

## **The Narrow Oseberg Band**

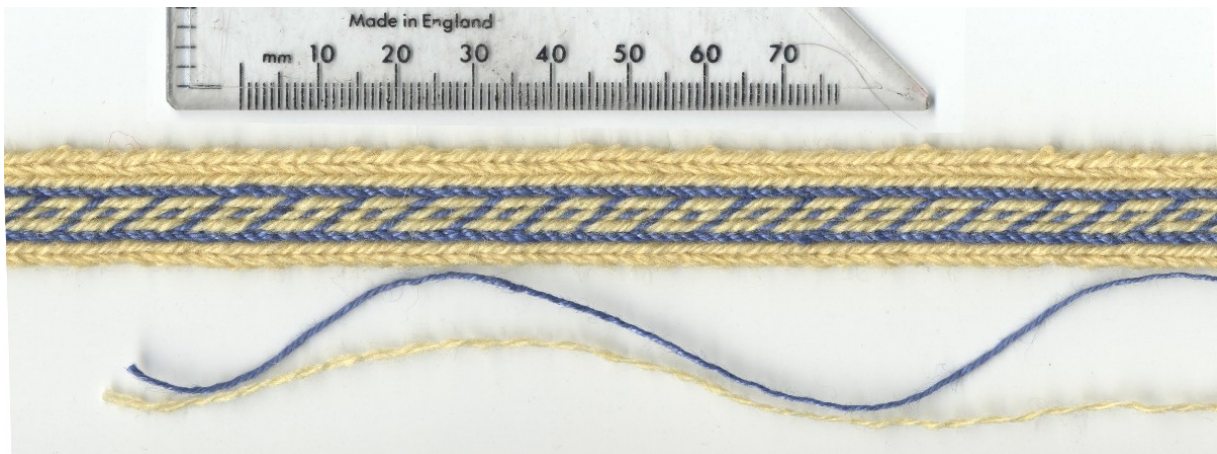
*with a variation woven on the same warp setup*

### **Description**

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In the year 834 AD, two women were buried in the Vestfold district of southern Norway, in one of the richest Viking-age graves ever found. They were buried in a wonderful carved wooden ship and accompanied by extensive grave goods. The metal goods were plundered within a few decades, but in 1904 the ship was excavated and a great number of textile and wood objects were recovered, including many items of weaving equipment, splendid tapestries and tablet woven bands. One of these bands was incomplete and still attached to its 52 tablets: it seems extremely likely that at least one of the women was the weaver, and very highly regarded for her work. The dramatic figurative tapestries probably graced a royal hall, and burying them must have had a great impact on the character of the hall.

In total around 50 different fragments of tablet woven bands were found, many of them attached to the tapestry wall-hangings as borders. The techniques used for these bands include brocade<sup>1</sup>, warp patterning and tabby<sup>2</sup> patterns.



**Figure 1: the narrow band from the Oseberg ship burial.  
Sample woven in 3/18 linen (blue) and two ply worsted wool (yellow).**

1 A decorative extra weft thread running across the surface of the band.

2 “Tabby” is plain over – under – over weaving. Patterns can be made by raising individual warp threads.

Just one band from this collection is woven mainly with silk and it is the simplest band to weave, using only 10 tablets which are turned together in the same direction. The contrasting linen threads have almost disappeared but they were darker than the silk. This band was only 0.5 cm in width.

Although the band is simple, the use of silk and its presence in the Oseberg grave makes it suitable for the highest status. A version woven in wool and / or linen would be appropriate for lower status.

The linen may well have been dyed for contrast and because if you are using expensive imported silk, it makes sense to use your best, most colourful, linen with it. Woad dye takes relatively well on vegetable fibres, so for the sample band I have used blue linen against straw-coloured wool<sup>3</sup>. The sample band shown in Figure 1 is woven with wool in place of the silk.

The pattern is unusual in that it is created entirely from the arrangement of the coloured threads in the tablets, not from individual turning of the tablets. It is also unusual in being the same on both sides.

Figure 2 shows a 'meander' variation which can be woven on the same warp. This is not unlike a meander pattern used in a reconstruction of costumes found in graves at Eura, Finland.



**Figure 2: variation woven on the same warp setup.**

Difficulty	Very easy
Authenticity	<b>A</b> An accurate copy of a specific band. Suitable for Viking re-enactment, medium to high status.
Date	Shortly before 834 AD
Location	Oseberg ship burial, Vestfold, Norway
Number of tablets	10
Weaving technique	The warp-twined pattern is entirely determined by the arrangement of threads in holes, and the tablets are all turned together.

## References

**Christensen, Arne Emil; Nockert, Margareta.** *Osebergfundet IV, Tekstilene*. Universitetet i Oslo 2006.

**Geijer, Agnes.** *Die Textilfunde aus den Gräbern. Birka: Untersuchungen und Studien III*. Uppsala: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1938.

**Lehtosalo-Hilander, Pirkko-Liisa.** *Ancient Finnish Costumes*. Vammala, 1984.

Website of the Viking Ship Museum, Oslo:

<http://www.khm.uio.no/english/visit-us/viking-ship-museum/exhibitions/oseberg/>

<sup>3</sup> Fragments of woad- and madder-dyed linen were found at Birka.

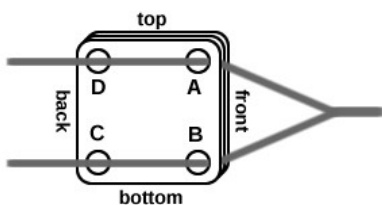
# Threading

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Thread the tablets as described below and shown in Figure 6:

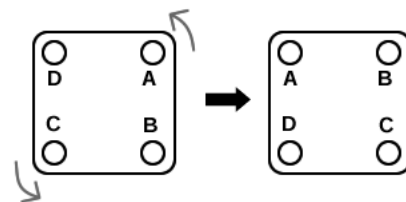
- **Tablets 1-3 and 9-10:** four yellow threads.
- **Tablets 4, 8:** four blue threads.
- **Tablets 5, 7:** one blue, three yellow threads.
- **Tablet 6:** alternating blue and yellow threads.

It doesn't matter how the tablets lie when you thread up: you will arrange them correctly in the next step.



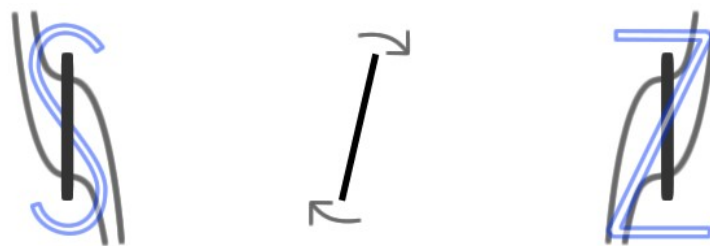
**Figure 3: labelling the positions.**

*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 4: 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 5: flipping a tablet to change it from S to Z (top view).**

## Weaving instructions

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After you've threaded the tablets, make sure they are arranged as shown in Figure 6:

1. Flip tablets if necessary so that their orientation matches Figure 6.<sup>4</sup>
2. Turn tablet 5 so the blue thread is in position A.
3. Turn tablet 6 so the blue threads are in positions B and D.
4. Turn tablet 7 so the blue thread is in position C.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A				■	■			■		
B				■		■		■		
C				■			■	■		
D				■		■		■		
	S	Z	S	Z	S	S	S	Z	S	Z

**Figure 6: threading the tablets.**

Now start weaving: turn all the tablets forwards a quarter turn and pass the weft, and repeat.

When the warp threads become tightly twisted, flip tablets 1-3 and 9-10. On the next pick<sup>5</sup>, flip tablets 4 and 8 and on the following pick flip tablets 5-7. This will reverse the twining and undo the twist.

### Troubleshooting

If you are having difficulty getting the pattern to work, first check that your tablets are correctly oriented, and then check that your ABCD is the same way round as in the diagram above.

## Weaving the variation

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To weave the alternative pattern, first set up the tablets to weave the basic pattern and then give tablet 5 a half turn so that the tablets match Figure 7. The weaving method is the same as for the basic band – turn all tablets together every pick.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A				■				■		
B				■		■		■		
C				■	■		■	■		
D				■		■		■		
	S	Z	S	Z	S	S	S	Z	S	Z

**Figure 7: threading the variation.**

<sup>4</sup> Orientation refers to the direction the threads pass through the tablets (Figure 5).

<sup>5</sup> One “pick” is a single unit of weaving, that is turn the tablets, clear and beat the shed, tighten and then pass the weft.