

*L-M BRIC News No. 6**2003-04-10 ©*

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L-M BRIC News

L-m braids, ca. 1630-40, Found in the Royal Danish Collections at Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen

Contribution by Katja Johansen (1)
with collaboration of Joy Boutrup (2)

Site constructed by J. Boutrup.

Family Tradition of L-M Braiding Kept in Aomori, Japan

Contribution by Mari Omura (3)

In July 2002, I received a phone call from Noriko Amano, a volunteer guide at the Sannai Maruyama Jomon Archeological Site in Aomori Prefecture, the northern most prefecture of the main island of Japan. "I read in a newspaper report about a braiding technique. It seems that it is the same technique as one of my friends, Mrs. Kumeda (4), knows. Her method, however, produces only a square-shaped braid" Excited, I responded eagerly, "May I meet her?"

Amano told me that she had kept for almost a year a piece of a news article in the Tohoku News reporting a revived ancient Japanese braiding technique thinking that it might be the same as the one that she had learned from Kumeda.

The news reported on our research presented at the Eighteenth Convention of Japan Association for Scientific Studies on Cultural Properties held at Nara University in 2001 (5). The research conducted at Gangoji Institute for Research of Cultural Property, "Braids observed on excavated keiko (lamellar) armor" by Omura, et. al., discussed that the 4-ridge twill lacing braids used on nine excavated keiko armor from the 5th to 8th century could have been made using the l-m technique. An accompanying photo showed how to make a 4-ridge flat braid.

According to Kumeda, it was her great grandfather, Mihachi Kinoshita, who had learned the braiding technique in the "South" (Aomori being the northernmost of the main island of Japan, practically any place in Japan is south to it), brought and bade to keep it as the family tradition. She, however, doesn't know where he was from or his birth or death date.

She learned how to ply a number of thread ends to get them into an appropriate size for making braids and to braid as a young girl from her grandmother, Yuki, and aunt, Kiwa. They used the braids for front closures of haori, a jacket worn over kimono.



Fig. 7 Mrs. Kumeda braids while Mrs. Amano holds the braid

Then she showed me how she braided. Using 5 loops, she mounts them on the middle and ring fingers of the both hands and in addition on the small finger of the left hand. She operates with the empty small finger while holding the palms facing upwards. For the

first inch of so she braids twin 2-ridge flat braids and then changes it to a square braid. Her method has exactly the same characteristics as the others reported so far in Japan.
(End of Omura's report)

In the Kinoshita family, they used braids to decorate the family Shinto shrines as well as the family Buddhist altar and wrapped around the wrist to keep bad spirits away. They hung red and white braids (good luck colors) on the New Year's decoration. Neighbors used to come asking for them to be used as a good luck charm. She made a pair of white silk strings for her mother's haori to send her off to her last trip. For the New Year 2003, Mrs. Kumeda wrote me, that she had revived the old family custom.

According to Kumeda's account, she is the fourth generation in this family tradition, which puts the approximate date of the first generation to the latter half of the 19th c.

The technique belongs to method 2 of the finger-held l-m technique, which is in accordance to all other four reported so far in Japan. This further confirms our inference that the method seen in the Japanese illustrations of braiders from the 16th century down was also method 2.

Kameda is surprised to learn that the family tradition, which she hadn't appreciated much as a child, has such a distinctive historical value. Now, she and Amano are busy starting a group to conserve the technique.

Loop-braiding in Early 19th-c. Egypt

Enclosed in the last year's greeting card from Barbara Oberwinkler of Tuebingen, Germany (6), was a copy of a lithograph showing a studio of a braider (le faiseur de cordonnets) who is obviously using the l-m technique (Fig. 8) (7).



Fig. 8 (Courtesy of the Saint Genèviève Library, Paris, France.)

It proves that l-m braiding was practiced in early 19th century in Egypt. From this image one can discern that it is "method 1." More importantly it also shows a method for tightening the braid structure when the

loops are longer than the arm's reach.

The L-M braiding requires a braider to hold the ends of the full length of the loops needed to make a braid.

The primal method of the technique for tightening the braid is by spreading the arms wide and batting the loops sideways for tightening the structure.

This requires that the length of the loops not exceeding arm's reach. If a foot is used as a beater, you can make a braid as long as a half your height.

Another method in which one worker braids and another tightens the braid by beating at the fell, provides a means to make longer braids. Since this method takes up the labor power of two, there's no doubt that people have looked for a single-person method for achieving this purpose.

We know of two methods to answer to this purpose.

One is the fixed beater method seen in the above mentioned lithograph, and that used in Bulgaria in the late 19th c. at right (Fig. 9), and also today in Morocco (8).

The other is the movable beater method seen in several Japanese illustrations from the 16th to 19th centuries (Fig. 10 below)



The Egyptian braider

is working with his arms bent at chest height and the palms facing each other while squatting on the floor facing the short side of a long low table or a bench. The loops are mounted on his fingers. The fell of the braid is resting on the nail-like post 7~9 cm high which stands closer to the braider's end of the bench. This is the beating device. By pulling the arms backwards and beating the fell against the post, he tightens the braid. Here he is manipulating the loops. He can keep the braid structure from becoming loose by resting the fell at the beater while manipulating. The braid runs along the length of the bench and reaches to a vertical slat which stands on the other end of the bench, and from there it starts climbing upwards. After reaching to the top of the slat about 60 cm high it goes over and starts going down behind the slat by the pull of a weight attached to the head of the braid. The weight not only stabilizes the head, but also controls the firmness of the braid. This device by its minimal implementation provides a beater with the mechanism to move the point of impact (the fell) forward as the braid is constructed.



As the Japanese answer to the problem, the one illustrated in a 15th-c. Scroll is called heshiki (pusher) (Fig. 10, at left), and another in a 17th-c. encyclopaedia, which is essentially the same device, is called ashiuchidai (foot beater stand). The sword-shaped beater is connected to the

braider's ankle by a rope and beats the fell whenever a foot motion pulls other end of the rope tied to the braider's ankle. Details of the working mechanism for advancing the fell to adjust it to the point of impact, however, cannot be discerned so far from any of illustrations, although constructing a workable beater may not be difficult

A Loop-Braiding Text from the Bad State Library, Karlsruhe, Germany

Contribution by Noémi Speiser [\(9\)](#)

Recently a news reached me about a loop-braiding text in German - the second we found hitherto.

The story of this discovery is long-winded: Dr. Ute Obhof, head of the Manuscript Department at "Badische Landesbibliothek" in Karlsruhe, Germany, has studied with a particular devotion one specific collection of several XV- and XVI-century MMS joined and bound in leather. It comes from Bavaria, Southern Germany (Mülldorf on the Inn is mentioned in some of the texts). It deals with various topics, mainly medicines: pious poetry is interspersed here and there - and among all this, there are a few instructions on BRAIDING STRINGS.

Dr. Obhof was curious to know more about this, so she consulted the conservator of her library, Magdalena Liedke who on her part addressed some Swiss textile colleagues. Everybody was puzzled about the frequently repeated curious term ZWISCH. However, among them was a student of mine: Kathrin Kocher found that when replacing it by "loop," the text became perfectly clear for her who knew the technique. She informed Karlsruhe and sent the transcription to me.

The dialect and technical terminology is distinctly different from the Nuremberg document (10). Here I give the important two key words: SLAHEN stands for braiding (DRINGEN in the Nuernberg MS). ZWISCH stands for loop (SCHLINGE in the Nuremberg MS); medieval dictionaries translate this curious word as double, paired, forked elements.

The first group of recipes relate to twill.

- They speak of upper and lower finger, not using any proper names; and they speak of upper and lower shank of a loop. This proves that they held their palms turned against one another, which gives the loops an upright position, and they worked on A-fell, with forefinger operating.
- They never mention the indispensable shifting of the loops from finger to finger, which means that the technique must have been commonly known. All this is very much the same as in the contemporary English pattern books.

Working instructions are for the tubular and flat four-ridge twill braid in two-color variations:

- 1) dark/dark on the left hand, light/dark/light on the right hand – giving the effect of a fine transverse zigzag:
- 2) three dark on LH, two light on RH – forming distinct A-chevrons.

Then follows a totally different type:

With palms facing. Two loops mounted on each hand are made to cooperate crosswise through one another. RH upper with LH lower, then RH lower with LH upper.

Two color variations: 1) exchanging a light and a dark loop in both pairs gives screw-lines; 2) exchanging loops of the same color in both pairs forms lengthwise columns. (End of Speiser's contribution)

The F-H L-M METHOD 1 is also used in Finland

U. T. Sirelius (11) describes a working process that proves that l-m is used in Finland: "From the lowest finger of the right hand thread is moved to the empty uppermost finger of the left hand, and from the lowest of that hand to the right empty highest finger. And so on, from the right hand to the left and from the left to the right in the same order. But, in order that both hands have an empty space to which the thread is to be moved, it is necessary to move the thread in each space one finger lower."

The description of "lowest" and "highest" fingers indicates methods of the palms facing each other. The running loops are transferred from the lowest (the small or ring finger) to the highest (the index finger). This means that this is Method 1! Accompanying photo shows a scene of Liisa Moisio teaching "viiteläs-technique at Nastola Uuskylä (New Village).

Theodor Schmidt (12) reports band-making technique entirely done by fingers, one of which is a "tightening-striking" method that uses six strings with looped ends mounted on the fingers and manipulated. Unfortunately there is no description of how it is done. The accompanying figure gave us no clue to discern the technique. He also writes that two people work together by taking turns in transferring the yarn from hand to hand. While this may suggest practice of the l-m technique, collaboration of two persons in textile production is not necessarily limited to the technique.

A Finnish custom called for a young woman to make large quantities of bands and ribbons (not necessarily made using the l-m) in preparation for her wedding. The least of them being the priest's fee, a shirt, socks and mittens, bound together by such ribbons. The bride had to give dowries such as these to the in-laws and the marriage arranger. The bride groom's attendants and relatives also got them. For the wedding trip from one house to the other at least in southern Savo, the bride's, the groom's and the spokesman's horses were decorated with tapes and ribbons. When the wedding reached its destination the person who was fast enough to be the first to unsaddle the horses got to keep the decoration bands.

LIST OF OBSERVATION POINTS FOR RECORDING L-M TECHNIQUES

ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION SERIES : Introduction to the basics

No. 6

Braids on Frederik III's gown

Mrs. Kumeda's method

Braids Found in The Karlsruhe Document.

Obituary: Gigi Crocker Jones who reported on the l-m technique used among the nomads in Oman died on May 27, 2002. The technique she reported is so far the only hand-held loop braiding used today. Japan is only other country where the use of the h-h l-m though in the past is known.

§ Publications relating to L-M techniques:

Monograph: N. Speiser, Loop-manipulation Braiding: Basic Instructions, Leisester: Jenny Parry, 2002. jennie.parry@virgin.net (UK) or unicorn@unicornbooks.com (USA)

§ Internet: *L-M BRIC News* URL: <http://www.geocities.com/lmbric/index.html>
Google search turns up quite a few "loop braiding" information.

§ Media: BS Japan, Jan. 4, 2003, Omura demonstrated kute-uchi along with Akiko Miyazaki's newly reconstructed ancient madder dye technique in BS Japan's program, "Colors Cherished by Ancient Japanese Poets."

§ Activities (April, 2002 to March 2003) :

Exhibit: Y. Hoshino, Feb. 2003, l-m braided paper strings in a 3D work at Senbikiya Gallery, Tokyo.

Lectures, presentations at Conferences, etc.: M. Omura, June 6, 2002, oral presentation, "Braids on swords excavated from ancient burial mounds" at The Textile Machinery Society of Japan, June, 2002; poster session, "Braids on armor at Kushibiki Shrine," at Japan Society for the Conservation of Cultural Property" ; lecture, "March, 2003, Ancient braids and their production method," at the Nara Festival.

Workshops and demonstrations : The Braid Society, V & A Museum, London, UK; C. Kawabe, Otani Women's Junior College, Nishinomiya, Japan; M. Kinoshita, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Ma USA, National Museum at Brede, Brede, Denmark, Izumi Ootsu Textile Museum, Izumi Ootsu, Japan, Riken, Wako, Japan; N. Speiser, Feb. 2003; S. Sumiura, at her Studio, Kyoto, and the Children's Museum, Kyoto.

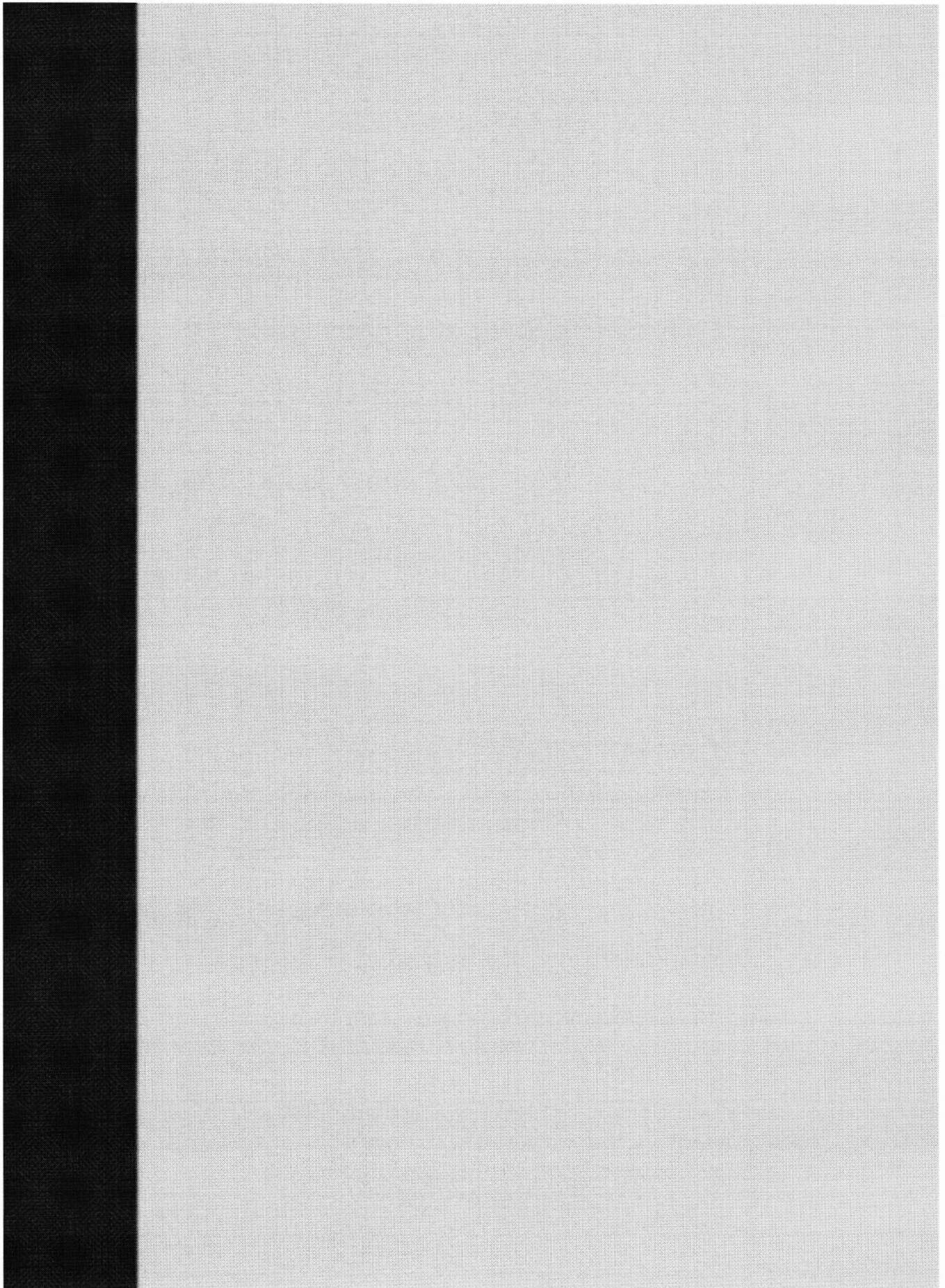
§ Acknowledgement: Contributions of reports, J. Boutrup, K. Johansen, M. Omura, N. Speiser. Translating Finnish papers, S. Ambegaokar. Sending information, N. Amano, R. Kumeda, B. Oberwinkler. Monetary contributions: Richard Ahrens, Marjie Thompson, Ruth Ward. Kay Kinoshita for initiating to put the News on line. And to those who wrote letters of encouragement.

Editor's note: E-mail address of *L-M BRIC News* has changed to mkinoshi@twcnv.rr.com.

Please note that we no longer mail hard copy version of English edition of the News starting from the next issue. Kindly let us know if you still wish to receive the hard copy version of the news. Thank you.

- For further information, please get in touch with the News editor.

L-M BRIC News is a 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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L-M BRIC News

ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION SERIES: No. 6

Braids on Frederik III's gown

The gold and silver threads used are not necessarily uniform in size or distribution. Here we give a diamond pattern (oblique plaid) color scheme as an example.

Material: fine gold and silver threads or yarns in two contrasting colors.

Cut 24 strands of gold and 36 of silver, 45 cm (18") long to make a buttonhole braid approx. 15 cm (6")-long.

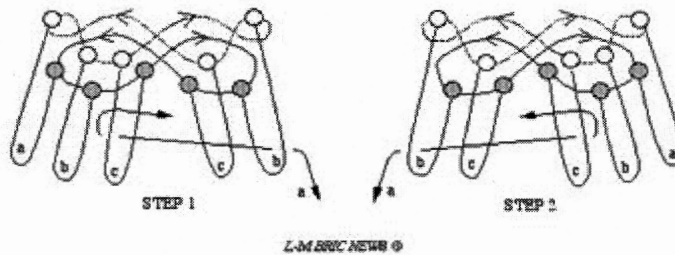
Using a piece of sturdy string, wrap around and tie very securely the whole bunch together at about 4 cm (3/4") off the mid point of the whole length. Secure the bunch to a sturdy post by the string.

1) To make the buttonhole portion: (Worked by one braider)

No. of loops: 5 To make this portion, use all the threads from the longer half of the bunch. Tie ends together to make 2 gold and 3 silver loops of an equal length each consisting of 6 strands.

Initial distribution of the loops:

3 silver loops to the left hand (LH)
 2 gold loops to the right hand (RH)



Braid about 5 cm (2") using braiding procedure: UO No. 1

Step 1: Ra goes through Rb loop and scoop the upper shank of Lc loop.

Step 2: La goes through Lb loop and scoop the upper shank of Rc loop.

Tighten the structure and repeat steps 1 and 2.

2) Rib portion (three braiders)

Fold the braided portion in half and bring the unbraided bunch of threads together.

Reattach the sturdy string to the fold and secure on the post.

Cut to make the length of the bunched thread uniform.

Regroup the threads and tie ends together to make 6 gold and 9 silver loops of an equal length each consisting of 4 strands

Initial distribution of the loops

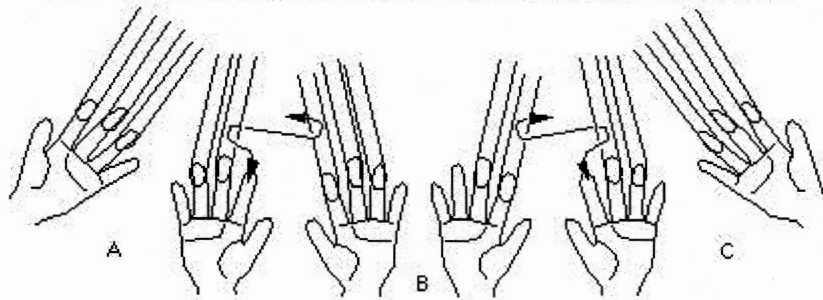
braider A On the left a, b and c GGG, on the right b and c SS

braider B On the left a, b and c SSS, on the right b and c SS

braider C On the left b and c SS, on the right a, b and c GGG

Each braider braids using the procedure for UO No. 1 and for every repeat of the procedure the two adjacent braiders exchange loops using the Crossed Exchange shown below (Figs. 11 STEP 1 and 2).

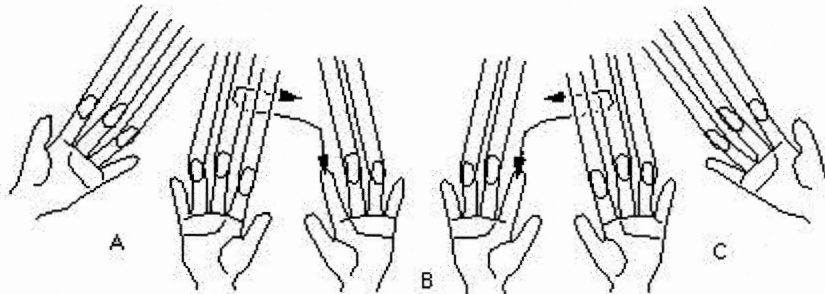
CROSSED EXCHANGE OF LOOPS BETWEEN TWO BRAIDERS



A's Ra goes through Rb loop and takes B's La loop unreversed. (Hook the upper of La.

C's La goes through Lb loop and takes B's Ra loop unreversed. (Hook the upper of Ra.

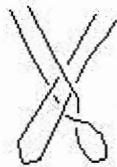
STEP 1



B's La passes under A's Ra and takes A's Rb loop reversed. A lows Ra loop to Rb.

B's Ra passes under C's La and takes C's Lb loop reversed. C lows La loop to Lb.

STEP 2

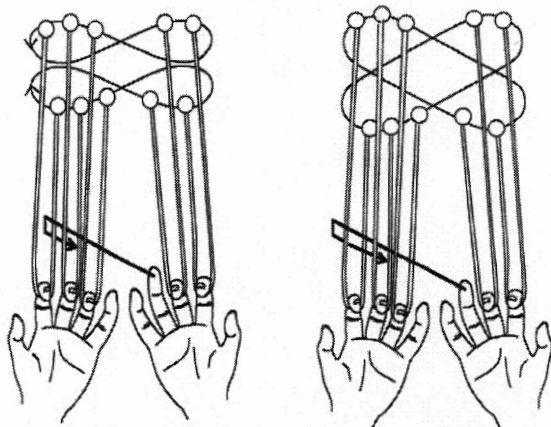


The two loops have been exchanged one going through the other.

MRS. KUMEDA'S METHOD

Braiding instruction: The same as THE YAO PEOPLE'S METHOD (*L-M BRIC News* No. 5, ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTIONS: No. 4, Fig. 3)

She cuts 5 lengths of the yarn 50~60cm (20"~24") long. She wraps around and ties securely the mid point of the length with a string. The string is tied to a post to secure the braid head. The cut ends of the yarn are paired and each pair tied close to the ends, resulting in five equal-length loops.



Mrs. Kameda scoops up the loop on the left middle finger



using the right small finger. (Photo at left)

The loop on the right middle finger is being transferred through the loops on the left small and ring finger. (Photo below left)

The braid structure gets tightened by spreading the arms wide and pulling the loops sideways. (Photobelow)



Following the braiding instructions shown above:

At first, she braids Recipe 1 (two 2-ridge flat braids in one shot) about 2 cm (3/4"). Then she switches to Recipe 2 (a square braid) and braids about 15~20 cm (6"~8"). She ties the end off leaving a fringe of several cm long.

The small loop at the head of the braid is used to attach the braid on to haori. Make the loop longer for a key link.

<>Braids Found in The Karlsruhe Documen

Twill braids:

1. Square braid. (Below left)

Step 1: Ra goes through the loops Rb and Rc, scoops the upper shank of Lc loop and brings Lc loop out through the loops Rb and Rc. Lc loop is now mounted on Ra. Shift the loops on the left hand.

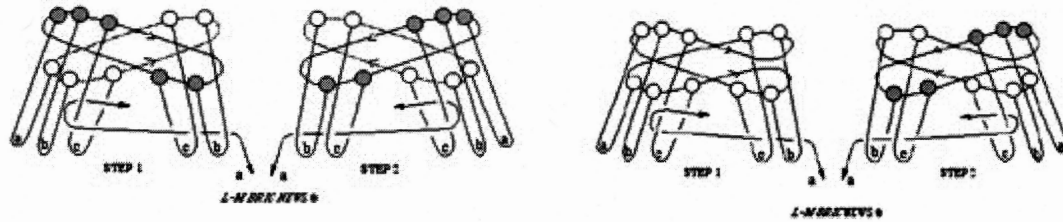
Step 2: The mirror image operation of step 1.

2. Flat four-ridge braid. (Below right)

Step 1:

The same as Step 1 of the square braid procedure.

Step 2: La goes through the loops Lb and Lc, hooks up the upper shank of Rc loop and brings Rc loop out through the loops Lb and Lc. Rc loop is now mounted on La. Shift the loops on the right hand.



The record gives two-color variations:

- 1) Fine transverse zigzag: on the left two fingers DD, on the right three fingers LDL
- 2) A-chevron: on the left three fingers DDD, on the right two fingers LL

The second group: Eight-strand (four-loop) square (or round) braid

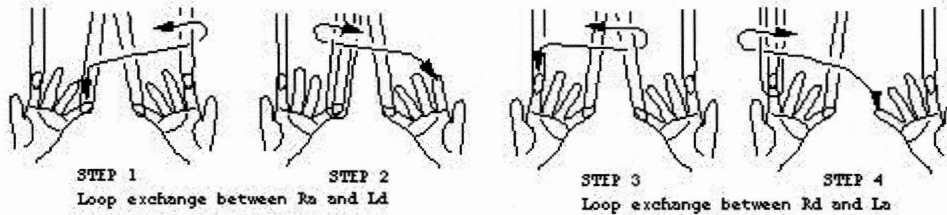
Braiding instruction: Mount a loop on each of the small fingers and the index fingers of both hands.

With palms facing. Give RH upper loop to LH lower finger going over the loop, and on the way back scoop up the LH lower loop. (RH upper and LH lower has been exchanged.) Then do the opposite with LH upper and RH lower.

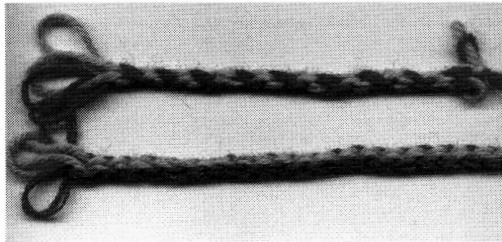
Two color variations:

- 1) Cork screw: on the left two fingers DD, on the right two fingers LL.
- 2) Vertical column: on the left two fingers DL, on the right two fingers LD. Dark and light is exchanged

4-LOOP ROUND BRAID



Sample swatches in the two color variations.



By exchanging diagonally opposite two loops by one going through the inside of the other many times in the same direction, you produce a pair of oppositely twisted yarn. By exchanging two pairs of loops crossing each other, the two pairs of twisted yarns are interlaced and form a braid with a square (or round) cross section. This braid has the same structure of one of the most basic 8-strand braids (NARABI KAKUYATSU) of the "Genji" family in KUMIHIMO.

