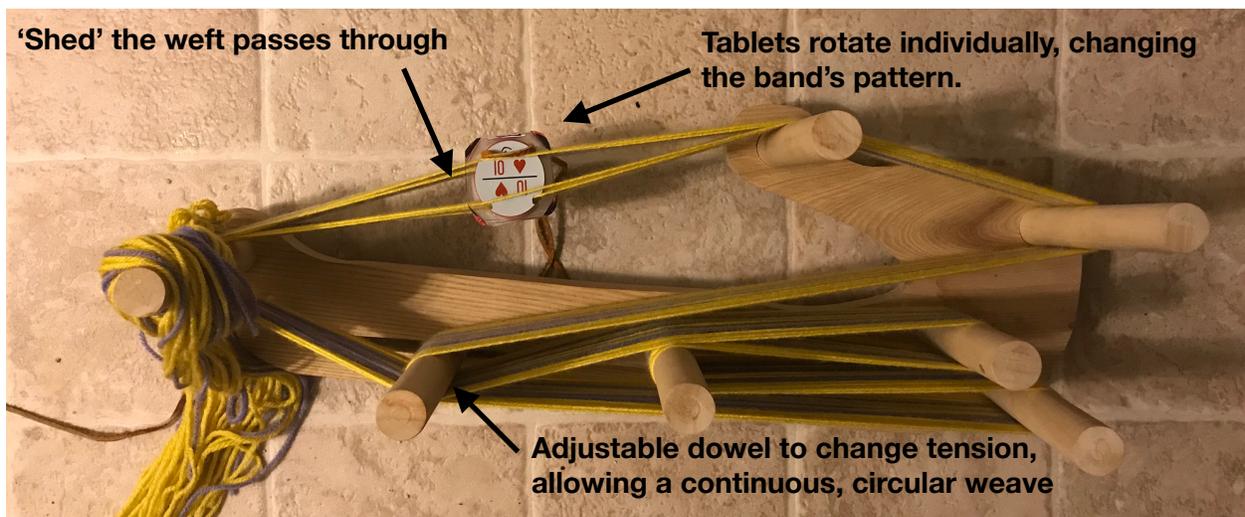


Tablet Weaving, also known more modernly as Card Weaving, is a technique that creates narrow, detailed work, referred to as bands or belts. The tablets, historically often made of wood or bone,¹ are shaped to be thin squares with holes in each corner that separate pieces of yarn, or similar materials, can pass through. The rotation of these small, individual tablets creates both the design of the band and the 'shed' required for the weft to pass through.



Tablet weaving has been dated as far back as the eight century BC; the earliest archaeological finds have been from the Bronze Age and early Celtic Iron Age in Northern Europe.² Early tablet weaving was almost entirely functional, a means to create free-standing lining and borders for other fabrics, which would increase durability and longevity.

¹ MacGregor, Arthur (1985).

² “

Tablet weaving became extremely popular in Scandinavia particularly and, during the fourth to seventh centuries (the Migration Period), the practice in this area evolved into a more decorative approach, often denoting social status, personal wealth or great skill.³ Some historical finds from this era demonstrate complex bands woven from expensive and imported goods such as silk, silver thread and gold thread.



Recreations of tablet weaving from the Birka B12 and Mammen archaeological finds

The bands themselves were used almost entirely for personal adornment, often being sewn as a decorative trim onto clothing, worn as leg-wraps and occasionally also worn as a headband or attached to a hat or headdress. Archaeological evidence of inhumation show that the more extravagant materials, such as silk, silver and gold were worn by nobles, social figures or were part of religious rights and relics.⁴



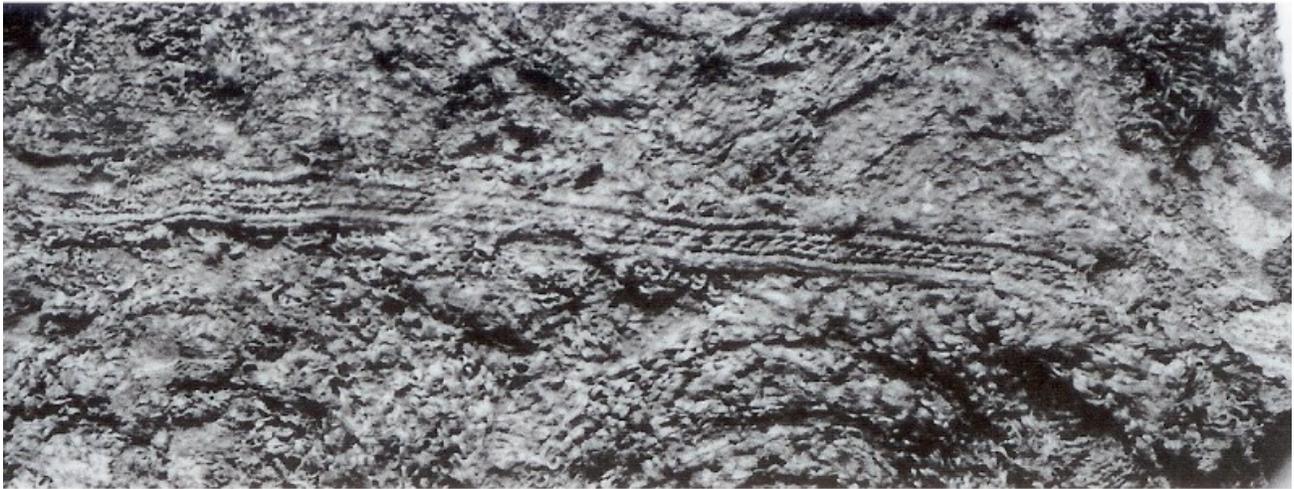
Example of a tablet woven band used as trim on a tunic.

³ Christensen, Arne Emil, and Nockert, Margareta (2006).

⁴ Spies, Nancy (2000).

The lower and middle classes also practiced tablet weaving, but the bands created utilized a fewer amount of tablets (often 5-10 tablets, compared to the nobility's 20-40 tables, resulting in a more narrow band), fewer colours, exhibit less intricate patterns and were made of less expensive materials (such as thicker yarn).⁵

The piece I have woven is a 40-strand reproduction of the Narrow Oseberg Band, which was found in one of the most extravagant and wealthy graves from the entire Viking Age, dated to 834 AD.



Picture of the Oseberg band taken during the archaeological dig. As the dig took place in 1903, no colour photographs exist and the textile decomposed shortly after being excavated. Drawings and notes taken by the involved archaeologists inform us further on the design, materials and colour.

For financial reasons, I have chosen to use yarn instead of silk, as was used in the original. The grave goods were so numerous in the burial, that this singular site is responsible for proving the consistency of art in the area, bring about the very first ‘official’ art style in the Viking Age, aptly named the Osberg Style.⁶

Two deceased women had been placed inside a carved ship, which was then buried with a large quantity of grave goods. Through the found accessories and iconography within the ship,

⁵ Spies, Nancy (2000).

⁶ Graham-Campbell, James (2013).

one of the women is thought to have been a religious or spiritual leader, while the other woman is thought to have been a highly respected weaver, as she was buried with numerous textiles (including all the equipment needed to make textiles, and a half-finished tablet weaving that was still attached to the loom).⁷ As textile material disintegrates somewhat quickly, an archaeological find that contained not only numerous examples of initially well preserved tablet weaving (and their patterns), but also surviving equipment, wooden tablets, looms, and even an in-progress piece has been invaluable in realizing and reviving how tablet weaving was authentically practiced.



Wooden tablets from the Oseberg burial

I have chosen to recreate this historical piece as a means of paying respect to what has become one of the most important finds in preserving the ‘how-to’ of this practice throughout history.



Tablet weaving used as a leg wrap.

⁷ Fuglesang, Signe Horn (1982).

Bibliography

Christensen, Arne Emil, and Nockert, Margareta. *Osebergfunnet Bin IV Tekstilene*. Oslo 2006.

Fuglesang, Signe Horn, 'Early Viking Art.' *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* (Series altera in 8°) 125–173. 1982.

Graham-Campbell, James, *Viking Art*. 2013.

MacGregor, Arthur, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: The Technology of Skeletal Materials since the Roman Period*. (London: Croom Helm) 1985.

Spies, Nancy. *Ecclesiastical Pomp and Aristocratic Circumstance*. Arelate Studio, 2000.