

A Narrow Woven Band from the Oseberg Ship Burial, 834 CE

I have made a tablet woven band whose design is based on one found in a 9th century Norwegian burial's grave goods. The particular band I've made is from textile fragment 12 L1 (Huse, translated via Aislings Welt). There is a "cake" of stuck together textiles, and from this, various bits of things are clearly visible, but cannot be picked apart or unfolded for us to know what function each detail was serving.



Fig. 2-16. Band i silke och växtfiber som kantar silkebroderiet på fragment 12 L1.

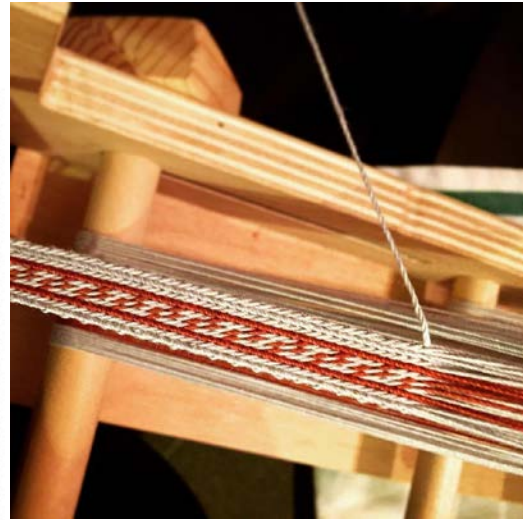
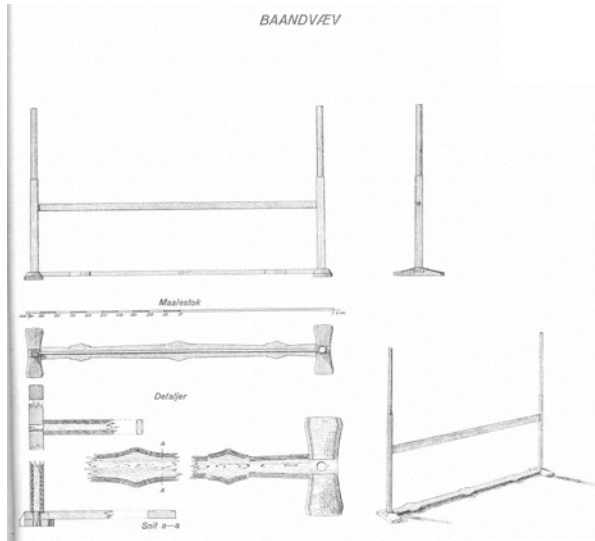
Foto: O. Væring 15/10 1917.

A narrow tablet woven band in silk and probably flax edging the silk embroidery 12 L1.

The grave was made with a small wooden ship which was covered over with dirt. Inside the ship, two women were buried with an extravagant array of goods, including animals, household goods, and a wide array of unusually well-preserved textiles. Among these, there are supplies for weaving in both tablet and brocade styles, as well as preserved woven bands, tapestries, and clothing.

The original band measures only 0.5 cm across and was woven using 10 tablets threaded with silk and an alternating plant fiber which has rotted away (Vedeler, 21). The pattern in the remaining silk is clearly visible in this photo from Margareta Nockert's fourth volume on the Oseberg finds. I used Shelagh Lewins' chart of how the pattern was threaded since I am not an experienced enough weaver to analyze and chart something like this myself. Also, I used cotton crochet thread instead of silk and linen because I'm still learning how to source the right kinds of weaving materials in the right weights.

Included in the finds was a loom, still warped with tablets in place. The Oseberg loom is simple, with two upright pegs at either end of a board, and the warp stretched between them (Schuster). The tablets were made of bone or horn and drilled with holes for the threads to pass through. I have a more modern tablet loom with a series of horizontal pegs mounted on an upright board, in a zig-zag formation. I used tablets made from a heavy cardstock, as the reproduction horn, bone, or wood tablets are very expensive.



1 - Card of 25 shades achieved with madder root as the dyestuff and other natural additions to achieve variations, such as mordants or additional plant material. From craftsmumship.com

I have been unable to find any account of what color the original band was in my research. I used rust and a light gray, with the light gray in the role of contrasting natural fiber because it's similar to the natural shade of unbleached, undyed linen. Reds run a wide range of colors, from subtle to intense, nearly orange to nearly purple, depending on what kind of dye, what kind of material, what kind of mordant, and a number of chemical factors that could influence the color one way or another, such as iron-rich water in the dye bath. Multiple shades of red were identified in other bands found in the Oseberg grave (Vedeler, 22), and there are a variety of naturally occurring dyestuffs identified as Viking age dyes used in Norway on silks that give reds (Walton, 14-19). Madder, which gives an orangey red, was one of the most heavily used, so I chose a color of cotton thread that one could get using madder root as the dye material.

The warp is rust and gray cotton, and the weft is gray cotton thread, all of the same weight. For this pattern, all tablets are turned forward, in unison, for the full length of the weave. The borders alternate between S- and Z-threading, but the center tablets are all S-threaded. As twist built up in the remaining warp, I periodically flipped the tablets to reverse their threading direction and untwist the threads. The outermost border tablets are flipped on the first pass. Then the two inner orange border tablets are flipped on the second pass, and the central pattern tablets are flipped on the third pass. This maintains the look and weave of the design by keeping all of the twist directions in the same relationship with one another. However, it gives a small disruption in the pattern over the three passes where the tablets are flipped. When I came to the end of my warp, I tied off the ends with a series of small knots.

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