

Undaunted:
Conquering the
Plaited Braid Stitch

Compiled & Presented

by

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Greetings!

What I will be demonstrating today is one type of Plaited Braid Stitch. I hope you enjoy the class. Thank you for attending!

PLAITED BRAID STITCH

Plaited braid stitch was a very common decorative stitch in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. It can be found on coifs, caps, embroidered clothing, swete bags, embroidered bookbindings, and even gloves of that time period. There are a variety of different braid stitches that typically get lumped together under the general term “plaited braid stitch.” In *Elizabethan Stitches*, Jacqui Carey documents several braid stitches seen in period embroidery and explains her version of their execution in full detail, including greatly enlarged photographs of extant examples. Figure 1 on the following page is an example of what Carey calls a Standard Plaited Braid Stitch, so named by her because of its prevalence in period embroidery. This is the variety of braid stitch that I will be demonstrating today.

Passing thread, or filé, is what would have been used for this stitch in period. Passing thread is made by wrapping flattened strips of gilt wire around a silk thread core. Notably, the modern equivalent of gilt passing thread is NOT the same as gilt passing thread used in the 16th and 17th centuries. These historic threads are difficult to replicate. Although you can find modern passing thread made with real precious metal wrapped around a silk thread core, it is not identical to historic passing thread. Historic passing thread was much finer while the flattened metal strip was wider and thicker than what is used now. Historic passing thread was actually more robust than its modern equivalent. Figure 1 shows an example of a beautifully worked standard plaited braid

stitch done in period. Figure 2 illustrates a standard plaited braid stitch wrought with a modern passing thread.

Figure 1

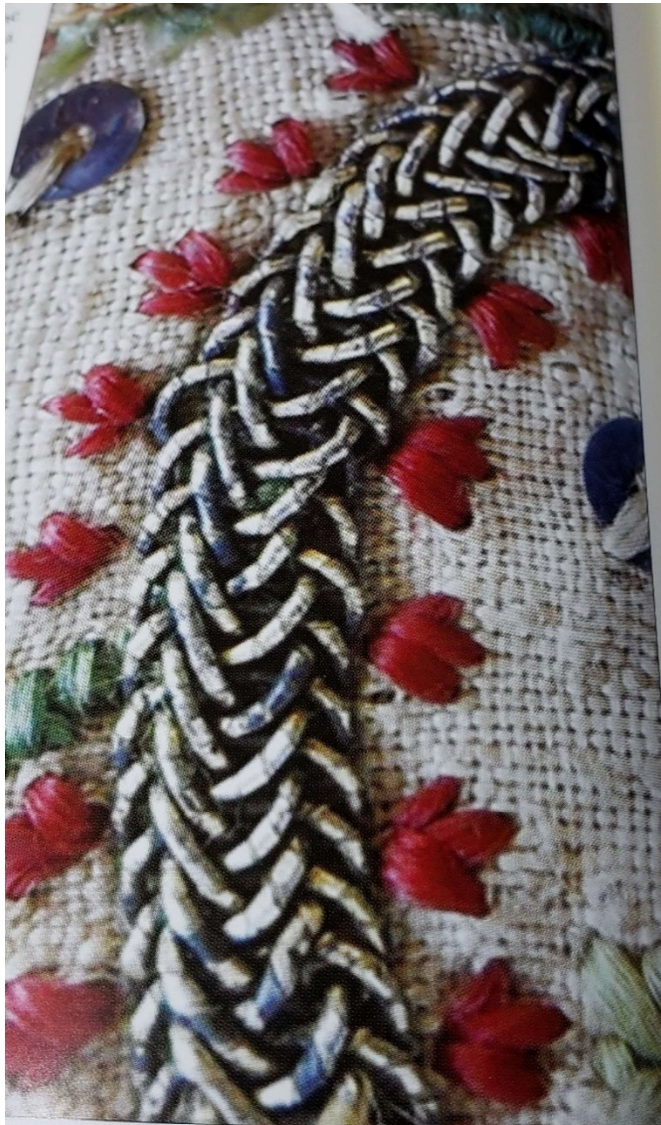


Figure 2



Synthetic threads such as Kreinik Fine Braid can be much easier to stitch with but the nature of the thread itself will not produce the distinctive edges of the braid stitch. Gilt passing thread holds the edges of the braid stitches in a more rigid fashion. Using a modern synthetic thread yields a different appearance than a period thread – even when wrought in an identical manner. Figure 3 is an image of a standard plaited braid stitch wrought with Kreinik #8 Fine Braid. To my eyes, the stitching is “floppy” compared to that

in Figure 2 which uses modern gilt passing thread. The thread you use makes a difference.

Figure 3

Plaited braid stitch has the reputation of being extremely complex and difficult to work. I have found that doing a braid stitch well requires patient manipulation of the thread, precise tension, *choosing the correct type of thread*, and practice! There are several tutorials available for the plaited braid stitch (See Bibliography). The first time I taught myself this stitch, I used Leon Conrad's instructions in his articles from the needlework magazine, *Fine Lines* (2003). A dozen years later, I discovered an easier way to execute this stitch in Jacqui Carey's book *Elizabethan Stitches*. Her approach is the one we will utilize today. So much easier than Grace Christie's!

Plaited braid stitch is NOT a counted stitch although it is easier to learn on a medium such as an open weave linen, hardanger (cross stitch) fabric, or plastic canvas. Many embroiderers make a point of counting threads to maintain an even line of stitching. However, not all plaited braid stitch was done in a straight line. There are too many coiling stems on the various extant items that indicate a free flowing execution of the stitch. I would like to stress to the class participant that the mechanics of the stitch being taught today are just the beginning. Learn the stitch and then graduate to different fabrics and threads – eventually to execute the plaited braid stitch in gold passing thread on fine linen.



BASIC INSTRUCTION

One of the easiest ways to learn the mechanics of this stitch is to use plastic canvas as your “fabric.” The most difficult part of the stitch is getting started. Let’s begin.

Thread your tapestry needle with about an 18 inch length of cord. Shown below is how you begin the stitch. Knot your cord and bring up at A.

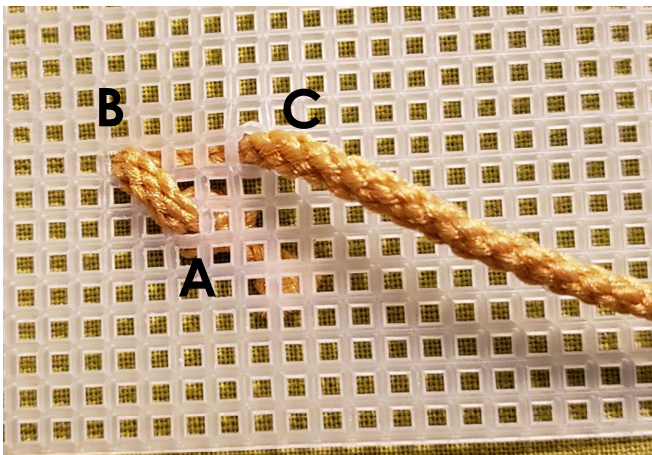
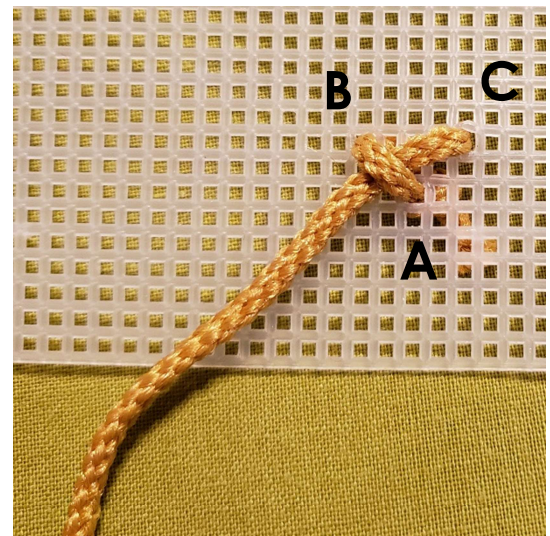
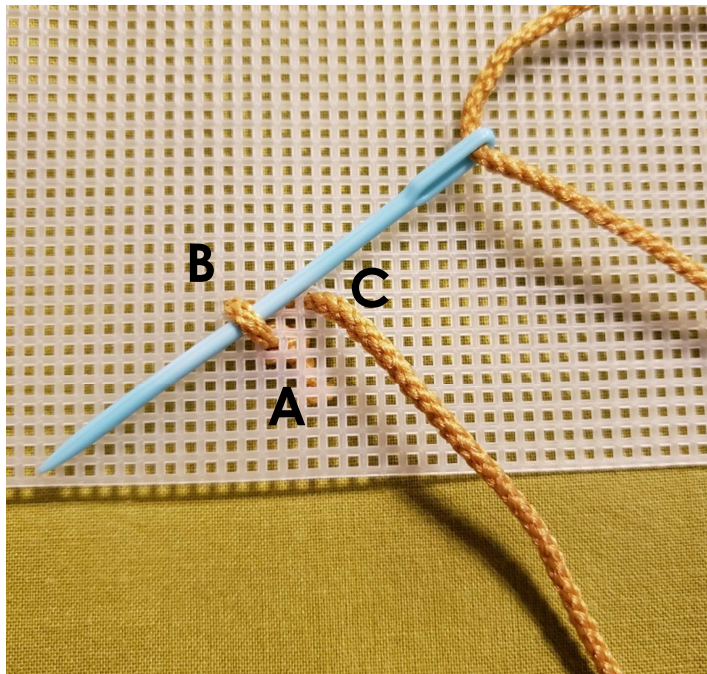
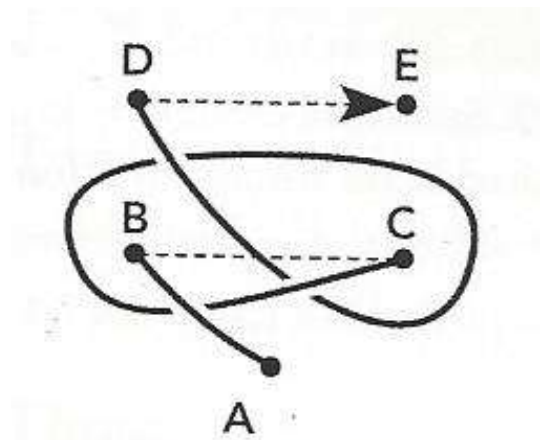
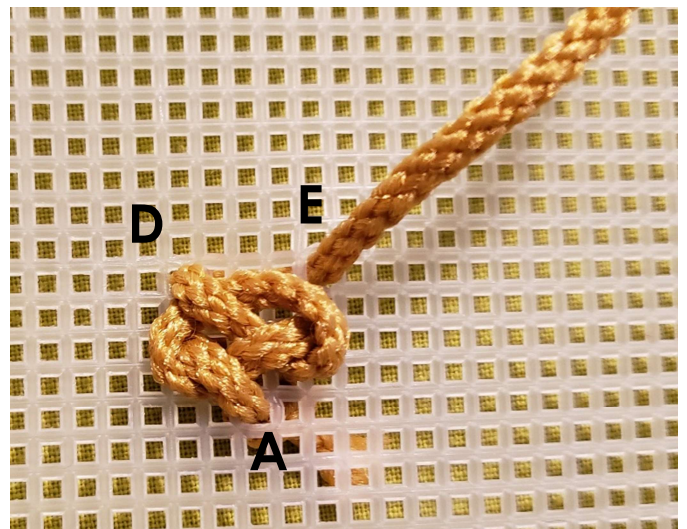
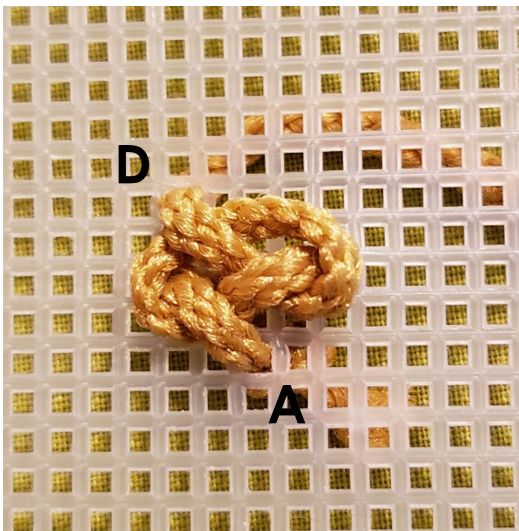
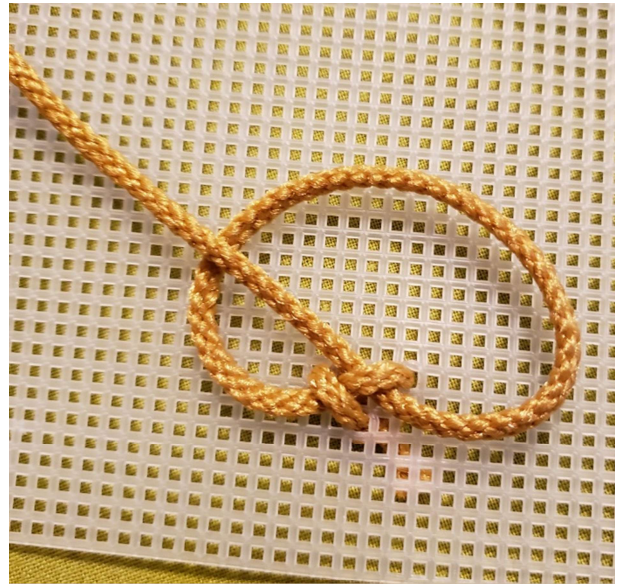
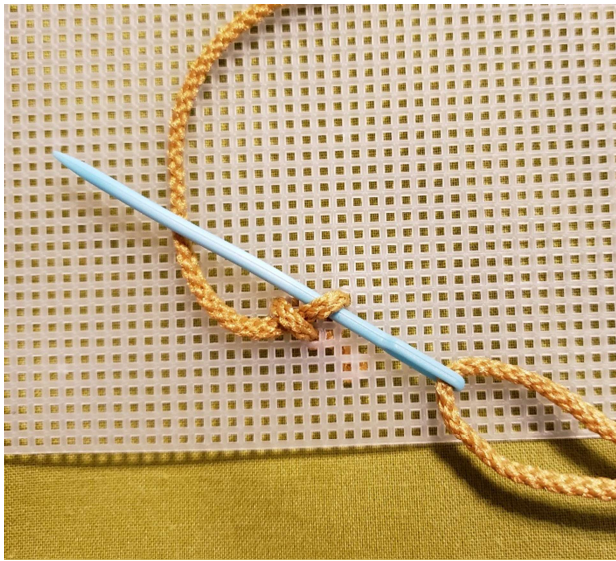
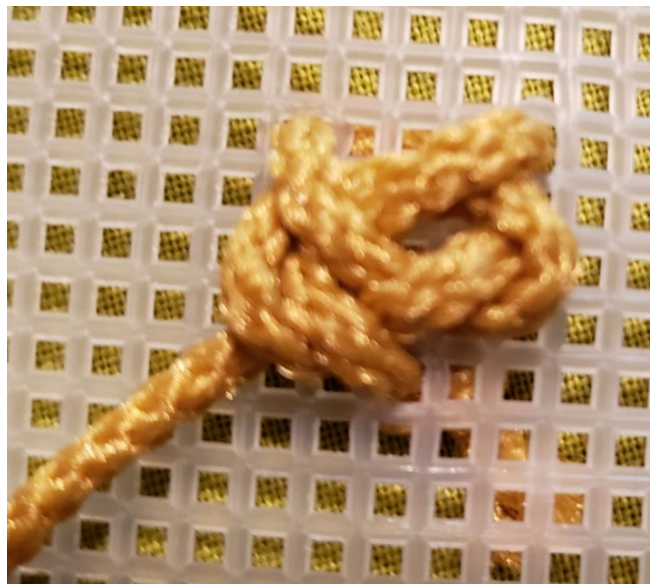
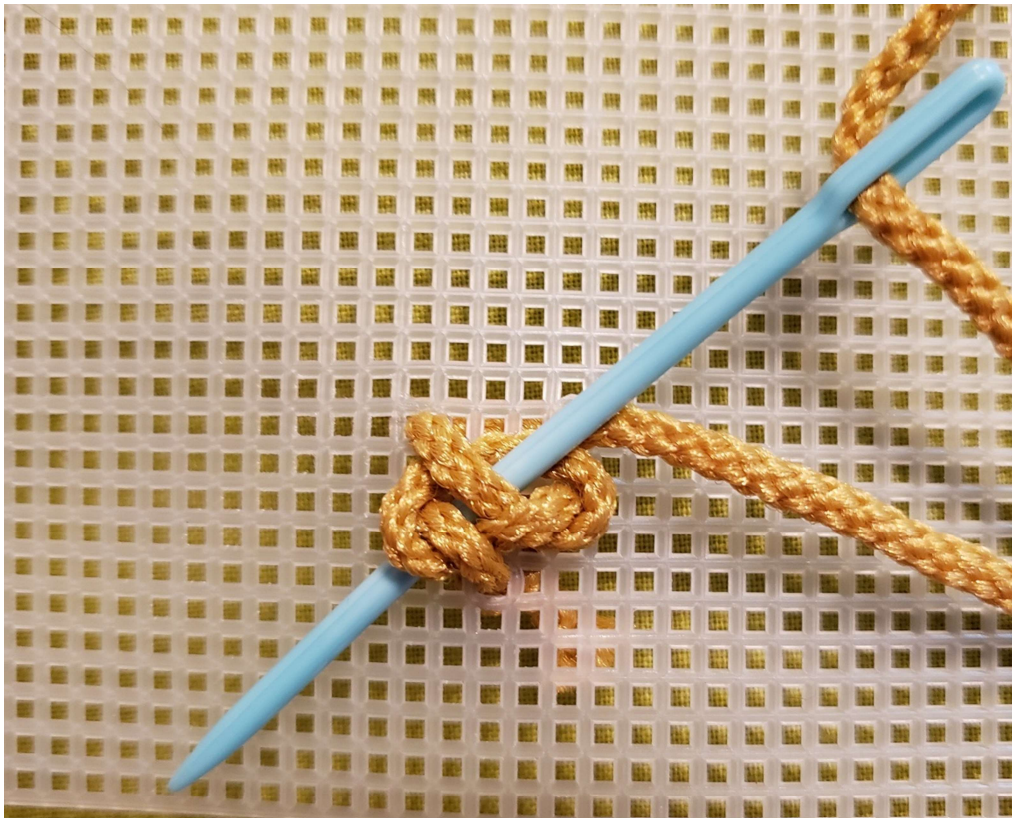
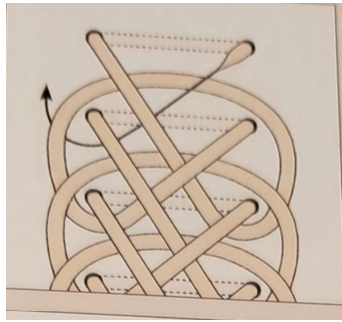


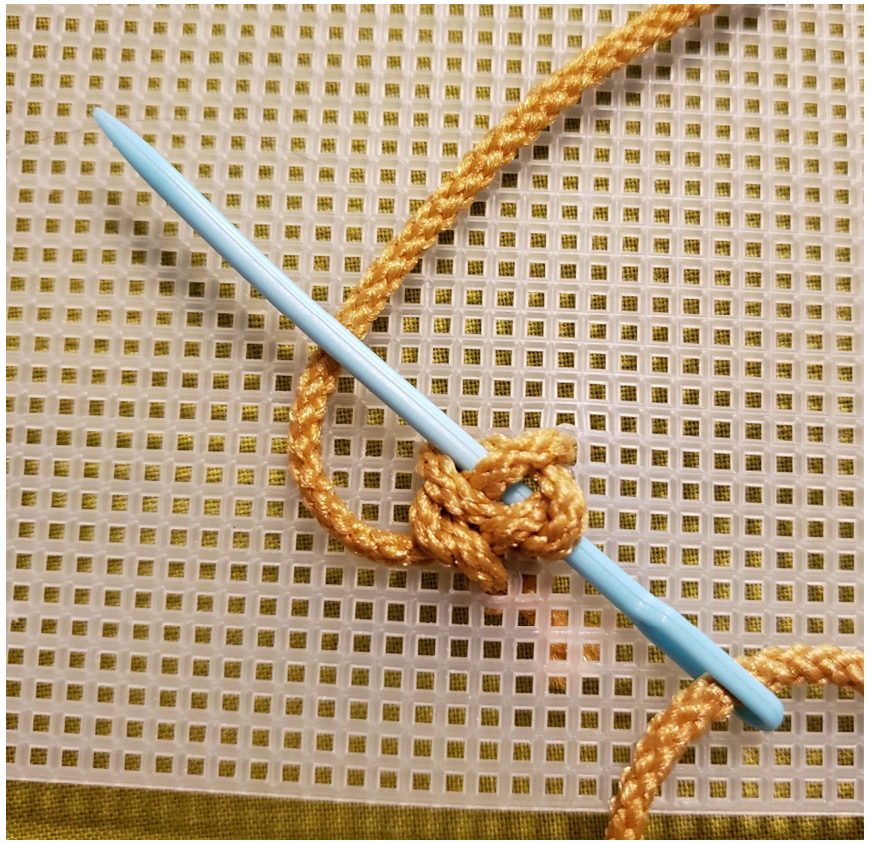
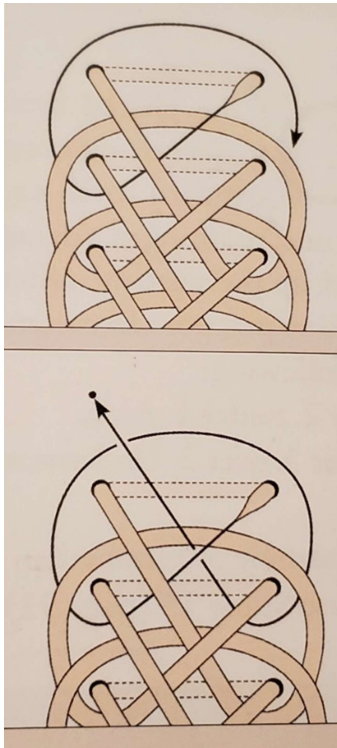
Figure 5

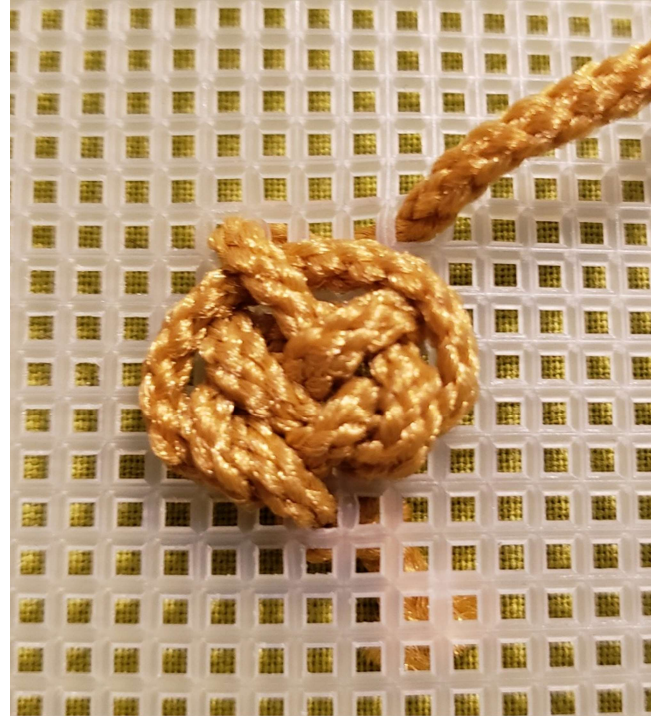
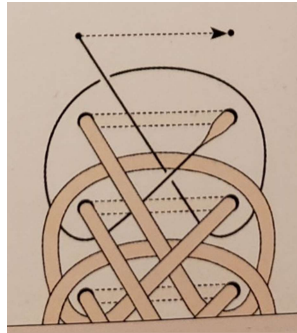




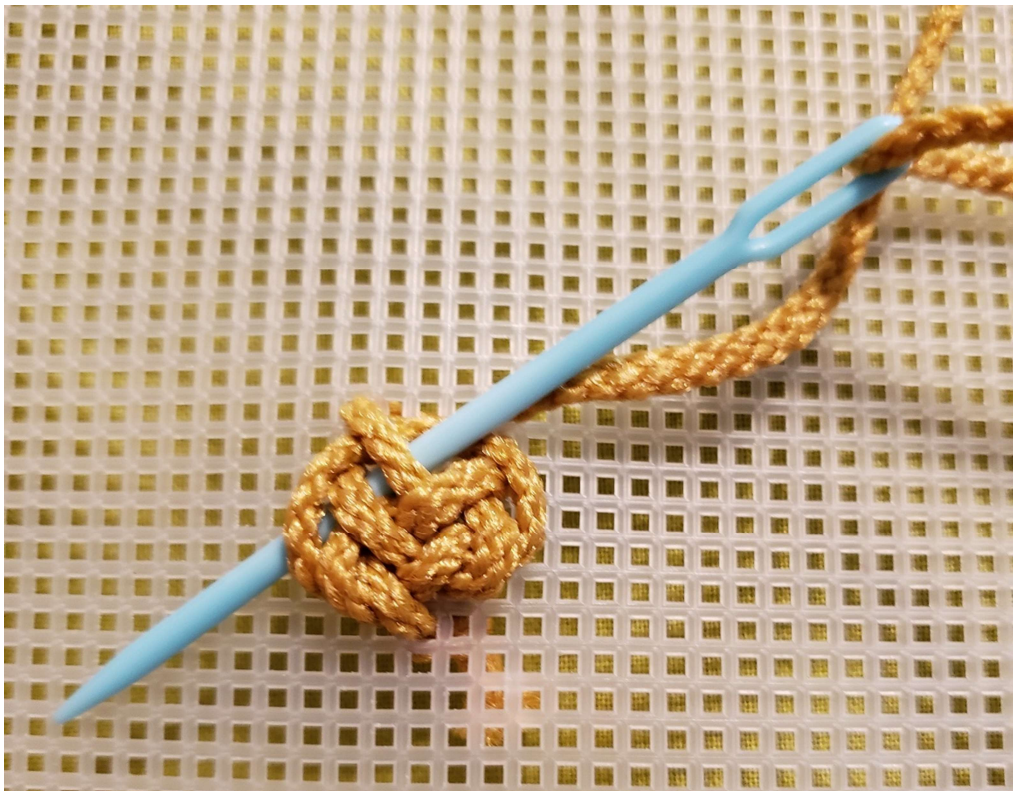
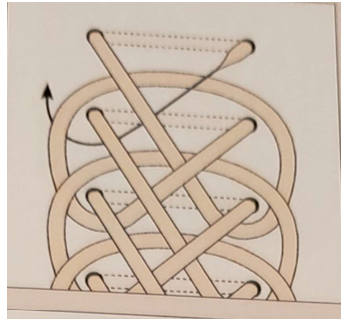
This completes the sequence of steps shown in Figure 5.

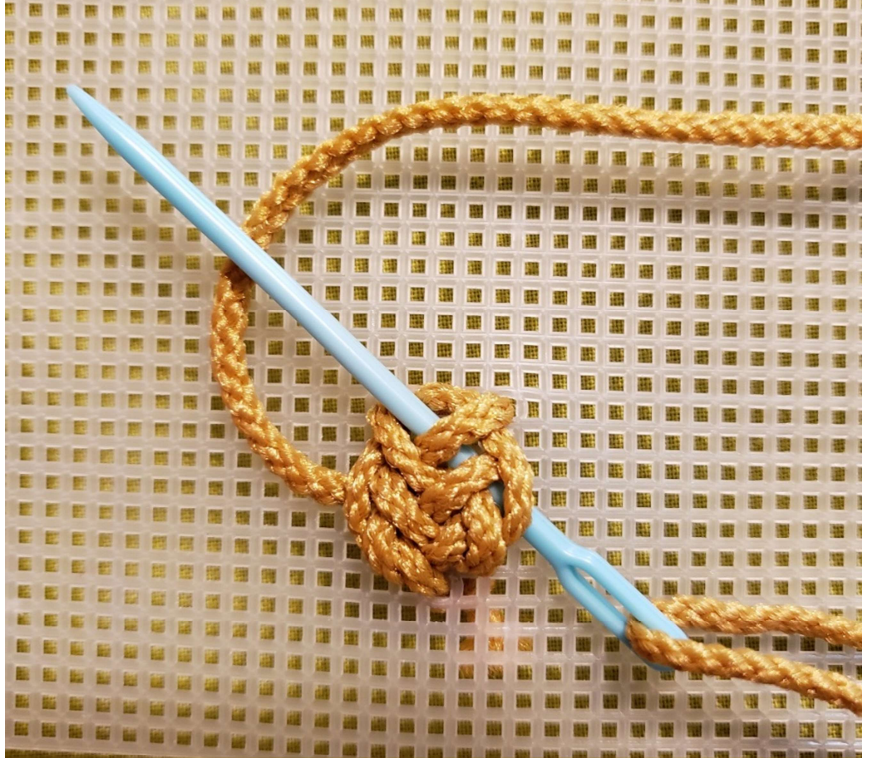
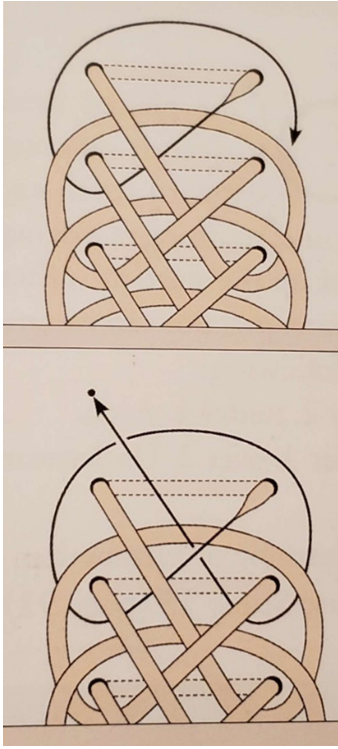


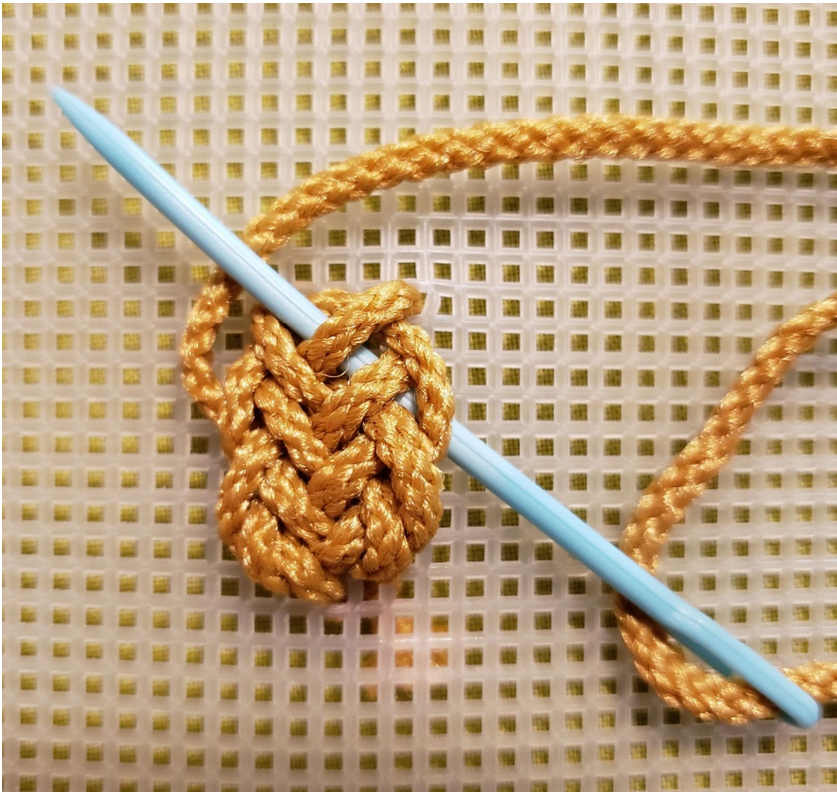
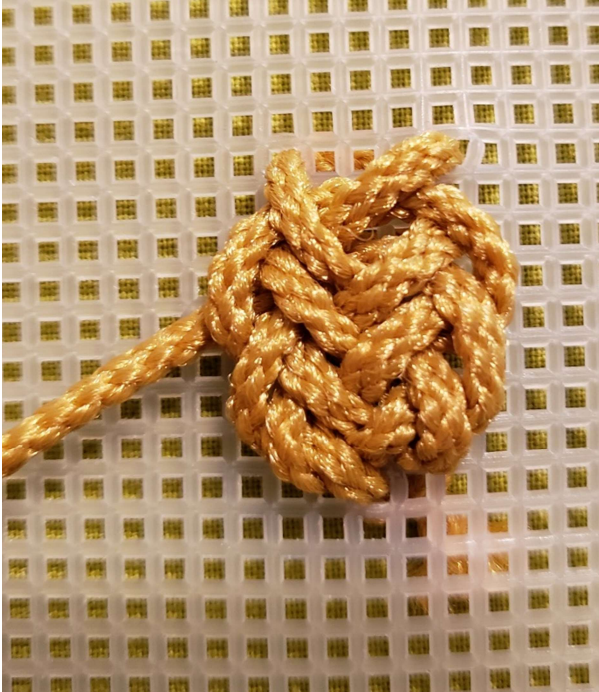
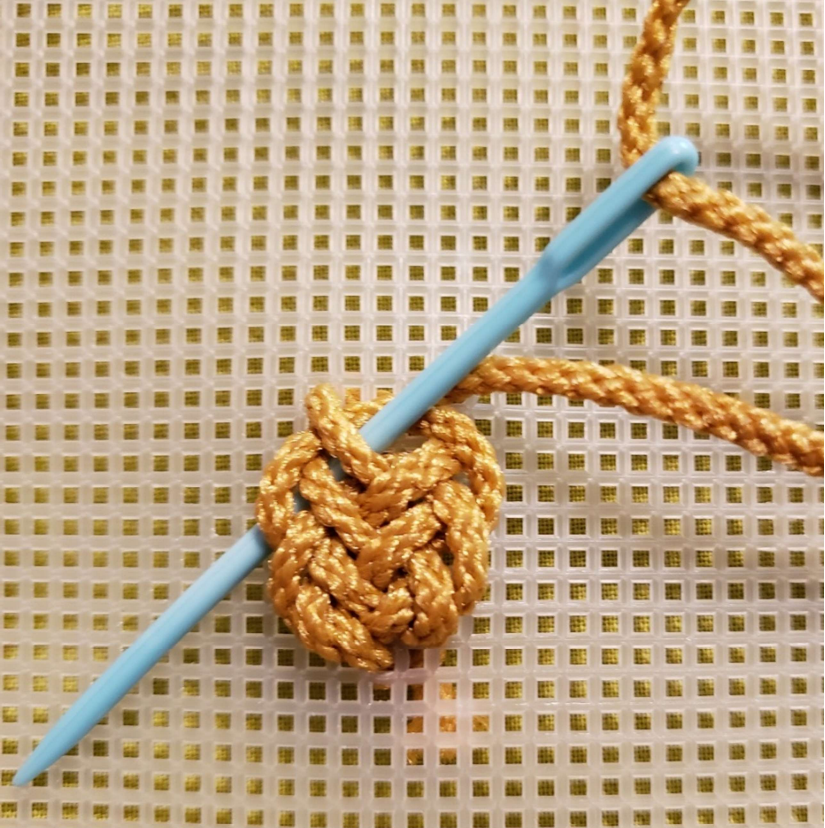
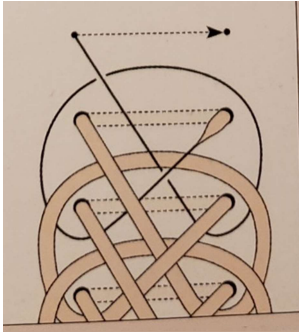


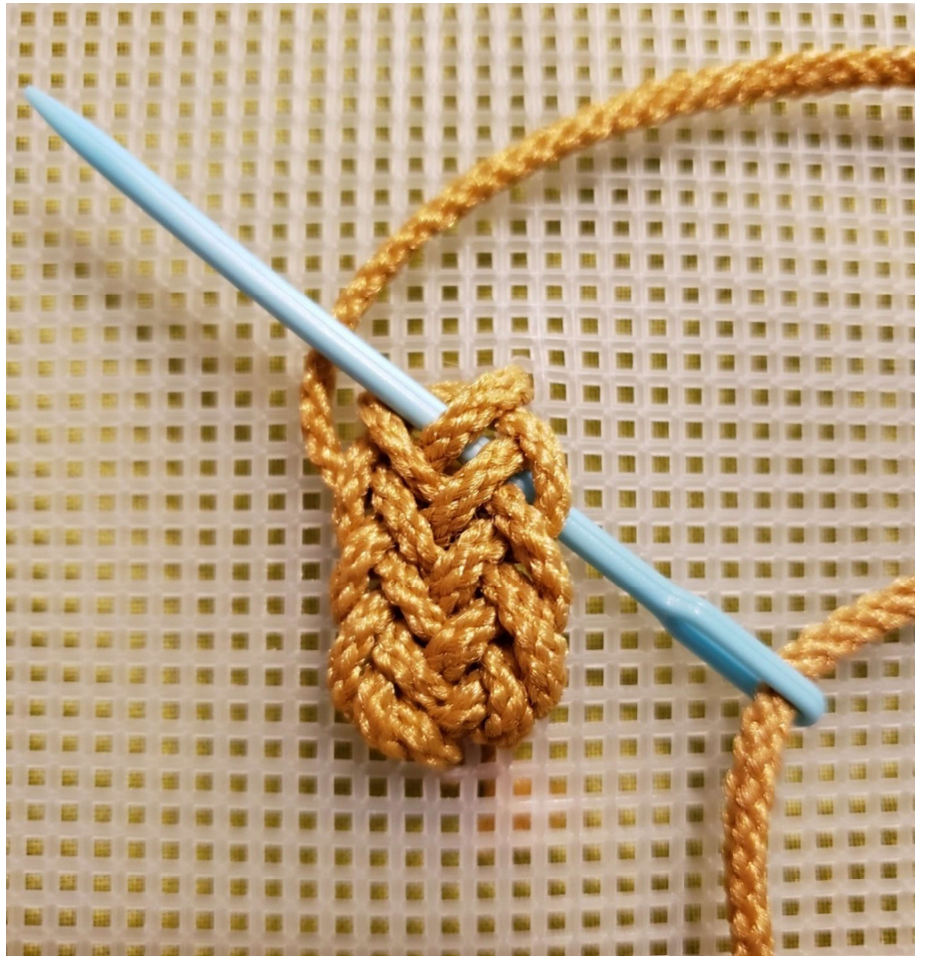
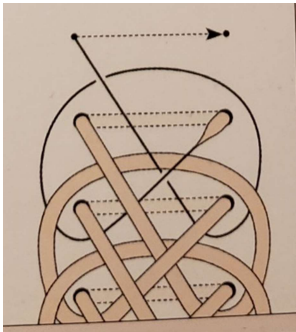
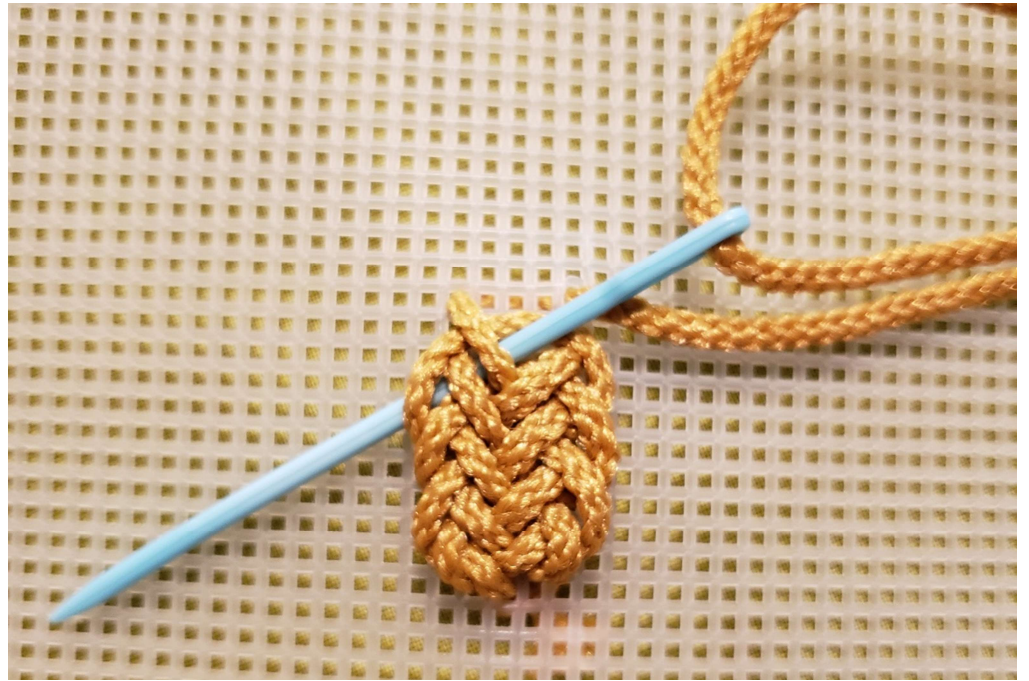


From this point on, you simply repeat the previous steps.



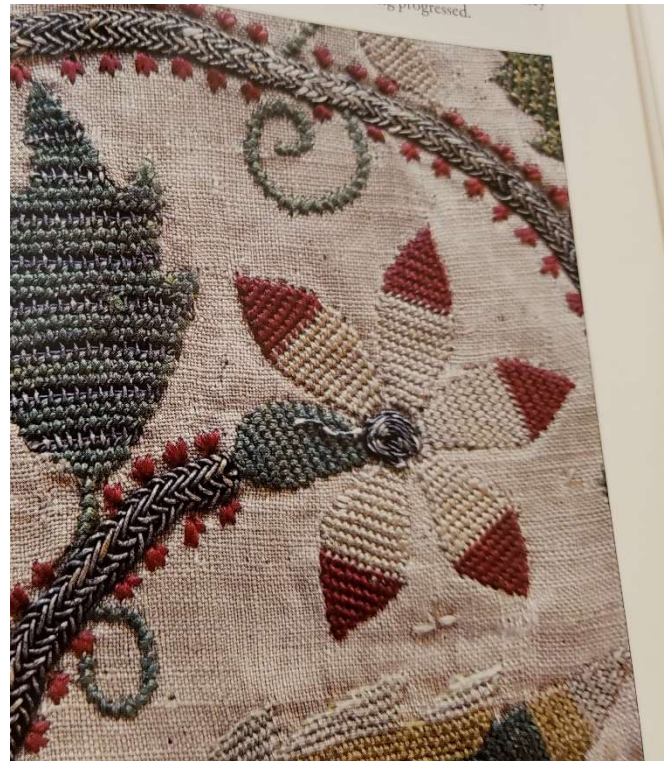








Privately owned - Heather Toomer Collection.

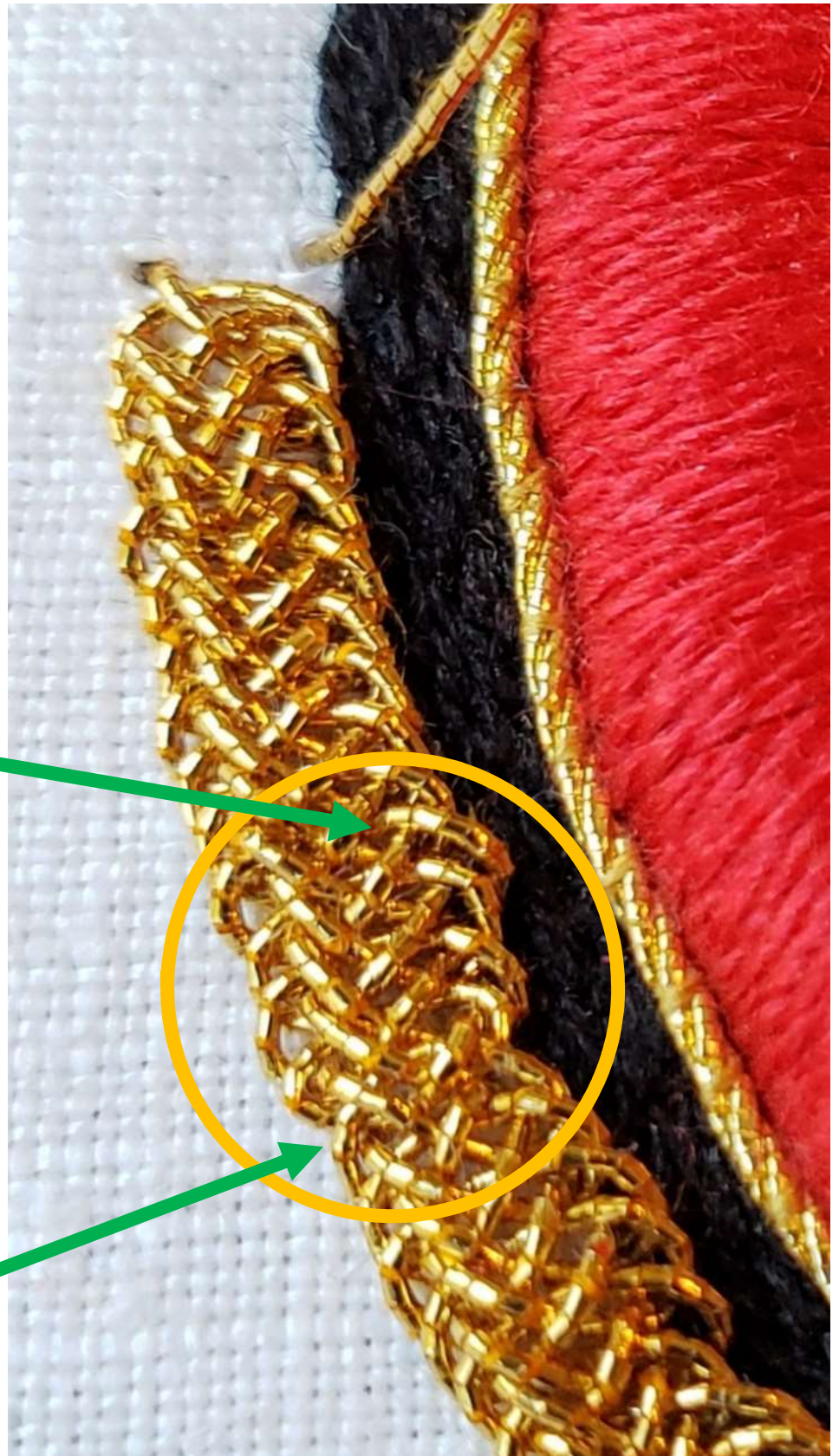


Close up images of a late 16th century lady's coif that clearly shows knots on the back of the embroidery. Where you see the line of horizontal bars is the back of a braid stitch. Notice how little metal thread is on the back as compared to the lavish use of metal thread on the surface of the embroidery. This is the beauty of the braid stitch – the glory of the gold is on the surface! Perfect for precious metal threads.

TENSION ISSUES

You can see on the right side of the braid stitch where the tension got a little wonky.

It is obvious I pulled on the thread too tightly on this part.



EXAMPLES OF PLAITED BRAID STITCH



Men's Nightcap
c. 1600-1625
Housed in the V&A Museum
London, England
Acc.No.T.75-1954
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O357046/cap-unknown/>



Lady's Coif c. 1600-1650
Housed in the V&A Museum
London, England
Acc.No.T.53&A-1947

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O251244/coif-and-forehead-unknown/>



The Layton Jacket

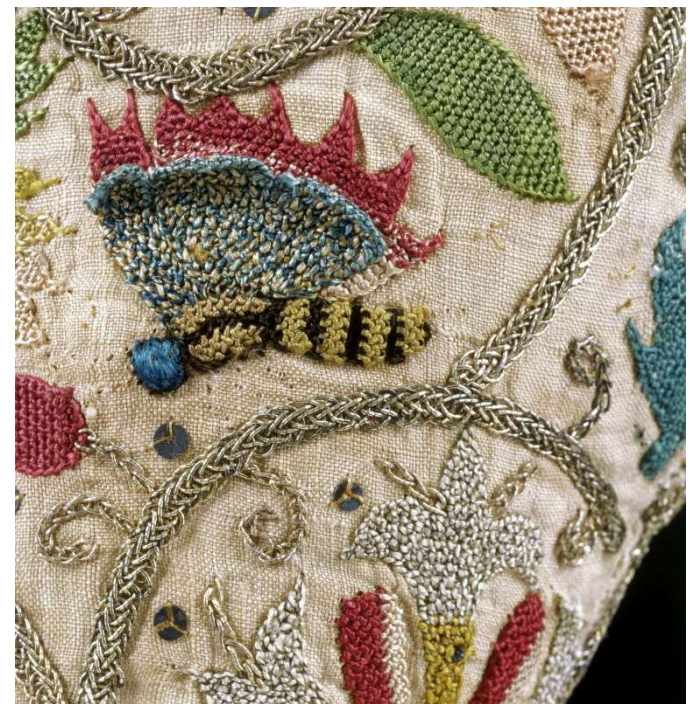
c. 1610-1615

Housed in the V&A Museum

London, England

Acc.No.T.228-1994

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11095/jacket-unknown/>



Embroidered Waistcoat c. 1610-1620

Housed in the V&A Museum, London, England

Acc.No.1359-1900

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15345/waistcoat-unknown/>

Embroidered Gloves

c. 1600-1625

LOOK AT THE BRAID STITCHING ON THE FINGER SEAMS!!!

Housed in the V&A Museum, London, England

Acc.No.711&A-1875

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O77704/pair-of-gloves-unknown/>





Embroidered Bookbinding
The Mirror of the Sinful Soul
c. 1544

Said to have been embroidered by the
Princess Elizabeth

Housed in the Bodleian Library
University of Oxford, England

<https://genius.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/exhibits/browse/le-miroir-de-lame-pecheresse-the-mirror-of-the-sinful-soul/>



Embroidered Swete Bag
c. 1600-1650
Housed in the V&A Museum
London, England
Acc.No.T87-1935
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15342/purse-unknown/>



Embroidered Swete Bag
From the Burrell Collection
Housed in the Glasgow Museum
Glasgow, Scotland
Acc.No.29/310
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11095/jacket-unknown/>

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