A MEDIEVAL TABLET WOVEN BRAID FROM A BUCKLE FOUND AT FELIXSTOWE

By GRACE M. CROWFOOT

The stirrup shaped bronze buckle (Plate XXX *a*) now preserved in Norwich Castle Museum (Reg. No. 697.76.94) is double at the narrow end. Inside it was found recently the small fragment of a braid in tablet weave (Plate XXX *b*, *c*). This is no doubt the end of a belt for which tablet weave is well adapted, being thick and durable; it measures hardly one centimetre across now, but may have been broader originally as both sides are damaged.

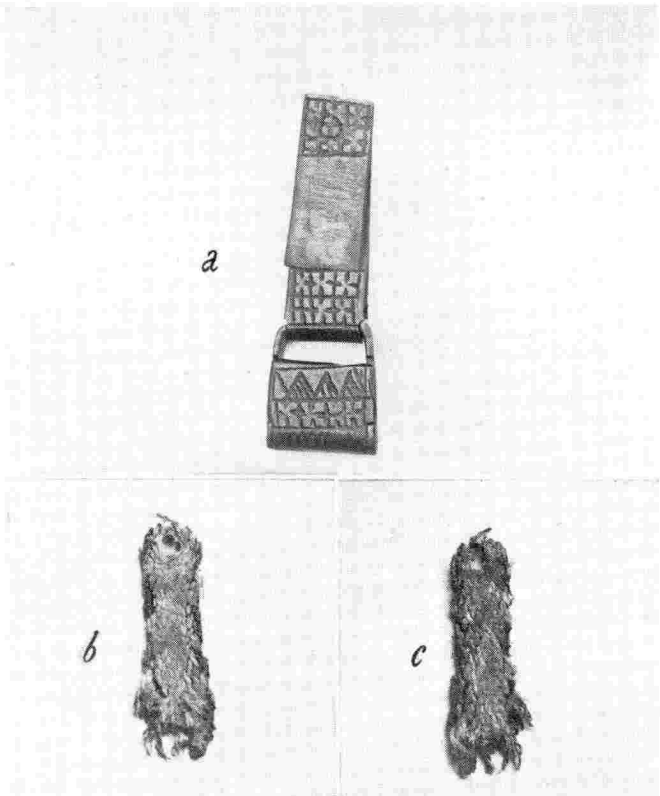
The braid is interesting for several reasons. There is a long series of small buckles and strap-ends adapted to hold narrow belts, running from Roman to medieval times. The belts are generally believed to have been of leather and in many cases traces of this material have been found, but traces of textile are very rare. In the fragment studied here the material is in all probability linen, the type of tablet weave is unusual, and it is in pattern (Reconstruction Plate XXX *d*).

MATERIAL.

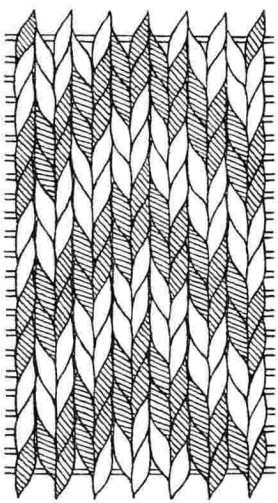
The fragment was submitted to Major G. O. Searle of H.M. Norfolk Flax Establishment, and he kindly sent the following report on a difficult piece of investigation. ' The specimen is made from vegetable fibre, not wool . . . From the general appearance of the specimen under a lower power microscope I should have judged it to be hemp. But there is only one conclusive test for distinguishing hemp from flax and that is the drying twist. Owing to the bacterial tendering and the senile decay of the specimen it is difficult to extract even the few millimetres necessary to see the drying twist, and when I have done so the twist is extremely small—perhaps a sixteenth of a revolution; this is most unusual as even in Egyptian specimens of much greater age we can usually demonstrate the twist quite easily. However, for what it is worth, the minute twist shown has always been clockwise, which if accepted proves it to be flax.'

THREAD.

The warp is S spun in thread of two shades of brown, one much paler than the other; they may be natural shades of linen. The weft is in a slightly darker shade, and appears to be double, no twist could be found.



a. Bronze buckle, Medieval, Norwich Castle Museum.
b., *c*. Braid found inside buckle, back and front. (All $\frac{1}{1}$).



d. Reconstruction of weave of braid.

WEAVE.

In a normal 4 hole tablet weave, the tablets are all turned together in a pack in $\frac{1}{4}$ turns, and then a weft is put through and beaten up, the weave repeating on four turns. If the tablets are threaded right and left, the result on the fabric will show the tablet twists meeting to form chevrons, thus ∧. But here when the fabric is examined, the twists though slanting right and left, do not meet, but touch at an angle, thus ⋏. This can be produced in the following way. The tablets are threaded right and left, but instead of being turned all together, half (the odd tablets) are given a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn and the weft passed through, and then the other half (the even tablets) are turned a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn and again the weft is passed through; the weave repeats on eight turns. This is not at all complicated, but is awkward to manage. It can be done by dividing the tablets into two packs, or by turning the tablets individually.

PATTERN.

A chevron pattern can be made out on the braid in two shades of brown, light and dark, and this is in reverse, i.e. where it is light at the front, it is dark at the back, and vice versa. This is obtained, as is usual in tablet weave, by threading the tablets with the colours in a definite order. The pattern repeats on eight rows of weft.

The following formula is suggested for the braid:—

Tablet numbers:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Hole numbers: 1.	D	L	L	L	L	D	D	D	L	L	L	L	L
2.	L	L	L	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	L	L	L
3.	L	D	D	D	D	L	L	L	D	D	D	D	D
4.	D	D	D	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	D	D	D

D—Dark L—Light

To weave: Turn all odd tablets $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, throw weft, beat up.
Turn all even tablets $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, throw weft, beat up.

Repeat these two $\frac{1}{4}$ turns, a procedure which will give the texture a twill-like effect, resembling that of the original fragment. A replica of the braid has been woven on the above formula, and is now exhibited in Norwich Castle Museum with the remains of the original textile.

COMPARISONS.

I only know of three other examples of this weave. One is a fragment of braid found in a Pagan Saxon strap-end from the cemetery of St. John's Cricket Field, Cambridge. It is now in the Museum of Archæology, Cambridge and is shortly to be published in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*. The two other examples are later in date, one is a braid with gold brocading

among the Walter de Cantilupe relics of the 13th century (Worcester Cathedral) and the other a broad braid in silk and gold, possibly from a stole, in the Bock Collection (Victoria and Albert Museum—No. 1270-1864) believed to be Sicilian in origin.

DATING.

Mr. Rainbird Clarke of Norwich Castle Museum informs me that nothing is known of the associations of this buckle. It was reputed to come from Felixstowe when acquired by Robert Fitch who bequeathed it to Norwich Castle Museum in 1894 with the remainder of his collection. It is here published by kind permission of the Curator who has given facilities for its examination.

It must therefore be dated by typology but buckles of this type have a long history and the general form is non-committal. Mr. J. B. Ward Perkins, Director of the British School at Rome, has examined a photograph of it and expresses the opinion that it is pretty certainly late Medieval. He draws attention to the ornament, particularly the repeated square rosette, which both in form and technique is characteristic of the 14th and 15th centuries. Mr. T. C. Lethbridge of Cambridge would incline to a slightly earlier date, but all those who have examined it are agreed on a medieval dating, although no close parallels to its form and decoration can be cited.