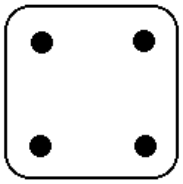
Tablet Weaving

Tablet or Card Weaving is a method to create narrow bands, often used for trim, belts, garters, and other straps. It is used throughout the sca period, especially in northern Europe.

Materials

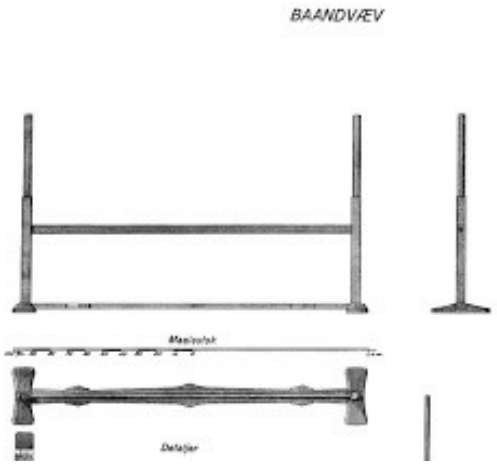
Cards – Cards can be made out of almost any thin, rigid material. In period, we see them made of horn, bone, and wood. Modern reconstructions often use what is cheap and easily available – plastic, cardboard, and playing cards. Individual comfort shifts which size is works best. Medieval examples range from 15mm to 30mm, but commercially made modern cards are available up to 4" wide. Whatever the materials, "standard" cards have four holes, one per corner. The corners also should be rounded for ease in turning.



Yarn – Your warp should be something sturdy, smooth, and not prone to breakage. It's going to be under a lot of tension and is going to be rubbing against the holes in the cards along the entire length. It's often easiest to learn on crochet cotton – It's cheap, it works well in a variety of applications, and is forgiving of beginner errors. You will want 2 or 4 colors. Your weft can be anything you want – other than at the edge (selvedge), it shouldn't be seen. The diameter and compressability of your weft will dictate the scale/distortion of your pattern – a thin yarn will take up less space than a thicker one, and thus will take more passes per inch. Because it's seen at the edges, it's advisable to use the same color or a neutral (grey).

Shuttle – Use wood, and no more than 6" long. Longer than that and it gets aggravating. It also needs to be a flat shuttle – boat shuttles tend to be too "tall" to fit through the shed. If your shuttle is not suitable to also be a beater stick, you will also need one of those.

Loom – The loom need not be any more complex than two poles. The famous Oseberg Loom was found on a Viking burial ship dated 834. Medieval illuminations frequently have women working on card weaving on frames. But 2 C Clamps and a table work just fine. (for portability, a lot of sca people use inkle looms, but they're not a period loom, just a period method of weaving.)





SETTING UP:

Calculate length – How long do you want your finished project to be? "Take up" (the effect of taking straight lines and making them into waves around weft) is about 20%. You need about 2 ft of overage for knots and twist. So the math looks like:

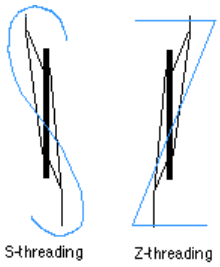
Warp length = 1.2 x project length + 24"

Width – How wide do you want your pattern? I've never found a mathematical model to calculate this, because each type of yarn compresses differently. The governing factor tends to be how many cards wide the pattern is. You want to have an even number of cards, and multiples of 4 are popular. With experience, you'll be able to get a feel for how wide any project is going to be.

For this class, each card has 4 holes. Each of those is going to need a warp thread. So, in the case of a two color project, you will need 2x Warp Length in each color (now you know how much yarn to buy). Before you start warping, you may want to mark each hole in your card ABC or D clockwise – it will make things easier later. Cut warp threads at warp length, you need 4x the number of cards you decided upon.

WARPING:

Each card is going to have four warp threads. Your warp can be S threaded or Z threaded, not both. Make sure that you are putting your colors in the same order through each card.



When you get the card on, tie a small knot at both ends of the set of four – this will ensure you don't drop the cards off as you continue threading. When you're done, tie a larger knot at each end to hold the whole thing together.

Now that the warp is assembled, time to get it on the loom. And each loom is wildly different. For anything on the two-poles variety, tie the starting end firmly, stretch the warp under tension to the other pole, wrap and tie. As you weave, you'll be tying and untying your warp frequently. Other looms will require different methodologies.

WEAVING:

Really, this is the easiest part. Start with all your cards lined up and think about the pattern you want to create. For diagonal stripes of multiple forms, you'll want to shift which hole is in the top left corner. A 16 card pattern looks like:

A B C D A B C D A B C D A B C D

Pass the shuttle/weft through the gap below the cards, and turn the cards a quarter turn. Repeat. Shifting which cards you're turning forward and which run backwards will shift the diagonal stripes into chevrons, eyes, greek keys…

Once you're comfortable with this and have a good handle on the possibilities involved, you can add a third color (For ex: thread A – red, B – blue, C – yellow, D – blue), or try your hand at double-faced brocade.

For complex patterns, or building your own patterns, I highly suggest Guntram's Tablet Thingy, a program that will help you chart, and then let you know which card needs to be where to create your pattern. He has a lot of patterns and fonts available for use on his website. (http://www.guntram.co.za/tabletweaving/gtt.htm It's no longer maintained, but

the main program is at the mirror site, the patterns on at http://www.guntram.co.za/tabletweaving/patterns/collection.htm His website is decaying very quickly, but I have everything and the ability to share it.)

FINISHING

Tablet weaving is much like the other forms of weaving to finish – when you're done, you can knot the weft yarn in or sew it in a couple of rows to secure it. You can fringe or braid the ends, hem it under, or let it hang.