



# *Blackwork Journey Blog*

July 2024

## Explore Croatia



### June – July Exploring textiles in Croatia.

I recently travelled to Croatia for a holiday and to research embroidery in the areas that I was visiting, Zadar, Sibenik, Split and Dubrovnik, all bordering the Adriatic sea.



I found that there are three main types of textile handwork that they traditionally make, namely Croatian embroidery (**Vež**) lacemaking (**Cipka**) and crochet (**Heklanje**).

Each type has its own technique some of which are practised throughout Europe such as cross stitch, whereas some are specific to particular regions and towns.

Many families have treasured heirlooms passed down through the generations, but given the country's troubled history before gaining independence, this has resulted in a mixture of patterns and designs linking the past to the present. Together, they are part of their cultural heritage and whilst many forms of handicrafts are in decline, it is still possible to find craftsmen and women producing traditional handicrafts, not just for the tourist market, but to preserve their culture for the future.

Vež or Croatian embroidery, is found on traditional costumes for men, women and children, as well as on domestic items such as tablecloths and linens. The predominant thread colour is often red, with combinations of white, blue, gold, black, green or sometimes brown, embroidered onto a white or off-white background fabric.

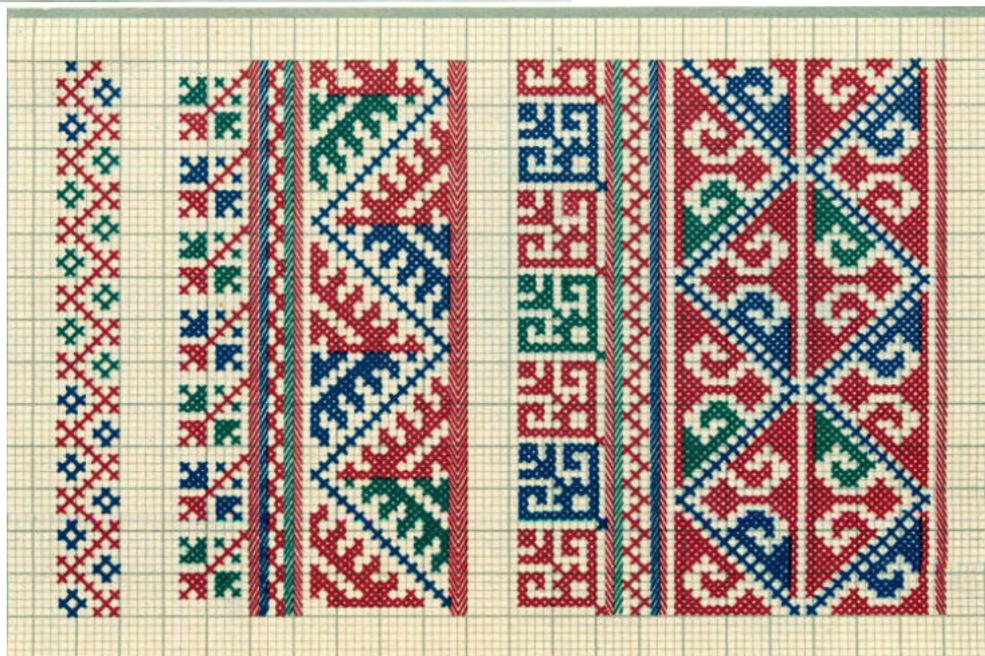


Embroidery samples, Vrlika, Croatia (former Yugoslavia), circa 1930-1937 - Payne (Blanche) Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection - University of Washington Digital Collections

<http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/search/order/digital>

These traditional cross stitch designs are found in many of the Eastern European countries and are wonderful patterns to recreate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They would have been used on the fronts, sleeves and borders on costumes.

Could you use these designs to create a small sampler?



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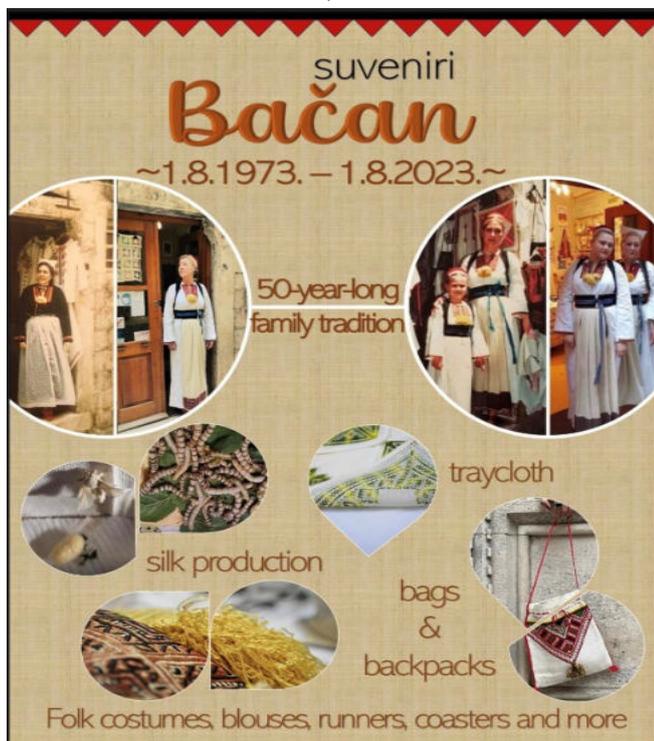
I was particularly interested in exploring the silk embroidery (**Poprsnica**) and woven textile patterns from the Konavle region of Croatia.

Traditionally, women embroidered for their families, often using hand-dyed silk thread and sometimes even breeding their own silkworms! In Konavle, cultivating silkworms dates back to the 15th century. Unlike most traditional folk embroidery, it is not worked in cross stitch but features symmetric and geometric patterns primarily in red, black and dark green with yellow/golden borders stitched in silk thread.

Today, cotton and other materials are also used, offering a variety of textures and colours. The colourful stitches are pulled through the background fabric with a special needle, using different techniques to create intricate designs. I purchased some evenweave fabric to recreate some traditional patterns from the Vrlika area from 1937. I also want to stitch some patterns from the Dubrovnik area. The fabric is softer and more open than the usual evenweave fabric and the embroidery is worked in the hand rather than using a frame. I have yet to determine the 'count' of the fabric, but the patterns could be worked in 28 count evenweave using cotton.

Pérle No. 12. Variegated threads, silk or cotton Pérle were used for most of the modern pieces I saw and purchased. I also saw traditional patterns worked in hessian with thicker threads which was unusual and rather coarse.

In the old town of Dubrovnik I found a small shop called Bačan, which sells decorative embroidery in a variety of sizes and designs, all inspired by traditional Croatian folk costumes. The store is run by a husband-and-wife team, with the wife handcrafting all the items sold in the store. (Address: Prijeko ul. 6, 20000, Dubrovnik, Croatia)



*Ane and Luka 52 years ago, founders of Bačan*

I spent a long time in the store talking to the husband about the history of the shop which was inherited from Ana and Lika over 50 years ago. It has passed down through the family and they still raise silkworms, create their own threads, and continue creating traditional embroideries.



*Grandmother, mother and daughter Lena Bacan Janjalija and Lucija Janjalija 30 years apart still wearing the traditional costume of the area showing the tkanica.*

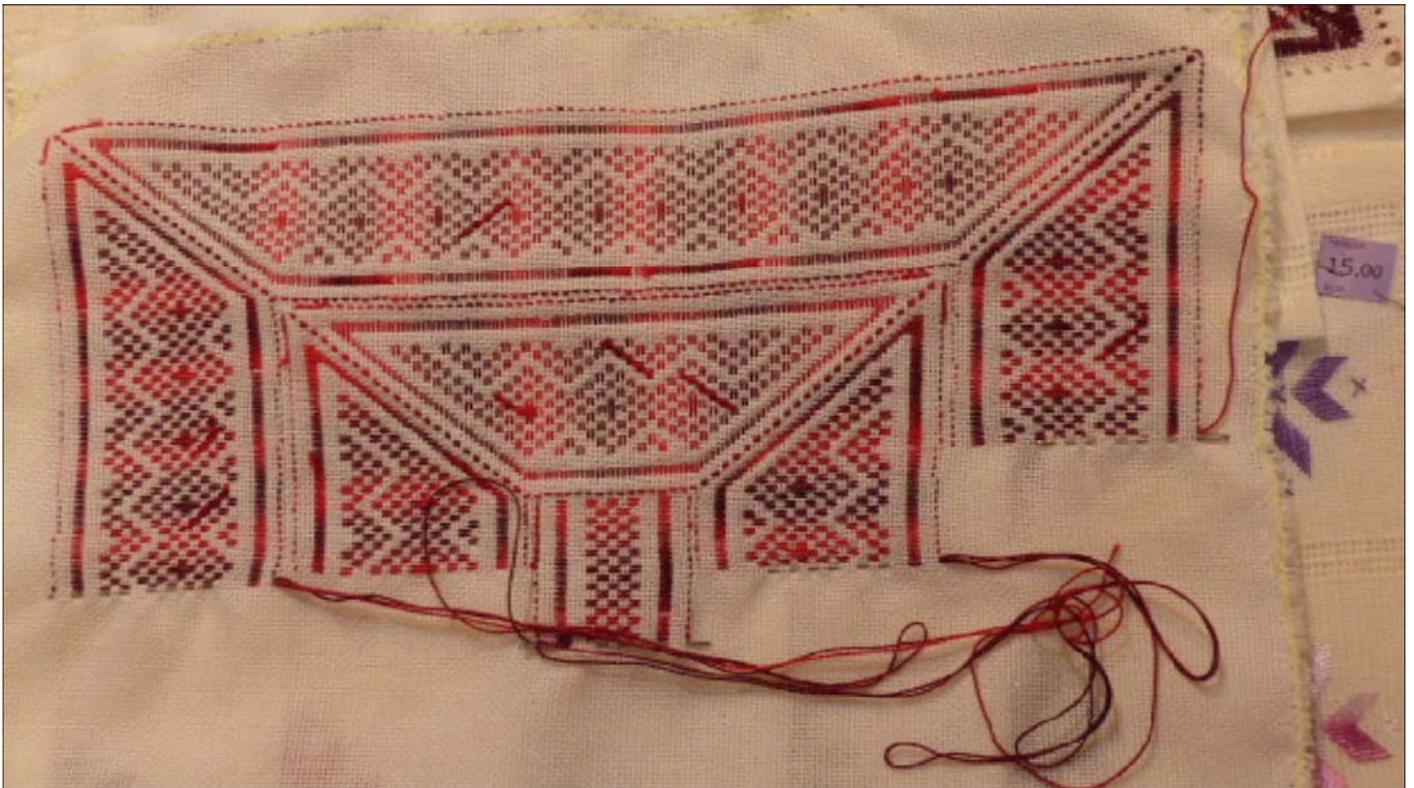
**Tkanica.** This is a woven belt worn traditionally by both men and women as part for their folk dress. *Tkanica* comes from the word *tkati* (to weave). The most common material for *tkanica* was wool but other types of fabric also be used. In Konavle, fine silk embroidery pictured above, features symmetrical designs usually in red, black, and dark green colours with golden borders. It decorates the two front pieces of a white blouse, and the costume is accented with gold filigree jewellery and golden tassels.

I photographed the embroideries and work in progress and whilst most of the small embroideries are sold to the tourists, the larger pieces are works of art and used for table linen, folk costumes etc! Embroidery plays an important part on national costume and is worn for occasions during the year and the shop creates these special pieces. Just as each region across Croatia has its own use of technique, colour and design, each of the different geometric or floral patterns of Vez embroidery has its own name and symbolic meaning.

Unusually the embroidery is worked from the back with the pattern appearing on the front.



*Front of the design. Stitches are worked in straight stitches horizontally across the fabric using one or more strands of floss.*



*The embroidery is embroidered from the back. All the ends are woven in as the piece is worked.*



*Most of the finished pieces have drawn thread work borders worked in white floss.*



*Coasters, mats, bags designed for the tourist market. Tourism is one of the most important occupations in Croatia.*





*Fabrics range from soft white evenweave to hessian and linen!*



However, I could not leave without buying at least one beautiful piece of embroidery from Bačan. In many respects the patterns reminded me of traditional Japanese Kogin where the patterns are worked horizontally across the fabric using line stitches.

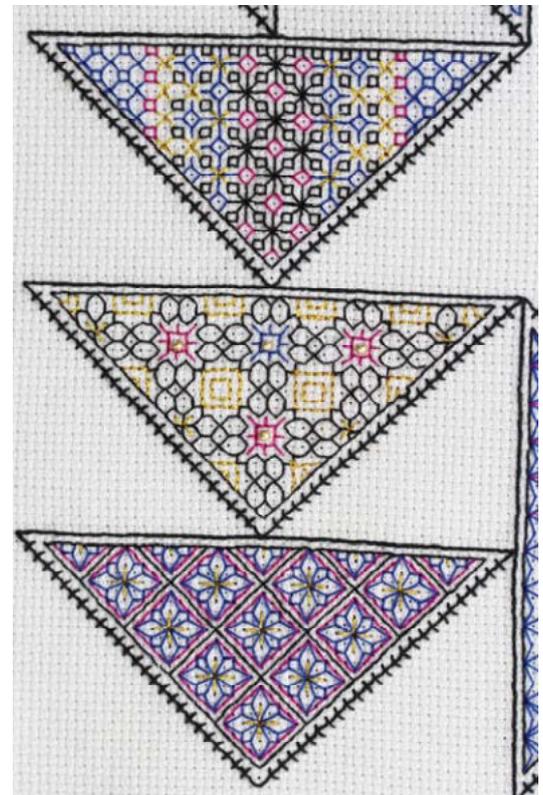
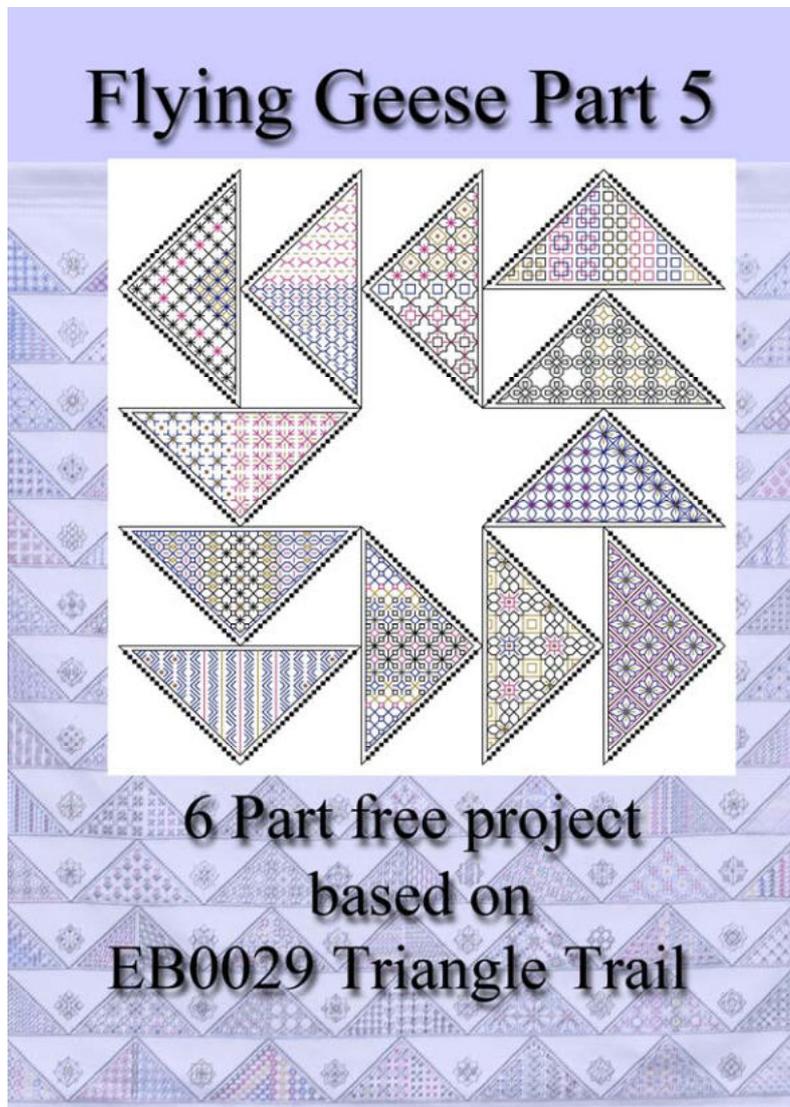
If you wish to learn more about the embroidery in the Dubrovnik area just half an hour drive from the congested streets of Dubrovnik is the tranquil village of Čilipi and the Konavle Valley Museum.

There is also an interesting article online where the curator Antonia Rushkovic Radonic gives a rich interpretation of the region's hand embroidery and its cultural and historical significance. She also shares her personal experience of living through the Croatia War of Independence

<https://www.peopleareculture.com/hand-embroidery-croatia/>  
Unique Hand Embroidery Traditions Tell Story of Croatia's Konavle Valley.

**Free Project for readers**

The next instalment of FR0196 Flying Geese Part 5 has been added to “Freebies” this month with three more triangles.



This completes the twelve triangles. In August, the motifs and border will be added to complete the design.

Please post pictures of your work in progress on the Facebook group ‘Box of Delights’ for all our readers to enjoy.



The Facebook Sal is also progressing well with 11 parts added so far and many new members have joined “Box of Delights” to work on the design.



*'Islamic Inspiration' workshop with members of the Aylesbury Vale Stitchers  
Teaching is always enjoyable especially when working with such dedicated and enthusiastic groups*

I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.

If you have queries, please contact:  
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Happy stitching,

*Liz*