

Anglo-Saxon Card Weaving

I have been interested in Card or Tablet weaving for a number of years. It is a very easy way to bring color, pattern and interest to your clothing. It is with these thoughts that I began to explore different fibers, patterns and research of Anglo-Saxon narrow ware designs. I quickly discovered that there are very few card woven bands, which have survived the ravages of the time. If a band of trim was going to survive, it would probably have been in contact with something metal. The metal produces oxidizing salts, which in turn harden or preserve the fibers. This process works best on fibers which are proteins (wool or silk) and not vegetable based (linen or hemp.) Very few of the narrow ware textiles which have survived have woven in patterns, rather they have a very complicated pattern which involves turning some cards forward while other cards are turning backwards. If a weaver can figure out how to do a complicated pattern, they must also have had more simple designs. It is this reasoning which has lead me to chose a more simple woven in pattern.

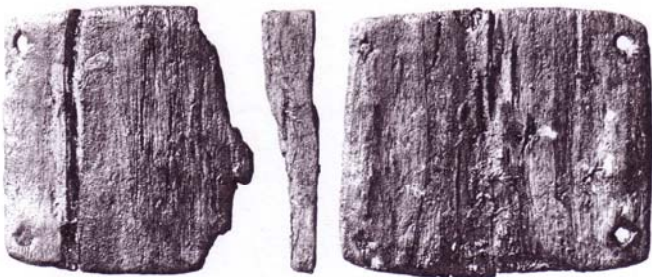


Sections of a band from Snartemo, Norway, in red, blue, yellow and green wool, 6th century

Having determined that woven in patterns while not common are highly probable, I then began to research color and looms. I quickly found pictures of the Oseburg ship burial card loom. It is pictured below. I found more references and pictures to the cards. They could have anywhere from two to six holes. Four holed cards are the most common. Choosing color for my design was a little more difficult. There is a fair amount of information on dyes from the Viking or Roman era, as the technology of the societies are fairly similar and they cover a very broad range in time, I have used that research to aid my color choices. Weld (yellow,) woad (blue,) madder (rusty red,) green (a woad over dye of weld,) and a wide range of browns or purples from tree bark and lichens were all widely available. Wool and linen were probably the most common fibers in use at the time.

Silk was very rare, but it survives the best when buried for more than 500 years. I chose a white and purple silk to make my belt.

I have included a sample book of my narrow ware weavings. It provides a more in depth look at a number of different questions. For example what is the difference between the look of a narrow ware woven with a rigid heddle, string heddle or two holed cards? (They all look alike if the tension is properly controlled.) An other area I have explored is a fiber comparison of wool verses acrylic, silk verses mercerized cotton, and linen or hemp. Each little swatch represents a different warp.



Late celtic Iron Age wooden cards, cart find from Dejbjerg, Denmark



Girdle end with textile, St. John's Cambridge (simple pattern in white, blueish-green and indigo.



Oseburg ship burial cards and loom for weaving, found in the tomb of Queen Asa