

# Worshipful Company of Broiderers of Lochac

Information Handout 3 – 12<sup>th</sup> Night Investiture 1999

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## From the Guildmaster of the Worshipful Company of Broiderers

### What I Did on my Holidays

#### Part 2

by Mistress Bess Haddon

After leaving Vienna, I travelled by train, through Austria, spending one night in Innsbruck and then passing through the Alps to the Tyrol region of Northern Italy, specifically a town called either Bozen or Bolzano, depending on whether you're German or Italian speaking. Since this area seems to change nationality on a regular basis most people speak both languages - English is a bit scarce though. I can't say that I recommend the railway hotel unless you're after an experience in medieval realism - the mattress was filled with straw and extremely uncomfortable. It was also boiling hot for the two days I was there, and as I had come to see a set of Tristan wall paintings at Schoß Runkelstein (or Castel Roncolo) about 8 km out of town, I had no choice but to walk up in the heat. By the time I had climbed up, I realised what an excellent defensive position the builders had chosen! The only way to see the paintings was to go on a guided tour (in either German or Italian - I chose German) so I trotted round only understanding about a third of what was being said. It was well worth it though. The Tristan paintings themselves were by no means the most exciting, but almost every room of the castle was covered in paintings from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, depicting a range of subjects both religious and secular. There were some lovely examples of regional costume, subtly different from anything I had seen before, reflecting the interaction of Austrian and Italian styles. Also very interesting were the painted walls which had a repeat stencil pattern produced in such a way as to imitate the folds of a textile, suggesting perhaps that textiles were the more desirable wall coverings and that paintings were a cheaper imitation.

From Bolzano I went again by train to Florence. Florence got off to a bit of a bad start since it was in the middle of a heatwave, and the youth hostel had lost my booking, leaving me to wander round the streets with a very heavy pack trying to find accommodation. I eventually did - in a much nicer place than the hostel - and things got better from then on. Florence was hot, dirty and full of tourists, but I fell in love with it. It is just so full of history. Not only are all the buildings in the main part of town medieval and still functioning, often in their original purposes, but as you look at them you are standing in the footsteps of the likes of Dante, da Vinci, Macchiaveli, Lorenzo de Medici and Giotto - a humbling experience.

The second day I sauntered over the Ponte Vecchio, past the Uffizi Gallery to the Bargello Museum, where I embarked on some hilarious discussions in an attempt to see the Tristan quilt. I had written to the museum staff before I left (in English) and had replies in Italian, but convincing the person on the door who spoke no English, in my very minimal Italian that they were expecting me was a difficult task. I eventually managed it by waving around a copy of their letter, whereupon they told me to come back the next day. I then committed the biggest mistake of my trip: I had dressed reasonably respectably in a skirt and court shoes in an attempt to convince them that I was a real textile historian rather than a scruffy backpacker, and instead of going back to the pensione to change footwear, I decided to do my sightseeing in the shoes I had on, reducing my feet to bloody stumps, and slowing me down considerably for the rest of my stay. I still walked a lot though, and it was worth it.

The next day I went back to the Bargello, and by some miracle they let me in, and introduced me to the textile conservator. Unfortunately he didn't speak English either. However, something prompted me to try French, and I made the happy discovery that while most Italians under about 30 learned English at school, anyone older than that learned French. Once we could communicate, things went much better, and I was able to get astoundingly good access to the quilt.

The Bargello Tristan quilt, variously called the Guiccardini quilt (because it once belonged to the Guicciardini family) or the Coperta Siciliana (Sicilian Coverlet) is one of two quilt pieces depicting the Tristan legend, the other being in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Although various writers have speculated that they were made as a pair, they were almost certainly once a single textile, and there is no evidence that they were ever intended, or indeed used, as bed quilts. The supposition that they were arises from the fact that quilting is now commonly used for that purpose, but it is more likely that they were originally hangings. The technique of these quilts has been described as trapunto quilting, a technique where design elements are outlined by quilting stitches and then the padding is inserted through small holes in the back which are subsequently sewn up. However, I was able to see the back of the quilt, and this is not the case, so it's a bit of a mystery how it was done. I suspect that the padding (cotton wool) was pushed around between the two layers of linen until it was in the right place, and then the outline of the design stitched around it. I'm looking forward to experimenting with the technique. The Guiccardini quilts, dating from the end of the fourteenth century, represent the oldest decorative quilting (i.e. excluding functional quilting for things like arming jacks) known in the West, and are virtually unique in style. I was able to spend several hours with the Bargello quilt, and to record it in some detail, although as there are photographs on sale, I was not allowed to photograph it. Unfortunately, dealing with the museum's photo office has proved difficult, and I don't have them yet, but I'm still hoping!

I will happily prattle at length on the rest of the wonders of Florence, but I've already taken up more than enough room, so you'll have to wait until you see me. Next time I'll talk about Nürnberg and Regensburg in southern Germany. It's a pity that my thesis is not as easy to write as 'what I did on my holidays'!

## Results from Spring Coronet

Firstly, thank you to Viscountess Ingerith Fra Russ for organising the competition and display in Innilgard. And thank you very much to the judges, Mistress Myfanwy, Mistress Kyriel and Lord Bartolomeo.

Sadly it was only a small competition, but Ingerith was able to find enough entries to make a competition. Thank you to Seona Dunlaith ni Sheanaaisagh and Contarina la Bianca for submitting your work, even the work in progress. The judges comments that came back to me sound very encouraging and I look forward to seeing your finished shirts.

The highest points were awarded to a shirt made by Keridwen the Mouse.

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### Contacts

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Guild Patron – Viscountess Keridwen the Mouse (Janelle Heron), 58 Redmyre Road, Strathfield 2135. (02) 9746 8865. [jheron@comtech.com.au](mailto:jheron@comtech.com.au)

### Other Resources

#### West Kingdom Needleworkers Guild

Guild Mistress – Mistress Isela di Bari (Debra Cobb), PO Box 22, Lockwood, CA 93032, USA. (408) 385 3040. [dcobb@MAIL.MEYER.NET](mailto:dcobb@MAIL.MEYER.NET)

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### Contributions

If you have good ideas to share, or wish to write an article, draw pictures, share patterns, give a books review, or wish to contribute to this regular handout, please contact the guild patron, who is currently the compiler of this handout.

Also let me know if you have any ideas for competitions.

## Competitions

### 12<sup>th</sup> Night, Dismal Fogs

Beadwork on material (I say this to exclude jewellery – we are looking for needlework)

The next four competitions will go towards the Company of Broiderer's Championship. The points will be added up at 12<sup>th</sup> Night 2000 and the winner will be declared the Champion of the Company of Broiderers.

### May Coronet

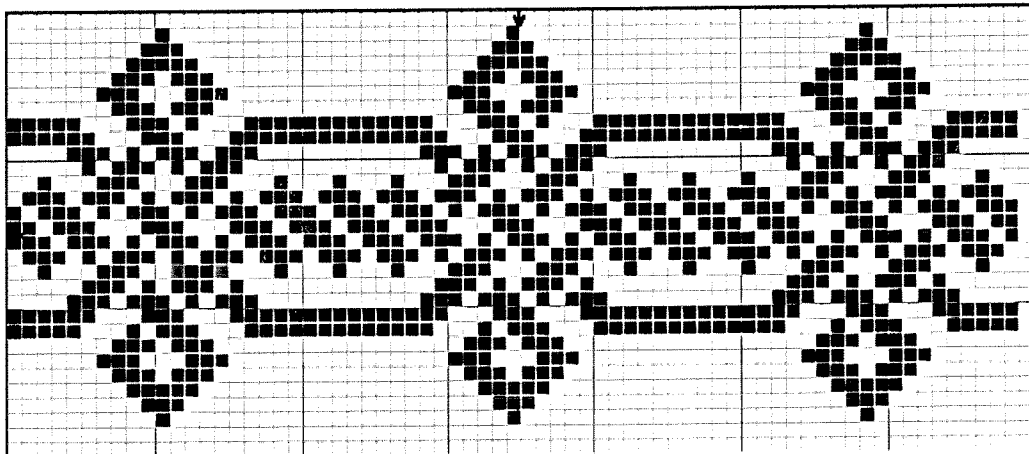
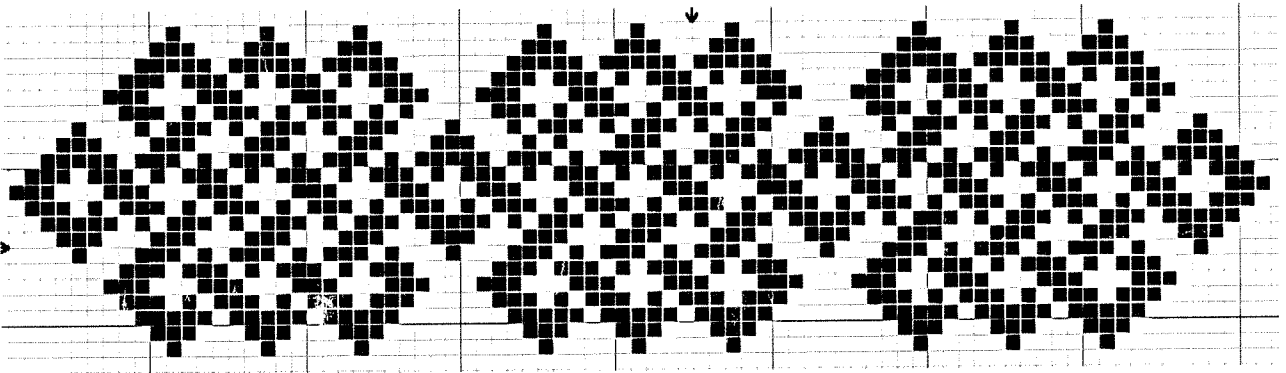
Embroidered pouches

### Midwinter

Couching

### Spring Coronet

Needlework using one of the following patterns



These pattern comes from “The True Perfection of Design by Giovanni Ostaus, In Venice 1567”. These patterns were redrawn by Susan J. Evans and put into a book published by Falconwood Press.

### 12<sup>th</sup> Night

Needleworked lace (filet lace, reticillia, punto in aria, not bobbin lace)

## Embroidered Pouches

Textile pouches and bags were used throughout the Medieval and Renaissance periods for just about any purpose that it might be useful to have a bag for, and many of them were embroidered. There is a huge variety of shapes and techniques of pouches over the course of the SCA period, many of them quite specific to the time and place where they were made. Some pouches were very simple, such as the tiny 10th century pouch found in the Coppergate excavations in York, with a minute cross embroidered on it, indicating, perhaps that it was intended to keep a holy relic in. (Fig. 1) At the other end of the scale and SCA time period, is a hunting pouch made for the Emperor Maximilian I, embroidered lavishly in wire work. (Fig. 2) A similar technique is used for the seal purses of Queen Elizabeth I, as can be seen at the web site: <http://www.dabbler.com/ndlwrk/el1purse.htm>. Other seal bags survive from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, easily dated by the documents to which they were attached (Figs 3 and 4). But it should not be assumed that earlier examples are necessarily simpler, or late ones more luxurious – dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are beautiful French pouches worked in very fine silk split stitches and laid and couched gold thread, showing scenes of courtly love. (Fig. 5) Some pictures of these are on the web at <http://web0.tiac.net/users/drbeer/joyce/emb/alm pouch/alm pouch.htm>, where you can also see a lovely pouch based on these, worked by Joyce Miller. Also from the fourteenth century, survives a small German pouch, where the ground fabric has been entirely covered in silk counted thread stitches. This pouch and the style of German embroidery has been discussed by Timothy Mitchell in a *Tournaments Illuminated* article and in a *Complete Anachronist*. Pictures and instructions can also be found on the web at <http://www.staff.uiuc.edu/~jscole/gemb01.gif>.

There are numerous surviving Elizabethan small embroidered pouches known as sweet bags, probably because they were originally designed for holding sweet-smelling herbs. These are usually in coloured embroidery on linen, featuring flowers, fruit and sometimes birds, and sometimes they have an embroidered pin-cushion attached. (Figs 6 and 7) One of the nicest examples of these is actually in Australia, at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, but unfortunately the Gallery's textile collection is currently being packed and in the process of being moved to another site, so the pouch will not be accessible until some time next year (2000). Mistress Alisoun has a picture of a sweet bag she has made and a general discussion of sweet bags on her web site at <http://bcn.net/~alisoun/purse.htm>

In making an embroidered pouch for a competition or to be considered for grading by the Worshipful Company of Broderers, there are a few things you should consider. The style, technique and the materials should be appropriate for the time and place of pouch that you want to make. This means that you should think about the shape of the pouch, the type of design, the fabric, threads, colours and the stitches that you will use. These should all complement each other. The best way of achieving this is to copy or adapt from an original, at least until you get a good feel for the style. But there's nothing wrong with making something up along plausible lines. For example, if you know that 15th century Swedish pouches were square, with drawstrings and tassels, and you know that 15th century Swedish embroidery uses appliqué and features fantastic beasts, you could quite plausibly appliqué an animal design based on a 15th century illuminated manuscript onto a square pouch with drawstrings and tassels. On the other hand, it would not be appropriate to appliqué Celtic style animals on the same pouch, to depict the animals in blackwork stitches, or to appliqué an Islamic geometric pattern.

Happy stitching! I look forward to seeing your pouches at May Coronet.

Bess Haddon (Guildmaster)

## Bibliography

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Kay Staniland, *Medieval Craftsmen: Embroiderers*, British Museum Press, London, 1991

Marian Stradal and Ulrike Brommer, *Mit Nadel und Faden durch die Jahrhunderte* (in German: 'With Needle and Thread through the Centuries'), Heidenheimer, n.p., n.d.

Patricia Wardle, *Guide to English Embroidery*, HMSO, London, 1970, reprinted 1981

Edna Wark, *Metal Thread Embroidery*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1989

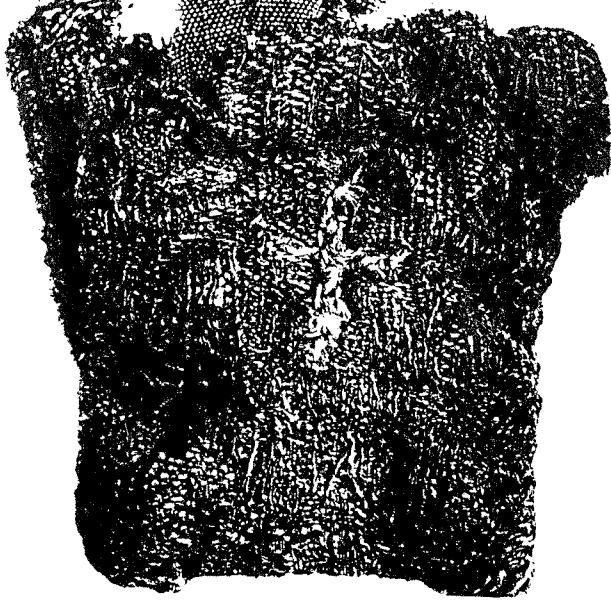


Figure 1  
A silk pouch with an embroidered cross  
Height of pouch: 3cm  
(Hall, *The Excavations at York*, p. 90)



Figure 2  
The hunting pouch of Maximillian I  
German, 16th century  
(Wark, *Metal Thread Embroidery*, p. 10)

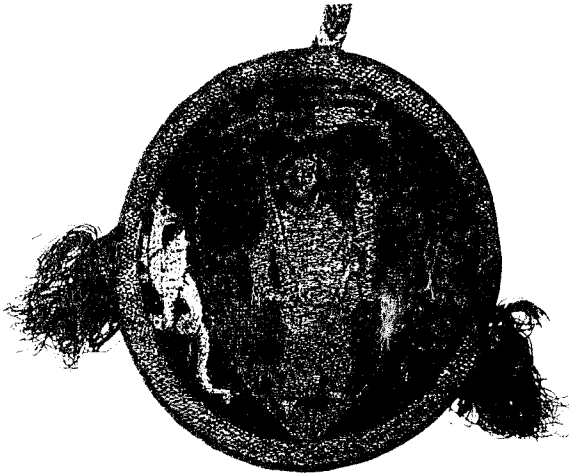


Figure 3  
Seal bag with the arms of the City of London  
Cross stitch, split stitch and underside couching  
1319  
(Staniland, *Embroiderers*, p. 36)

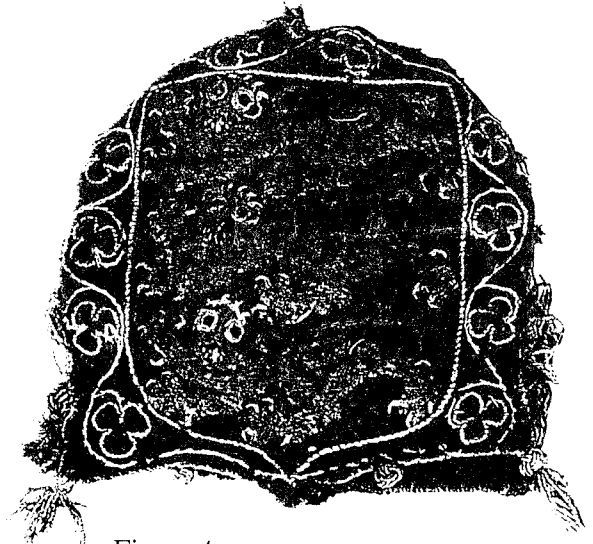
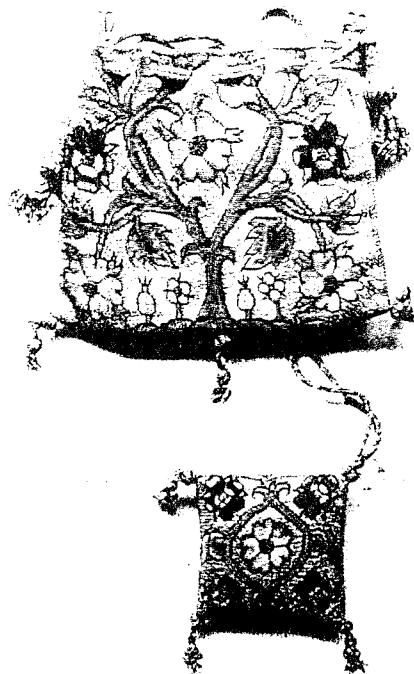


Figure 4  
Seal bag for Edward I, 1280  
Appliqué and split stitch  
(Staniland, *Embroiderers*, p. 34)



Figure 5  
Alms purse (*aumonière*) French, c. 1340  
various silk stitches with couched gold thread  
(Staniland, *Embroiderers*, p. 43)



Figures 6 and 7  
Sweet Bags English, late 16th century  
coloured silks and silver gilt threads  
(Wardle, *Guide to English Embroidery*, p. 33)

