

# TABLET WEAVING

A PRESENTATION FOR THE WEAVERS  
GUILD OF THE NORTH SHORE BY THE  
WGNS TABLET WEAVING STUDY GROUP



## WHAT IS TABLET WEAVING

Tablet weaving (also known as Card Weaving) is a method of weaving strong, narrow, decorative bands. It is a warp faced weave with a distinctive twist.



Tablet woven bands are known to have been made in Europe from the Bronze Age until medieval times, and they are still made in parts of the world such as Turkey and Pakistan.



This band is woven after a band from the Bronze Age, found in Hallstatt in Austria.



This is a band from the Viking Age found in a chieftain's grave in Mammen in Jutland.



The patterns in this band are from the island Sulawesi in Indonesia.

## A Little History

While a great deal of fabric survives from the past looking as though it was tablet woven, Peter Collingswood, in his large survey, *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving*, says a distinction must be made between the earliest known fabric which could have been tablet-woven and those which in all probability were so woven.

His book discusses where and when early tablets were uncovered. A

*wooden tablet* from a cart burial at Dejbjerg Bog, Denmark, early Iron Age is in the National Museum Copenhagen.

*Triangular bone* tablets found at Wroxeter, England, probably 2nd century, are in the Clive House Museum, Shrewsbury, England. In fact, a ship burial from Norway (9th. C.) found a set of wooden tablets with attached warp and band!



So, even though we can be convinced tablet weaving has been around a long time, samples of textiles from those very early dates were not easily assumed tablet woven. Collingswood reports that a so-called girdle of Rameses III (dated before 1197B.C.) could have been the earliest tablet woven textile. Lots and lots of impressive analysis and woven reproductions could not support it was tablet woven even though it had the warp faced, plain weave characteristics. Also, another theory drawn from ancient Egyptian tomb paintings showed the designs of belts and hangings could be tablet-woven! Another Bronze Age warp-faced plain weave fabric from belts found in women's graves in Denmark could have been woven from two-holed tablet.

With all these discoveries, the earliest *certain* examples of tablet weaving all show its use as a starting border for a textile to be woven on a warp weighted loom, not as a separate band!! He says that the earlier starting borders in warp-faced plain weave, from the New Stone Age, could have been made on two-holed tablets but cannot be proved.

So, the early fabrics/bands mostly found in burial sites and ship burials did show bands as borders for clothing. Depending on the piece, *wool*, *silk*, and *cotton*, and not so often *linen* which was combined with fibers were used in the warp.



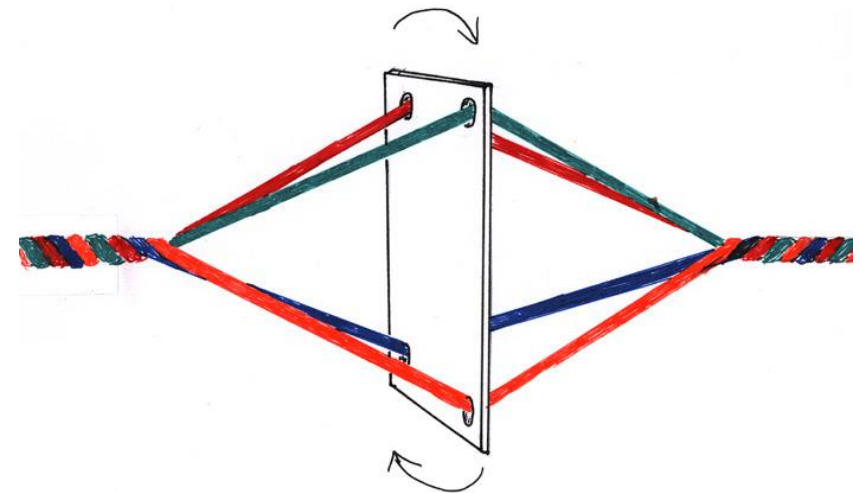
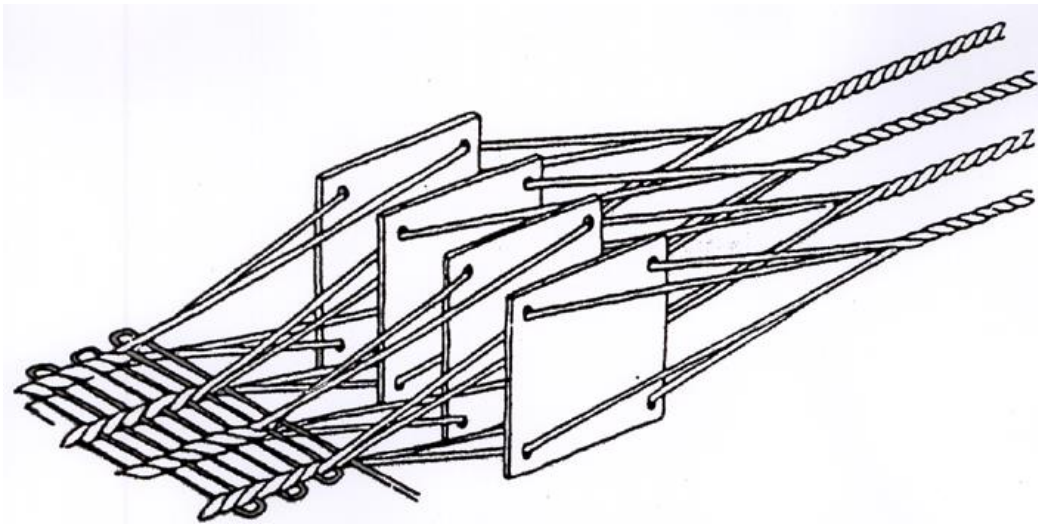


The equipment required is very cheap and simple, yet the range of possible patterns is immense.

All that is required are some tablets, yarn, and a method for keeping the warp taut.



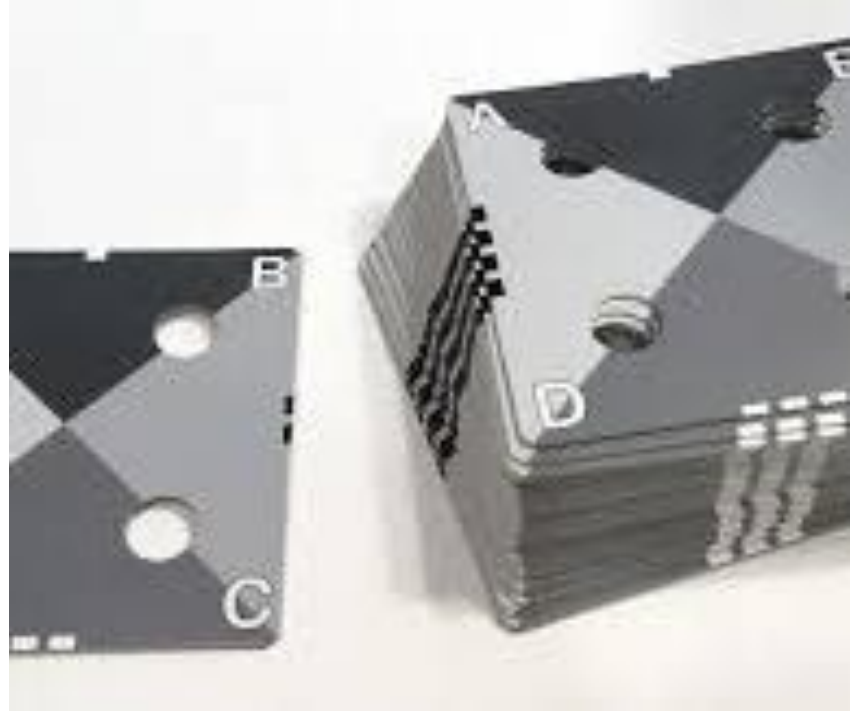
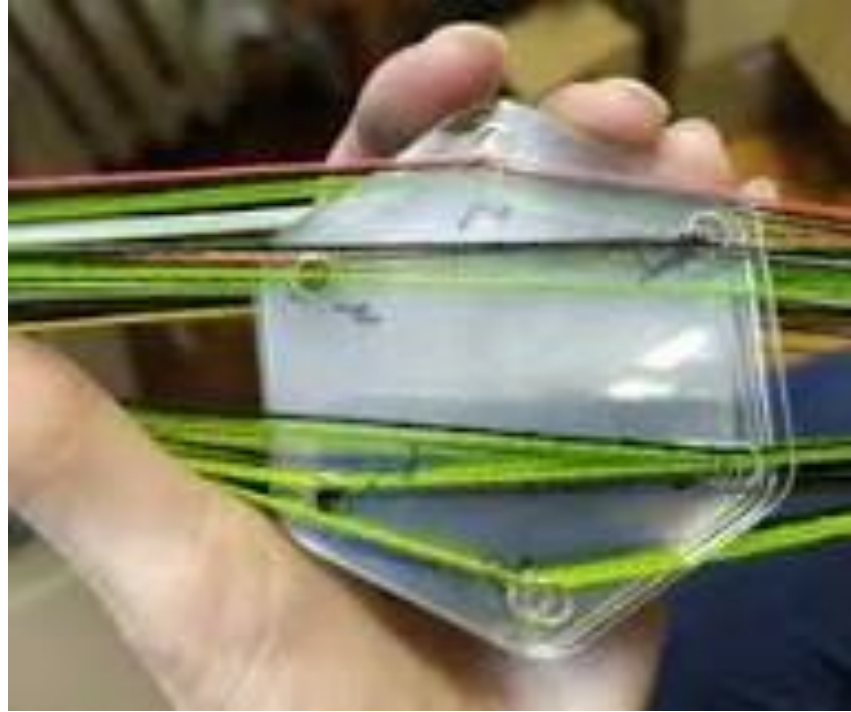
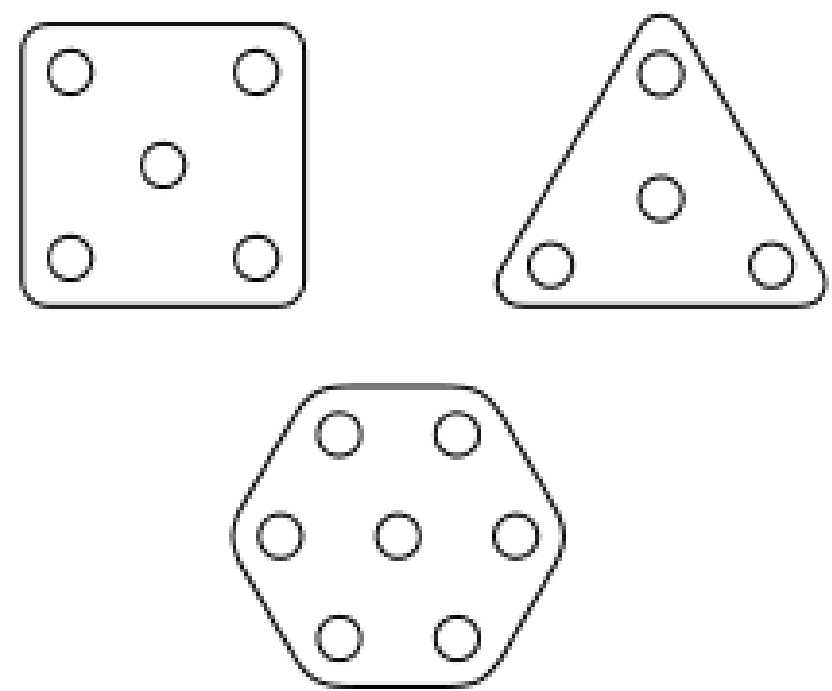
The tablets are small plates, which can be triangular, square, or hexagonal. Near the edge, normally in the corners there are holes. Through each of these holes a thread is drawn, which corresponds to the warp in a shaft loom and when the tablet is raised on the edge there will be a shed between the upper and the lower threads. Every time you turn the tablets, the four threads will twist and the shed will change. When we want to weave a band, we use more tablets beside each other and stretch the warp threads between two fixed points. The tablets stand parallel with the threads and are turned forwards or backwards according to the pattern. After every turn the weft is put through the shed and when you tighten it, the warp threads gather and the pattern appears in the band.





The tablets can be made of wood, horn, bone, leather, cardboard, plastic or whatever you can cut into squares and put a hole in each corner. The width can vary from  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch to  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  inches. The material must not be too flexible. Playing cards can make good beginning tablets, which you cut out into squares with rounded corners and cut a hole in each corner  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the edge.





# Yarns

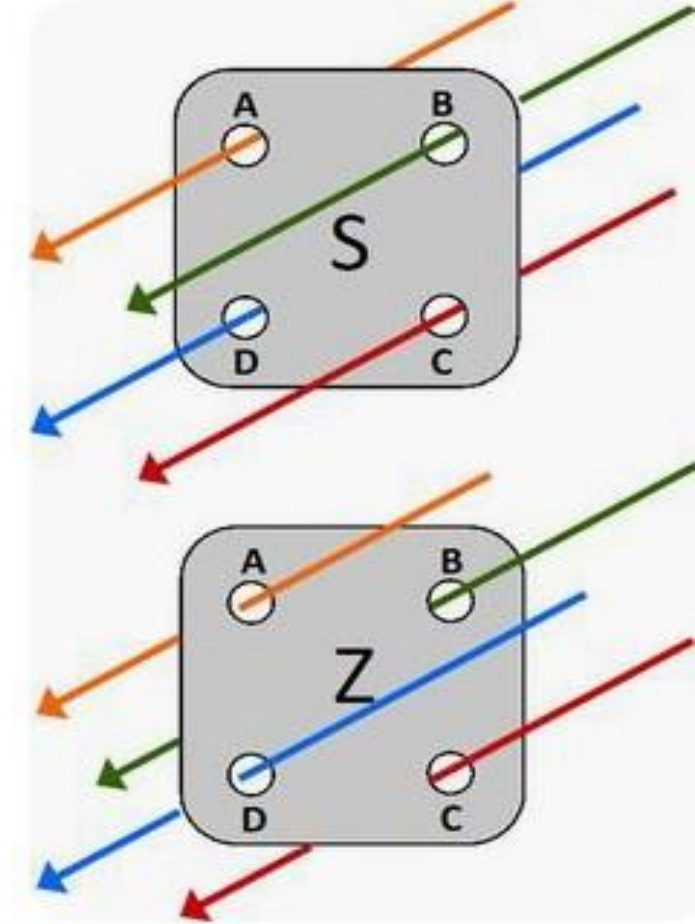
Any weaving yarn will work for tablet weaving; however, smooth, strong, non-stretchy yarns work the best. Most beginners start with 5/2 or 8/2 pearl cotton or crochet thread.



## How does tablet weaving work?

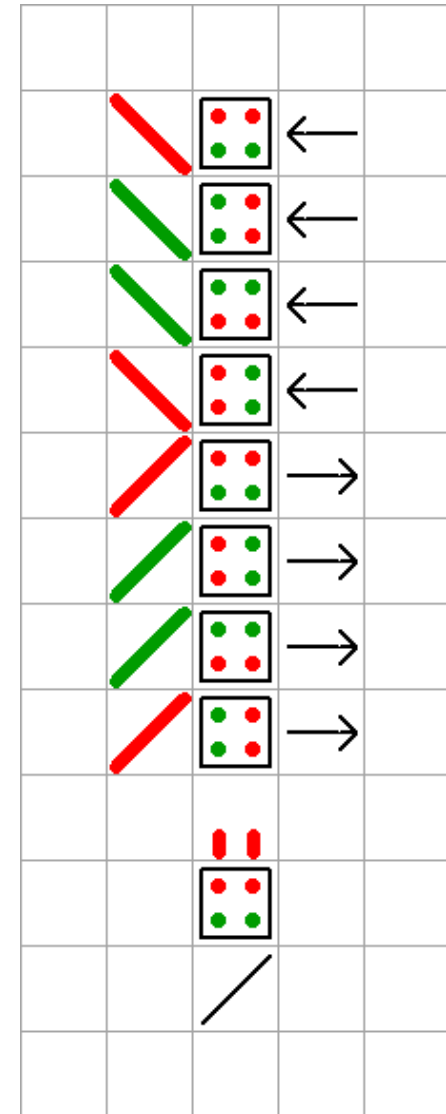
All threads in one tablet must be threaded from the same side of the tablet; otherwise you cannot turn it. If you arrange the tablets S Z S Z S Z and so on, and turn them in the same direction at every turn, the band will look like a knitted band.

It is possible to change the position of a tablet during the weaving by revolving it about a vertical or horizontal axis, and in that way change the twist direction. So it is possible to turn all the tablets in the same direction all the way during the weaving; but it may be difficult if you make a mistake and have to go backwards in the weaving.



Let us look at a pattern for a single tablet in a band. The lowest single square shows us how to thread the tablet. It has two green threads in the bottom holes and two red threads in the top holes. The slanted line under the square shows us, that the tablet is Z positioned; it has the same direction as the slanted line in a Z. The right side of the tablet is the front, and it turns forward to the right. The tablet turns backwards to the left, towards the weaver.

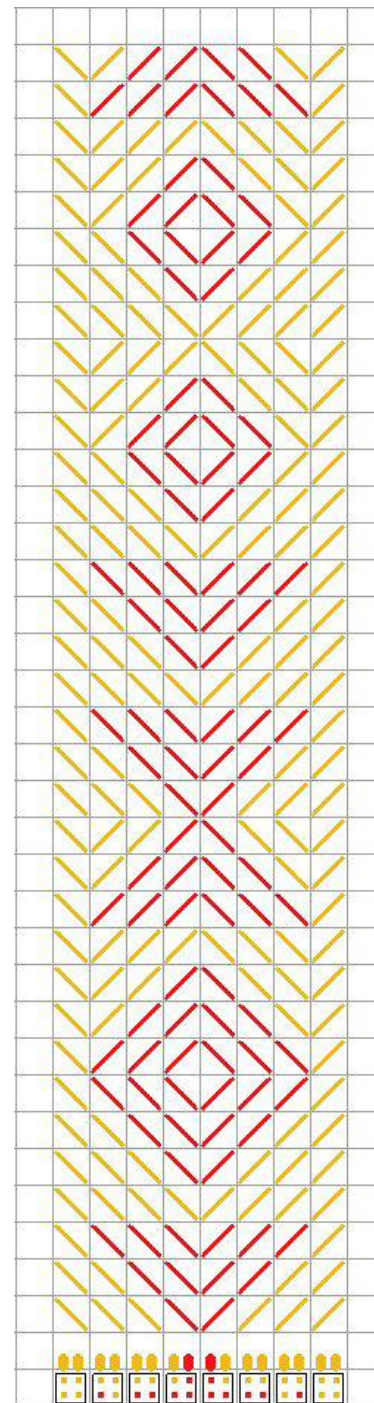
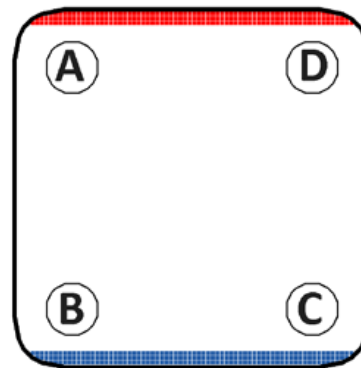
Over the single square there is a column with 8 squares that show the turns of the tablet. The line to the left of the first square shows us, that the tablet has to be turned forward, and it is red, because a red thread is moving between the top holes of the tablet and is seen in the band. In the next turn a green thread will show on the band. Now follow two turns, and the tablet is back in its start position with the two red threads on top. The next four slanted lines show, that the tablet must turn backwards, and they will be seen as red, green, green and red in the band.



## A pattern with single slanted lines

This little pattern has 6 pattern tablets and 2 border tablets. The two border tablets get 4 threads of the same color. They may be turned the same way during all the weaving. If the twists behind the tablets get too tight, you must change the turning direction and turn the tablets backwards, and the twists will loosen. Or you can revolve the tablets so they get the opposite position, and the twist will loosen, when you go on with the forward turning. The tablets do not need to have letters or figures in the corners during the weaving. But when you are threading the tablets, you must know which thread threading through which hole, and for that you need letters. In this pattern draft the figures are numbers of the tablets; the letters to the left correspond with the letters in the drawn tablet, and the Z's and S's tell us how the tablets are threaded. The drawn tablet shows us the position of the letters, and to the right you see a Z positioned (S threaded) and an S positioned (Z threaded) tablet. Beneath the pattern to the right is the threading pattern. The holes have the color of the threads, and the slanted lines under the tablets show their positioning. In the left side the tablets are S positioned and in the right side they are Z positioned.

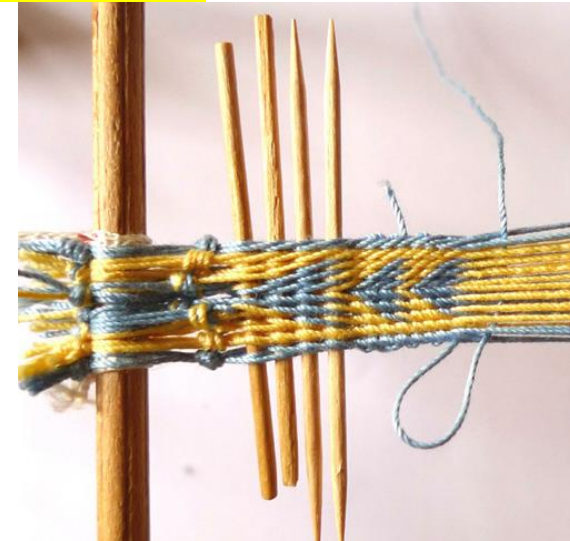
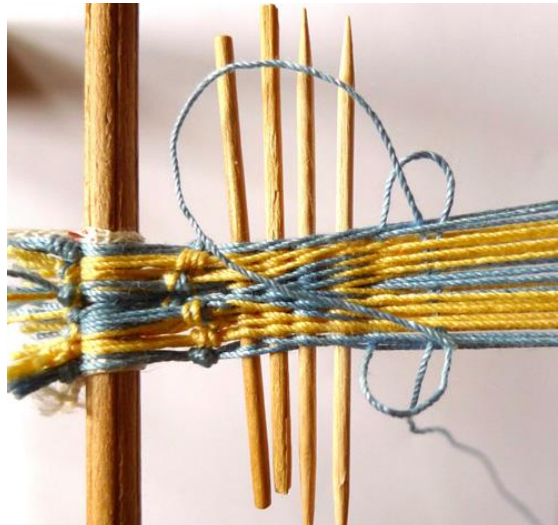
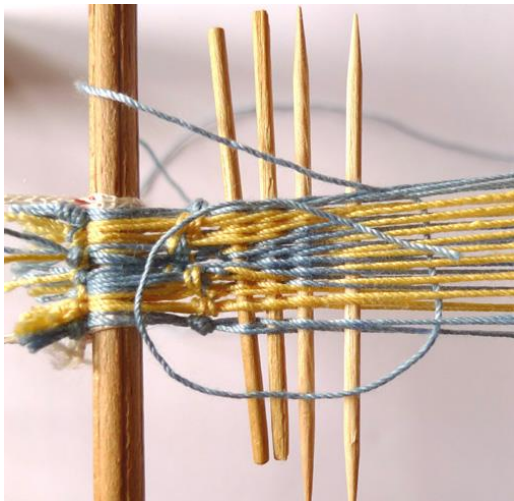
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A								
B								
C								
D								
	Z	Z	Z	Z	S	S	S	S



## Starting a tablet woven band

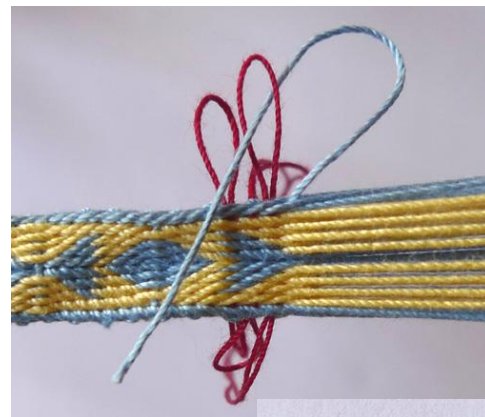
Put a toothpick into the shed and turn the tablets one quarter turn forwards; put the next toothpick into the second shed and turn one quarter turn forwards. Press the sticks a little together, and go on with the last two toothpicks in the same way. Now you are back at the start position and can continue with the yarn. Put the weft into the shed, but leave about 4 inches of the end and turn the tablets a quarter turn forwards; put in the warp from one side and the end of the yarn from the other side and leave a little loop in both sides. Turn the tablets, beat carefully and pull the threads until the loops just disappear at the edge of the band.

At this moment It is important to fix the width of the band. The weft must be as little visible as possible, and the woven band must be beaten so much as possible, so it has a solid structure. The free end of the weft is put into the shed 3-4 times, and then you go on with the weft alone. The weaving rhythm is: put in the weft thread, leave a little loop, turn the tablets, beat and pull the thread, until the loop just disappears. Put in the next weft - and so on.



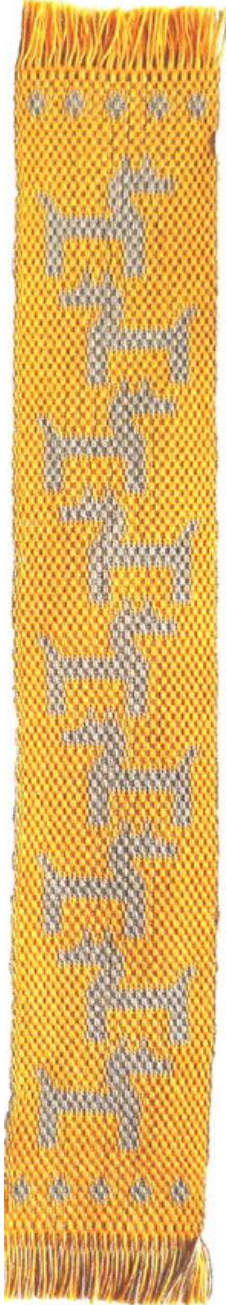
## Ending a tablet woven band

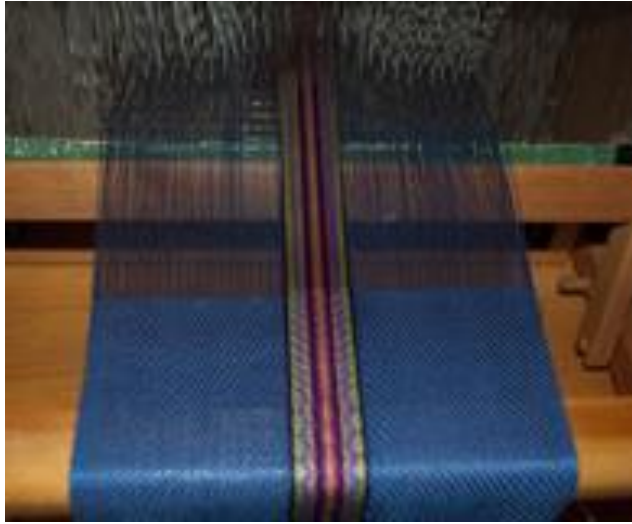
When you want to end the band, it is a good idea to lock it as you did in the start. But you must use a different method. Take a thin thread and fold it double; the double thread must be longer than the width of the band. Stick the double thread into the shed together with the weft thread and keep the loops at the same side of the band. Turn the tablets, beat and draw the weft thread as usually, but keep the loop of the thin thread open. Do the same with two other thin threads. At last you stick only the weft thread through the shed, turn the tablets, beat and cut the thread 8 inches from the band. Put the end of the thread through the nearest loop and draw the weft thread through the band by help of the thin thread. Do this two times more, and the band is locked.

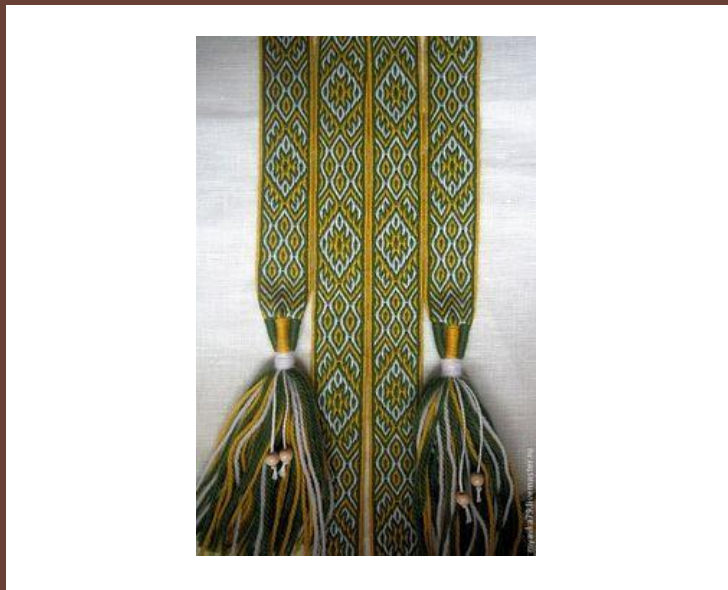
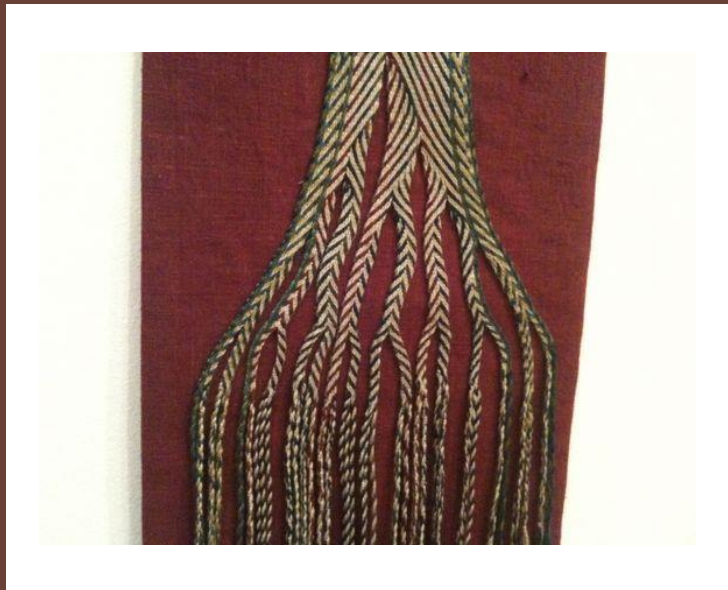




# Beyond the Basic Threaded-In Pattern





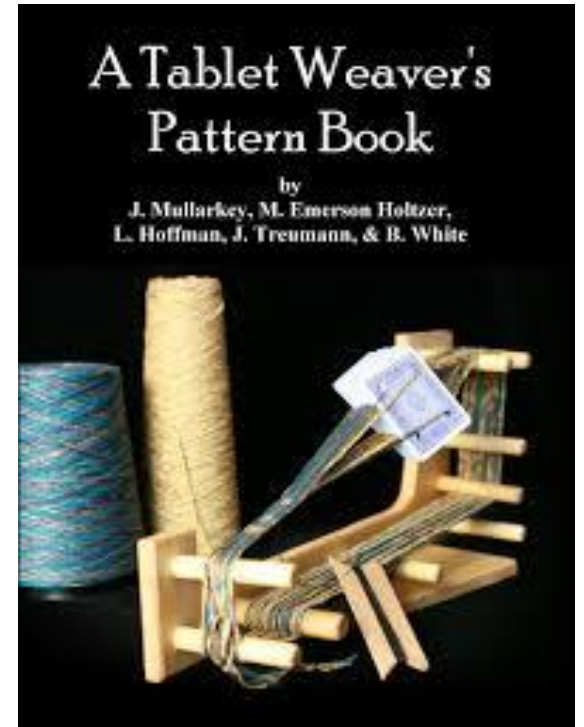
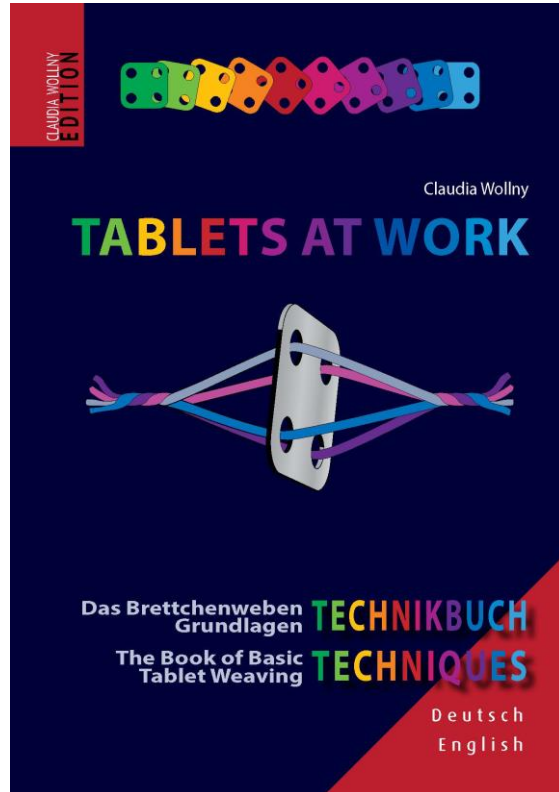
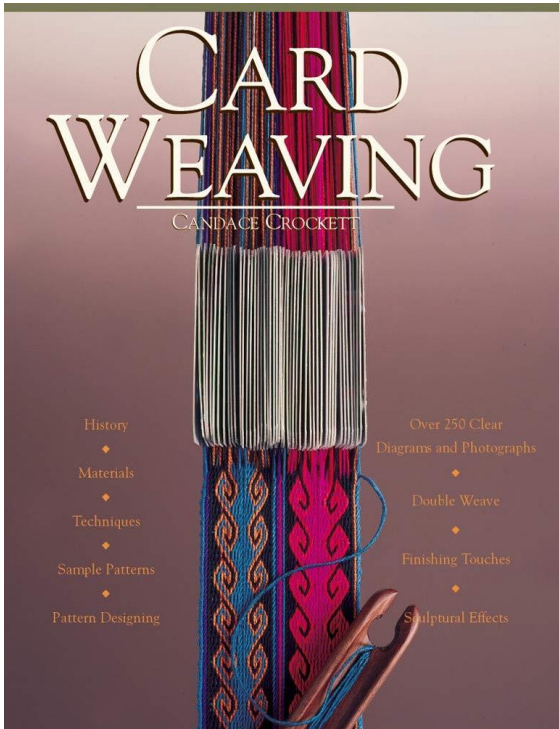




# What Can You Do With Tablet Woven Bands?

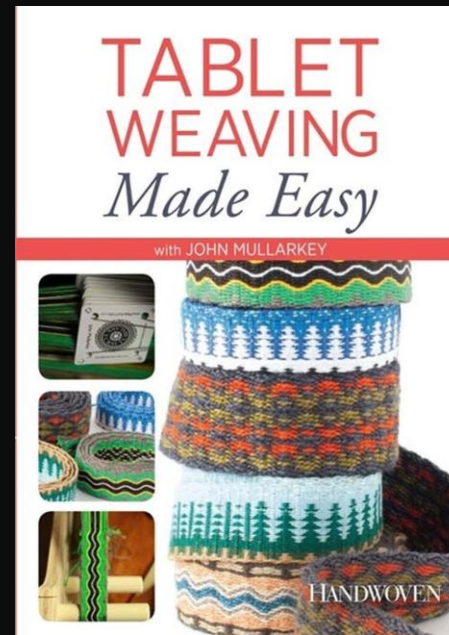







# Books on Tablet Weaving

# DVDs by John Mullarkey









Tablet Woven  
Pieces Made By  
Members of  
the WGNS  
Study Group

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