

13th Century Brocaded Tablet Woven Band



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Summary

This brocaded tablet woven band was woven using a 2ply wool/silk blend for the background weave and silver and gold embroidery thread for the brocaded weft. The embroidery thread replicated the silver and gold thread that was used in period. The pattern for the band was adapted from a tablet woven band on a relic bag found in Germany and dating to the 13th Century. The brocading is done in alternating silver and gold scrolling vine motif. The tie down points use two threads instead of the standard one thread tie down. I took approximately 74 hours to weave this relatively short band.

Documentation

History

Tablet weaving has a long history, as shown by a few examples. The earliest known tablet woven band is the "Rameses III" belt dated 1197 BC (Crockett, 11). Most scholars credit the Egyptians with developing tablet weaving. Tablet weaving spread north and east out of Egypt to Europe and Asia. Women's belts, woven on two-holed tablets and dating to the Bronze Age, were found in Borum Eshoj and Egtved in Denmark. Tablet weaving was used as a starting border in warp-weighted looms as early as the new Stone Age. Also, 6th and 7th century Anglo-Saxon belts were found in women's graves in Cambridge and Suffolk. A linen brocaded band made with 52 tablets was found in the Oseberg ship find that dates to 850 AD. Viking Era (10th and 11th Centuries) bands range in complexity from threaded-in patterns to brocaded silk. 12th Century bands from the Middle East were primarily double-faced and brocaded in silk and linen. Finally, 13th Century and later bands found in Europe were often silk with gold and silver brocading.

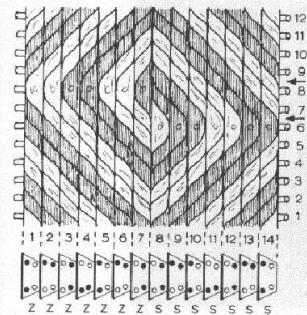
Materials

Tablet weaving is an art form that can be accomplished with very few tools. All you really need are a few cards, some yarn, and a method to attach the warp threads at each end.

Common Weaving Techniques

Threaded-in Technique: The pattern is created by how the warp is threaded in the cards, along with the turning sequence. This is shown in the example above on reading pattern drafts. This is the most basic technique and a good place to start. This technique can produce very complicated and beautiful repeating patterns with relatively little skill or effort required.

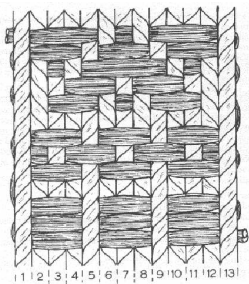
Egyptian Diagonals: The cards are all threaded with two dark and two light colors. The cards are then stepped. Changing the turning direction of individual cards in the weaving creates the patterns. An example from Collingwood, page 107, is shown here.



Double Face Technique: The cards are threaded using two colors, two threads of each color per card. The pattern is created by turning individual cards to bring the color of choice forward, much as a mosaic is made up of many small bits of color. The continuous warping method is often used in double-faced weaving. The cards are alternately threaded S and Z.

Brocaded: This is the most difficult and time-consuming technique and is discussed in detail below.

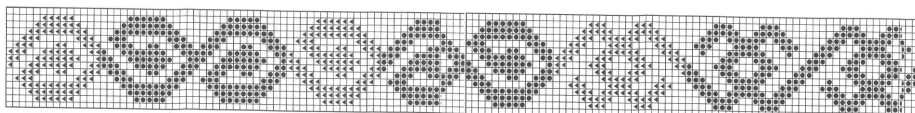
Brocaded Tablet Weaving



For brocaded weaving, the cards are usually all threaded with one background color alternating with the S and Z threading direction. The pattern is created by laying in a second weft on top of the band and picking up individual threads to create tie down points. The picture above shows an example of brocade, from Collingwood page 240. In this picture, the darker thread is the brocade thread. The brocade thread is often doubled to give a more solid look, such as shown in the drawing, or it can be a heavier yarn than the warp and weft. Brocading looks best when the background colors contrast well with the brocade color. Brocading was done mostly for the very wealthy or clergy in the middle ages, because brocading is extremely time-consuming even for an experienced weaver. Numerous religious artifacts have been found with brocaded tablet woven pieces.

Brocaded tablet weaving was often used as trim decorating the sides of bursa pouches or reliquary pouches (Spies p34). One example of brocaded tablet weaving decorating a reliquary pouch is an eleventh century silk bag with brocaded tablet woven bands edging each side.

I used the pattern from a tablet woven band on a relic bag found in Germany and dating to the 13th century, which is shown below. The original band was attached to the top and sides of a tapestry-woven relic bag patterned with several heraldic motifs. The bag is thought to originate in France. The brocaded tablet woven band on the relic bag is .5 cm wide, 10 cm long and has a background warp from a yellow orange silk. The brocading is done in alternating gold and silver thread. The artifact is brocaded in 2 gold and 1 silver in a scrolling vine motif with tie downs under two threads.



Procedures and Materials

Materials Used:

Blue Silk/wool blend yarn (In the 10th -16th century silk/wool blends were not unknown.)

15 Tablet weaving cards Cardboard is common today; in period they were made from bone, horn, antler, leather, wood, or cardboard

Silver embroidery thread (I can not afford true silver thread, which is silver wire beaten flat wrapped around a silk core, therefore I substituted silver embroidery thread.)

Gold embroidery thread (See above comment for gold thread.)

Inkle Loom (The looms used between the 10th and 16th centuries were a free standing loom as pictured earlier in this document similar to the

Oseberg loom. I chose to use an inkle loom because of its portability and size.)

Reading the Pattern Draft

Just as in all other forms of tablet weaving, you first have to understand how to read the pattern draft in order to weave. A brocaded pattern draft looks very much like any other tablet weaving draft. The difference is that the draft shows your tie down points (also known as your pick up threads). The pattern does refer to how you turn the tablets or how you thread them. Most brocaded pieces have the tablets alternately S and Z threaded. The design in brocaded weaving is obtained from your supplemental weft, not the warp threads in the tablets. The warp and weft provide your background for the brocading.

The brocaded pattern draft is read much like a cross-stitch pattern. The grid shows the brocaded pattern, which will be the color of your brocade thread, and the tie-down points, which will be the color of your warp threads. Unlike cross-stitch, the grid squares do not represent true squares, but will result in a pattern that is slightly rectangular. In this pattern draft the shaded grids indicate the brocaded pattern. Therefore when you weave a brocaded row, you count the threads and pick up the white points. The brocaded weft will pass under the pick up threads and over the other threads forming the pattern.

When you pick up your threads in brocading, you can pick up either one or two adjacent threads, depending on the desired effect of the pattern. In this case I picked up two threads. Picking up two adjacent threads will produce a block look, similar in appearance to modern counted cross stitching, and picking up one thread will produce a narrower look to the tie down points and show more brocade thread. This is easier to see in the picture below; the blue band shown below uses two pick up threads and the purple band shown below uses only one pick up thread.



I used a blue background weave instead of the orange as indicated in the artifact because I decided the blue background would better highlight the beauty of the brocading. I deviated from the artifact by alternating silver and gold thereby making the silver thread the dominant color in the band. I prefer silver to gold and think that the silver looks better on a blue background. I had to constantly change brocading weft on this band, since it alternated between silver and gold. I did not want to run the weft up the back of the band to the new starting point, which would waste the precious silver and gold thread by creating a series of long loose pieces on the back of the band. I instead wove the ends of the wefts in and out of the background weave on the back of the band to secure the ends. This created a series of raw ends visible on the back of the band. Very rarely is the back of a brocaded band displayed, therefore the appearance of the weft on the back is of little consequence.

How to Weave:

- 1. Set up the loom: Warp the loom with alternating S and Z threading for the number of tablets indicated in the pattern draft with your background weft.**
- 2. Set up your bobbins: One bobbin will have your background weft and one will have your supplemental or brocaded weft.**
- 3. Weave approximately one to two inches turning the cards continuously in one direction with your background weft, but without the brocade, to obtain the width of the woven piece.**

4. Start weaving the brocaded pattern:

- a. Pass the background weft.
 - b. Turn the cards 1/8 of a turn in the same direction you are weaving. The cards will be on end. This opens up a mini shed and separates the two threads that are on the top layer of the background shed.
 - c. Pick up the threads indicated by the pattern draft. I count from left to right. If you are left-handed you may find it easier to count from right to left. See the picture for placement of the pick-up stick. The pick-up threads are shown as heavier black threads in the picture.
 - d. Return the cards to their position before the 1/8 turn.
 - e. Bring the brocade weft, shown as a heavy shaded thread, up from the back of the band between the end two tablets. Passing the brocade *through* the end tablets would result in a bit of brocade thread showing along the edge, which most weavers do not like. By coming up *between* the outside two tablets you can avoid this.
 - f. Lift up the threads using the pick stick.
 - g. Pass the brocading weft under the pickup threads (picked up by the pick up stick).
 - h. Pass the brocade weft to the back (underside) of the band between the other end two tablets.
 - i. Turn the card 1/4 turn in the direction of weave.
 - j. Beat your weft into place.
 - k. Weave the next row.
1. Weave as many rows as desired. If you warp threads start to get excessively twisted, reverse the direction you are turning the tablets.
 2. End the band by weaving another inch or two of plain weave, without the brocade.

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