A Band from Laceby

*An early Anglo-Saxon band from Lincolnshire,
with additional motifs from the Maaseik textiles*

Description

A fragment of a linen tablet-woven band was found attached to a square-headed bronze brooch that formed part of a collection taken from an Anglo-Saxon burial at Laceby, Lincolnshire, in 1939. The brooch has been dated to around 600 AD based on its style.

Although no colour had survived on the band, it seems likely that the pattern threads would have been dyed. Woad dye takes relatively well on linen, so I have used blue.
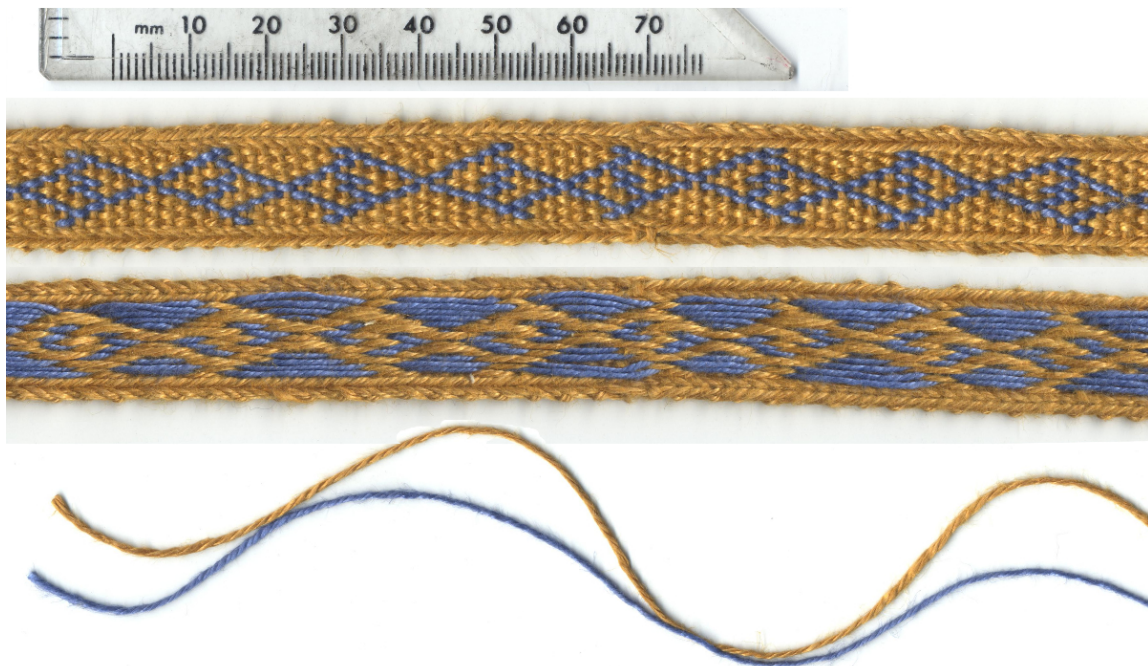
Figure 1: sample woven in 3/18 linen according to Crowfoot's reconstruction, showing front and back of band.

Figure 1 shows the band as reconstructed by Grace Crowfoot based on the warp floats at the back of the band. However the centre of the diamonds had no long floats and so she suggested "some small

pattern, checks or the like". Figure 2 shows an alternative version which is consistent with this description.
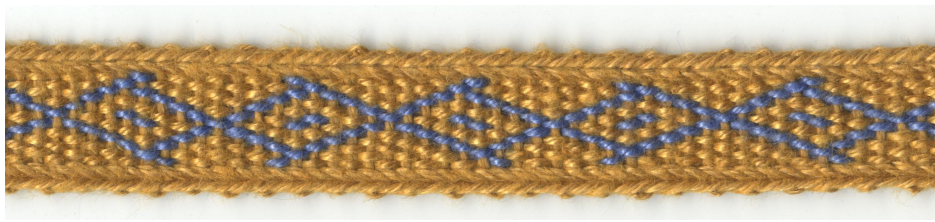

Figure 2: alternative design.

The centre of the band is a warp-faced plain weave with a two-colour design on the front, and long floats at the back. The borders are warp-twined. This type of pattern can be woven in a number of ways: I wove the sample bands entirely with tablets.

The pattern tablets should be threaded in two opposite corners, with two threads through each hole, one light and one dark.[1] The other two holes are left empty. The pattern tablets are turned alternately forwards and backwards, so that first one pair of threads and then the other is raised (Figure 3). The weaver manually picks up one top thread from each tablet to make the shed[2]: the unchosen thread floats at the back (Figure 4).

The border tablets are each threaded with four threads, one in each corner, and are always turned forwards.
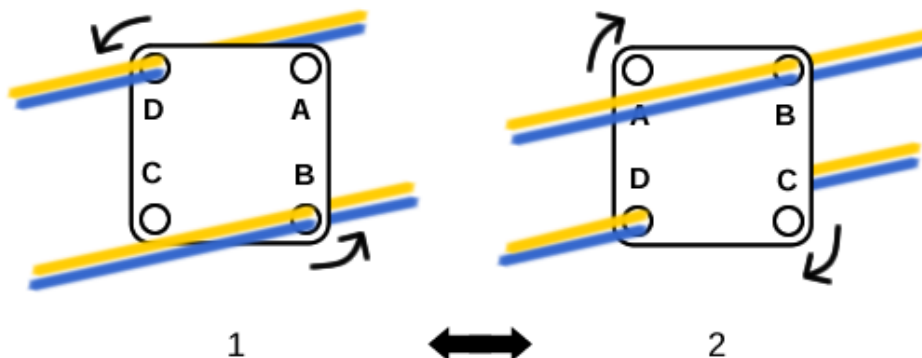
Figure 3: "rock" the tablets between two positions.
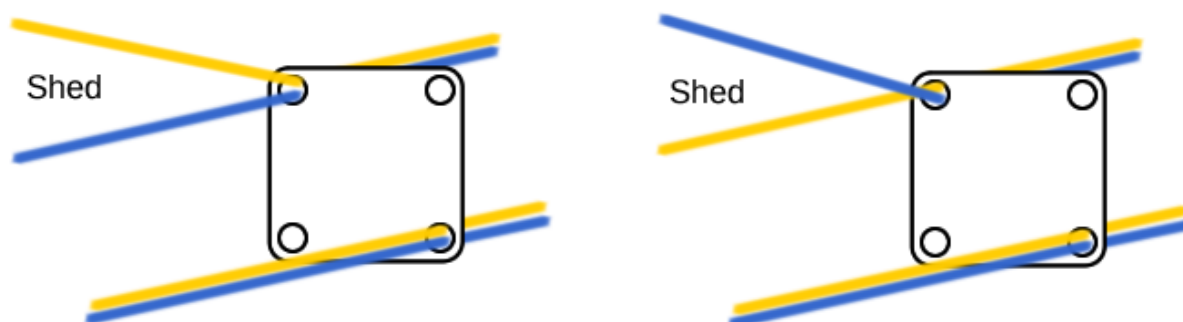


Figure 4: the weaver lifts a blue or yellow thread.

1   A plain warp-faced band, identical to that woven on a modern 'inkle' loom, can be woven by using a single thread in each hole.
2   The 'shed' is the space between upper and lower warp threads through which the weft is passed.

Another possibility is to use tablets with extra holes at the corners, which makes it easier to separate the two threads. Crowfoot comments that this method is known from Scandinavian peasant weaves. Tablets with extra holes were found in the Oseberg ship burial (Figure 5, Figure 6).

Figure 5: Tablets from the Oseberg ship burial, showing extra holes.

(Photograph: Alister Perrott)
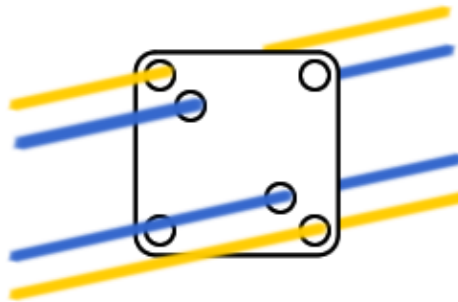
Figure 6: how to thread tablets that have extra holes.

This technique allows a wide range of patterns to be woven, and Figure 7 show designs taken from the Maaseik textiles[3] and woven in the Laceby technique. These textiles date to the 8th / 9th century AD and are thought to have been made in Anglo-Saxon England. They include embroideries edged with brocaded tablet weaving worked in gold on red silk. The brocaded motifs are different in character from the "Viking standard": although made from diagonal lines they are not completely abstract, one being a leaf and vine motif, and the other little hearts.

This weaving technique is also known from the relics of St Cuthbert, although no pattern could be distinguished. The combination of later-style motifs, woven in a technique also known from a later find, makes these variations arguably suitable for a mid to late Anglo-Saxon costume.

A further possibility is to use a second weft thread between the two top and two bottom holes (Figure 8). This prevents warp floats at the back and allows you to weave patterns with large areas of a single colour. Both wefts should be thinner than the warp threads.

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3   Also known as the Chasuble of Saints Harlindis and Relindis.
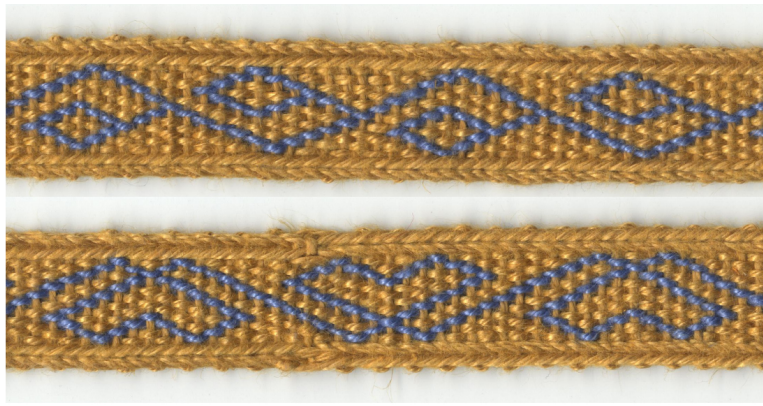
Figure 7: motifs from the Maaseik tablet-woven borders, adapted to the Laceby technique.
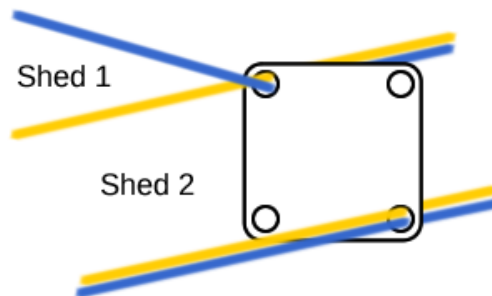
Figure 8: using two weft threads to avoid warp floats.

Difficulty	Medium
Authenticity	**A** An accurate copy of a specific band. Suitable for Anglo-Saxon and Viking re-enactment, medium to high status.
Date	Around 600 AD
Location	Laceby, Lincolnshire
Number of pattern tablets	6
Number of border tablets	4
Weaving technique	Double plain weave with warp pick-up patterning, and warp-twined borders.

References

Battiscombe, C. F. (ed). *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert*. Oxford University Press, 1956.

Crowfoot, Grace. *The Braids.* In The Relics of Saint Cuthbert, above.

Crowfoot, Grace. *The textiles and impressions.* Anglo Saxon Sites in Lincolnshire by F. H. Thompson, The Antiquaries Journal XXXVI, p.181-199, 1956.

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

Threading

Pattern tablets

Six pattern tablets, each threaded in two corners only. Each corner should have one yellow and one blue thread.
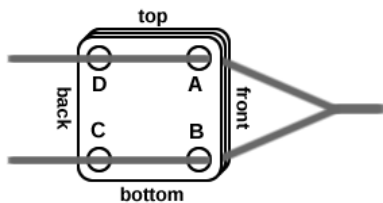
It doesn't matter how the tablets lie when you thread up. You will arrange the tablets correctly in the next step.

Border tablets

Two border tablets on each side, each threaded with four yellow threads, one in each corner. Orient the border tablets alternately, S Z.[4]
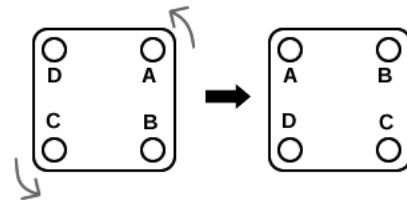
Weft

Use the same yellow thread for the weft as the background, because it will be visible.

Figure 9: labelling the positions.

A, B, C, D show the positions of the threads in the threading diagram. Most weavers do not label their tablets because which hole is "A" changes as you turn them.

Figure 10: turning the tablets forwards.

If you work with the woven band on your side of the tablets, push the top of the tablets away from you with your thumbs.
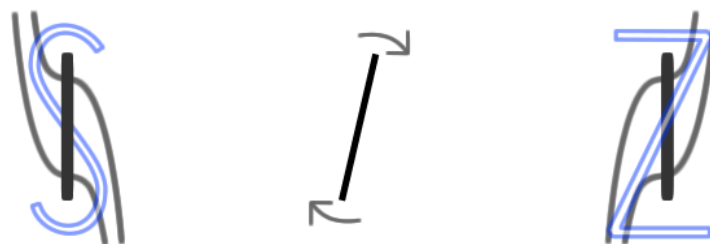
Figure 11: flipping a tablet to change it from S to Z (top view).

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4   Orientation refers to the direction the threads pass through the tablets (Figure 11).

Weaving the basic band

After you've threaded the tablets, arrange them to match Position 1 in Figure 12:

1. Flip tablets if necessary so that the pattern tablets are all Z oriented.
2. Turn the pattern tablets so that the empty holes are in positions A and C.

You should have threads in the bottom front, and top back, holes of each tablet.

For the first pick[5], insert the thumb of your left hand[6] into the shed of the first two border tablets, that is between the top two threads and the bottom two threads for each tablet.

Now use the fingers of your left hand to pick up one top thread from each tablet in turn, laying the threads over your thumb. Pick up the blue thread for tablet 3, and the yellow thread for all the others.

Finally put your thumb into the shed of the right hand border tablets, so that your thumb lies in the shed across the entire band.

You can now use your fingers to clear the shed so you can beat and then pass the weft across.

For the second pick, turn all the tablets forwards and beat again. Repeat the process, this time picking up the blue thread for tablets 3 and 4.

For the third pick, turn the pattern tablets backwards and the border tablets forwards. Pick up blue threads for tablets 2 and 4.

Continue weaving, turning the pattern tablets alternately forwards and backwards. The diagram below shows which colour to pick up for each tablet.

When the border warp threads become tightly twisted, flip them. This will reverse the twining and undo the twist.

Troubleshooting

Remember to turn the pattern tablets forwards one pick and backwards the next.

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5   One "pick" is a single unit of weaving, that is turn the tablets, clear and beat the shed, tighten and then pass the weft.
6   If you are left-handed, you may wish to reverse these instructions.
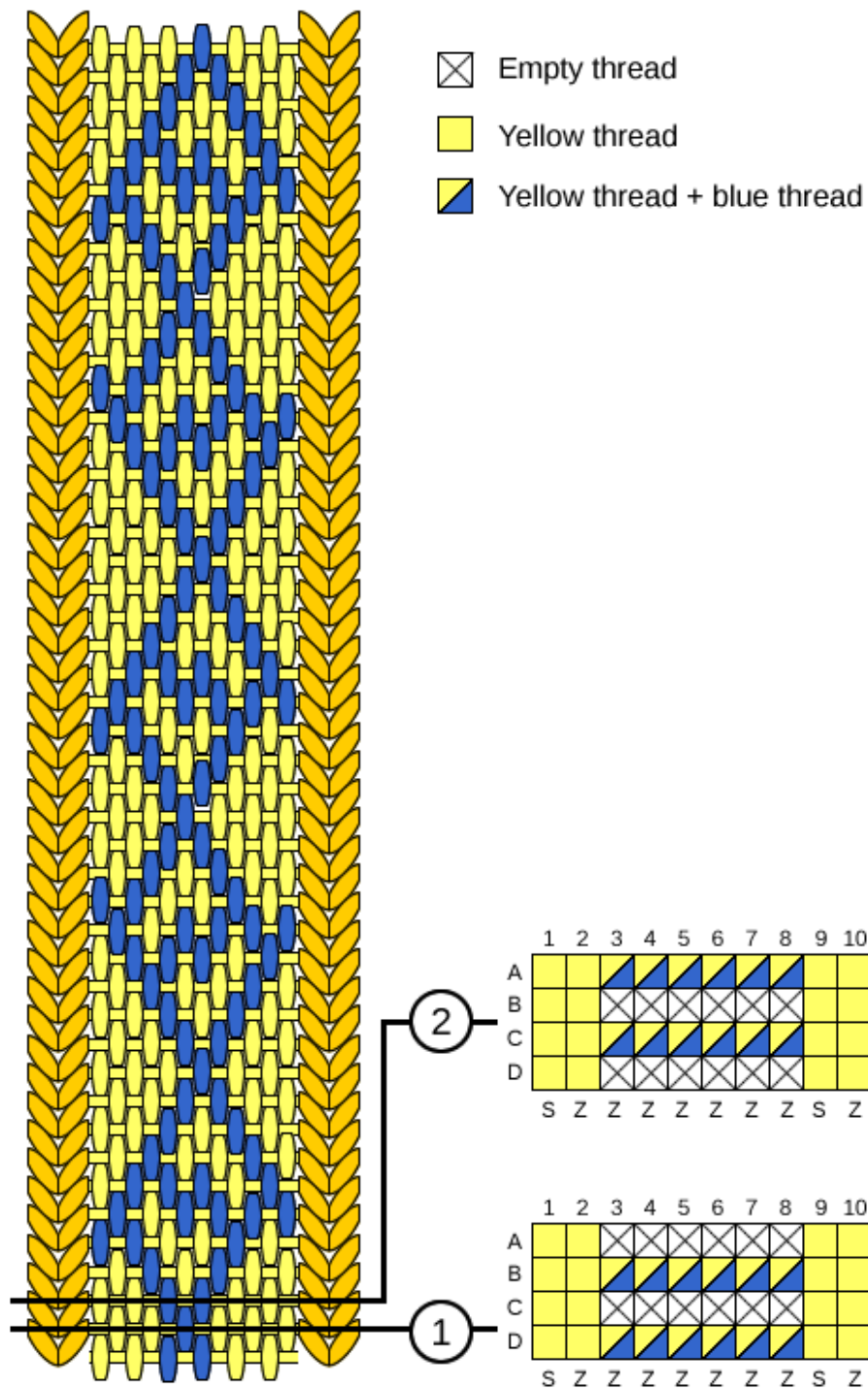
Figure 12: weaving instructions.

*Start at the **bottom of the diagram** and work upwards weaving each row in turn.*

Note that Figure 12 shows 12 pattern warp threads for six tablets, because each tablet alternately contributes two warp threads, one for each threaded hole.
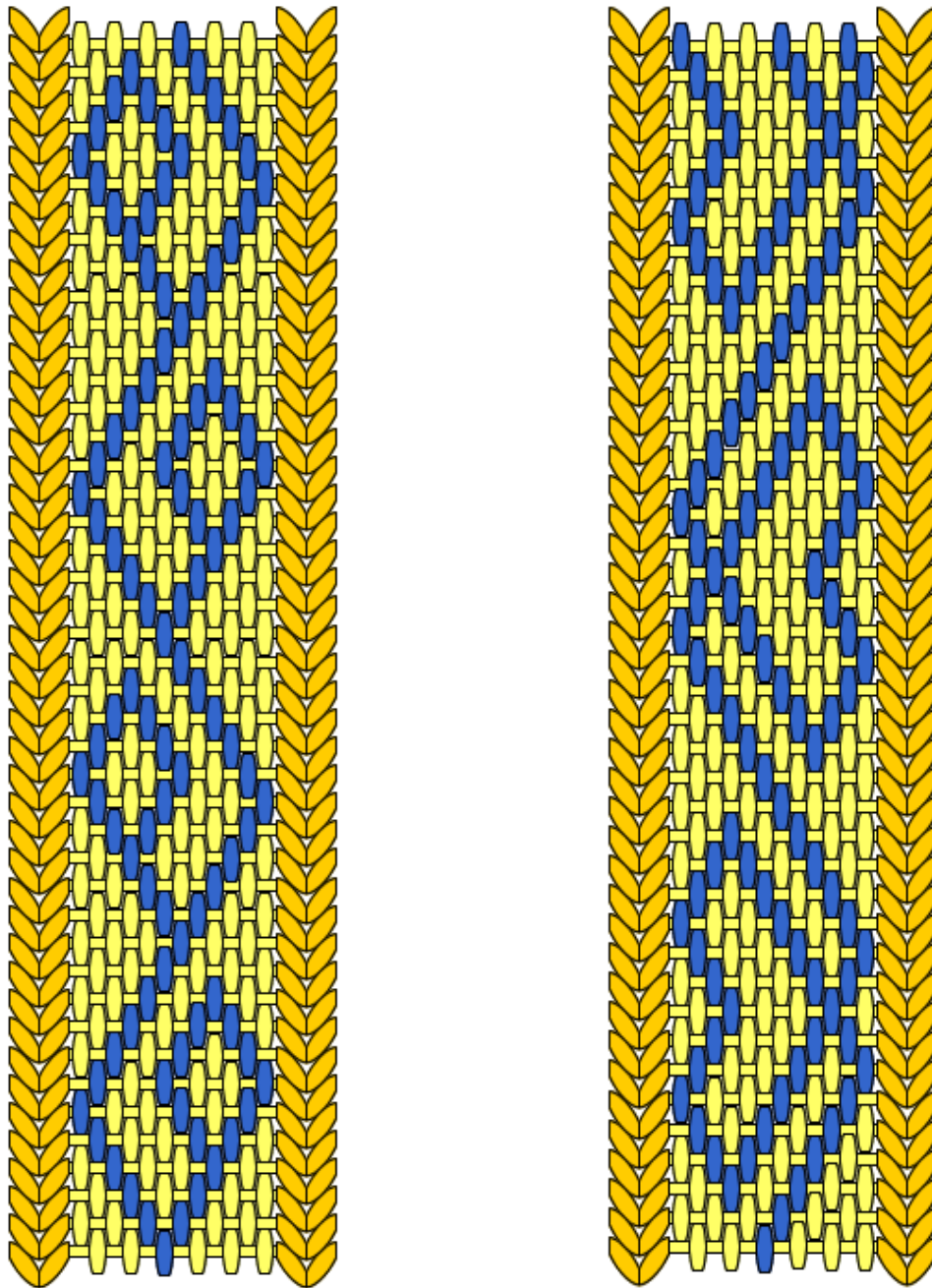
On each row, count along the surface threads for that row only. For example, on the first pick lift the upper blue thread from tablet 3. On the second, lift the blue threads from tablets 3 and 4.
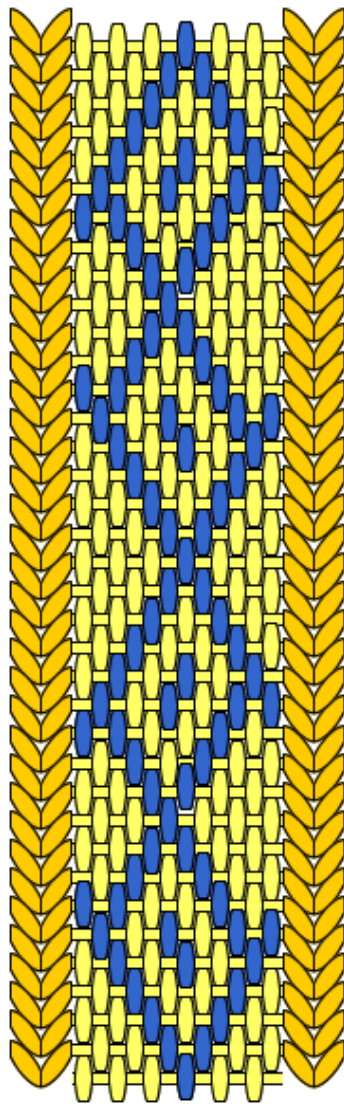
Figure 13: weaving the variation.

This alternative pattern is consistent with Crowfoot's description of the Laceby band.

Figure 14: Motifs from the borders of the Maaseik embroideries.

The motifs shown in Figure 14 are taken from the tablet-woven borders attached to the Maaseik embroideries, and have perhaps a more insular character, being figurative rather than purely abstract motifs. They might be suitable for a mid to late Anglo-Saxon costume.