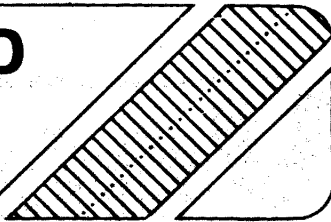


# THE RIGID HEDDLE



by Dianne Swanson

## Soumak—An Early Ethnic Rug-Making Technique

Soumak and Shemakha are two weaving centers in Asia Minor where the embellishing technique generally called soumak originated. Soumak has the flat appearance of tapestry weaves but it is actually closely related to the Ghiordes (rya) knot. Woven without making a deep pile, soumak is a wrapping of weft yarns over warp threads—either singly or in groups in any of several patterns. Closely packed rows of soumak can conceal the warp to produce a weft-face fabric. When rows of soumak are alternated with plain weave, a ribbed effect develops. It is like a stem stitch or overcast stitch in embroidery as it also can be used for outlining shapes. The stitch is always slanted. Rows worked back and forth produce an arrow or look of knitting. Rows always started from the same side slant in the same direction for a twill look. These characteristics are necessary to know in designing with soumak.

The soumak weft can be the only, or major weft; or it can be a supplementary or pattern weft with tabby between rows. For a durable, firm rug several rows of plain weave between the soumak rows is most practical—the tabby packs down in under the soumak rows and tends to raise them from the ground weave. The filler rows can be the same yarn, or finer, or even a different color. Soumak allows leeway in color, flat, or raised patterns.

Soumak can be taken around curves, pushed into molded contours, or woven in vertical stripes. It is called "soumak inlay" when a small area or raised band is woven within a flat weave. Soumak is generally woven with a closed shed.

### Some Types of Soumak

#### Oriental Soumak

Traditionally worked over 4 warps and back under 2, it may be worked on different proportions of warp, but always back under fewer than the number of warps forward.

#### Single Soumak or Swedish Tapestry

This soumak is worked forward under 2 warps, back over 1, etc. This gives a look like beads strung on the warp.

#### Greek Soumak

Greek is the most ornate of the knots. The weft is wrapped 3 or more times around each warp before moving on to the next one. As Greek soumak packs together, it gives a rather rippled effect.

Care must be taken with soumak to avoid distorting the vertical alignment of the warps, especially with long overshots of five or six warp threads. Measure your work often to make sure that you are not pulling in. Generously arc and bubble your tabby weft. However, you could also take advantage of this tendency for the warps to bunch together and create an open-work fabric. A lattice effect can be produced by staggering the warps to be wrapped in various rows.

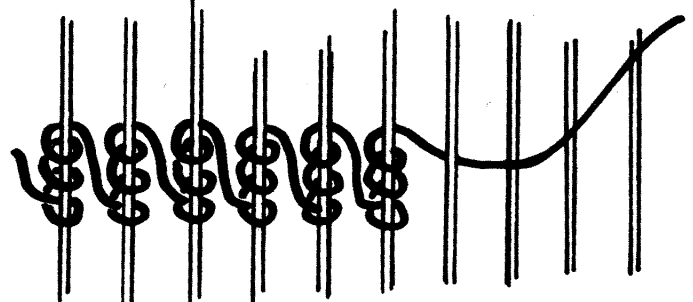
For further information, consult Weaving is Creative by Jean Wilson and Weaving, A Handbook for Fiber Craftsmen by Shirley Held.



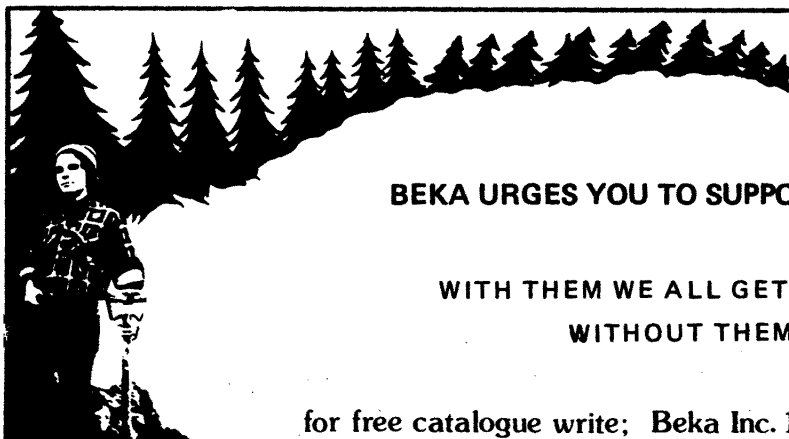
Oriental Soumak



Single Soumak



Greek Soumak



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