

Cockatrice



From the *Codex Manesse*, c.1304-1340

May A.S. 53

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From the Editor

Greetings, and Happy SCA New Year!

I'm pleased to announce that our website is now fully up to date, with all editions uploaded there. As time goes on, I'll be adding tags to make them more searchable by content. Thank you all for letting us know what would make Cockatrice better for you...and now I'm about to ask for your feedback again.

I was lucky enough this Rowany Festival to have some wonderful conversations how Cockatrice can better serve the artisans of Lochac. At the moment, many people haven't heard of Cockatrice, and we're frequently low on submissions – possibly because of the relative accessibility of personal websites and social media for sharing A&S stories.

With that in mind, I think it's time to ask you, the readers: What do you like about

Cockatrice? What do you dislike? What makes us special? What do you think should change? What type of content do you like to read? What type of content do you like to write?

To make your voice heard on this issue, please fill out our survey at www.tiny.cc/cockatrice, or contact me at editor@cockatrice.lochac.sca.org. I'll be collecting feedback over the next three months, with the goal of sharing the results in the next edition, and making announcements about any future changes in November.

In the meantime, if you're on Facebook, come say hello at our new page (www.facebook.com/cockatriceoflochac) keep those submissions coming, and enjoy the edition!

*Yours in Service,
Lady Gwen verch David*

Cockatrice Calendar AS 53 (2018)

August 53 Edition	Submissions due	1 July
	Published	1 August
November 53 Edition	Submissions due	1 October
	Published	1 November

Early Period Russian Garb on a Budget: A Project Diary

Baroness Adelindis filia Gotefridi

This article documents the transformation of an existing generic T-tunic into basic early period Russian garb for my then-10 year old, Bridget Wynter, as part of their¹ wardrobe for Rowany Festival in 2016. The idea of publishing the project diary is to give an example of some of the aspects which can be considered when wanting to move from a generic early period look to something which more consistently evokes a specific time and place, while still using cheap and easily accessible items to make it more practical for a quickly-growing child's wardrobe (or for someone who would like to try a new style without initially needing to outlay a huge amount of money). Most of the compromises made with the materials used could be fairly easily upgraded later as time and funds permit, so this could also be seen as a staging process towards slowly increasing historical accuracy while still having something that looks more place and time specific in the interim.

Initial Design Idea and Planning

I started with an existing generic T-tunic, cut and pieced with a keyhole neckline, armpit gussets and side gores to the waist, made of a heavy and relatively coarse natural cotton with very faint stripes. Since it looked more like homespun than the fine bleached linen of more prosperous classes, I decided to aim for a peasant's outfit (if a fairly well-off one), which dictated the rest of my fabric and design choices. This was also sensible since they needed practical everyday wear for camping and playing in at Festival more than they needed Court garb.

Rubakha

While the *rubakha* can be worn as the underwear layer of a more formal or expensive outfit, in Women's Layer 1 in Early Rus, Kies suggests that for peasants it could be the only layer worn.

This also ties in with the heavier weight of the fabric, which wouldn't be particularly comfortable as underwear, but looks fine as a single layer (it was originally made to be worn as such). My first thought was that the *rubakha* could be trimmed with red bias binding or similar, as suggested in the Easy Breezy handout, since making and retrofitting embroidery



26 December 2015

¹ Bridget uses they/them pronouns, so I have used singular they/them to refer to them throughout this article.

would be a lot more work. In Decoration and Ornament in Early Rus, Kies writes, “An edging of colored fabric was a characteristic finishing of Russian clothing in all periods, however. (Kireyeva)”. Adding a contrasting coloured border down the track would also give me the option to extend the dress to account for growth.

Zapona

Since Bridget was ten at the time, the ‘maiden's’ garb of *zapona* (open-sided tabard) over the *rubakha*, as discussed in Women's Layer 2 in Early Rus, was the obvious choice. In the first design, the *zapona* was planned to be made of fulled woollen twill in a golden-brown shade easily achievable with natural dyes, lined with natural linen for stability; and the neckline trimmed with commercial woven braid. Because the length of wool I had was not long enough in one piece, I planned to add a strip of the linen as a border, decorated (time permitting) with couched woollen embroidery in an iconic design like the one illustrated below.²



Embroidered design (10th century Kiev)

Belt and Accessories

The belt in the initial design photo is my own inkle-woven belt. Lacking time, money or skills to replace it with a similar woven belt, I decided to make Bridget a fabric belt with tassels, long enough to wrap twice around the waist and hang down at the front.

Hair and Headdress

At the time, Bridget had very long straight hair which they liked wearing braided. In Women's Headdress in Early Rus, Kies writes: “Maidens could wear their hair loose or in a single braid. Often, strands of hair at the temples were put in little braids and strung with small bells of bronze or glass. (Pushkareva97)”. While this was intended to be a fairly informal outfit, if a headdress was needed for more formal occasions, I planned to make them a fillet covered in strips of linen and trimmed with bias binding or any leftover braid, with temple rings (actually a pair of earrings of a passably close design). From the same article: “The characteristic maiden headdress consisted of various headbands made of

² This design was taken from Kolchin, B.A. Drevnyaya Rus': Byt i kultura. (Ancient Rus: Life and Culture) Moscow, "Nauka", 1997, and can be viewed at <http://rudocs.exdat.com/docs/index-179349.html> with the original (Russian) captions.

ribbons or braid to resemble crowns and floral wreaths. (Stamerov) and (Kireyeva) and (Pushkareva97)”.

Shoes

From their existing stash – probably either long boots or ankle boots. Making shoes or buying period-style ones is not practical or affordable for me when trying to keep up with the garb needs of two growing kids.

Design Evolution: Update 1

I found a piece of colourful Guatemalan woven cotton fabric in my stash which seemed like much the quickest and easiest solution to making the belt. While the fabric as a whole is distinctively South American in style, by cutting out strips with a symmetrical pattern, joining them, and lining with the same fabric as the *zapona* lining, I was able to create a belt which looked less distinctive, and which matches the weight and look of the *rubakha* well enough to make the outfit come together in a harmonious whole. Kies writes, “In the layers of Old-Russian cities frequently are encountered knitted [probably naalbinding], plaited and woven fabric belts of woolen threads.” While the woven fabric doesn’t approximate tablet weaving particularly well up close, it’s a somewhat closer visual substitute than a solid coloured fabric.

I had enough woven fabric left over from making the belt that I decided to use strips of that at the neckline and bottom of the *zapona* instead of the original idea of commercial trim and embroidered linen (which I wouldn’t have had time to do anyway). Both the fabric and trim are still quite modern-looking, but the first is more harmonious in weight and fabric composition, and using it as trim as well as in the belt lessens the distraction of contrasting visual elements and presents a more coherent whole. To lengthen the *zapona*, I sewed a second shorter piece of the base wool to the bottom and used one woven strip to cover the seam, added a second strip at the lower hem, and lined the whole length of the *zapona* for stability. On wearing, we discovered that the belt wasn’t enough to keep the *zapona* in place properly, so I added knotted leather buttons and loops at the waist.



Design concept #2, using strips of the Guatemalan fabric at neckline, belt, covering the join, and bottom hem.

Design Evolution: Update 2

After doing some more in-depth reading on Kies' site, I decided to add some bronze and glass ornaments to the belt. In Class Distinctions in Early Rus, Kies writes, "An obligatory part of the peasant's garment was the belt. (Pushkareva89) The richer a village inhabitant was, the more prominent were all kinds of ornament, the higher the quality of their manufacture, and the more expensive the utilized materials, especially for holidays. (Pushkareva89)". I didn't read anything which documented the addition of decorative elements for this age group, but adding ornaments to the belt of a well-off unmarried peasant girl to show off their family's resources seems plausible. Based on Jewelry in Early Rus and some previous research into early bead styles to identify compatible modern ones, I also made Bridget a strand of glass beads (which broke at Festival, probably inevitably).

I also remembered that Bridget had a second plain white undertunic which wasn't currently being used in any other ensemble, and decided that since I had upped their social class slightly with the bling on the belt, they could also reasonably have a white linen (actually a linen-cotton blend) *rubakha* for festive occasions, which means they had an extra day's worth of clothing from this repurposing exercise - even better! Although if I kept escalating the bling like this I would feel compelled to make a new *rubakha* out of coloured fabric to keep up with their elevating class status, which would rather defeat the point of the wardrobe repurposing.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show how taking a generic T-tunic and adding consistent details to make an outfit which is more evocative of a specific historical time and place was a relatively simple way of improving Bridget's early period look without needing to invest a lot of money into something that they would grow out of fairly quickly. Considering details like available fabric and colours, layers, jewellery and accessories, hairstyles and headdresses, and attempting to keep them consistent for the chosen class helped to create a coherent



Design #3: unfinished zapona and completed belt over white rubakha and modern brown boots; worn with headband and temple rings. Evidently Bridget had grown at least three inches since this undertunic was made a year previously. I could extend this with a contrasting border, although peasant garb would be kept short for practical reasons.

look. If a greater degree of historical accuracy was sought, some of the modern materials initially used could be replaced with more accurate versions as time and money permitted.

Sources

Kolchin, B.A. *Drevnyaya Rus': Byt i kultura*. (Ancient Rus: Life and Culture) Moscow, "Nauka", 1997, as shown at <http://rudocs.exdat.com/docs/index-179349.html>

From Sofya la Rus/Lisa Kies, *Medieval Russian Life*, <http://sofyalarus.info/Russia/>

Easy, Breezy Russian Garb: <http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/easybreezy.html>

Women's Layer 1 in Early Rus - Rubakha, Sorochka, Sorochitsa, etc:

<http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KWC1.html>

Women's Layer 2 in Early Rus - Short Overgarments:

<http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KWC2.html>

Decoration and Ornament in Early Rus:

<http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KRCdecor.html>

Accessories in Early Rus - Belts, Purses, Gloves, Mittens and Handkerchiefs:

<http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KRCacc2.html>

Women's Headdress in Early Rus: <http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KWChead.html>

Class Distinctions in Early Rus: <http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KRCclass.html>

Jewelry in Early Rus: <http://sofyalarus.info/russia/Garb/KRCjewel.html>



in a green sward cloaked in Sol's warm embrace
Bathed in shards of crystalline light
Ears full of hedgebird twitterings, small trace
Of past month's cloak of cold frosted winter
white.

Hawthorn scent floats heavy on hot still air
Rising sap quickens through twining greenery.
Colourful hues hide a busy queen's fare
Treating the meadow in flowered finery
As night's shadow falls all silver gilt dressed
All are soothed by Luna's calm blue caress

- Lady Ragnhildr Freysteindottir

Cord-Making Techniques: A Practical Comparison

Lady Gwen verch David

Aim

To evaluate the cost (in material and man-hours) of different cord-making techniques

Method

Using one metre lengths of DMC perle cotton, I spent fifteen minutes making cord using each of six techniques (lucet, 8-strand interlocking, 4-strand braid, fingerloop, whip-cord, and plying).³ When the time was up, I tied off the loose ends, and measured both the quantity made and the thread remaining. In some cases, I was able to make multiple lengths in the allotted time.

Results

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Length made (in 15min)</i>	<i>Thread remaining</i>
Lucet	3cm	76cm
Interlocking	7cm	81cm
Braid	35cm	56cm
Fingerloop	2 x 32cm ⁴	0cm
Whip-cord	42cm	50cm
Plying	4 x 19-21cm	0cm

From this information, it is possible to calculate an approximate take-up ratio for each technique (when using this thickness of cord), and when combined with information about the number of working threads each technique requires, we can determine the quantity of thread used for each metre of cord. We can also extrapolate the approximate length of time required to make a metre of cord.

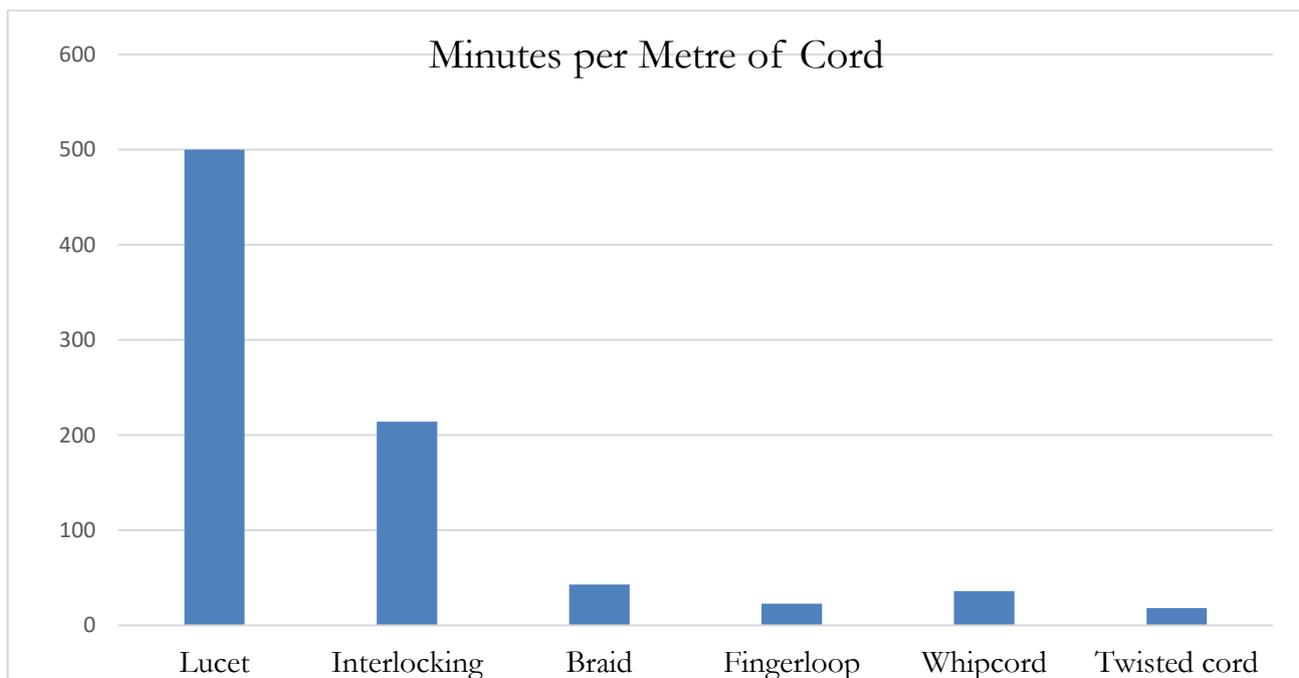
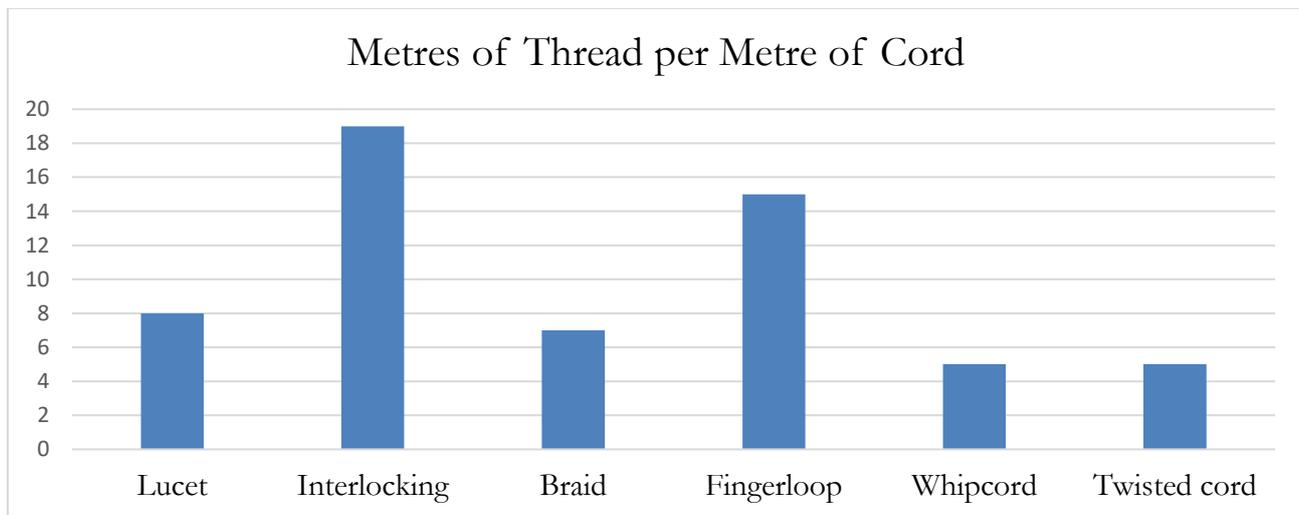
³ See appendix for more details on these techniques.

Please note: I am an experienced cord-maker, and I believe I am similarly competent with each technique used, but I can't guarantee that, and I did *not* use a large sample size. It is very possible that different people could repeat this experiment and get different results.

⁴ Both fingerloop and plying resulted in multiple cords

Costs per Metre of Cord

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Initial Length : Final Length</i>	<i>Number of Working Threads</i>	<i>Thread per Metre of Cord</i>	<i>Minutes per Metre of Cord</i>
Lucet	8:1	1	8m	500
Interlocking	2.75:1	8	19m	214
Braid	1.75:1	4	7m	43
Fingerloop	3:1 ⁵	5	15m	23
Whip-cord	1.25:1	4	5m	36
Plying	5:1	1	5m	18



⁵ Note: This measures the length of the thread that forms a single loop, not the length of the loop.

Discussion

Which technique is cheapest? Plying comes out in front for both material and labour costs – which is unsurprising, considering it is the simplest method. Whip-cord also did well, coming second for material costs and third for labour costs. The ranking of braid and fingerloop would depend on whether you prioritised materials (in which case braid is better) or labour (in which case fingerloop is better). Interlocking and lucet stand out as clear losers because of their phenomenal labour cost.⁶

<i>Least Thread Used</i>	<i>Least Time Taken</i>
1. Plying (5m/m)	1. Plying (18min/m)
2. Whip-cord (5m/m)	2. Fingerloop (23min/m)
3. Braid (7m/m)	3. Whip-cord (36min/m)
4. Lucet (8m/m)	4. Braid (43min/m)
5. Fingerloop (15m/m)	5. Interlocking (214min/m)
6. Interlocking (19m/m)	6. Lucet (500min/m)

However, cost is not the most important metric when choosing a technique. Other factors that influence decision-making include:

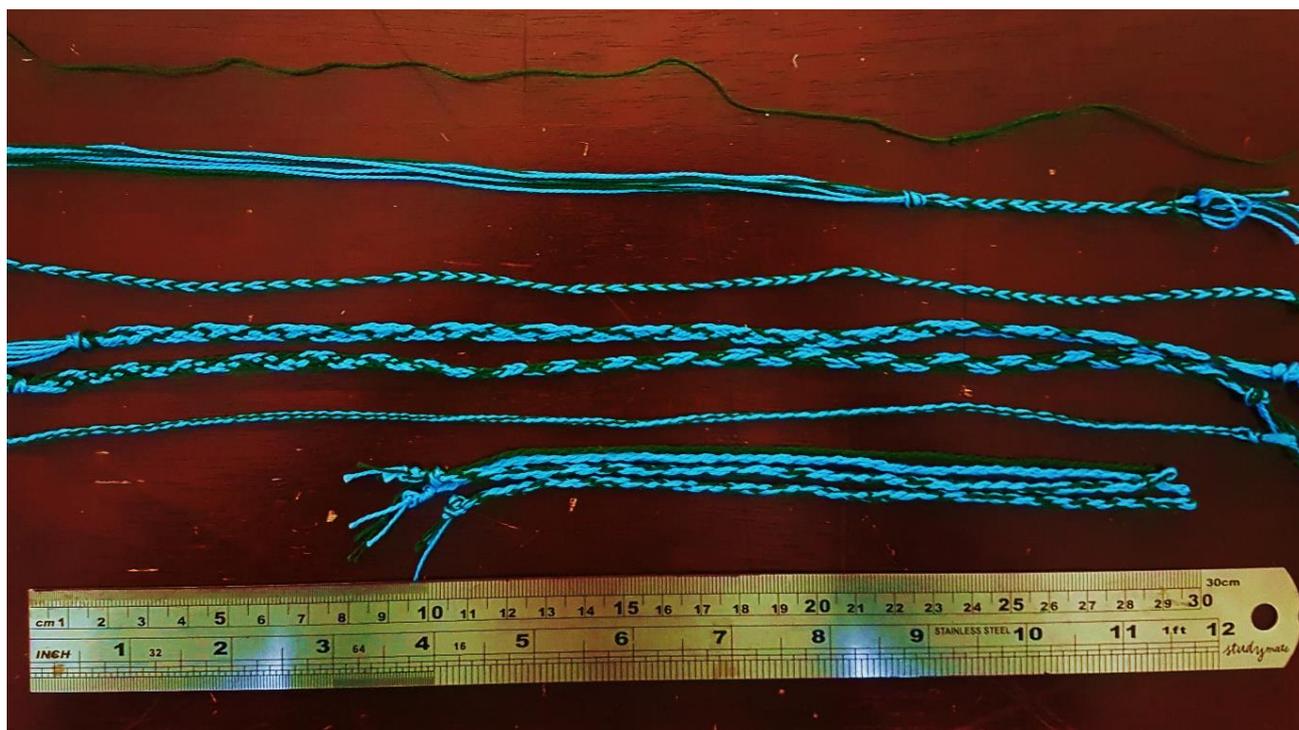
- **Familiarity:** People are more likely to use techniques they already know, particularly because that familiarity speeds up the process
- **Strength:** Different techniques perform differently under tension or strain
- **Appearance:** Especially if the cord is for a decorative purpose, techniques may be chosen to produce a particular pattern
- **Shape:** Plying, whip-cord, and interlocking produce a round cord; lucet makes a square cord; braid makes a flat cord; and fingerloop can produce a variety of shapes depending on the pattern
- **Thickness:** Cords meant to pass through eyelets, lacing rings, or the hole in a token may need to be made with a less bulky method
- **Required length:** Fingerloop only works well for certain lengths of cord
- **Portability:** Lucet can be put down at any time, while other forms of cord use less portable anchor points. Fingerloop in particular is very difficult to put down and successfully resume the pattern when it is picked back up

⁶ The round braid produced by interlocking could probably be made much faster using kumihimo tools, but I did not include that in this experiment.

Conclusion

This experiment does nothing to evaluate the relative quality of different techniques. It would be possible in future to do comparisons of some of the factors mentioned above, but personal preference is significant enough that I believe it is impossible to choose the 'best' method.

If, however, the deciding factor is not quality, but quantity, it's clear that plying is the most efficient way to produce a large amount of cord.

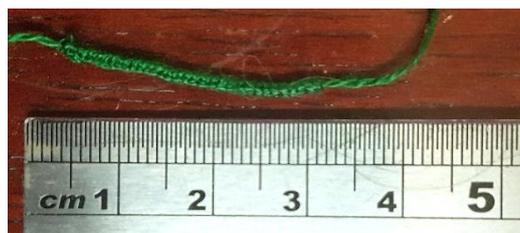


*A side-by-side comparison of cord made
From top to bottom: lucet, interlocking, braid, fingerloop, whip cord, plying*

Appendix: Techniques Used

Lucet

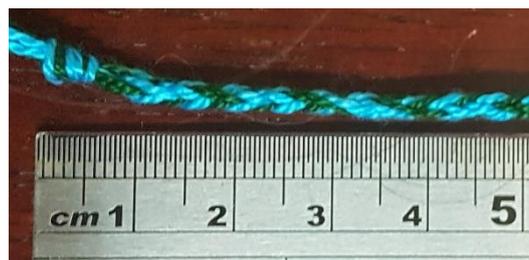
To make lucet, a single thread is looped around a two-pronged tool, with lower loops pulled over upper loops and tightened. It is widely believed to be a Norse technique, and the main plausible find of lucet cord is from 11th century Gotland.⁷



⁷ See <https://haldorviking.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/001-lucets-in-the-early-medieval-r01.pdf> for a more detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence.

Interlocking

I used a variant on an 8-strand braid, where the working thread goes over five threads, then back under two of them, before a new working thread is picked up from the opposite edge. (Note that the result is essentially identical to what can be produced with kumihimo techniques.) This pattern was common in finds from 13th-14th century London, although it was not restricted to that area or time-period.⁸



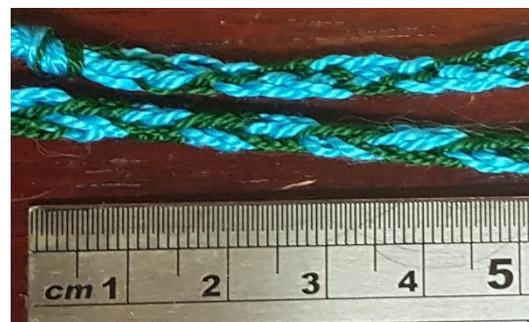
Braid

A basic braid or plat pattern, where threads are brought from the edge to the middle, alternating between the left and right edge. I used a four-strand version, but any number of threads is theoretically possible (although beyond eight they get difficult to manage). This technique is incredibly widespread, and does not belong to any particular period.



Fingerloop

I used a simple fingerloop pattern in which five loops, attached to an anchor point, are distributed on the fingers of both hands, with the bottom loop from one hand being passed through both loops on the other to become a top loop. Fingerloop braids are extremely well-attested in both the archaeological and historical record, and were particularly common in the 13th-16th centuries across Europe.⁹



Whip-cord

Four threads are suspended from an anchor point, and diagonally opposite threads are exchanged, moving clockwise around each other (i.e. right front is exchanged with left back, then left front with right back). This technique is difficult to identify in the archaeological record because of its simplicity, but



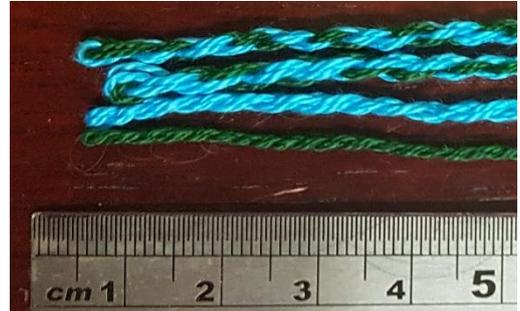
⁸ See <http://www.stringpage.com/braid/medbraids/medbraids.html>

⁹ See <http://fingerloop.org/>

possible examples date as far back as several centuries BC, and as late as seal tags on a 16th century contract.¹⁰

Plying

Plying is an extremely old technique for twisting two or more threads together to make a thicker, more even cord. I used a method without a spindle, in which a loop of thread is anchored at one end, and a stick is threaded through the other end to twist it. When sufficient twist has been added, the two ends are brought together, and the thread will naturally twist into a stable cord. I am unable to date this method, but the result is plausible throughout our period.





ach six month we gather to Court
 To witness those who seek a Lochacian crown'd.
 Called to duty, not merely to sport;
 By majestic rite is an honour bestow'd.
 Not for empty actor seeking their songs
 Nor fops and lollards feigning homage.
 Tis a time for enthusing and righting of wrongs
 And should only be sought by those full of
 courage.
 Goodly thoughts and deeds doth inspire populace
 loyalty
 O'er and o'er as Blessed are we in our Southern
 royalty.

- *Lady Ragnhildr Freysteindottir*

¹⁰ See <http://www.medieval-baltic.us/whipcords.pdf>

Spindle Whorls V1.0, 2.0, 3.0: Being a Series of Attempts to Bring a Project to Fruition

Mistress katherine kerr of the Hermitage

Main lesson: First identify your target!

I spent around three months wracking my brains for where I had seen an example of *loom weights* in a blue-and-white majolica, early 16th century Italian – the perfect thing for an on-going project I have. I knew I had seen them before Festival 2016, because I'd bought some plain pottery examples there from Master Alex the Potter with the intent of painting them up to match the examples I'd seen. But where?

I looked through thousands (yes actually thousands) of my travel photos in case I had taken a shot in a museum or exhibition somewhere – at the Peruvian women's weaving collective? the warp-weighted loom exhibition in Heraklion? the Renaissance gallery in Lisbon? Nope. I flicked through my more recent book acquisitions; I checked my A&S notebooks for random jottings; I searched and searched and searched the Internet, surely there would be something there?? But all to no avail, not a thing turned up.

It wasn't until I plaintively asked on the Known World Laurels list if anyone could help out, that I learned what I was doing wrong – I was hunting for *loom weights* when I should have been looking for *spindle whorls*. Ahem. Suddenly there was an abundance of blue-and-white majolica spindle whorls to be found!

Chalk that learning experience up to the importance of correctly identifying what information you are seeking. And clearly keeping good records is valuable too – if I'd done the usual thing and written down or photographed the example in the first place, I would have had a much better starting point. (Turns out I'd seen the items in one of Duchess Yolande's books on domestic life in Renaissance Italy, d'oh!)

Background

Any fibre person can tell you the difference between a loom weight and a spindle whorl. After all, the latter have been around for around 9,000 years, and are still in use today. The whorls are the roundish weight of stone, bone, pottery, ceramic, lead, glass or other solid

material that sits at the bottom of a spindle rod, providing momentum and tension for the controlled spinning of plant or animal fibres into yarn or thread. Over the millennia, whorl shapes have ranged from roughly spherical beads to flattened discs, ranging from 5cm to under 1cm in diameter, depending on the materials used and nature of the spinning.¹¹

Once I correctly identified my object, I found a number of examples of the late-period spindle whorls I was after. Various museums have majolica spindle whorls, made in Faenza or Deruta from 1510 to approximately 1560. Deruta is still highly regarded as a centre for the production of high quality majolica (aka maiolica or tin-glazed earthenware), being an early entrant into the European race to find a way to imitate Chinese porcelain. Because of the popularity and exclusiveness of the latter, early majolica copied its coloration, with a white ground painted in blue with small motifs of yellow and orange. The whorls are decorated in this fashion, in much the same way as majolica plates, bowls etc.¹²

Judging from extant examples, majolica spindle whorls were formed and fired, then painted with a generic stylisation around the top and bottom, leaving the central strip plain. This was available for a customer to have a name painted on, often accompanied by the initial B or *Bella* (for beautiful), and fired for a second time to preserve the artwork.¹³ You can still read the names on a number of whorls, such as CHASANDRA B, PERLA Bella, CRISTOFORA B, and CAteRINA B.¹⁴ These have been interpreted as love tokens or gifts, possibly to mark a marriage.¹⁵ These types of whorls tend to be bead-shaped, ranging between 1.3cm to 2.5cm in diameter.¹⁶

The British Museum has an interesting disc-shaped version in “Medici porcelain”, an experimental Italian ceramicware technology sponsored by Grand Duke Francesco in the 1570s-80s. It is described as being a uniquely utilitarian piece amongst surviving examples of what are otherwise high-end artistic items, but wear marks shows it was at some stage used for its intended purpose.¹⁷

¹¹ British Museum: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.aspx
spindle whorls; Number: 1890,0517.19, 1885,0508.95 (named beads); 1885,0508 102 (Medici porcelain)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/139611.html>

Portable Antiquities Scheme Database: <https://finds.org.uk/database>

V&A Museum: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1158228/spindle-whorls-unknown/>

Ajmar-Wollheim, Marta and Dennis, Flora (eds.); *At Home in Renaissance Italy*; V&A Publications, 2006

¹² British Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, V&A Museum

¹³ Andrea Bayer (ed); *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*; Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale University Press (2008), p.112.

¹⁴ British Museum, 1890,0517.19

¹⁵ Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, p.112.

¹⁶ British Museum, V&A Museum

¹⁷ British Museum, 1885,0508 102

Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, p.113.

My ~~Loom Weights~~...er...Spindle Whorls, V1.0

In the bottom of my mother's cassone lie two spindle whorls, gifts on the occasion of her marriage to my father, all those years ago in her native Venice. One has her name written on it – Caterina – the name we share, and my father never fails to remind me that the B stand for bella, for she was a beautiful woman. It carries the blue and white roses of her family, the Mocenigo. She died when I was but 10 and now her things from La Serenissima brighten my home here in Scotland.

I have a long-term project of filling my persona mother's cassone (her wedding chest), as a means of pushing me to find out about aspects of life in Venice in the early 1500s and guiding suitable small A&S challenges to take me out of my usual interest areas and learning something new. Like now.

When I saw Master Alex the Potter selling unglazed earthenware whorls, I immediately bought a couple with this project in mind. At around 2cm high and 4.5cm in diameter, they are somewhat larger than the Italian examples. Their size and shape is similar to that of lead spindle whorls, as can be seen in post-medieval entries in the Portable Antiquities Database, so they are not too far off base for my purposes.

So, having learned what my pottery thingummies are properly called, I spent some time looking at the period examples. I knew I wasn't going to be able to glaze and fire mine – the local community pottery club here closed down due to the earthquakes – but I figured I could get a similar effect with a suitable paint approach.

I first gave each whorl around half-a-dozen thin coats of gesso. The pottery was unglazed and the gesso would provide a means of sealing it for the paint layers, a technique which was used in the Renaissance to provide a flat ground for painting on canvas, plaster and stone. This was followed by a final couple of coats of goache; the zinc white has a similar slightly blue shade to that of the tin-glazed earthenware used to produce majolica.

I based the designs on those used on the bead-shaped whorls – I had found more examples of those and I wanted to paint one whorl with my mother's name on it to personalise it for the cassone. These were painted in goache in colours similar to the examples (ultramarine and cadmium/medium yellow), and then sprayed with several coats of varnish to provide the glossy finish seen on glazed majolica. The lettering is quite free-form, in the style of the examples, though the circling rings on the extant versions are more precise than I can

do – the latter because of my poor eyesight for fine work and, I suspect, the lack of a turntable which may have been used to draw the fine even lines around a revolving item.

All in all, I was pleased with how these turned out, though I could have done without the significant amount of wasted time at the start of the project! Now I just had to learn how to use them...but that was a project for another day.

Spindle Whorls, V2.0

So there I was with a couple of spindle whorls painted up the way I wanted them, but there was this niggle... Compare them with the extant examples and they do look like the wrong shape for early 1500 spindle whorls (*pace* the Medici porcelain example, but that was from the 1570s, long after Mother died).

That niggle got worse when I found out from Master Alex that the whorls I'd bought were based on Viking and Anglo-Saxon examples.

So I finally gave in and pulled out some air-setting terracotta clay. Maybe I would have time before November Crown (this was three days before leaving) to make a better shape and paint them up; after all, I wasn't expecting to use these versions for actual spinning, so I wouldn't have to worry about perfection of form.

Just as well. Last time I'd used the pack of clay, I had clearly carefully sealed it, but at the unopened end... Even after cutting the hardened clay into small bits and adding water, it was still a bit lumpy, but I persevered with pummelling it into three bead-shaped whorls. Drinking straws provided a means of drilling a roughly correctly proportioned hole through and I flattened them to visually match the originals, possibly a bit too much.

A windy warmish day helped the beads to dry, at least enough on the surface to start painting on layers of gesso. I suspect that they would still have a lot more drying to go. I left one bead untouched – I had already chastised myself for not photographing the first set of whorls in their unpainted state for a before-after image.

Painting this lot wasn't as easy as the first set – the beads were not as spherical as they should have been and the circling rings were clearly off-centre...so there's this niggle...

Spindle Whorls, V3.0

After all that effort, it was a bit dismaying to lose the spindle whorls at November Crown; fortunately after I'd inflicted one on Lady Juliana Northwood in thanks for demonstrating that even an oblate spheroid that's off-balance has its uses in the hands of a competent drop spinner!



That niggle about not quite getting it right persisted and then Southron Gaard's Baronial Variety Pentathlon Challenge pushed me to have yet another go. The Tool Me Once category asked participants to make a tool to be used in other projects, and this seemed a good chance to give it a whorl.

So out came the air-dry clay again but this time I spent a decent amount of time trying to get a nice even globular shape. I rolled and rolled and rolled it again and almost got it properly spherical. Cutting the hole with a wide-diameter smoothie straw worked better and gave me a larger hole more appropriate for a spindle. More working resulted, shaping, smoothing, squidging. I got it pretty close to right when boredom set in so I moved onto painting. The result is a much better look than the V2 slapdash varieties and it certainly shows up in the paintwork.

By this time I'd decided to go whole hog and make a spindle for the full tool. A jar full of old glue brushes provided a suitable recyclable. Pulling a brush head off and then lots of judicious application of sandpaper produced a thing that approximated a spindle. I was quite pleased with the joint effect right up to the point where the dog decided it was her stick...

Mother's abandoned spindle lies at the bottom of her cassone. I know the weight – a gift from my father – still works as well as the day he commissioned it, but the once-smooth spindle is split and dog-chewed. I can't bear to throw it out as it connects me to her and those long-ago days where she whiled away the time as the waters of Venice lapped below her window...

The Short Version

Just to demonstrate you can do documentation on an index card

What: Bead-shaped spindle whorls for spinning thread or yarn

Where: Faenza or Daruta, Italy

When: mid-1500s (extant examples from 1510-1560)

Materials: air-dry clay with gesso, gouache, spray varnish; chosen to match look of original tin-glazed painted earthenware/maiolica

Description: flattened bead form, pierced for spindle shank; painted with name matching original style (e.g. CATERINA B) and matching colours (blue, white, yellow)

Outcome: a reasonably close match to the extant examples; more care needed in conditioning the clay and painting fine lines



References

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V&A Museum: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1158228/spindle-whorls-unknown/>