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# UZBEK DECORATIVE STITCHES

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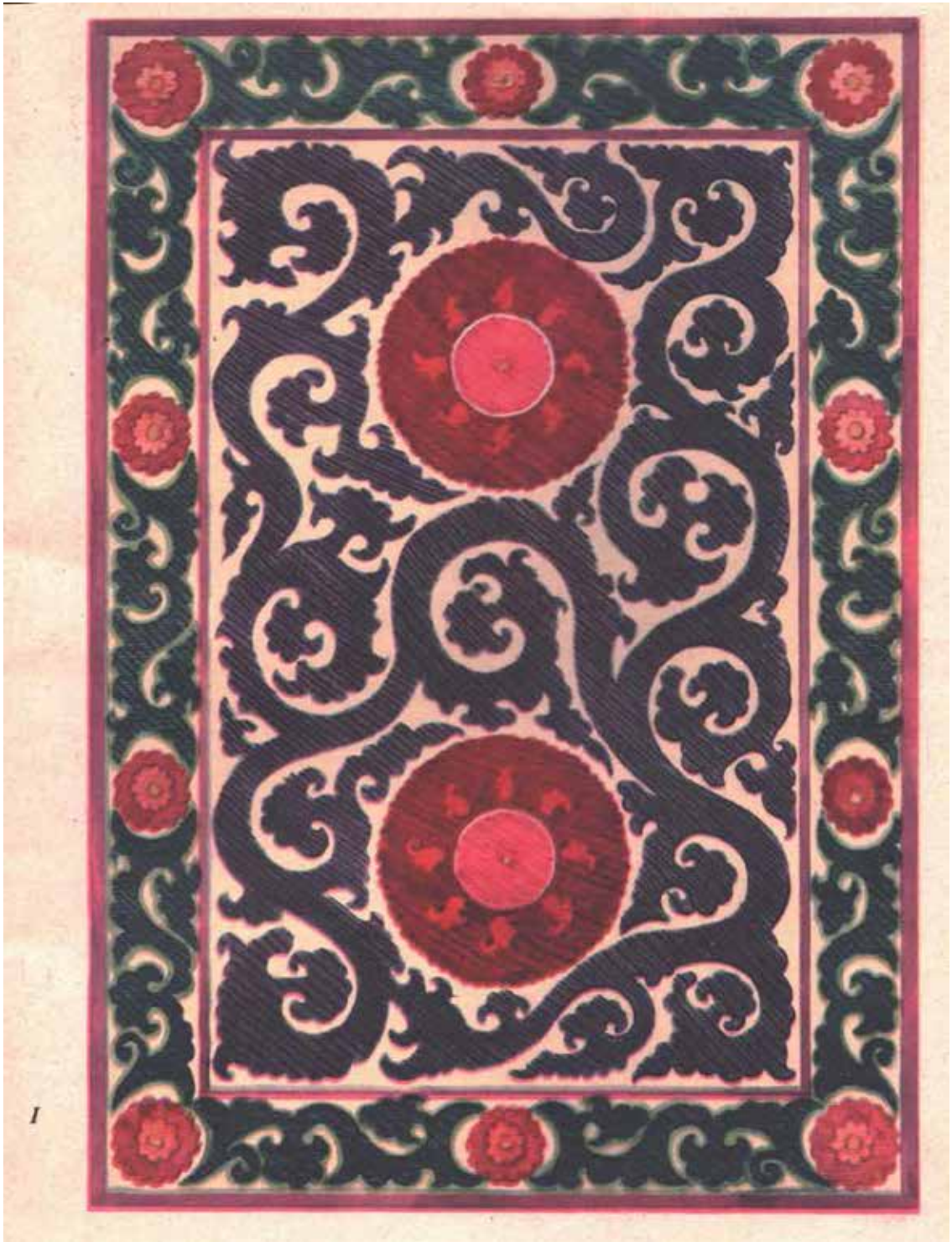
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UZBEK DECORATIVE STITCHES

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Various kinds of embroidery have been widespread among all segments of society in Uzbekistan since ancient times. Embroideries are used to decorate walls and niches in rooms, bedclothes, diverse small items of everyday use, certain parts of clothing, and headwear.

Uzbekistan's best-known embroideries, both locally and abroad, are the large decorative pieces that adorn the walls of rooms in people's homes – so-called palaks, suzanis, and zardivars. Other embroidered items include the sheets used to cover a newlywed couple's bed (ruijo, joypush, choyshab), pillow covers (takyapush, takhsarpush, bolinpush, yastykpush), and small and large towels for bathing. Clean folded laundry is wrapped in an embroidered bugjama or bugcha. Old people often say their prayers (namaz) on special embroidered carpets called joynamaz.

Both men's and women's headwear – skullcaps – are usually decorated with embroidery. So are scarves and sashes: headscarves worn by women (rumol, peshona-bandak), and belt-sashes used by men (chorsi, kiikcha, belkars).

Embroidered bags for tea (choy-halta), money (pul-halta), combs (shona-halta), mirrors (oyna-halta) and other items are popular in rural areas, especially where the inhabitants followed a nomadic way of life until recently.

There are varieties of decorative embroideries like bedspreads that are more richly ornamented with extensive, continuous patterns. Sometimes the field is filled in entirely with embroidery, set off by a fancy wide border.

The patterns on old Uzbek embroideries (before the second half of the 19th century) were significantly denser, filling up more space, than those on later pieces. There are almost no gaps in the design, as a result of which the backing cloths of old embroideries cannot be seen.

Sheets are embroidered only along the edges (the central field is left empty). Joynamaz are embroidered only on three sides; a mihrab, generally in the shape of a pointed arch, is always depicted on the topmost, horizontal side. Small pieces also have specific ornamental designs determined by local traditions.

Plant and flower patterns are fundamental for all embroideries: twisting branches, found on both an embroidery's central field and border; complex flower rosettes complemented by other design components; bouquets of flowers arranged over the whole embroidery. Side by side with wholly vegetative ornaments one often finds depictions of birds, household items (knives, lamps), the sun, moon, and stars (stars are embroidered primarily on large pieces like suzanis and palaks).

Embroideries are distinguished not only by their appearance and function, but by where they are produced.

Local people know very well the different ornaments characteristic for each region, and consequently many designs are referred to geographically – Chust designs, Shahrisabz designs, Urgut designs, etc.

The embroideresses of Uzbekistan employ a great variety of stitches. The sewing technique applied to any given piece is conditioned by its appearance, and where and when it is produced. Decorative stitches on embroideries, no less than the composition of their patterns and the physical materials used to make the pieces, are subject to change over time. Certain stitches favored in the past have vanished altogether, or have been forgotten in some areas while reappearing in others. In many cases, completely new kinds of stitches have been adopted.

The present volume aims to acquaint the reader with the national stitches that are in the current repertoire of Uzbek embroideresses, and provide a practical guide to how these stitches are used.

## **BASIC MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUMENTS**

The majority of old Uzbek embroideries that have survived to this day are made on white, artisanal cotton cloth called *buz* (*karbos* in Tajik), or on *malle* woven from yellowish-brown threads of local *guza* cotton. Later embroideries began to make use of factory-made cloth of various colors, yellow and red in particular.

It is characteristic of modern-day embroideries to combine artisan-produced silk thread with special factory-made cotton and silk thread (bobbin thread, Iris thread, *mouliné* yarn, viscose, etc.).

The basic equipment used by Uzbek embroideresses to produce their pieces are needles (*igna nina* and *ninduz*), thimbles

(*angish*), tambour hooks (*bigiz* or *daraush*), tambour frames (*chambarak*) and tambour sewing machines (*popur mashina*). The embroidery needles called *igna nina* come in different lengths and widths depending on the size of the piece and the kind of fabric being embroidered. The second type of needle (*ninduz*) is big, used only to fasten the fabric while it is being embroidered, or to stretch it onto a tambour frame.

All artistic stitches are done with a needle – even, on some pieces, buttonholed chain stitches, for which there are special *bigiz* hooks and tambour sewing machines.

The *bigiz*, or *daraush*, is a thin iron wire, circular in cross-section, 5-6 cm long. On one end is a small wooden handle that can be a variety of shapes (cylindrical, oblong, pear-shaped); on the other end is a hook. The *bigiz* is used to produce a chain stitch exclusively on a tambour.

The *chambarak* (tambour) is a square or circular wooden frame; it can be as large as 110 x 80 cm. Fabric is stretched onto the tambour and fastened to its edges with needles.

Tambour sewing machines appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, initially among embroideresses in the big cities (Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand), then spread gradually to other places.

Embroideresses work on *buranboi* for certain types of pieces. *Buranboi* is patterned, cotton gauze fabric that has been slightly starched. Factory-made material does not make good backing cloth because the mesh is too large and designs embroidered on it





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look crude. Buranboi is laid over a fabric suitable for embroidering, and can be attached to its edges as well. Embroideries produced on buranboi stand out for the delicacy and elegance of their decoration.

In recent times women employed in artels [Soviet cooperative craft associations – trans.], when working on large embroideries, have started transferring patterns with premade stencils and tracing paper (certain traditional but rarely used stamped designs on skullcaps are exceptions). Designs are prepared in the embroidery artels by special draftswomen called chizmakash.

The design is hand-drawn on the fabric in ink made of colored clay, using either a reed or steel pen.

First, the area of the central field of the embroidery is defined. This is done with straight lines that demarcate the border (the distance is measured using fingers or a stick). Next, dots are used to mark the centers and outlines of the main rosettes or floral sprays. Rosettes, medallions and bouquets are drawn starting from their centers; the contours of any large design motifs are put in last.

Occasionally, the patterns on small pieces are drawn by the embroideresses themselves.

While working on a piece, embroideresses always use a special soft case or pouch to protect it from getting dirty. At any one time, the part of the fabric that a woman is not working on is kept in the pouch, and during breaks the whole piece is stored there. Such cases are used when embroidering

large suzanis, joynamaz, sheets, etc. When embroidering a small item like a skullcap, they cover it with a piece of clean cloth with a slit in it, and the cloth is moved around as needed.

An embroideress usually works while sitting on a blanket spread on the floor. Her left leg, which she leans on while working, is half bent. The fabric being embroidered is thrown over her left knee and attached by a needle to her dress, which she gathers beneath her knee. Sometimes, when necessary, she secures the fabric by squeezing it between her knees. She holds it taut all the time with her left hand to keep the material straight as she sews. Her left thumb is constantly at work. The threaded needle is pulled up through the fabric from the left and passed over the thumb, which raises the thread into a loop; then as the needle is reinserted to make the stitch, the thumb gradually bends down until the thread slips off by itself. This very efficient maneuver prevents the threads getting tangled, a serious nuisance that frequently affects some women's embroidery work.

## **BASIC STITCHES**

The basic, most popular stitches of those used by embroideresses in Uzbekistan are the following: basma, kanda-khayol, chinda-khayol (duruya), khomduzi, yurma, popur, iroki, ilmak, chamak, bakhya, and others.

Basma, kanda-khayol, chinda-khayol, khomduzi, yurma and iroki are employed to sew the most important decorative motifs; the other stitches have auxiliary functions,

used to execute secondary aspects of the ornamentation (dividing lines, inner portions of small motifs, outlines and shading contours of decorative elements). Of the major embroidery stitches, yurma is the one used for decorative finish – ornaments executed in basma stitch have outlines in yurma. However, more than one main type of stitch may not be used to sew the primary decoration on any single embroidery.

Basma is a single-sided stitch used to fill in the surface of a decoration. Threads are laid horizontally or vertically on the backing cloth, then couched down with stitches running across them.

A long ground thread (nakh) is laid horizontally from one edge of the embroidery motif to the other, then is fastened down to the fabric with small, transverse stitches (zakhm).

It is done as follows. Starting from the left edge of the motif to be embroidered, the needle is poked through from the back to the front of the backing fabric. The thread, pulled tight horizontally to the right, is laid on the fabric. The needle is reinserted in the outline of the motif on the right, in a line with the laid thread, and is passed back to the left and slightly downward along the underside of the fabric. Along the way, the needle picks up a few threads from the fabric's underside, then is brought to the front again, now below the laid thread. It is reinserted diagonally above the laid thread, either slightly back (to the right) or slightly forward (to the left), then brought to the front again, below the laid thread and a little further forward than before (always moving left). This is repeated till the end of the laid thread is reached.

A second thread is laid below the first one,

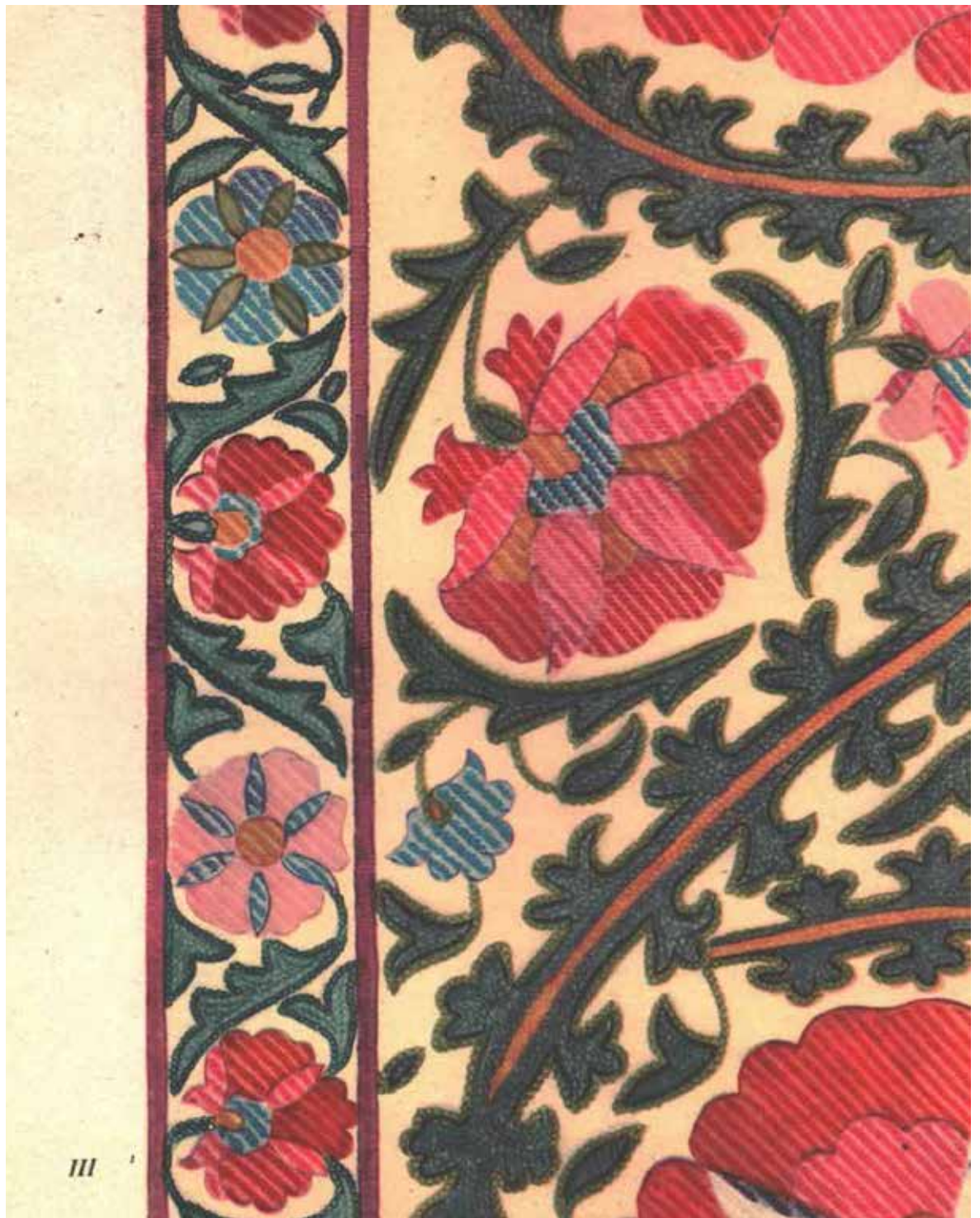
a third is laid below the second, etc. The laid threads run exclusively from left to right, while the couching stitches go in the opposite direction, i.e., from right to left. Furthermore, the stitches must all be at the same angle (inclined either to the right or the left) and spaced equally from one another over the entire embroidery.

The laid threads can also be vertical. In this case, they run exclusively from bottom to top, i.e., pointing “away from oneself,” whereas the stitches are done from top to bottom, i.e., moving “towards oneself.”

When the laid threads are vertical, the stitches couching them are executed as follows. At the top edge of the motif, the threaded needle is pulled through from the back to the front of the fabric on the left side of the laid thread. Next, the needle is brought across the laid thread to fasten it down and reinserted farther back (i.e., higher up) and now to the right of the laid thread. This is repeated till the end of the laid thread is reached. A second thread is laid to the right of the first one, etc. In this way, whether the laid threads are horizontal or vertical, the stitches couching them are all a certain distance from one another and at a slight angle, creating a sewn field running diagonally over the surface of the motif. The result, as seen on the front side of the fabric, is tiny stitches with their long ends on the left (plate 1). The stitches' maximum length on the right is 3 mm.

There are a number of varieties of basma stitch, identical in their method of execution, but different in appearance. These differences are achieved by varying the length of the couching stitches, their placement and their direction relative to the laid threads:





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(a) sewing over the laid thread with oblong couching stitches (up to 3 mm) – zakhmash daroz (plate 2);

(b) sewing over the laid thread with very short “round” stitches – zakhmash lunda (plate 3);

(c) sewing over the laid thread with double stitches of the usual length for basma – two stitches are made right beside each other, with a very small interval between them; the next pair is placed a slight distance away (plates 4–5);

(d) sewing over the laid thread with “grains” (donacha, ziraduzi) – tiny couching stitches are made not one above the other, but rather each stitch in an upcoming row is placed between two stitches of the previous laid thread. This technique yields a grainy texture, and the stitch produces an impression of little spots or grains rather than diagonals (plate 6).

The quality of the threads has an important role in changing the look of the embroidery. If the ground thread is tightly twisted, it will lie close to the fabric and sink deep, creating a background from which the couching stitches will stand out in relief (this effect is found in Samarkand). On the other hand, a ground thread that is loosely twisted and fluffy will not pull tight but will form ridges between the rows of stitches, and the stitches will sink deeper.

The stitch known as kanda-khayol can be regarded as one of the varieties of basma. Its method of execution is the same, but it sharply differs in appearance from all the types of basma described above.

With kanda-khayol also, the laid threads can have two orientations, horizontal or vertical.

But unlike basma, the threads can be laid starting from either the left or the right when placed horizontally, and from either the top or the bottom when placed vertically.

The kanda-khayol stitch itself has two variants.

1. Here, too, the laid threads are fastened down with stitches, but they are different than those used in basma: when reinserting the needle on the frontside of the fabric (above the laid thread, the same as in basma) embroideresses make the hole far from where they pulled the needle through from the underside of the fabric. Thus, the long ends of the couching stitches stay on the right, with the tiny knots of the stitches on the left. The stitches in each row are placed one above the other, at a slight angle. The texture of the embroidery is reminiscent of the textile of a basket woven from twigs (plate 7).

2. The first laid thread is tacked down on the fabric in the usual way for kanda-khayol, i.e., it is couched on the right with oblong stitches. However, as she executes the following rows of couching stitches, the embroideress catches, with each new stitch she makes, the thread of the couching stitch in the row immediately above, reinserting the needle right where that row’s laid thread is. The result is fully filled-in, almost sinuous lines of stitches running diagonally above the laid thread (plate 8).

Embroideries executed in kanda-khayol also differ from other varieties of basma on the underside of the backing cloth. The design viewed in reverse is practically free of threads; there are only a few dots from the short couching stitches running diagonally.

With all the other types of basma, the reverse design is almost entirely filled with the long threads of the slanting couching stitches.

Motifs executed in basma almost always have an outline done in buttonholed chain stitch, yurma, in a color contrasting with the color of the motif itself. Moreover, yurma is often executed with a needle, not a sewing machine. Khanda-khayol is never framed by any other types of stitches.

Notwithstanding its many varieties, basma is used basically for large decorative embroideries. In the past in Samarkand, kanda-khayol was employed solely for straight border strips (obá or suv) and certain small details. At present it is only used there to embroider skullcaps. Although it is labor-intensive, basma continues to be used widely by the inhabitants of all the regions of Uzbekistan.

Chinda-khayol or duruya is a double-sided flat stitch on the surface of the fabric, in which the ground thread makes a dashed line, without couching stitches (plate 9). The ground thread is pushed across the fabric, from one edge of the embroidered ornament to the other, using an ordinary “forward needle” movement [running stitch – trans.]: at regular intervals – the width of a few threads in the backing fabric – the needle is inserted into the fabric, advanced an equal distance on the reverse side, and brought back through to the front again, always moving forward in a line. The distance between the holes must always be identical. Then the fabric is turned 180 degrees and, starting from the opposite side of the ornament, is sewn in the same fashion in the opposite direction. Wherever the needle was pushed

down the first time around, it is now brought up in exactly the same place. In this way the ornament is filled in equally solidly on both the front and back of the fabric. The direction of sewing for chinda-khayol is “towards oneself.”

Chinda-khayol or duruya is used for small items like headscarves and towels, where both the front and back sides may be visible. This stitch was used on old headscarves principally to fill in plant designs.

Chinda-khayol is most widely used in the regions of the Fergana Valley and Tashkent Province.

Khomduzi or khomipak is an ordinary double-sided flat satin stitch. With khomduzi, the thread is either placed straight (vertical) or at a slight angle (right end elevated, left end lowered) (plate 10.)

In the past, khomduzi was most popular in the regions of the Fergana Valley, where it served to embroider elegant designs on skullcaps, but also was used for various types of large bedspreads. Not long ago, in certain regions like Samarkand, this stitch began to be used together with chinda-khayol to embroider belt-sashes in a delicate geometric pattern which in fact is called khomduzi-nuska “satin-stitch pattern.”

There are two forms of iroki stitch in Uzbekistan: terma iroki and iroki. Terma iroki is a full cross stitch with two slanting crossed lines. It is done like a usual cross stitch. First a row of slanting lines is worked in one direction, then a row of lines slanting in the opposite direction is worked backwards over it, inserting the needle in the same holes as before,

thus connecting the crosses. This produces, on the reverse side of the fabric, a column of short lines consisting of two threads arranged horizontally (because Uzbek women embroider vertically, starting from the bottom, i.e., “away from themselves”).

Iroki differs from iroki terma both in look and in execution. A vertical ground thread is laid from the bottom edge of the motif to the top edge. Then it is crossed at an angle by small, equal stitches running “towards oneself” (top-down) with some distance between them. The length of the stitches and distance between them on both sides of the fabric must be equal. A second ground thread is laid in the same direction, bottom-up, beside and always to the left of the first one (plate 11).

Each of these stitches can be done in two ways.

Sanama iroki (or sanama terma iroki), i.e., “counted iroki,” is done without a pattern drawn on the fabric, but rather the pattern is embroidered by counting cross stitches according to a pre-established model; good artisans even work by memory. In the case of chizma iroki (chizma terma iroki), i.e., “drawn iroki,” the pattern’s outline is first drawn directly on the embroidered fabric (in ink or with a pencil), or else on buranboi placed on top and sewn onto the fabric. The pattern is embroidered in accordance with the outline, but the artisan is free to choose the internal details and colors herself.

Iroki is the favorite stitch of women in the upper reaches of Kashkadarya. Earlier, it was used to make splendid, large-scale decorative embroideries – suzanis, iroki-gulyams,

different kinds of bed coverings and horse blankets – and all sorts of small pieces. In other regions of Uzbekistan the stitch is employed exclusively for small items like skull-caps, bags and pouches. Nowadays, iroki is used abundantly to decorate clothes, skull-caps, etc., in all areas of Uzbekistan. Its use on large embroideries has sharply diminished, even in the region of Shahrisabz.

Yurma is buttonhole stitch “in a chain.” It is done by hand with a needle or by means of a small iron hook (bigiz). Fabric embroidered with a hook is stretched onto a tambour (chambarak) positioned vertically or inclined slightly backwards. The thread is held in the left hand, lower on the fabric, while the hook is inserted above it. As soon as the hook is poked down to the underside of the fabric, the thread is placed on the hook with the left hand and the resulting loop is pulled through to the front. The next loop is produced beside it in the same way, and so on. The sewing can be done vertically, either “towards oneself” or “away from oneself,” or horizontally from left the right. The stitch is never sewn right to left.

Yurma can be executed with a needle, but only in one direction, “towards oneself.” The threaded needle is brought to the front side of the fabric; then, with the thread secured under the thumb of the left hand, the needle is inserted through the same hole, moved down a distance of 3-4 threads along the underside of the fabric, and then brought back to the front. The thread has to stay below the needle on the fabric. Each new stitch starts by inserting the needle in the hole made by the last one (plate 12).





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Yurma is used both as a fill-in stitch for an entire motif, and for narrowly specific purposes: for contour lines surrounding major motifs, for all sorts of thin lines – small stems joining flowers and leaves to the main branch, the tips of slender plant tendrils, etc.

Yurma is used on all kinds of embroideries, large and small.

Nowadays, large-scale pieces are generally embroidered using popur stitch – the same buttonhole stitch as yurma, but done with a sewing machine.

## **STITCHES USED FOR DECORATIVE FINISH**

The best-known decorative stitches are yurma, described above, ilmak, chamak, bakhya, and others.

Ilmak is a buttonhole stitch executed only with a needle. There are two kinds: (a) yaktarafa “single-sided” and (b) dutarafa “double-sided.”

Yaktarafa ilmak has loops on one side only; dutarafa ilmak has them on both sides.

Yaktarafa ilmak is sewn horizontally from left to right. First, the threaded needle is pulled through to the front side of the fabric, then inserted vertically downwards, the thread being secured under the left thumb. At the moment the needle is brought up again, the thread is released, making sure it stays below the needle – thus producing a small loop (plate 13). There is a second variant of this

stitch. Its method of execution is the same; the difference is that the vertical thread is positioned at an angle. In this case the needle is inserted a little further forward (to the right) and brought back up a little further back (to the left). If vertical, the stitch may only be executed from top to bottom, i.e., “towards oneself” (plate 14).

The double-sided buttonhole stitch dutarafa ilmak may be done in two ways. The first way follows the principle of the single-sided buttonhole stitch. After stitching a line through to the end, the fabric is rotated 180 degrees and sewn in the opposite direction using the same single-sided buttonhole stitches, passing the needle between the vertical threads of the first row. The result is a band of stitches with loops on both sides (plate 15). Like yaktarafa ilmak, dutarafa ilmak is sewn horizontally from left to right.

The second method of execution is different. Here the sewing is only done in a vertical direction, “towards oneself.” The threaded needle is pulled through to the front side of the fabric, then inserted to the right, then pulled up again on the left, all on one horizontal line. The thread, held down and moved slightly back by the left thumb, must stay below the needle. This produces the first (still only a single-sided) loop. Next, the needle is reinserted on the right and brought up horizontally on the left. However, in making this second (and all subsequent) holes on the right, the needle is inserted above the vertical thread – which is kept slightly loose – and inside the last loop. This is what produces a loop on the right. When the needle is pulled through to the front on the left, the vertical thread stays above it; the loop on the left side is produced by the thread



secured under the thumb, which stays below the thread when it is brought up (plate 16). Whichever technique is used, short parallel lines (either straight or slanted) are produced on the reverse side of the fabric.

Single-sided *ilmak*, particularly with a slanted vertical thread (plate 14), serves to make the edges of leaf ornaments done in *basma*. Double-sided *ilmak* is used exclusively to embroider the strips (*obá* or *suv*) separating the border from the central field and from the edges of the fabric. In Uzbek embroideries, fabrics' edges are hemmed or decoratively trimmed with many different kinds of braid.

The *chamak* or *khunari* stitch is known to Russian embroideresses under the name *kozlik* "goat" [herringbone stitch – trans.] *Chamak* is sewn from left to right, and executed in two sets of slanting parallel lines, the ends of which cross. To get in position for the next line, the threaded needle is inserted, passed horizontally along the underside of the fabric, and brought up a few thread widths to the left. This back-stitch move is done alternately along the upper parallel (setting up a line slanting top-down) and the lower parallel (setting up a line slanting bottom-up); each line crosses the one sewn before it. The thread must always be kept above the needle (plate 17).

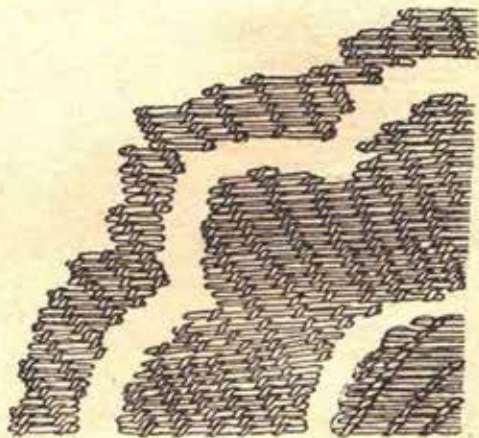
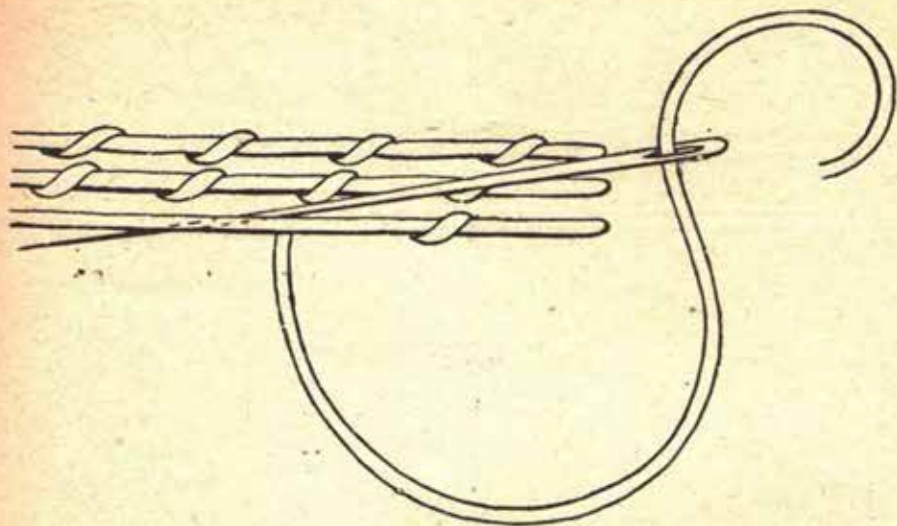
*Chamak* is used primarily for small embroideries. It is found in all regions of Uzbekistan.

*Bakhya* is an ordinary backstitch, previously executed by hand but nowadays with a sewing machine. *Bakhya* is common throughout Uzbekistan and used for the most part to decorate clothing.

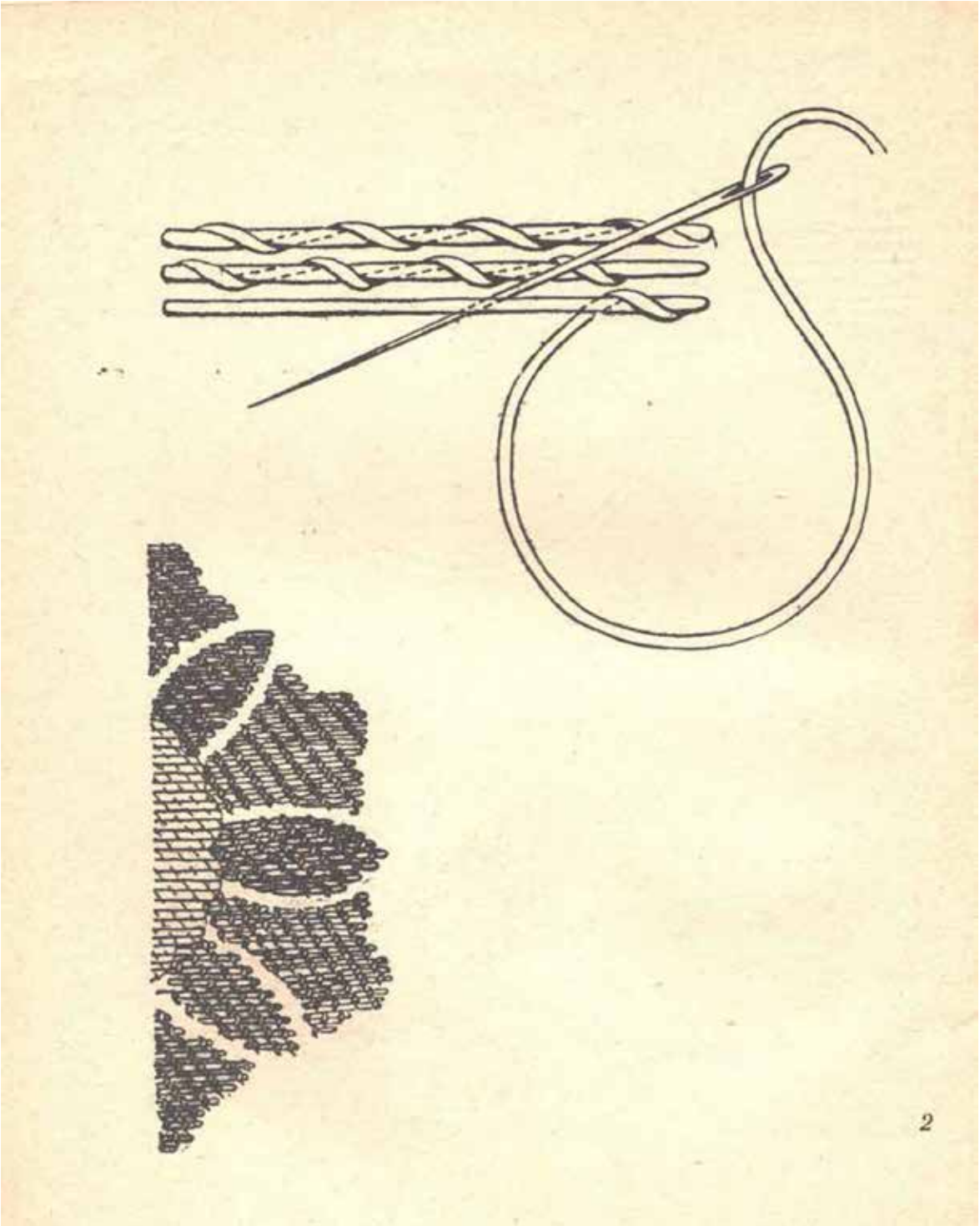
Some stitches employed in Uzbek embroidery art are also used by peoples of different ethnicities, such as *khomduzi*, *terma iroki*, *chamak*, *bakhya*, and the simpler kinds of *urma*. On the other hand, *basma* in all its forms and certain types of *urma* and *iroki* are unique. They are found almost exclusively among the embroidery techniques of Uzbeks and Tajiks. The rich texture created by these stitches beautifully emphasizes the precision and sheer scale of the patterns.

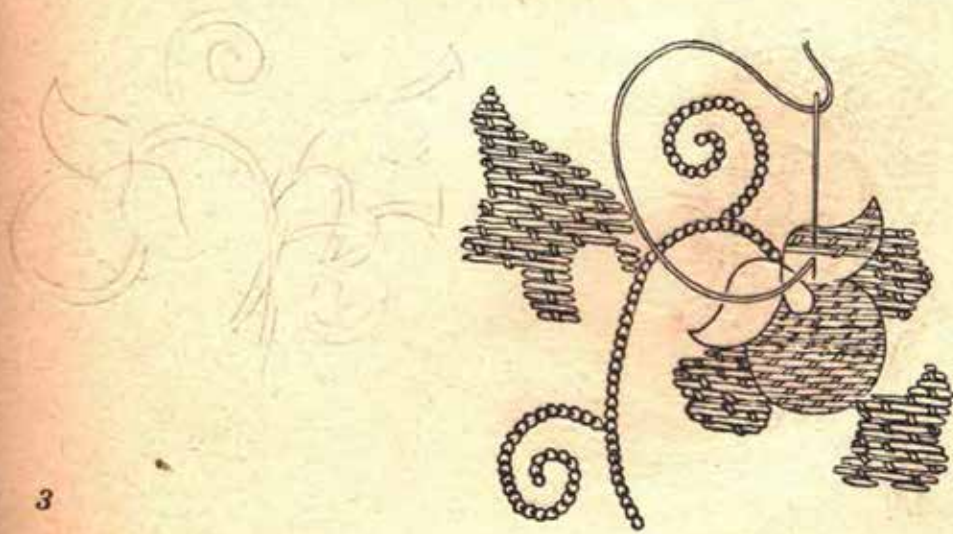
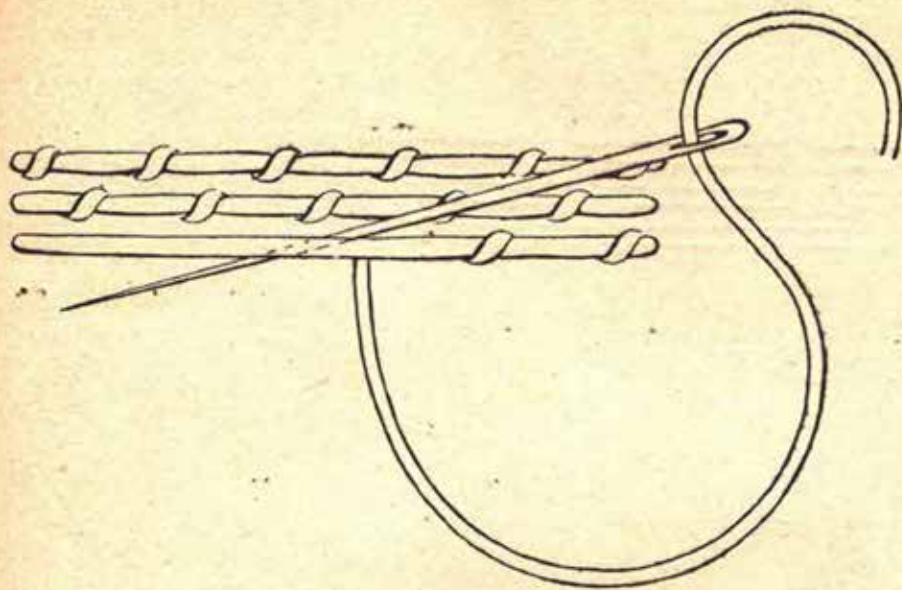
The artistic achievements represented by these stitches, tested by practice over a thousand years, should be incorporated into the embroidery art of our times.

## PLATES



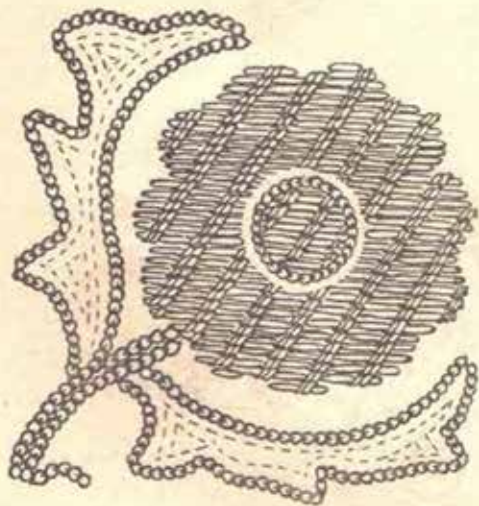
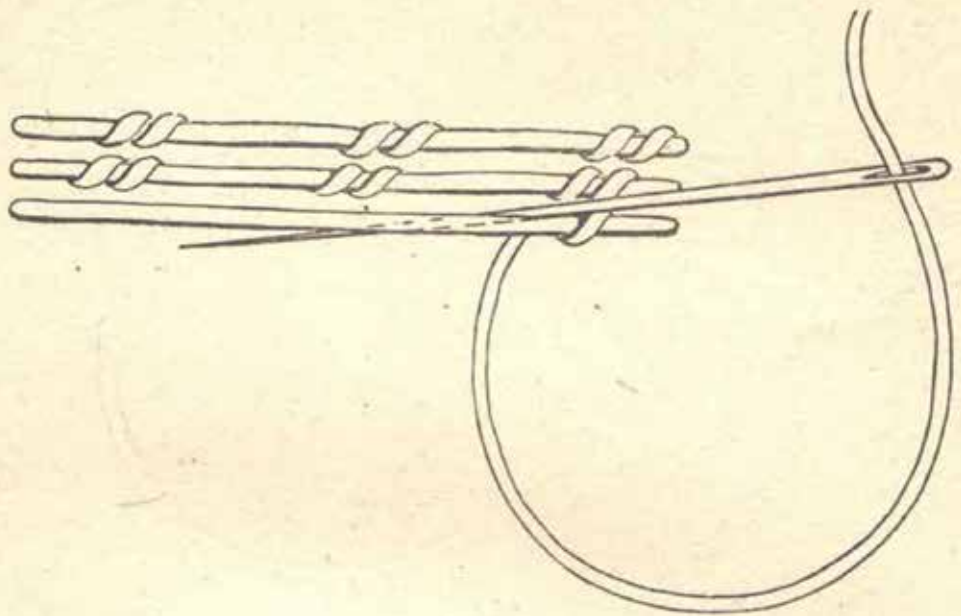
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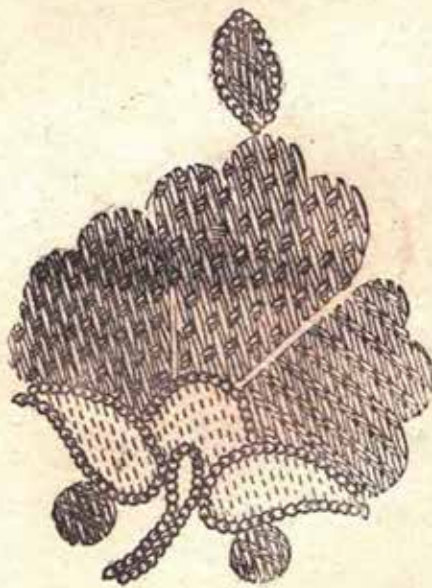
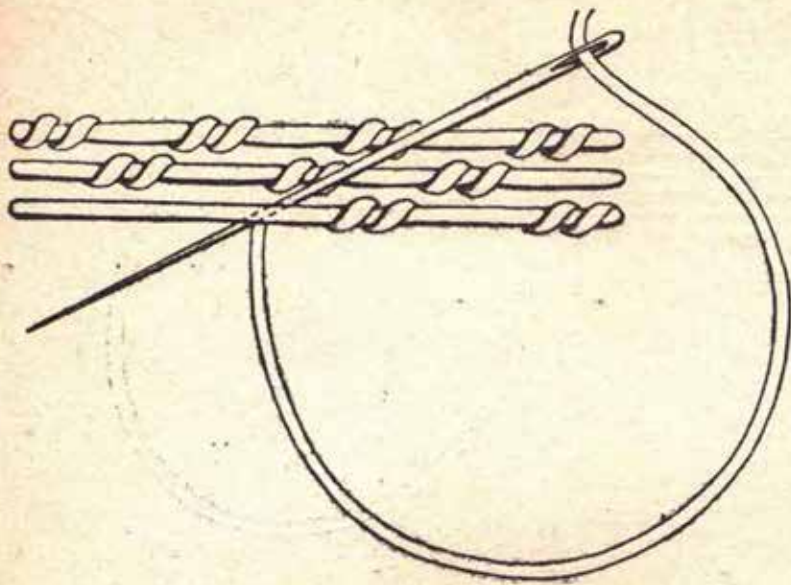


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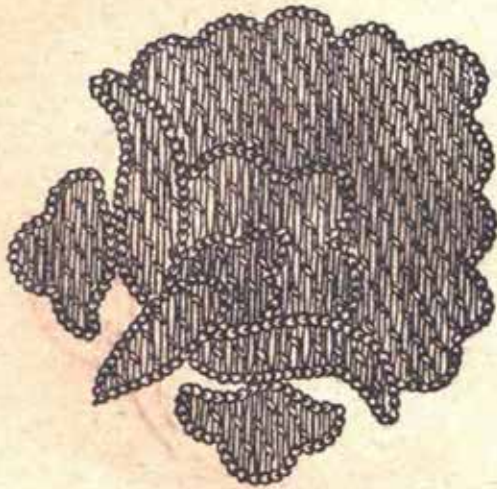
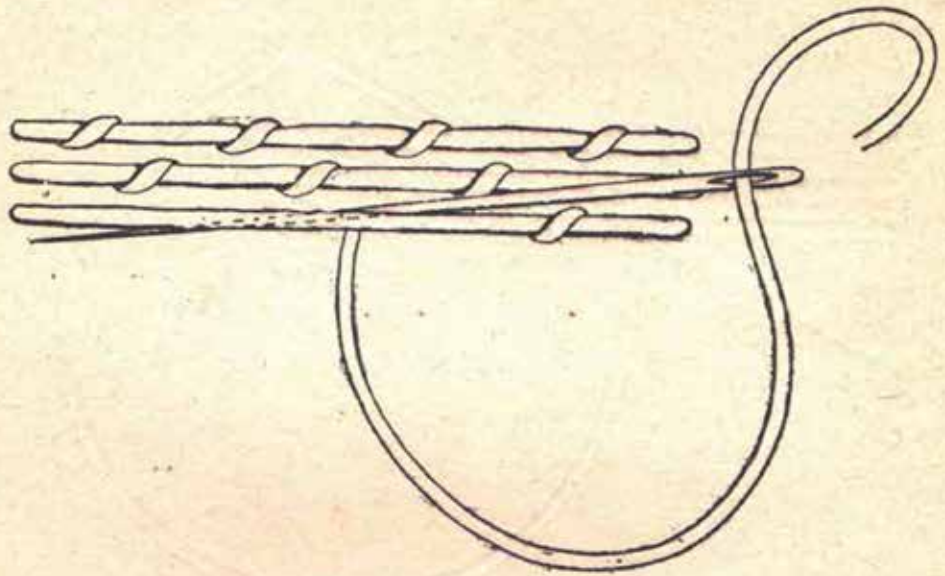


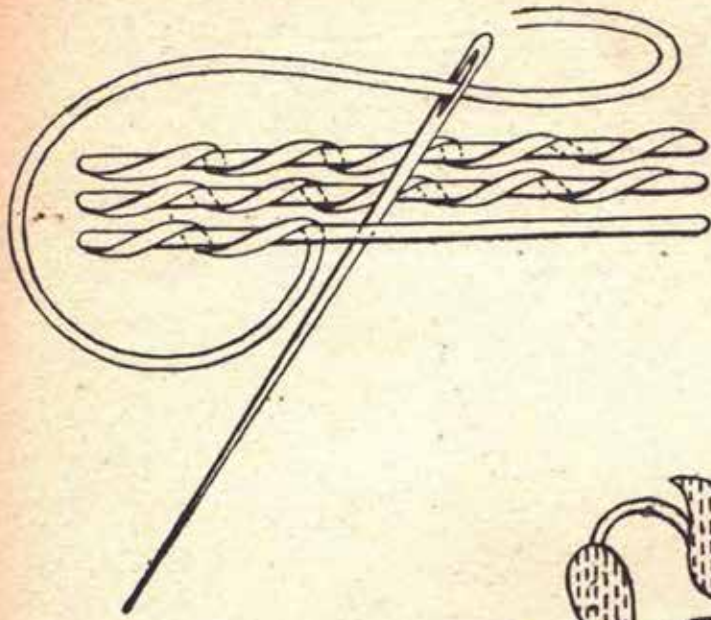






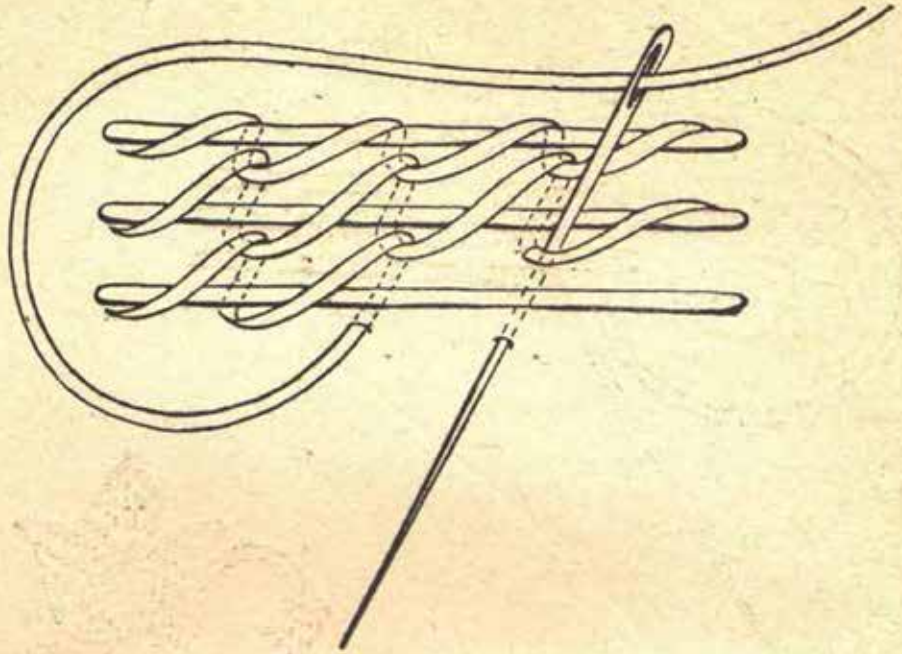
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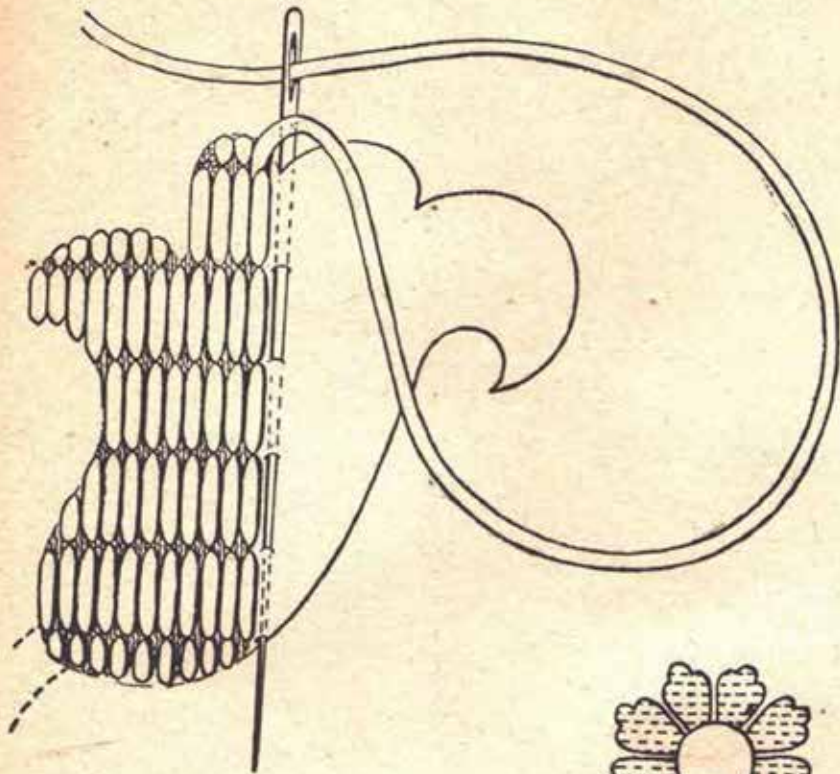




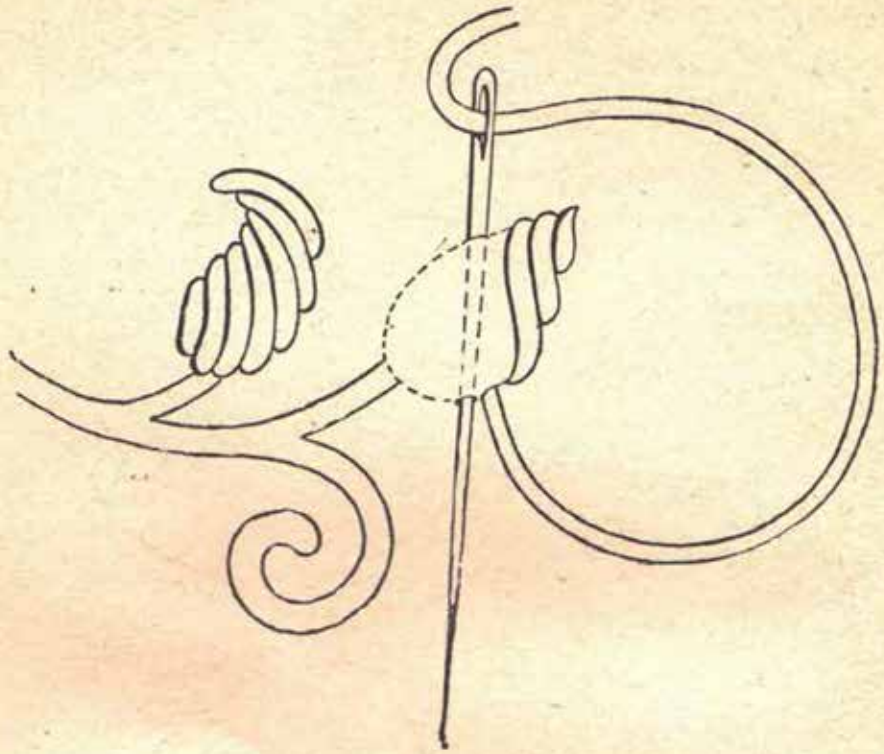
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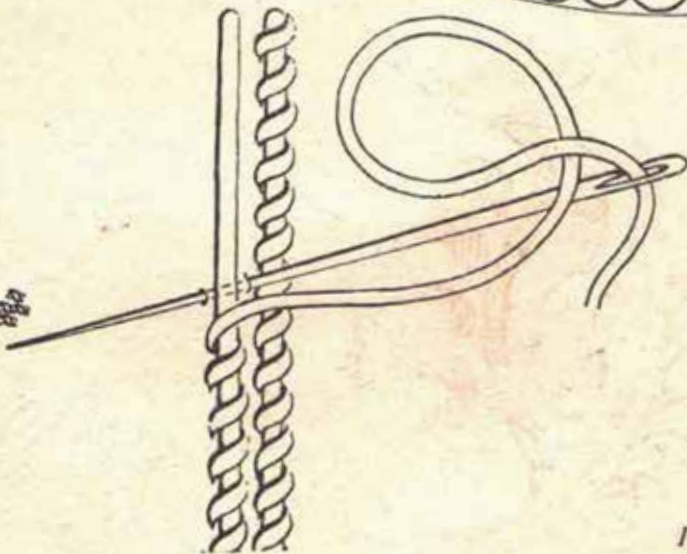
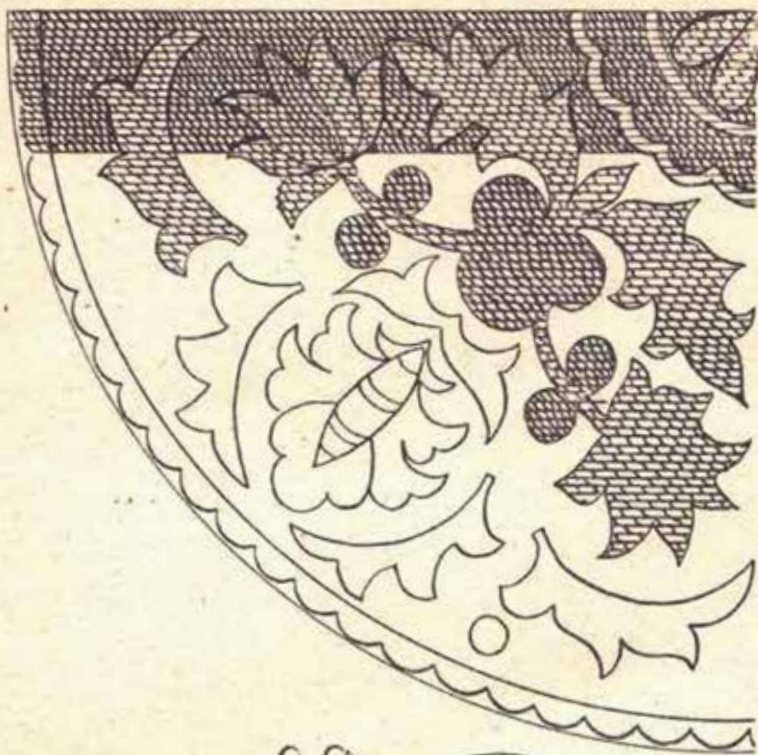
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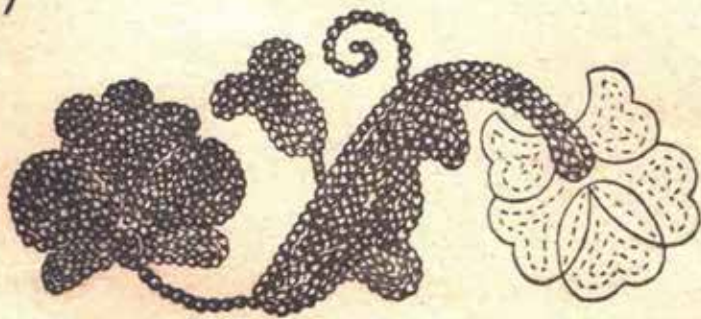
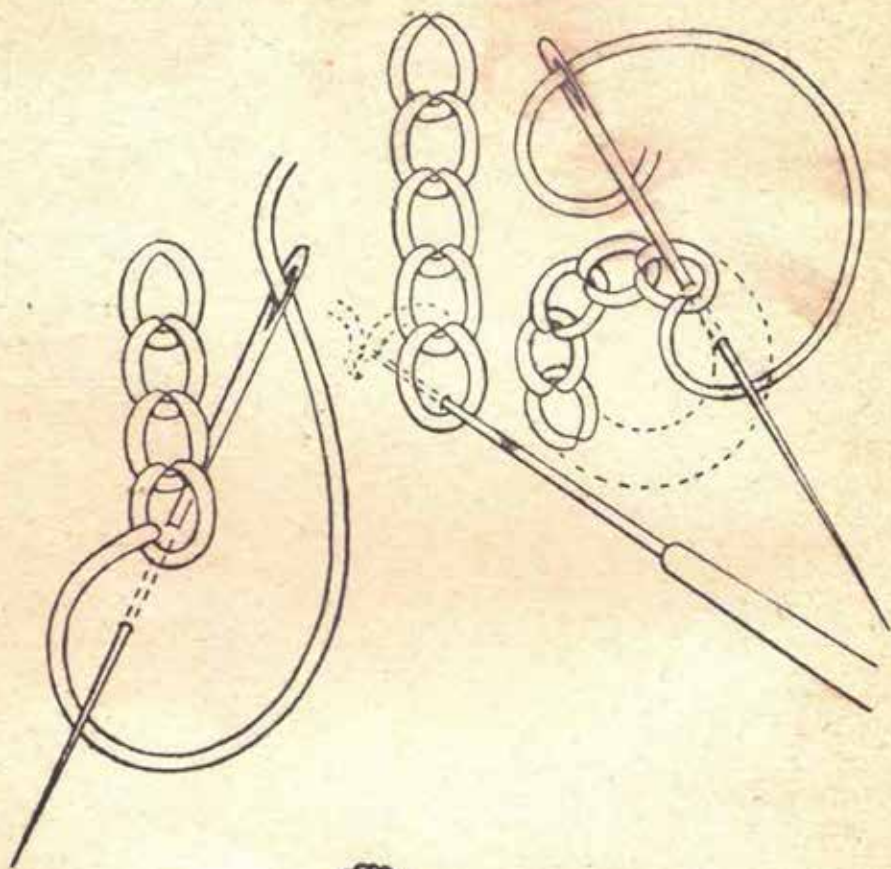
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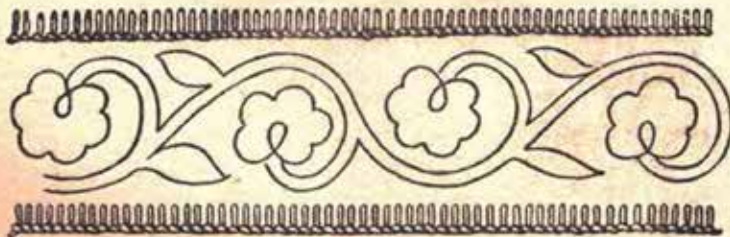
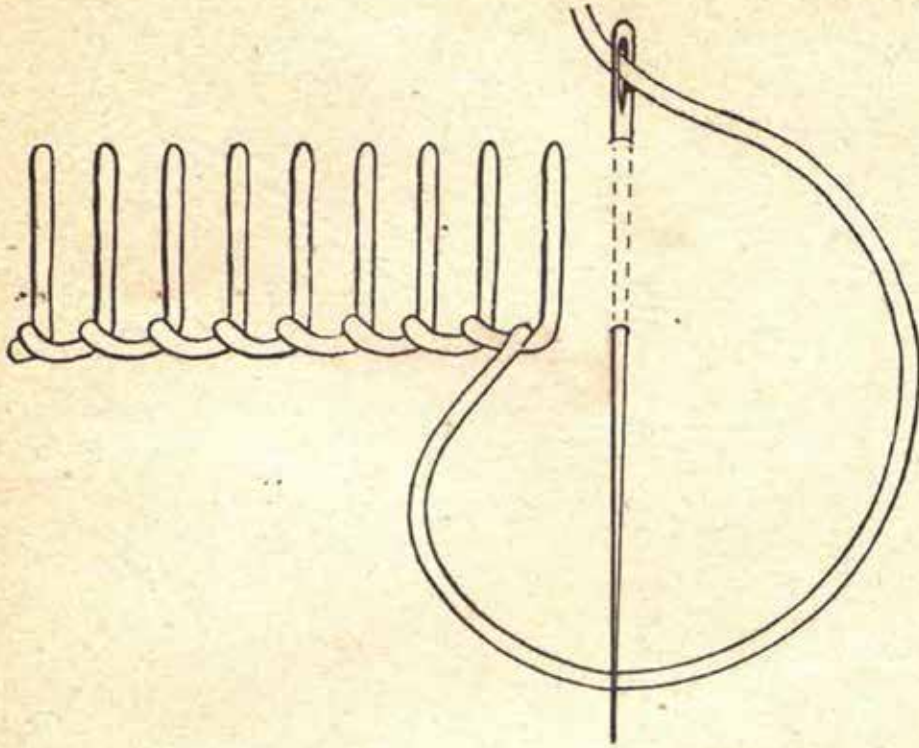




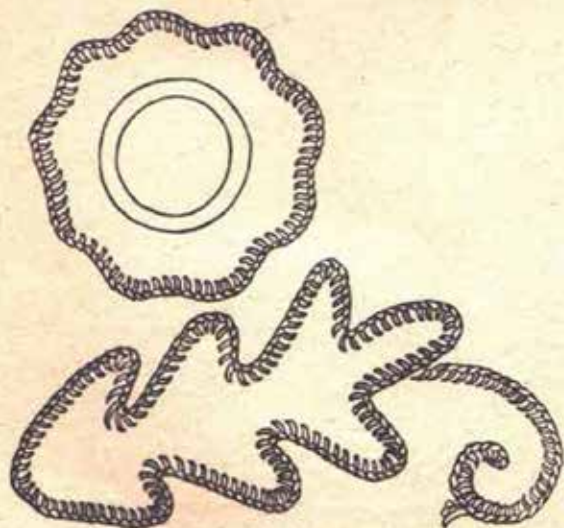
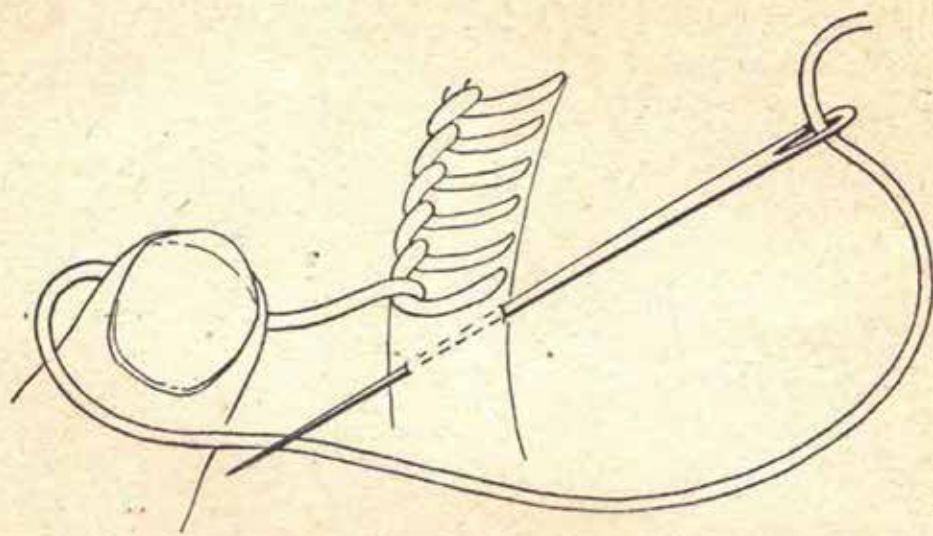
Р. Рассудова

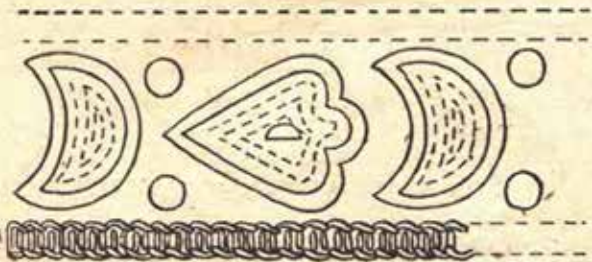
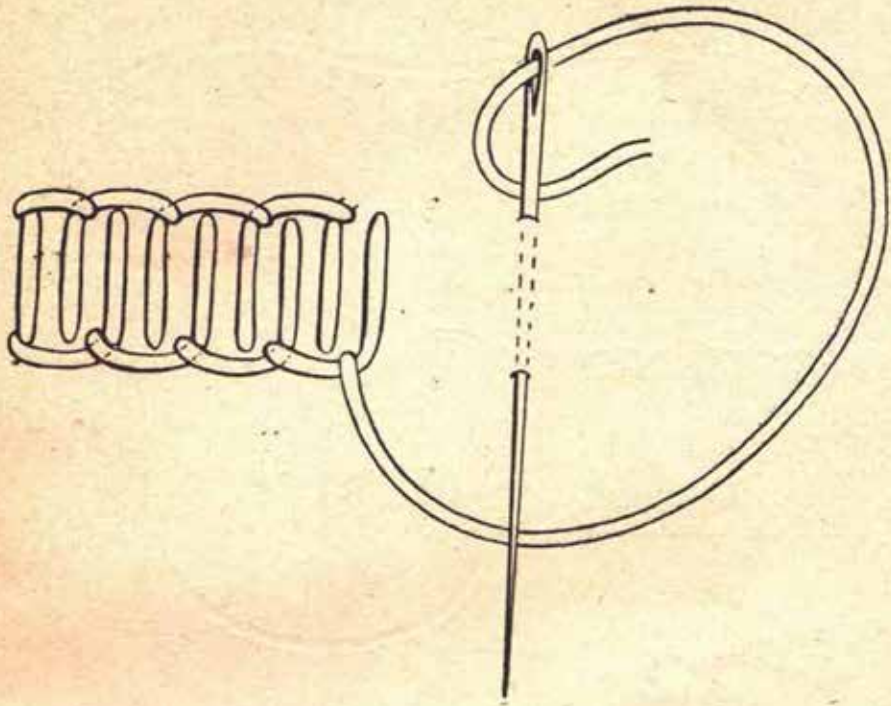






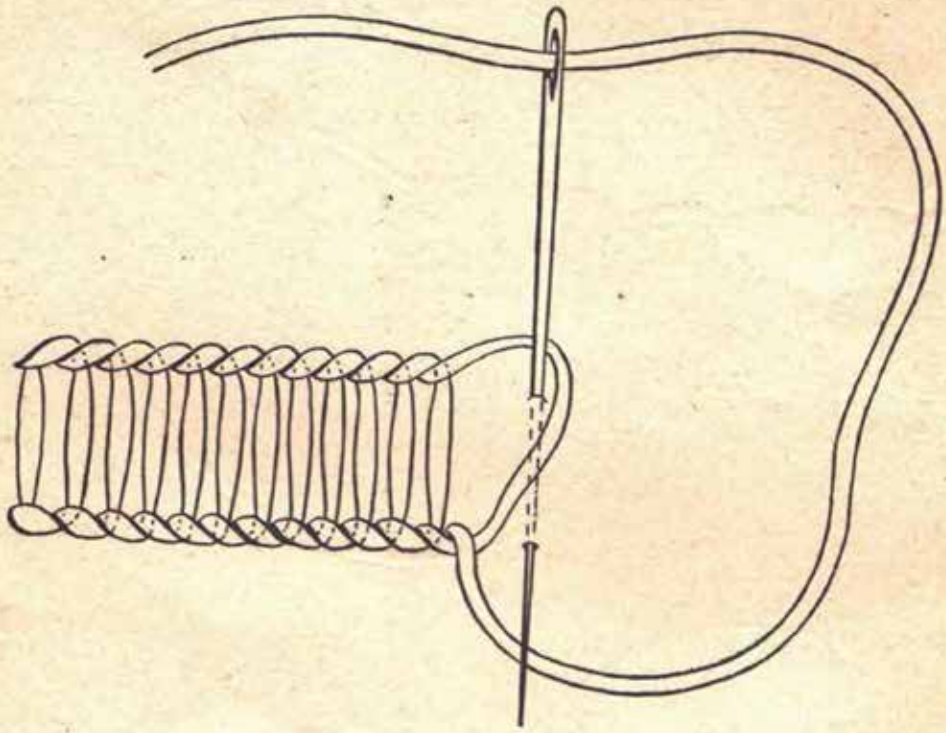
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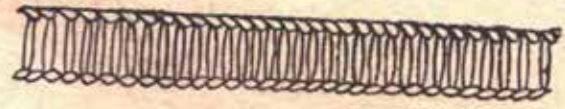


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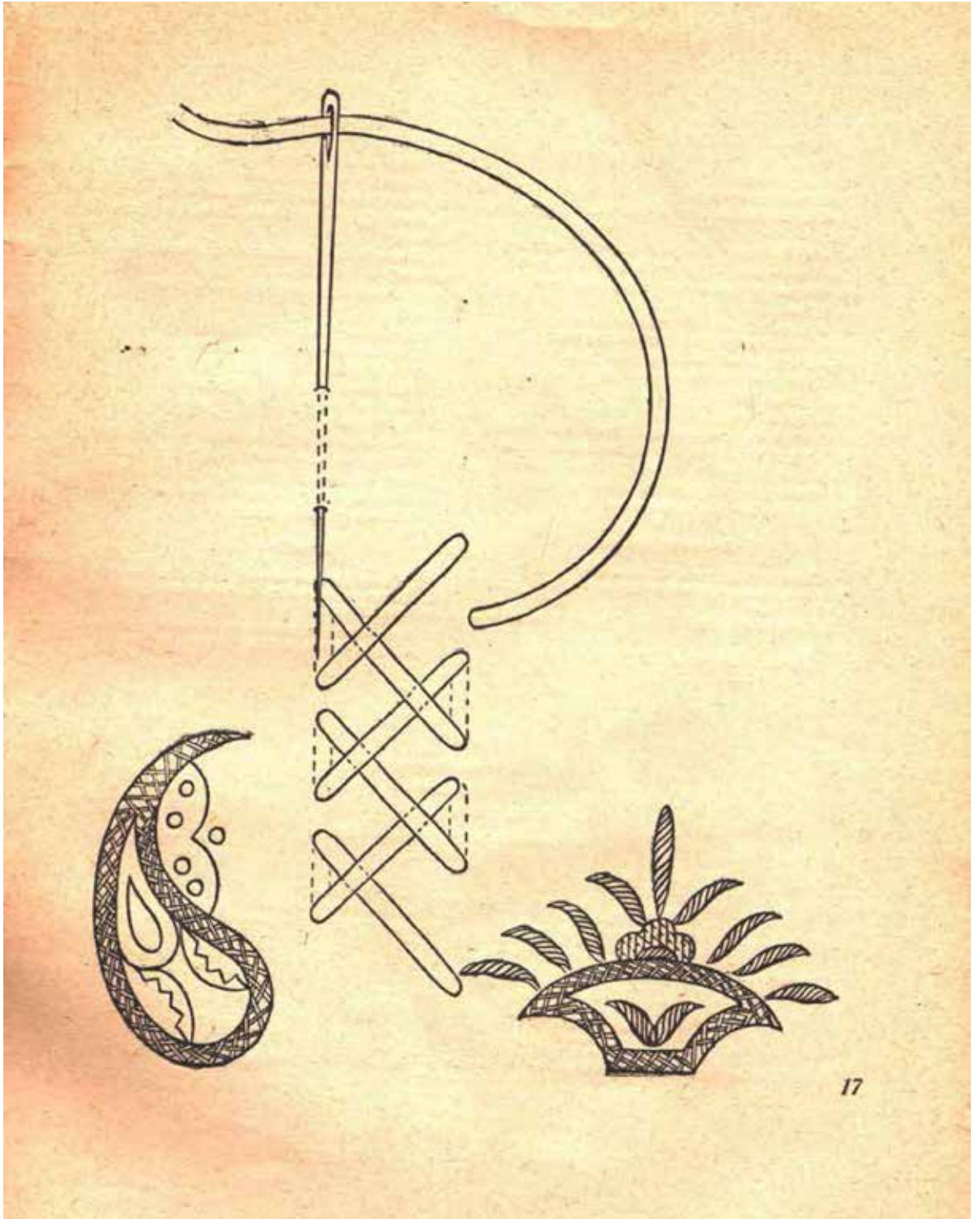




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## KEY TO PLATES

1. Ordinary basma stitch.
2. Basma variant – zakhmash daroz.
3. Basma variant – zakhmash lunda.
4. Double-stitched basma (first variant).
5. Double-stitched basma (second variant).
6. Basma variant – donacha or ziraduzi.
7. Kanda-khayol stitch (first variant).
8. Kanda-khayol stitch (second variant).
9. Chinda-khayol or duruya stitch.
10. Khomduzi or khomipak stitch.
11. Iroki stitch.
12. Yurma stitch.
13. Ilmak yaktarafa stitch (first variant).
14. Ilmak yaktarafa stitch (second variant).
15. Ilmak dutarafa stitch (first variant).
16. Ilmak dutarafa stitch (second variant).
17. Chamak or khunari stitch.

## Color plates

- I. Samarkand embroidery, basma stitch.
- II. Detail of Samarkand embroidery – border pattern, basma stitch.
- III. Bukhara embroidery, basma and yurma stitches.
- IV. Shahrisabz embroidery, yurma stitch.

R. Rassudova  
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