers of cloth together with padding in between is an effective way of making a sturdy fabric that resists punctures, softens sharp corners and retains body heat.

Modern American culture complicates our discussion of quilting by using the word “quilt” both to describe the process of stitching layers together, and to describe a bed covering that is in fact not always quilted, but has an appliquéd or pieced design in colored cloth. But combining these decorative techniques *and* quilting didn’t become really popular till the 18th century. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, quilting — in the sense of sewing layers together — was far more often done on plain cloth. Such “whole-cloth” quilting is what we’ll be discussing here.

## Bed furnishings

There are plenty of descriptions and a few surviving examples of quilted pieces from our period. That medieval quilting was fairly common is supported, for instance, by many mentions in inventories of bed furnishings called “quyltes,” “counterpoyntes,” or “counterpanes,” including “a bed... of quoytene and of materasz” in 1290 (“of quilting and mattress”). More entertaining is a 1320 poem giving a list of the

furnishings for a castle, including “Four hundred beddes of selk echon [each one], Quiltes of gold there upon.”

Probably the oldest surviving example of quilted fabric is a floor covering from one of the “kurgan” tombs of the nomadic peoples from Western Asia, a place called Noin Ula, south of Lake Baikal. (*Details of this quilt are above and below, and a line drawing is on the cover of this issue.*) It was found on the floor of the tomb, where it had been preserved by permafrost.

As you can see in the photo below, the center of the quilt is filled with a pattern of large clockwise and counterclockwise spirals, with smaller spirals between, forming a continuous pattern. The inner border is a

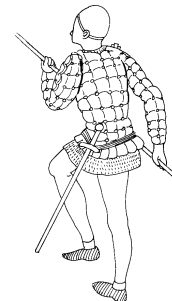


band of geometric shapes, outlined with cord and quilted to the foundation. The outer borders (*detail at left*) are quilted in small diamonds, and appliquéd with small trees and pairs of battling animals filled with closely spaced lines of additional quilting. This dates from sometime between the first century BC and the second century AD.

## Quilted clothing

There is also abundant evidence of quilted medieval clothing, dating from at least the early 1200s, especially of protective clothing to be worn under armor. The surviving quilted “pourpoint” or jacket of Charles de Blois in the Musée Historique des Tissus in Lyon, France, which dates to the 1360s, is one example made in this style (though it’s now questioned whether this particular example was originally quilted).

*An armsman in a quilted “jack,” original and as re-drawn by Averil Colby from Memling’s Chasse of St. Ursula, 15thc.*



Other quilted jackets known from period documents, pictures and a few surviving examples, include the gambeson, haketon and jack. These were made by specialist “linen armorers” (separate from the makers of metal armor). King Edward I of England approved their Guild charter in 1272. (They later became the Merchant Taylors Guild, which still exists today.)

Quilted caps and linings were worn inside metal helmets, under armor and inside gloves. A quilted “jack” could also be protection for men who couldn’t afford metal armor, and these could be surprisingly tough: rioters during Wat Tyler’s rebellion (1381) trying to destroy a jack belonging to the Duke of Lancaster had to resort to swords and axes to hack it in pieces.

The few quilted garments that survive from Europe all seem to be quilted in plain  
(Quilting, continued next page)

*Probably the most common question we get in the Needleworkers Guild is “Is this stitch ‘period’?” This is one of a series of articles exploring the historical uses of stitches common in modern times.*

## (Quilting, *continued*)

straight lines, squares or diamond shapes. This seems to be generally true for Europe: decorative quilting is more or less confined to furnishings such as bed covers and perhaps wall hangings. Quilted clothing seems to have been more utilitarian.

Another early example, which may be an exception to this, is a quilted slipper (*see p.8*) that was discarded on the Silk Road sometime in the 8th century. It is quilted in a pattern of overlapping quarter-circle “fans,” but it seems to have been pieced together from scraps of already-quilted fabric (perhaps a furnishing).

Information on early quilted pieces is often hard to find, or to extract from manuscript sources. Quilting seems to have been taken so much for granted that it was rarely described in detail. For instance, decorative quilting is seldom mentioned. Was it very rare or was it common? We have no way of knowing. In the same way, we can't be sure if the bedcoverings described as “quyltes” or “counterpanes” were always quilted, even though that's the origin of the words: “quilt” from the Latin *culcita*, which seems to mean “stuffed,” and “counterpane” from the French *contre-point*, literally “counter-stitching,” referring to stitching back and forth through layers. A third complication is that apparently the word “quilted” can also simply mean “stuffed,” like a cushion. We know that King Henry VIII had a favorite “quilted” brocade cushion, but we don't know whether this was merely a stuffed cushion or whether it was a cushion with a quilted cover.

By the 16th century, we have a lot more records to look at; and we know that Katherine Howard, for instance, was given 23 bed quilts of “sarcenett” (a lightweight silk). We also know that quilted nightcaps were worn, because Sir Thomas Elyot's book *The Castel of Health* (1541) recommends against them as being too warm! The Hapsburg emperor Charles V also took 16 quilted silken nightshirts with him when he retired to Spain in 1556.

## The materials

The nature of quilting is dictated somewhat by the materials used. Linen, especially plain tabby cloth, and the more luxurious silk seem to have been the most common outer fabrics.

Probably the most famous examples of medieval European quilts are three pictorial quilts of linen, called the “Tristan quilts” (*see detail on this page*), made around 1400 in Sicily. The front is linen, the back is a slightly coarser linen, and it is quilted with light and dark natural shades of linen thread. These quilts are often referred to as “stuffed quilting” or “trapunto”: the design motifs are stuffed individually with cotton, and the background is sim-

ply the two layers of linen, quilted together but with no stuffing between them.

Cotton as the stuffing of choice seems to be quite common. This is a bit surprising at first, since cotton cloth and cotton yarn did not become really common in Europe until well after 1600 — but cotton batting was present much earlier. A wardrobe account from the reign of King John (1212) mentions paying 16 pence for a pound of cotton for the filling of a haketon for His Majesty.

Cotton is harder to quilt through than wool, and it does not have the same tendency to “bounce back” when compressed. For armor padding, this is actually an advantage: compressed cotton is tough and doesn't move easily, so quilting stuffed with cotton is harder for weapons to pierce, even if it's not reinforced (as it sometimes is) with metal or horn plates inserted into the compartments of the quilting..

Cotton's lack of resilience is also an advantage if decorative quilting is to be “stuffed” with additional bits of padding to raise it from the background, as in the Tristan quilts. I discovered this for myself the first



time I tried to stitch a stuffed motif from the Tristan quilt's borders. When I tried using carded wool, it was easy to stuff it into the corners of the motif, but it would spring back before I had a chance to stitch the motif closed. Cotton stays where you put it, making the job much easier.

To its disadvantage, however, once a motif has been stuffed with cotton, it's difficult to stitch *through* it to add any decorative details, as is done with the faces, for example, on the Tristan quilt. Quilting through cotton almost always requires a thimble, even if you don't use one for other stitching, and to stitch through a firmly stuffed area, I find I often need to pull the needle through with pliers.

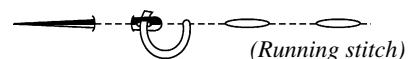
Cotton also needs to be quilted fairly closely, at least every inch or so, if you want

it to remain in place and not slip or bunch up. This is particularly true if the quilted object is going to be washed frequently. This is different from modern polyester batting, which can often be simply tied or tacked in place here and there. Polyester batting also does not reproduce the “look” of period quilting very well, because it tends to be both springier and thicker, creating a puffier look. (Modern quilters, of course, often prefer this look.) Polyester also may not “breathe” well if used for clothing, since it doesn't absorb moisture very well. On the other hand, both polyester and wool retain some warmth when wet, and they also dry more quickly than cotton.

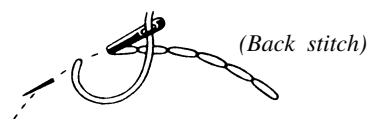
Wool is used as stuffing in some medieval pieces, but mostly where something is quilted specifically for warmth. It's much easier to quilt through, but has to be washed very carefully to prevent shrinkage.

## The stitching

People who haven't tried quilting are often intimidated by the idea that it requires some mysterious “quilting stitch.” In actual fact, it's quite easy. For simple or utilitarian quilting, the “quilting stitch” is simply an ordinary running stitch, taken through all the layers at once.



In period, decorative or fine quilting was more often done using the equally ordinary backstitch, which creates a continuous outline on the surface of the fabric, making the design stand out more clearly. Although slower, this does make a significant difference in how the finished product looks.



The ideal is to make your quilting stitches even, straight, and small. Stitches don't have to be tiny — 1/8 inch is a good length; it's hard to get them much smaller unless you use very thin batting and fine needles. “Betweens” needles are good for quilting because they are short and have an eye that isn't larger than the rest of the needle, so they slip through fabric easily, but any sharp needle you're comfortable with is fine.

There's a good deal of advice out there on how to improve your quilting stitches; the consensus is that it's better to try for evenness first, and your stitches will get smaller with practice. Everyone's quilting looks different: I noticed when working on a major quilting project with a friend that our quilting stitches were every bit as distinctive as our handwriting: mine were

(Quilting, *continued*)

# Quilted cap, Asian style

Simple quilted caps like the one at right are among the few complete garments that have survived from the Mamluk era (14thc.) in the southern Mediterranean. This cap is perhaps a *kalautah*, a type of cap worn by itself indoors, or with a turban wound around it for outdoors. Simple caps like this, often decorated with embroidery, are still worn daily by many men in Asian and Western Asian or Mediterranean cultures.

This particular original, now in the Cleveland Museum, is made from a green, brown and dark blue silk with an Arabic inscription proclaiming “Glory to our master, the Sultan!” The lining is linen, and it appears to be quilted in a pattern of overlapping hexagons. It is made with a straight band that goes around the head, and a pieced top made from six slightly curved triangular sections. The whole cap is about five inches tall.

As mentioned earlier, garments like this in our period seem mostly to have been quilted in simple, utilitarian patterns. But I’ve let the quilt from Noin Ula

(*on our cover*) inspire me to design a slightly different cap, decoratively quilted in spirals, which you’ll find a pattern for on the next page.

It’s easiest to do the quilting before cutting the fabric and assembling the cap. To make a cap sized to fit you, wind a measuring tape horizontally around your head just above your eyebrows. Note this measurement, add two inches for ease, and you have your working head measurement. The ups and downs of quilting “take in” the fabric a little, so the pieces will shrink a little after you’ve quilted them — that’s what the extra two inches are for. Mark a rectangle three inches wide and as long as this measurement on your fabric, and add half an inch on all four sides for seams. This is your headband, but don’t cut it out yet!

## (Quilting, continued)

smaller but tended to wander a bit; hers were a bit larger, but more even and straighter. In either case, practice makes perfect.

The consensus also is that running stitches are straighter and more even if you run your needle in and out to get several stitches on your needle before pulling the



A 16th-century arming doublet of quilted leather from Germany

Now divide your working measurement by 4, which will be the width of your pattern. Trace or copy the pattern on page 6, and adjust its size so that the width of the pattern repeat (between dotted lines) is the same as this width you just calculated. Transfer the bottom quilting design onto the headband you’ve marked on the cloth, lining it up so there are exactly four repeats.

Then draw and mark four triangles like the pattern (adding half an inch on all sides for seams) — if you’re using scraps, which this is a good project for, the triangles can be cut from any scrap that’s big enough as long as they are on the straight grain. Copy the three-cornered spiral pattern onto them.

Sandwich a thin batting between your marked fabric and a plain backing. For the most medieval “look,” use cotton batting,

needle through, as shown in the illustration of hands on p.6. Resist the temptation to do “stab” stitches, plunging the needle down through the fabric once and pulling it through, unless you are in a particularly thick or difficult area. For backstitch, you are taking only one stitch at a time, but you can still bring the needle down and up through the fabric before pulling it through.

Many authors try to make distinctions among various types of quilting, such as “wadded” quilting with a uniform layer of batting, “trapunto” for quilting with extra stuffing to create raised motifs, and “corded” quilting where the design is formed by quilting narrow channels, which are then filled by running a soft cord through them. In practice, however, these techniques are often mixed and matched in period examples. The Tristan quilts have the motifs stuffed with cotton, while in the background the two layers of fabric are simply held together by rows of running stitches with no padding at all. There is a 16th-century Ger-



man quilt with a design of corded eight-point stars, each filled with the same kind of running-stitch background and centered with small animal motifs that are not stuffed but merely outlined with stitching.

Remember to include seam allowances! You can simply sew the pieces of the cap together through all fabric thicknesses, beginning with the four sides of the top, leaving the seam allowances inside to be covered later by strips of fabric or by a lining. A neater looking, but somewhat finicky, method is to put two pieces with their right sides together, fold back the batting, and seam just the top fabrics. Flatten the seam, turn it over so the lining side is up, trim any batting that overlaps the seamline, then turn under one edge of a lining piece and stitch it down just through the lining on the other piece. (*See diagrams, p.6*)

man quilt with a design of corded eight-point stars, each filled with the same kind of running-stitch background and centered with small animal motifs that are not stuffed but merely outlined with stitching.

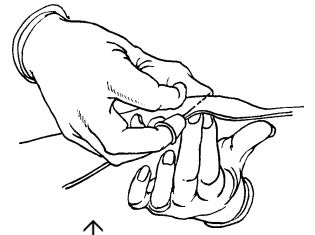
## For further reading:

As with many medieval arts, there isn’t yet a single book that covers medieval quilting in detail. The best book for historical documentation (and a major source for this article) is Averil Colby’s *Quilting* [1972, B.T. Batsford Ltd., ISBN 0-7134-5901-8]. It’s out of print, but used copies are not too hard to find on the Internet.

An interesting piece of news is that Mistress Bess Haddon of York, Patron of our “sister guild” the Company of Broderers in Lochac, has been writing her PhD dissertation on the Tristan embroideries, and will be giving a paper on the Tristan quilts in England this summer. We’ll certainly ask her to share! —*BJ*

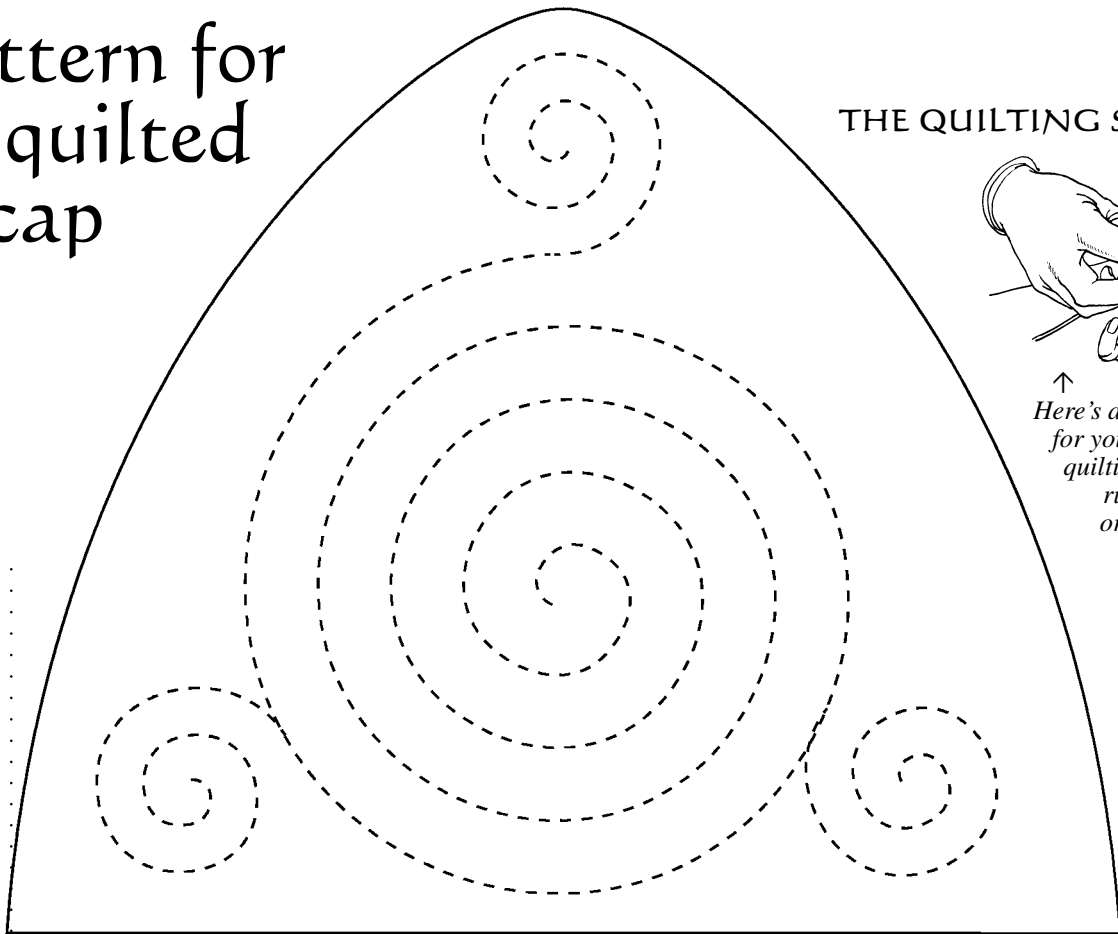
# Pattern for a quilted cap

THE QUILTING STITCH



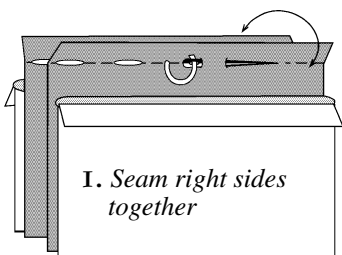
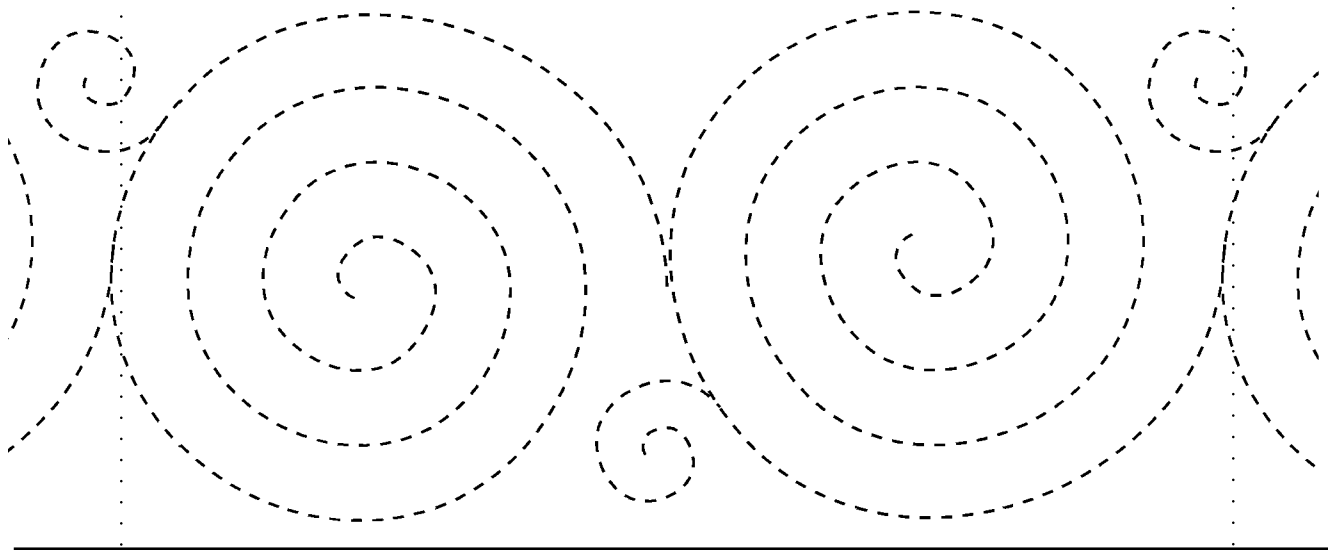
↑  
Here's a good position for your hands while quilting, either with running stitches or back stitches.

SECTION OF TOP →  
(SIZE TO FIT & MARK 4 OF THESE)



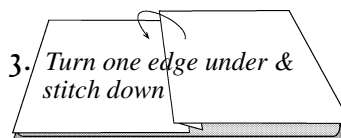
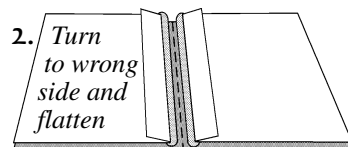
PATTERN REPEATS between these dotted lines ←

SECTION of HEADBAND (SIZE TO FIT & MARK 4 TIMES ON A CONTINUOUS STRIP)

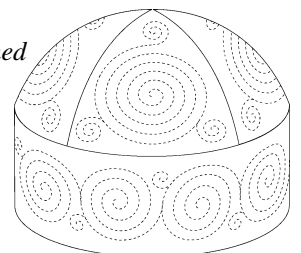


## Assembling the cap

with smooth inside seams (see directions p.5)



4. The finished product!



# Have bags, will travel!

**S**pring is rushing by and we are into tournament season. March's classes went well and we have a wonderful lineup for the rest of this year thanks to Aelia and our teachers. Don't see a class you want to take? Please let us know, and we will endeavor have it taught in the near future.

Speaking of classes, don't forget to take a look at sources outside the SCA. **Stitching Festival** will be in Santa Clara May 21-23 ([www.stitchingfestival.com](http://www.stitchingfestival.com)).

At **June Crown**, the Needleworkers Guild will be hosting the A&S pavilion. At Saturday evening court, we will be presenting the Kingdom Travel Bags to Their Majesties for them to give to all the royalty from other kingdoms at Pennsic! Be there to hear all the admiration, especially if you have taken part in this project! The bags

will also be featured in our Saturday display. (Below, Sorcha's bag for the Kingdom of the Outlands.)



If you are making one of these bags, please give it to either Sabrina or Isela as soon as possible, so arrangements for delivery can be made. The deadline is **June 1st**; we need to photograph and label the bags before they leave our hands!

Planning a bit ahead, think about our Silent Auction to be held at 12th Night. If you have items to contribute, you may drop them off to us at the Guild pavilion or just bring them to 12th Night.

We look forward to seeing you at our Mentors Corner stitching and advice time at Crown events, classes and meetings throughout this year.

In Service,

*Sabrina de la Bere*

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## IN STITCHES... NEWS AND NOTES OF GUILD & FRIENDS

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### CONGRATULATIONS

to **Sorcha Fhionn inghean ui Ruairc** and **Eiliana Fraser**, recent recipients of Princess' Favors;

to **Jaida al Rakhshanda**, who has been awarded the Scutiferus Cynaguae;

to **Ella Gajewi**, Cynaguan Arts & Sciences Champion;

to **Eliska z Jihlavy**, received into the Order of La Courtesia;

to **Bethia de la Birche** and **Euriol of Lothian**, who have been awarded Golden Acorns;

to **Iulitta Rowan**, recently awarded a Rose Leaf for her needle arts;

and to **Margaret Anne of Somerset**, received into the Order of the Laurel in Oertha for her needlework!

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### 2005 ROSE POUCH SERVICE PROJECT

At October Crown, the Guild chose to do Kingdom Rose Pouches for the 2005 guild service project. This would mean that at Pennsic 2005, Their Majesties of each of the other 16 kingdoms would be presented a pouch with their embroidered Royal Rose.

Each needleworker can select the stitches, fabric, threads, and finishing techniques of their choice. The design itself is approximately 6 x 6 inches, which means the pouches usually run about 8 x 9 or 8 x 10. If you are in need of fabric, thread, or

pouch strings, the guild can provide these. The deadline is June 1st, 2005 for completion. If you would like to sign up for this fun project, please e-mail or call Isela (see p.8). We still need an embroiderer for the Kingdom of Aethelmaerc's rose pouch. Please remember that as each pouch is finished, they will be displayed at various guild events and photographed! —

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### FUTURE FILUM

We are approaching the end of an era! Now in the works are plans for the last three articles in our l-o-o-o-o-ng ongoing series on "Is This Stitch Period?" The next three issues will feature:

- Summer 2004 - Couched cord
- Fall 2004 - Pulled-thread embroidery
- 12th Night 2005 - Stars, spangles & studs

Earlier articles in this series were:

- 1 . Canvaswork (in issue #11)
- 2 . Opus Teutonicum (#12)
- 3 . Surface embroidery (#13)
- 4 . Goldwork (#14)
- 5 . Quilting (#15)
- 6 . Cross stitch (#17)
- 7 . Voided work (#18)
- 8 . Bargello (#19)
- 9 . Beading (#20)
- 10 . Applique (#22)
- 11 . Chain stitch (#23)

Some of these feature articles are still available to download from our Guild web page or from the Files section of our mailing list, [WKneedle] (*see p. 8 for addresses*).

Next spring, the plan is for **Filum Aureum** to start a new series, "Lesser-known techniques" — period embroidery stitches and styles that only a few of our needleworkers so far have "discovered"! Candidates so far include (in no particular order):

- Convent stitch (a form of laid work)
- Lacis (perhaps including basic net-making)
- Turkey work (wool pile embroidery)
- More varieties of blackwork (not all of them are counted stitch!)
- Pattern darning
- Braid stitches
- Knot stitches
- Reticella

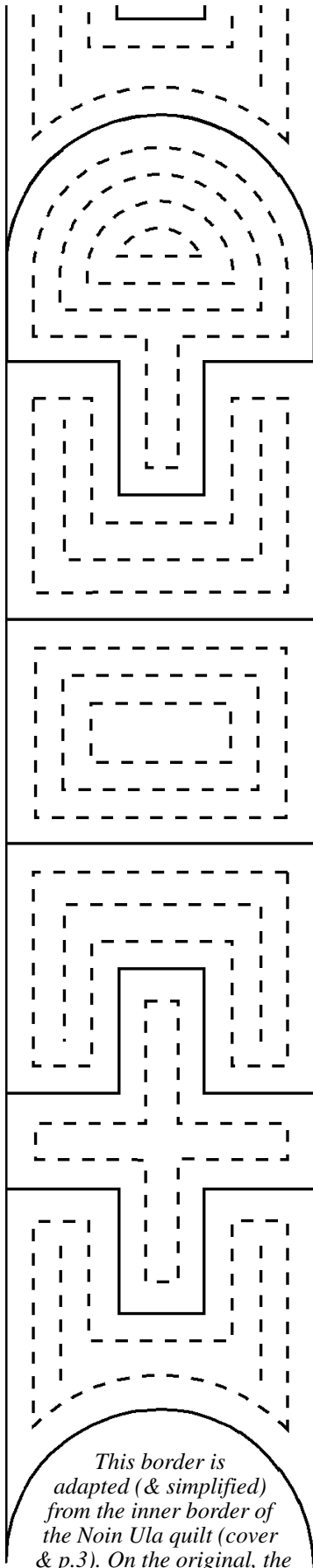
I'm sure you can think of lots more. Nominations will be cheerfully accepted! —

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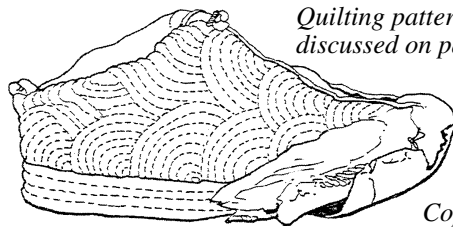
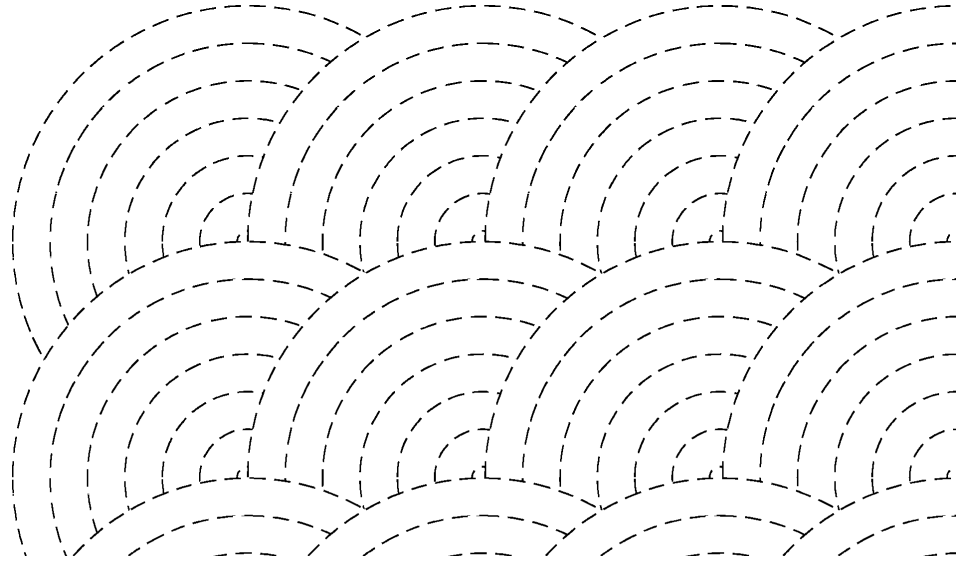
### GIFT CHESTS

The Royals need your handiwork! Consider donating your completed kit, or other needleworked items, to your Kingdom or Principality gift chest. It greatly pleases the Royals to be able to show largess 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) —



*This border is adapted (& simplified) from the inner border of the Noin Ula quilt (cover & p.3). On the original, the shapes are colored appliqué, the solid lines are overlaid with couched cord, and several closely spaced lines of quilting are stitched within each shape.*



*Quilting pattern (above) and drawing of the quilted slipper discussed on page 4, which was discarded on the Silk Road. It was found in the rubbish dump of a fort occupied by a Tibetan garrison in the Taklamakan Desert. The unfinished edges suggest it may have been assembled from scraps of a previously quilted object. Copyright British Museum; MAS 495.*

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