

Weaving of Narrow Wares -- An Overview

By Ginevra Lorenzo and Ciarán mac Ultáin

Here are some topics and resources to introduce SCAdians to weaving of narrow wares, both in period and in practice.

- Weaving Techniques
 - **Plain/tabby weave** (i.e. “inkle”) is warp-faced weaving, where the shed is created by manually raising or lowering the warp yarns, some of which are held in place by heddles, to pass the weft through.
 - **Pickup weaving** is similar to plain/tabby weave, but instead of simply alternating the sheds, the weaver manipulates the threads in the warp before each pass of the weft to create a pattern on the top of the band.
 - **Tablet/card weaving** is a weaving technique where tablets (or cards) are used to create the shed that the weft is passed through. The number of threads in each tablet determines the number of sheds.

- Historical Basis
 - Plain/tabby weave (i.e. “inkle”)
 - Modern (post-1900) resurgence in USA
 - Wider textiles seen in period; no extant narrow wares
 - Great for learning basics of how to weave, and can look “period”
 - Pickup weaving
 - Same as plain/tabby, but more detailed patterns
 - Can achieve appearance that looks identical to extant finds!
 - Great stepping stone for learning to brocade on tablet woven trim
 - Tablet/card weaving
 - Extant finds dating back to before 700 AD, and past 1600 in many areas
 - Examination of the twist of the fibers has identified many pieces
 - Finds of tablets, warped and being woven have been found whole

- Terms
 - **Loom:** An apparatus for making fabric by weaving materials together. There are many loom types for narrow wares; we’ll look at backstrap, board, and inkle.
 - **Shuttle:** A tool designed to neatly and compactly store and carry the thread of weft between the sheds while weaving on the loom. A sword can be used as an independent beater, or the shuttle can be used to beat the weave down.
 - **Sword:** A tool used to beat the weave down and make it more compact.
 - **Heddle:** Each thread in the warp passes through a heddle, which is used to separate the warp threads for passage of the weft. Heddles can be rigid (commonly made of wood) or flexible (made of thin fibers).
 - **Warp:** The threads, laid out lengthwise on the loom, over and under which other threads (the weft) are passed to form the weave.
 - **Weft:** The crosswise threads, the warp lays over and under to form the weave.
 - **Shed:** The temporary separation between sets of warp yarns, formed by the heddles and the manipulation of the weaver, through which the weft thread is passed to form the weave.

- Loom Types (with Commentary)

- **Backstrap:** This type of loom can be as simple as hooking one end of the warp to your belt, and the other end to a fixed point like a door knob. Advantages include low setup cost, authenticity, and ability to set up a weave practically anywhere. Disadvantages include it being hard to keep the warp threads untangled (if you need to stop before the weave is complete), and the need to keep tension may aggravate back issues.



- **Oseberg Style:** This style of loom consists of two poles at a fixed distance; the warp is wrapped between the poles, with weaving occurring sideways. Advantages include authenticity, cheap to produce, and the ability to stop weaving and come back to it. Disadvantages include bulky construction (hard to take anywhere), and sideways weaving (which can feel weird).



- **Box Loom:** Portable and fairly easy to make (though expensive to buy), box looms are seen in period tapestries. As with the Oseberg style, keeping the threads untangled while warping can be hard and is much slower. The length you can create is almost limitless.



- **Inkle Loom:** Modern invention that makes warping, tensioning, and weaving easy. Also portable to events, and you can put it down and come back to the weave. Can be made for <\$20 in materials, or found for ~\$40 on Ebay. Not period, but so handy. All of our in class weaving uses inkle looms for a reason!



- Materials
 - In period, extant samples are found from wool, silk, and linen, plus metal “thread” (or thread wrapped in metal) for brocade. Modern materials include cotton, polyester and nylon.
 - Different materials will affect your weave:
 - Wool can frequently be “sticky”. At high tension, it can be felt during weaving.
 - Silk is wonderful to work with, but will show all of your weaving flaws.
 - Linen is strong but inelastic, so tension maintenance is key.
 - Cotton will vary based on the stretchiness and thickness. If you have a clear idea of your end product, do a sample swatch to make sure!
 - Bamboo has a couple varieties: Bamboo Silk can be springy and more durable than normal silk. Bamboo from Viscose, can be less durable than cotton, however both are breathable, soft, and will soften with time and washing.

- Process for Plain (Inkle) Weaving on an Inkle Loom
 - Finding and reading the pattern
 - Please look at resources below for ideas; you’ll soon develop your own
 - We’ll walk through how to read a typical pattern in class
 - Creating thread heddles
 - Customized to the dimensions of your loom, to align the warp groups
 - Should be made of thin, strong, slick material
 - Can/should be reused across projects, so hold onto them!
 - Creating warp and weft
 - Continuous warp vs individual threads will be discussed in class!
 - Remember to alternate heddled and unheddled threads, but be sure to start and end with heddled
 - Weft should be same material as first/last threads to hide
 - Weaving
 - Start the weave using a flat surface such as sticks or bag clips to ensure pattern and form a firm surface.
 - Always alternate sheds when you weave; remember which side is which!
 - Pattern is pass the weft; change the shed; beat the weave; secure the tail
 - Advance the warp periodically, but don’t let it fall off the loom
 - We’ll go over finishing techniques in class

- Resources
 - Online
 - For inkle basics and patterns, I love <http://aspinnerweaver.blogspot.com>. I find her material to be very easily readable.
 - There are Facebook groups for Inkle and Historical Tablet Weaving, and both have an enormous wealth of resources in their files sections.
 - Shelagh Lewins' website, <http://www.shelaghlewins.com>, has some amazing tablet woven patterns, with descriptions of the extant finds they are based on. Same for many postings on <https://swanrivercrafts.com>.
 - More tablet woven patterns can be found at <http://mimbles.com/tablet-weaving/pattern-library/>, though they don't have links to extant samples (homework for the reader!)
 - Mistress Sylvie la chardonnière shared has an excellent blog post on making your own simple board loom here: <http://research.fibergeek.com/2014/03/04/simple-board-loom/>
 - Books
 - Peter Collingwood's, "The Techniques of Tablet Weaving"
 - Cadence Crockett's, "Cardweaving"
 - Nancy Spies's, "Ecclesiastical Pomp and Aristocratic Circumstance: A Thousand Years of Brocaded Tabletweoven Bands"
 - Claudia Wollny's, "Tablets at Work"
 - Pattern generators
 - Inle patterns from Seizenn – Loom Weaving Pattern Editor http://www.raktres.net/projects/inkle_loom_svg/inkle_loom_svg.html
 - The Carolingian Realm Inkle Loom Plain-Weave Pattern Generator <http://www.carolingianrealm.info/PatternGenerator.php>
 - Excel works well for setting up patterns for card weaving
 - Guntram's Tabletweaving Thingy <http://www.guntram.co.za/tabletweaving/gtt.htm>
 - Tablet Weaving Draft Designer: <https://jamesba.github.io/tabletweave/>
 - Twisted Threads pattern generator and library: <https://twistedthreads.org>

Images used in this handout can be found here:

(1) https://www.interweave.com/wp-content/uploads/Larson_3CottonBand.jpg

(2) <http://tangibledaydreams.blogspot.com/2011/11/oseberg-style-tablet-weaving-loom-first.html>

(3)

http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=obj_view_obj&objet=cartel_3414_61273_3414_002.jpg_obj.html&flag=false

(4)

<https://allkindsofyarns.wordpress.com/2014/05/16/continuous-warping-the-best-invention-since-ever/>