

# Medieval Textile Study Group

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## Warp Weighted Looms:

This is taken from the web site:  
[www.dmv.com/~iceland/vefstadur/vefstadur.html](http://www.dmv.com/~iceland/vefstadur/vefstadur.html)

From the beginning of Western history until the Middle Ages, the main weaving tool was the warp-weighted loo, although its particular form varied through the ages and by locality, its essential parts were the same. It was a heavy frame, with a roller beam on the top, and shafts of heddles, or loops of string, which were used to raise and lower the warp threads to make the "shed", or space for the weft. The warp was attached to the roller beam, and it was held under tension by weights attached to the bottom ends of the threads. The weft, or crosswise thread, was passed between warps, and it was beaten upwards with a curved boan beater, a comb, or a broad wooden "sword."

There are representations of weaving on a warp-weighted loom in Egyptian and Greek art, which attest to the great age of this kind of weaving. The horizontal loom, which has a shedding mechanism operated by foot pedals, developed somewhere in Asia in ancient times, and slowly migrated westward, displacing its less efficient cousin. The warp-weighted loom survived into the last century in Iceland and Norway, and well into the middle years of our century in Lapland.

The operation of the warp-weighted loom is described in detail in the book, *The Warp-Weighted Loom*, by Marta Hoffman. Some of her experimental work was done on looms in the collection at the National Museum of Iceland.

Weaving was often a job for two persons. There is a line

in Gisli Sursson's Saga which roughly translates, "Nothing good comes when two women get to weaving." To weave, the weavers raised a shaft and placed it over the shaft supports. This opened up an area between the layers of warp, through which they inserted the weft thread, which was bundled into a long bundle, the vinda. The weft was loosely beaten upwards to the fell of the cloth, where the woven cloth ends and the unwoven warps begin. Then the shed was lowered, and another shaft was placed over the shaft support, and a new weft passed through the new shed. By raising and lowering the warp threads in patterns, the weavers could create intricate diagonal and diamond designs in the cloth.

As the cloth was woven, it was wound upward onto the cloth beam, and the weights were attached lower down on the warp bundles. Because the cloth hangs free, it was quite difficult to keep the edges even. There are standards for fabric, and procedures for valuing fabric, in the oldest Icelandic law book "Grey Goose," which dates from the Middle Ages. Woven fabric was Iceland's main export product during the Viking period, and Icelandic trade cloth more or less set the standard for trade cloth in much of the North Atlantic. However, the introduction of the far more efficient horizontal loom, with its foot-pedal controls and reed beater, was a severe blow to Iceland's cloth production. Curiously, the horizontal loom did not reach Iceland until it was deliberately introduced by an economic reformer at the end of the eighteenth century. But by that time, it was too late to resurrect the Icelandic fabric trade, and fish became the country's primary export.

## Business:

Firstly, I have moved. See the membership address list for my new address. My e-mail is still the same, as I only moved 5 miles from my last home.

Second, for copying, samples, etc, we have 17 members. That is, 15 people members, and there is a need for 2 more copies of everything as one has to go to the Complex Weavers' Library, and a copy will be placed in a file to go to the next Complex Weavers Meeting which is coordinated with Convergence.

Third, you may want to look at the mailing label on this newsletter. Next to your name should be a date. This is the date of the last newsletter you will receive, as its the

renewal date for you. I figured this would be the easiest way to help everyone remember their renewal date.

### **Members:**

Note: because this copy is being made available through the Public Library System, the addresses of members is not included. Members who need to contact other members may request this information from the coordinator or you may consult your Complex Weavers' Membership Directory.

Frances Alcorn

Laurie Autio

Gail Bingham

Interests: dying with woad & other early dyes.

Bronwyn Clark

Diana Frost

Julie HennesseyGlencoe No. 2 RD

Peggy Hoyt

Interests: Lampas and related weaves

Jacque Kelly

interests: Viking fabrics in s-z patterning, evolution of weft patterned structures

Desiree Koslin

Interests/project: St. Claire's Cloak

Brother Kim Malloy, OSB

Interests: Linen Plague Chausables

Harry McCoy

Interests: See related article

Nancy M. McKenna

Lynn Meyer

Interests: Spanish Tablet Weaving

Lois Swales

Interests: Bocksten Man's clothes, early wool textiles

Marjie Thompson

Chris Verhecken-Lammens

It has been reported that information about historical weaving/sources for viewing medieval textiles are very rare in Australia and New Zealand. If members from

those locations would like to pose questions, please do send/e-mail them to me. And anyone else with questions should feel free to do the same. Hopefully, someone else in the group can either offer the information, or steer the person to a location that has the information.

### **Questions:**

From Harry McCoy:

1. Has anyone found a historical instance in which the warp beam is on the bottom instead of the top. (The weaving would be done from the bottom up as opposed to the top down.)
2. Have discovered that weights were made of stone, ceramic and metal. Has anyone found any other material documented?
3. Inasmuch as the sett of the remaining fabrics varies so widely and is so irregular, I believe this contraindicates the use of a reed of any type. Does anyone have evidence of a reed being used on a vertical warp weighted loom.
4. Since the warp must be quite strong, I believe the spinning was done entirely woolen, perhaps double spun, usually in the grease. Has anyone found documentation on the spinning that would indicate the use of any other sizing, or mention of using hot shrink and stretch technique.
5. I have seen, years ago, a Medieval illumination of about 1450 or so, depicting a woman in a wimple type headgear weaving at a horizontal loom, since the drawing was crude and the perspective weird, details were hard to see, however the loom was a sort of light A frame type structure with a horizontal rectangular frame. There were two shafts over a beam which she used with stirrup like loops instead of treadles and the beater was slung on harness from a beam that projected forward from the crosspiece of the A frame. I have designed a loom that would fit this, with cog and dog stops on the fabric beams. I built one once and it worked very well, being limited to tabby, of course. Has anyone seen this illustration or something similar in their researching.
6. Has anyone devised or seen a warp weighted loom built horizontally?. I designed one, but have never encountered another. I used warp weights on several of my regular type shaft looms because I found it the only way to get perfect tension.

I have redesigned a warp weighted loom to suit my own requirements, which I use mostly for tapestry. Will forward specs and picture and small exposition article on what I did and why. The loom will work in almost any sett and I have devised my own solution to the bunched warp syndrome.

## Members' Monographs:

Some members have produced monographs that may be of interest to the rest of you. They are:

Drawlooms, American Style. A monograph based on studies by the Complex Weavers Group 1984-1998. Includes history, types of draw looms, mechanics of the drawloom, and dressing the drawloom, considerations when purchasing a draw loom, and types of weaves possible on the loom with examples. Edited by Peggy Hoyt and Suzanne Nicholson. \$12.50 domestic, \$13.50 Canada, \$15.00 overseas. All USD. Contact Peggy Hoyt

Harry McCoy is a conservator and replicator of historic fabrics, and has written a procedural monograph on \*exactly\* reproducing historical fabrics. To paraphrase his description: "When analyzing an old fabric for replication, which I have done on several occasions, I had to learn one thing - the way the fabric is when analyzed is NOT the way it was set up.... The whole question revolves around what happened to the fabric AFTER it was woven... . In those cases [where] I had to match existing fabrics that were part of an object, such as a chair, where previous upholstery or braid had to satisfy picky collectors or institutions who would go over the piece with magnification etc. They would be sure the thread count was EXACTLY the same." Out of his experiences, Harry has written a 16 page 4-1/2" x 5-1/2" monograph. Although he will share it for free to members, it does cost him at least \$1.60 USD to reproduce his monograph. His address can be found in the membership list.

More will be listed next newsletter.

## Italian Textiles -

A Primary Source that will be available to all through the internet is to be found at [www.medic.org](http://www.medic.org).

<http://www.jhu.edu/~medici/costume/costumea.htm>

## COSTUMES AND TEXTILES IN THE MEDICI ARCHIVE

The textile trade has been a mainstay of the Florentine economy since the middle ages. By the early sixteenth century, the mass production of woolen cloth had already given way to a smaller and more luxurious commerce in silks, brocades, fine linens, embroideries, trimmings and specialty fabrics—an identity that is still proudly maintained today by Florence's fashion and interior furnishings industries.

During the age of the Medici Grand Dukedom of Tuscany (1537-1743), quality clothing and textiles were vastly expensive and thus intensely prized. A single court costume for a man or a woman cost as much as a large house and a set of brocade wall hangings out-priced a whole room of major old-master paintings. Such extravagant creations were daily necessities of life at the Medici Court, complementing its brilliant cycle of festivals and ceremonies. Their creation and use are richly documented in the Medici Archive in Florence.

THE MEDICI ARCHIVE PROJECT is addressing three essential issues in the history of costume and textiles:

What was specifically Florentine about Florentine style in the renaissance, baroque and rococo periods? The MEDICI ARCHIVE PROJECT is working to define this concept by matching the documentary sources with the surviving visual evidence.

Who were the individuals that created Florentine style, as documented in the Florentine archives? There are many lost biographies waiting to be recreated in the correspondence of the Medici Court, the records of the Medici Granducal Workshops and the private papers of individual craftsman and designers. The MEDICI ARCHIVE PROJECT is now preparing the definitive critical edition of the "Richordanze" of Gasparre di Matteo Landini—an early sixteenth-century Florentine manufacturer of luxury fabrics.

What was the international dimension of Florentine style? Then as now, fashion was crucial to the Florentine image abroad. The Medici Granducal Workshops planned and produced lavish state gifts of apparel and textile furnishings that were treasured by princes and courtiers throughout Europe. This essential aspect of Tuscan cultural diplomacy is eloquently documented in the Medici Archive.

THE MEDICI ARCHIVE PROJECT is committed to bringing these unique documentary resources into the mainstream of both current scholarship and current fashion discourse.

You can find this information online at the above addresses, or contact:

Robert B. Strassler,  
Acting President  
100 Park Avenue  
12th Floor  
New York, NY 10017-5563  
RBS750@aol.com

## **Places to go:**

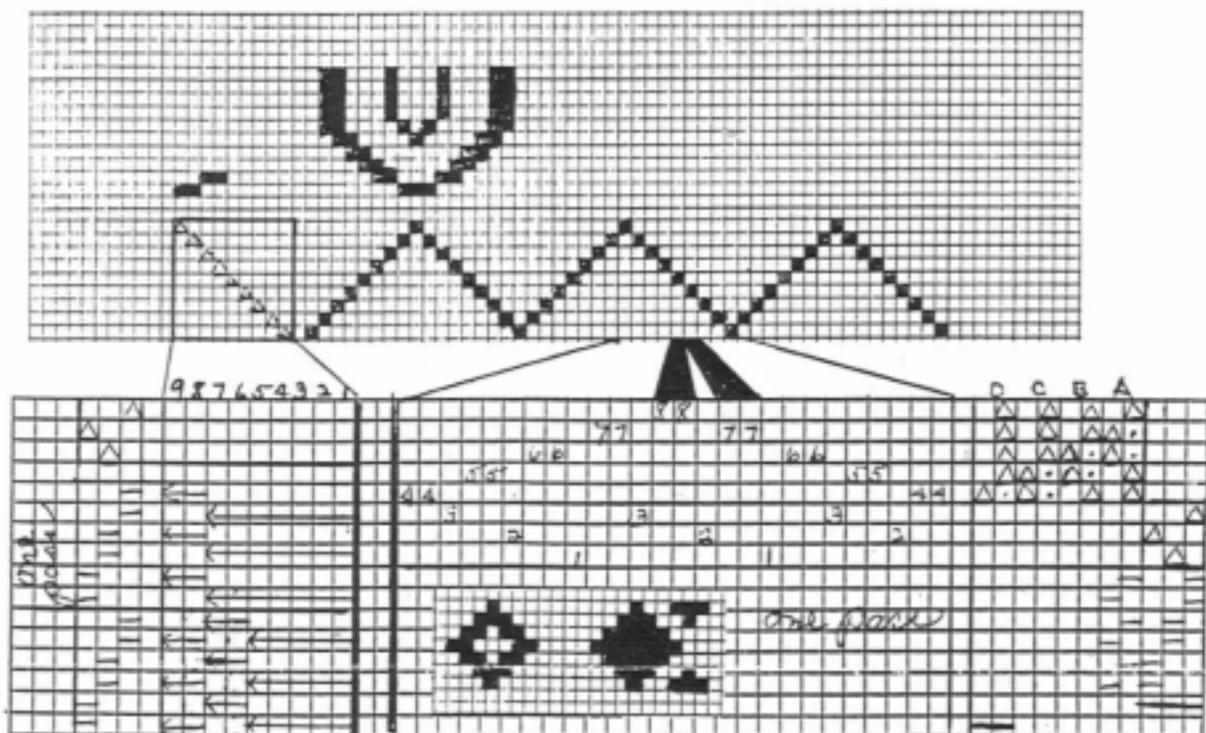
The Art Institute of Chicago hosts:  
Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland, 1572-1764  
until September 6th, 1999  
IKAT: Splendid Silks from Central Asia  
September 30 - January 9, 2000

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Colloquy 1999  
October 10-15th, 1999  
St Meinrad Archabbey  
St Meinrad, Indiana

“Open to all who wish to attend, Colloquy is composed of a group of weavers who meet annually to discuss varied weaving interests. Inge Dam, a weaver from Canada will share her expertise in tablet weaving; Find out about the Hill people of Thailand...” (excerpt from notice in Complex Weavers issue 60) contact Br. Kim Malloy

This COMPLEMENTARY WEFT WEAVE is a study of SAMITUM and its relationship to other structures such as lampas, exploring their historic development. The loom is set up for both single harness and double harness weaving, the single harness operating like a jack loom since pattern threads are held in a down position by the DH shafts and the twill tie-down threads are held down by a bar behind the pattern shafts. With long-eye heddles on all 8 ground shafts, both systems are able to function normally, but of course, cannot be combined. The doubled threads in pattern heddles will allow re-threading of ground threads for the lampas.



## KEY

- △ Rising shed
- ▼ Sinking shed
- | Warp
- Weft & treadling
- Pattern

## LOOM

Shaft draw using CB  
ground drall pulley  
and dummy shafts

The 9 DH pattern shafts are set up in a point order, repeated 8 times whereas the SH point is repeated 16 times.

REFERENCE "Weft-faced Pattern Weaves"  
by Nancy Hoskins

REED 8 EPI 24 ENDS 402 WIDTH 16"  
WARP 20/2 cotton WEFT 5/2 cotton in  
two colors

A STUDY OF COMPLEMENTARY WEFT WEAVES AS PRECURSOR  
TO LAMPAS WEAVE

A DEFINITION: two or more co-equal sets of weft threads that  
are both necessary to complete the interlacement with  
one set of warp threads.

REFERENCES

HISTORY

PATTERN & LOOM by J. Becker, chap. 4 & 5, taquete & samit  
WEFT-FACED PATTERN WEAVES by Nancy Hoskins

METHODS OF WEAVING WITH RELATED WEAVES

Boundweave - Weavers Jr., Fall '85 p.58, by P. Waggoner

Handwoven April '86 p. 35 by Lynn Strauss

"Tied-overshot Boundweave" PWC Issue 10, p.9 by Xenakis

Polychrome weaving on point twills and rosepath

"Polychrome Drafting" WEAVER'S Issue, 18,19,20 by Hoskins

"From Summer & Winter to Taquete" by Lillian Whipple

Complex Weaver Newsletter, Jan. '92, page 18

SAMITUM AND TAQUETE

"Taquete and Samitum" WEAVER'S Issue 5, p 46 by C. Barrett

"Sumptuous Samitum" WEAVER'S Issue 30, p 39 by N. Hoskins

COMPARISON OF MECHANICS OF WEAVING ON THE SINGLE HARNESS  
LOOM AND THE DOUBLE HARNESS LOOM

COMPARISON OF DRAFTING METHODS FOR THE S AND DH LOOM