

L-M BRIC News No. 32000-05-10 © Revised 2002, 2006

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L-M BRIC News

'Fingerloop' Braids from the 12th - 15th-c. Dump Sites in London, UK.

Archeological excavations of old dump sites along the Thames carried out during the 1970s to the 80s have produced many articles of daily life of city dwellers in the Middle Ages. (Note1) Due to the soil environment of the sites, a significant amount of textile objects in a rarely found condition have been recovered. Among them are 24 'fingerloop' braids, so identified because they had looped threads at the unbraided end. From the number of loops, 10, 14 and 20 in addition to 5 and 7, one may discern that not only one-person braiding but also two- and four-person methods were employed. Braids used for trimmings for hairnets and purse strings identify some ways the braids were used for.

I am delighted and congratulate the researchers of the report for their appreciation of the braids, which are often relegated to mere 'strings' among meticulously cataloged fiber products. This pushes the existence date of the l-m technique back to the 12th c. from the 15th c.

The specimens seem to have been grouped into two; 'fingerloop' braids for those having looped end threads of 5, 7 and multiples of 5 and 7 loops, and 'plaited' braids for those with cut ends. While I have no qualm regarding the identity of the braids in the former group, I am not sure of those in the latter as plaited braids do not necessarily exclude 'fingerloop' braids. For instance, a flat braid (#370) is tagged as 'fingerloop' where it is wide, and 'plaited' where its tail end splits into two half-width braids. In the l-m technique, splitting a flat braid into two narrower braids (and vice versa) is one of the most common practices. In another instance, 8-element square braids identified as 'plaited' braids are in itself not wrong. If their structure is scrutinized further, however, many or even all 17 'plaited' braids might turn out to be 'fingerloop' braids, as was the case with the 8th-c. Japanese braids. (Note 2).

L-M BRAIDING in China from the First Century BC

My motivation to publish the L-M BRIC News was initiated when I learned two and a half years ago about the bronze cowry container from the Li Family tomb site in Yun-nan, China (Note 3). (Photo 1a)



My dream of seeing the actual object was realized much sooner than expected by way of a textile study tour of the Southern Chinese minority organized by the Textile Museum, Washington, DC.

Photo 1a. Weaving Scenery on a Cover of a Cowry Container
 Li Family Mountain Museum, Jiang-chuan, Yun-nan, PR of China.
 紡織野具器の蓋上の群像、李家山青銅器博物館、江川、雲南省、中華人民共和國。
 Photo: M. Kinoshita © 1999
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The Li Family Bronze Museum is situated in Jiang-chuan, 100 km south of Kung-ming, the capital of Yun-nan

Province.

I found the container that I had come to see displayed in a dark corner of an exhibition hall. I saw four loops of bronze thread mounted on the index and middle fingers of the braider's hands held in 'palms-up' position (Photo 1b).

Why four loops rather than more commonly observed five? It is not that they don't work, but few 4-loop procedures have been reported. Is it an oversight or intentional simplification by the bronze artisan? While there is no way to know, it showed that the technique used most likely was the 'palms-up and operating with the inner (ring or small finger) method



Photo 1b. Two Braiders on a Cowry Container with a Cover Decorated with Weaving Scenery: Li Family Mountain Museum.
 紡織野具器の蓋についている2人のループ組紐組み手、李家山青銅器博物館。
 Photo: M. Kinoshita © 1999
 L-M BRIC News ©

(Method #2) which is the same as the kind used today in Japan and Thai Land.

The hands and loops are large compared to the size of the figurine. The clothes and hairdo of the braider pair are distinctly different from those of weavers. These details seem to tell more than the braiding technique.

How fortunate it was for us that the Museum had chosen to display this particular cowry container from many others that are equally valuable. I would like to thank Dr. Shi Ming-jong allowing to take the container out to a more suitable spot to photograph.

L-M Braiding of THAI Minority People; the KARENS and the AKHAS

This report has come from Ray Napier of UK. In photo 2 (right), two Paw Karen women are making a braid for jewelry. The woman on the left (braider) waits for the next move while the one on the right, who also works as a beater, is inserting silver pieces to the braid. The head of the braids is tied to a support hidden behind the beater.



Photo 2. L-M braiding of Paw Karen silver-making village. ポーカレン族のループ指操作組紐
 Strings of silver amulets and shapes are worked between stitches of braids.
 銀細工を組み込んでジュエリーにする。
 Photo: Ray Napier © 1997
 L-M BRIC News ©



In photo 3 (left), an Akha girl is showing how to mount the loops on



Photo 3. An Akha girl showing how to mount the loops on the fingers. An assistant would hold the braid head and help tighten the structure.
アカ族のループ指操作組織
通常は、手伝いが組頭を支え組口を打って組織を緊迫する。
Photo: Ray Nagler © 1997
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the fingers and hold the hands. The head of the braid is pinched between the knees. In other pictures, however, she is seen braiding with another girl who beats the braid with one hand while holding the braid-head in the other.

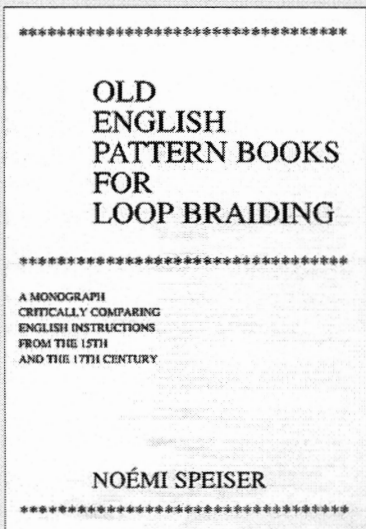
Both photos 2 and 3 show the typical feature of 'the palms facing each other, operating with the inner fingers' method (Method #2). Of the two women working as a pair, only one of them carries out the interlacing. Therefore, this is 'one-person' braiding. In 'two-person' braiding, two braiders must be engaged in interlacing. The method shown in the

photos agrees with an earlier report of the Paw Karen method. (Note 4)

For both the cases of the bronze figurines and the Thai minorities, I have discerned that they used Method #2 from the way loops were distributed on the fingers, although this distribution pattern could be interpreted as the moment right after the loop transfer of Method #1. This assertion is based on my own experience in practicing the l-m braiding as well as my observation of others, that at this stage the braiders always hold the loops in the initial distribution pattern.

"OLD ENGLISH PATTERN BOOKS FOR LOOP BRAIDING" (Note 5)

Special contribution by NOÉMI SPEISER



This Monograph deals with the following two sources, both stemming from English upper class ladies.

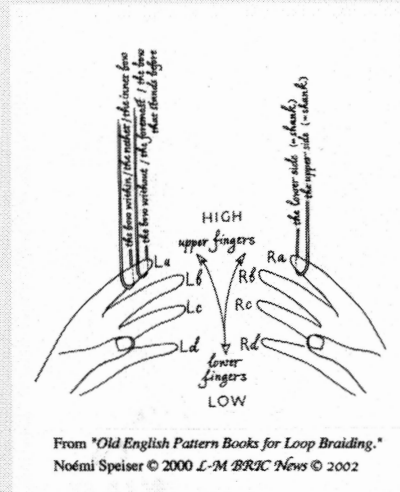
1. Nine handwritten books from the 17th century provided with swatches, of which I published the main facts in "The Manual of Braiding." (Note 6) In this new book, I picked out several particularly mysterious cases for which I tried to find an interpretation, to divine the secret intention of the ladies and to guess the reason for strange structural irregularities.

2. Sixty-five recipes for loop-braiding from the "Tollemache Book of Secrets," 15th c., which came to my knowledge five years ago. Once transcribed, the Middle English instructions were surprisingly clear and logical. However, in studying bit by bit I hit upon a few stunning surprises. Of these I present meticulous analysis, additional suggestions, conjectures, associations...

This is a deep-see dive into the English loop-braiding traditions. The harvest is a surprising diversity of patterns.

The recipes are commented, explained and provided with many diagrams showing hands and fingers. The instructions are easy to follow. And in addition the track-plans should reveal the fascinating secrets hidden in the body of a compact braid.

The first part supplies the fans and freaks of loop braiding with a synopsis over related techniques producing more or less different fabrics. This should light up the particularities of this against other methods of interworking yarns, and point out when and where whether this or another one would be practicable and appropriate.



From "Old English Pattern Books for Loop Braiding,"
Noémi Speiser © 2000 L-M BRIC News © 2002

And when the readers are fed up with thinking and frustrated with awkward trials, when their fingers are weary, then they can enjoy the list of the colorful names of the braids, the list of the amusing technical terminology and the curious adjectives used for the fingers.

Moreover I am happy to show photos of thirteen original pages of recipes with swatches and two pages of Lady Tollemache's faded handwriting.

It was for me and could be for you a rewarding adventure to penetrate the fanciful minds of the 17th-c. Lady Cecilia Lucie Glover, Phelitia Milward, the notoriously extravagant Lady Cecilia Bindloss and others, and compare with them the consistent logic of Lady Catherine Tollemache, 200 years earlier.

Editor's note: Despite well established fame of the Tollemache Book of Secrets as an English family document from the Middle Ages, nobody understood the content of "Treatise on the Making of Laces" until, in 1994, Noémi Speiser realized that it was a rare record of the l-m braiding technique. The new study significantly widened the scope of the finger-held l-m technique.

The book may be purchased from: N. Speiser, Ziefner-Strasse 25, CH-4424 Arboldswil, Switzerland; the Handweavers Studio, 29 Haroldstone Road, London E17 7AN GB; Unicorn, 1338 Ross St., Petaluma, CA 94954 USA; or through us where the proceeds will help support publication of the News.

LIST OF OBSERVATION POINTS FOR RECORDING L-M TECHNIQUES

This is a shorter version of the list from p. 12 of Speiser's new book. The list shows what to look for when you happen to encounter a person who knows l-m braiding and is willing to answer your questions. It will be greatly appreciated if you take such a record and send it to the *L-M BRIC News*.

TWO DEVELOPMENTAL DIRECTIONS OF F-H L-M

The sources of finger-held l-m braiding that we know of today are reports of field studies or casual encounters in the 20th c., and written records from the 15th- and the 17th-century England (Note 7).

We see two possible directions of development from these traditional techniques of braid making performed by simple exchanges of loops mounted on fingers.

Direction 1 (D1) is represented by procedures for making braids with an ORTHODOX PATTERN, such as a square braid shown in the *News* no. 2, Fig. 3, and a two-ridge flat braid and 4-ridge flat braid shown in Illustrated Instructionn Series of this issue, Figs 1 and 2. The operator picks 'through' every loop mounted on the fingers between itself and the finger on which the loop to be transferred (running loop) is mounted. Braids are constructed in two superimposed layers.

Direction 2 (D2) is the one unique to F-H L-M and represented by procedures for making braids with an UNORTHODOX PATTERN. The operator picks the loops between itself and the finger that hold the running loop in a mixed shed of either 'through,' 'upside down' or pass 'over' (not necessarily in this order) before taking the running loop. Some examples are shown in the *News* no. 2, Figs. 2, 4-6.)

UO no. 1 and 2 seem to be the most widely used form f-h l-m braiding. This can be easily understood since they are the easiest and fastest l-m procedures that produce functional as well as esthetically pleasing braids.

ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION SERIES:

INTRODUCTION:

No. 3

Braids with an Orthodox Pattern:

Twin 5-element 2-ridge twill flat braids (pigtail braids)

10-element 4-ridge twill flat braid

Braids with an Unorthodox Pattern:

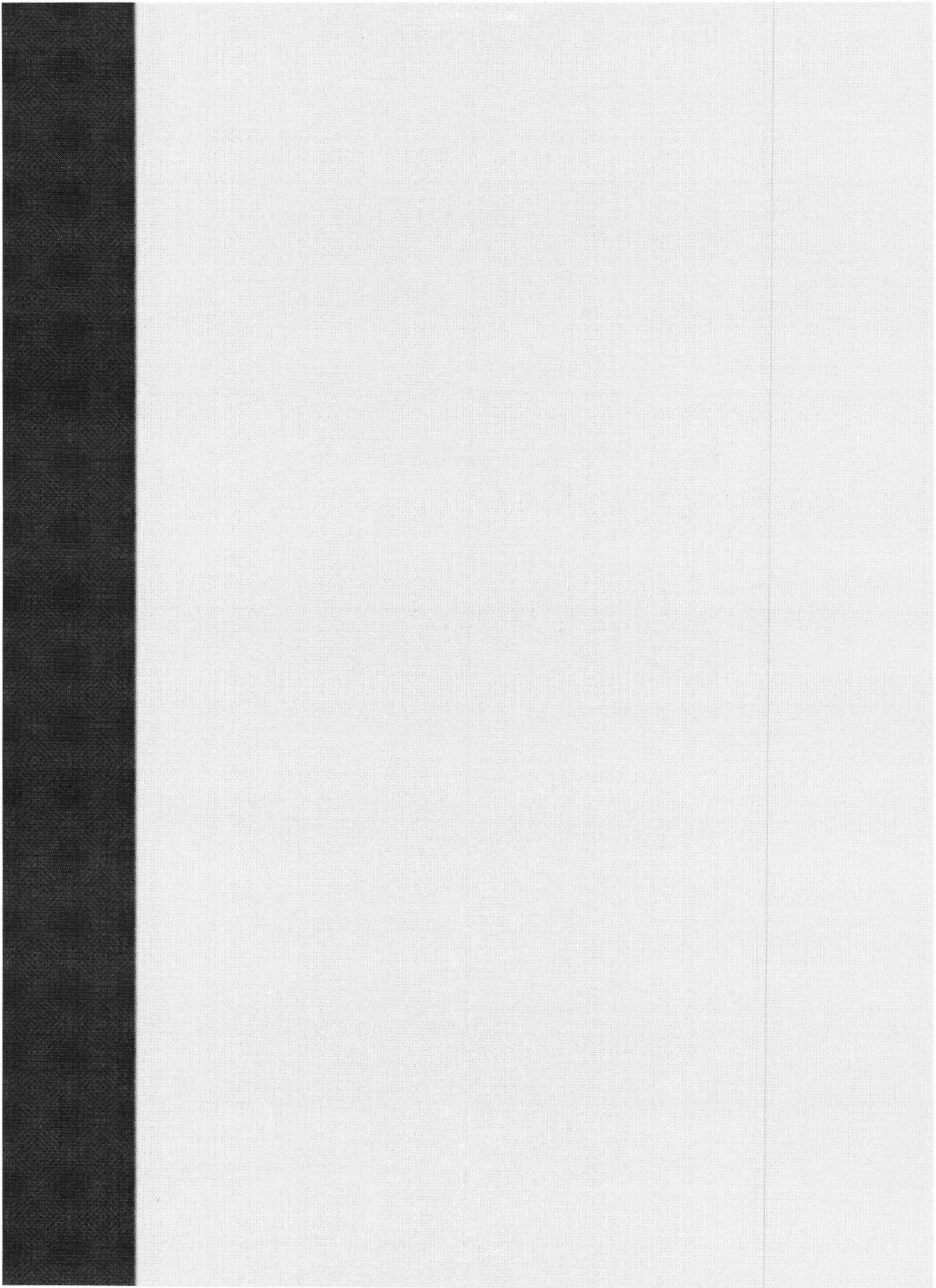
UO No. 1

UO No. 2

Acknowledgement (1999-2000):

I would like to thank J. Fielder, S. Lou, R. Napier and J. Parry who sent me information on the l-m technique, to N. Speiser who contributed to this issue. Also to U. Bargmann, S. Berlin, M. Suzuki, and R. Ward, for their monetary support, and to those who sent me letters of encouragement.

L-M BRIC News is totally self-supported publication by the Loop-Manipulation Braiding Research and Information Center founded by Masako Kinoshita to promote the study of L-M braiding. The Hardcopy version is distributed free of charge. Donations from interested readers, however, are welcome.



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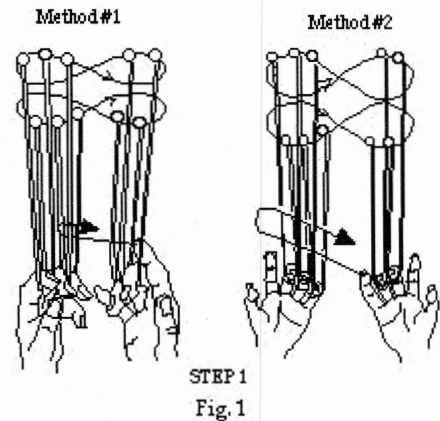
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ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION SERIES: No. 3

The number of loops for the braids shown in this series is five unless specified otherwise.

THE BASIC RULE OF LOOP TRANSFER is the same in both Direction1 (D1) and Direction 2 (D2).

	Method #1		Method #2	
Initial loop allotment	La, Lb, Lc	Rc, Rd	L2, L3, L4	R2, R3
	OP	RN	OP	RN
Step 1	Ra	Lc	Rd	Lb
Step 2	La	Rc	Ld	Rb



PROCEDURES REPRESENTING D1:

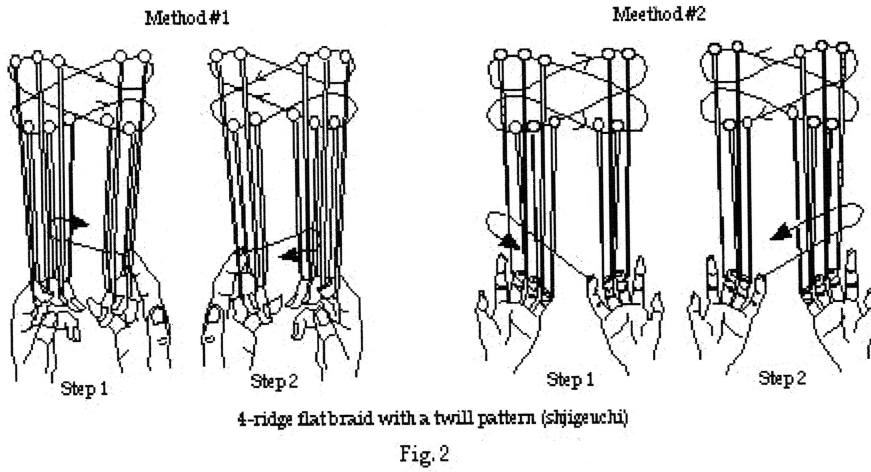
Twin 2-ridge flat braids (Fig. 1)

#1	Method #2	Method	Method
OP		Ra / La	Rd / Ld
Step 1		opn - thr thr	opn thr thr
Step 2		mirror image of Step 1	mirror image of Step 1

Twin 2-ridge flat braids with a twill pattern (or twin pigtails)
The twins are layered on top of the other as they are made.

Four-ridge flat braid with a twill pattern (Fig. 2)

OP	Ra / La	Rd / Ld
Step 1	the same as Fig. 1 , Step 1	the same as Fig. 1 , Step 1
Step 2	thr thr - cr	thr thr cr

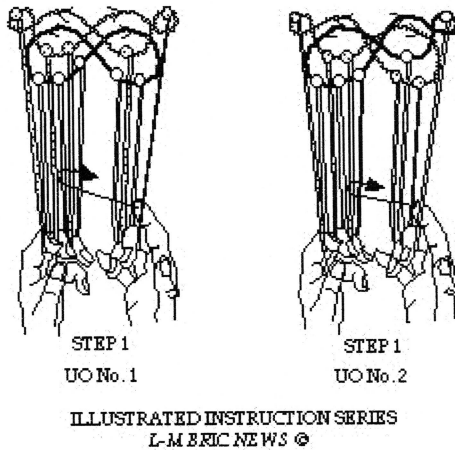


ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION SERIES: 2

L-M BRIC NEWS No. 3 ©

PROCEDURES REPRESENTING D2:

	UO No. 1	UO No. 2
Method #1	thr ov - opn	thr ov - cr
	mirror image of Step 1	mirror image of Step 1



The track plan illustrates that UO No. 1 is composed of two flat braids, one with two ridges and another with 4 ridges, super imposed on each other. On the other hand, UO No. 2 is composed of two inter crossing 3-ridge flat braids.

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