

Prologue

Haupt Verlag in Berne has kindly suggested to reprint my original MANUAL OF BRAIDING in the same form as it was published from the second edition onwards, that is, with no further amendments or changes. I am very grateful for this offer.

In view of the reprint I went through the book once again, wondering whether one or the other revision was required. After careful scrutiny, I came to the conclusion that everything expressed therein is still valid.

The Manual provides an extensive overview of the foundations of oblique interlacing. Then, based thereon, several specific braiding methods we discovered in the course of the seventies and eighties are meticulously described, explained, discussed and, moreover, illustrated by means of my system of Track-Plans. So I am convinced that any new discovery or personal advancement will fit in one or another compartment of this Manual.

Thirty-five years ago, I designed the whole layout of the book without professional support, compressing the large volume of text and the many diagrams into as concise a form as possible. This lent the Manual its own, special face – something I have never regretted. I am happy that this face is to be preserved in the upcoming edition.

Noémi Speiser,
September 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, in the past, generals have watched the progress of a battle from a nearby hill, seeing how first one side then the other gained ground. I feel that, over the last few years, I have also been on the sidelines witnessing a great struggle, as Noëmi Speiser gradually and painfully brought order into her chosen field of braiding.

This was not in any way a simple gathering together of farflung information - an academic work of synthesis - because much of the knowledge just did not exist before she brought it to light. But through her efforts, where there was ignorance and confusion, there is now a formal structure of knowledge, describing, classifying and analysing every form of braid in a consistent and satisfying way. It was an awe-inspiring task and its completion has, I know, been both a work of love and a cause of mental torment. Possessing, as she does, a most meticulous mind, she has agonised over the technical vocabulary she has evolved. Each word was weighed with elaborate care, changed and changed again, before the final choice was made. Such a word may now read as the obvious choice. But nothing is obvious when you are more or less inventing a subject single-handed; you are feeling your way alone in the dark, constantly discovering new pitfalls.

I sometimes received despairing letters on these matters and I always tried to encourage her to continue this up-hill journey. I was convinced that this work, which only she had the knowledge, intellect and indeed the fanaticism to complete, was going to be of real importance. I was not wrong.

Peter Collingwood

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PREFACE

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This book gives a general systematic survey of all the types of braids, defined as long and narrow fabrics constructed of threads which run on zigzag or helical courses, interlacing, twining and, occasionally, interlinking. The aim is to show both the working methods and the resulting structures and to illustrate how these two aspects are related.

This special subject has thus far never been treated as a whole. In both the "Primary Structures" and the "Basel Systematic" flat braids are only touched on with a few words and three-dimensional braids are "not reviewed" (Emery, page 62) at all. I think the reader of this book will be surprised, as I was myself in the course of my twelve years of research, to see how complex this narrowly defined subject is, and how extensively it is subdivided.

This book is an attempt to understand braiding on its own merits, as a totally autonomous class of techniques with its own set of delightfully logical rules and not as some bastard form of weaving, an interaction of vexatiously misbehaving warps and wefts.

History of my research

My interest in the subject was first caught in Japan, where the ancient tradition of "Kumi-Himo", i.e. the construction of braids, is kept up and tended by a guild of highly skilled craftsmen. I saw them using a number of sophisticated tools and equipment, perfected over the centuries.

Now it is a well known fact that the first impression you gain in some field of experience establishes your views which, from then onward, will be biased. Indeed when later I came in touch with equally refined braids of other origins, I immediately looked out for analogous tools - only to find out that the artisans used nothing but their very dexterous fingers and maybe toes in manufacturing them.

This notion came to me as quite a shock and I had to revise my premises totally.

But surely a person who happens to have his first experience with Andean shepherds braiding their elaborate slings out in the field as a part-time job would be equally surprised to hear about the paraphernalia of a Japanese workshop. And

again an expert in industrial braiding would be utterly perplexed to hear how handbraiders are capable of producing structures he deemed to be uniquely the products of the braiding-machine.

The result of my twelve years' research has been the recognition that seemingly identical structures can be produced by completely different methods; and that patterns which I at first thought typical of one certain ethnic group, may in fact occur all over the world.

This made me realize that a general survey was needed.

I had started off with the subjects for several monographs and I wanted to combine them into a single classification. This, of course, is a contradiction in itself. Therefore the ethnographical aspects had to give way to the purely structuralist and technical aspects. I decided to write a compendium of braiding, giving something like an aerial view where general facts come out clearly, allowing the expert to draw information and spot cross-connections at a glance, while details were excluded.

Program

I give a comprehensive course of instructions. Starting, as it were, with the "Kindergarten" I gradually advance to the University, and finally I enter the sphere of the truly initiated.

Thus the book is a whole in itself. Every subsequent chapter relies on the preceding ones and all of them are interrelated. Single chapters, taken out of the context, are necessarily incomplete and therefore all but useless. You are requested to start your studies at the very beginning. Then you progress as far as you like, and whenever you fail to follow the argumentation, you can reconsult the initial statements.

The basic facts are explained minutely, but the more advanced techniques are reduced to their essentials. I expose the underlying principles rather than describing single incidents; I offer general rules instead of giving dozens of recipes. This is, in fact, the only way to pack a great deal of information into a restricted space. But it does not make the book easy to read. Not unless he contributes actively, can the practitioner draw the information needed to adapt the techniques to his creative visions.

In order to give a synopsis an immense documentation is packed in a nutshell. This manual, in fact, contains the substance for several monographs which

deserve to be written sooner or later. Let me point out some subjects: -The techniques of Straw-braiding (page 36); -of Hair-braiding (16B). -New patterns in Indian split-ply camel-girths (12) Peter Collingwood has this on his mind. -The Peruvian flat braids (chapters 4+5+6). -The objects worked in Fourcroya fibres (page 225). -The elaborate braids mentioned on page 96, a subject of Mary Frame. -And the possibilities already explored or still latent in flat-angled ribbing (5) would make up an exciting book on their own.

I hope that the general survey and the nomenclature given in this manual may prove useful to future authors.

The track-plans

In the course of my research I developed the concept of "tracks". A track-plan illuminates the internal construction of even the most complex braids in a flash. Thus they are suddenly seen to be built up by a number of simple braids, interlacing in intricate ways.

The immense satisfaction I derived from the concept of track-plans inspired me into the most daring speculations. This is certainly not to everyone's taste; yet in my long teaching experience I found that among a majority of practical minded partners some single individuals will take a theoretical outlook. They formulate questions which cannot be answered unless the matter is probed to its very depths. For this purpose the track-plans proved to be an indispensable intellectual tool.

Specification of the given examples

This compendium is based on a very large documentation and on innumerable analyses of braids from all over the world. It is impossible to enumerate every single incident which has been traced. The patterns described in the relevant chapters are usually distilled from several examples which might even descend from different places and periods. Since they are meant to figure as representatives of certain classes, a painful enumeration of every single incident would be impossible or even absurd. Therefore, except for some really unique cases, I refrain from giving exact data. The kind of detailed information indispensable in an ethnographic treatise, cannot be expected in a technical survey of this sort.

The application of the braiding-techniques

Whilst many methods given in this book can be practiced immediately, because they require little or no tools, some others are neither recommended nor even possible, since the appropriate equipment is not available or not worth purchasing. I include them in this book because I mean to give a comprehensive survey. They should inform and serve as cross-reference for the scientific-minded reader.

Braids have been in general use throughout the history of mankind. They appear as fringes, edgings, drawstrings on textile fabrics, or as detached accessories such as belts, sashes, straps etc. Immense care and mental effort went into making them not only strong and efficient, but also refined and beautiful. Strangely enough in modern times they are in little demand. This may be largely due to the invention of elastic. Though a fabric of oblique interlacement as well, it is seldom used decoratively; usually it is concealed as far as possible.

This book offers many ways to vary the patterns and the colour-effects, also for dividing or combining braids, for producing loops or slits etc. As for the working of extended surfaces and shaping these into two or three-dimensional objects, such as hoods or caps, waistcoats, shoes, gloves etc. only the techniques of braiding with strips (chapter 2) and the structure called "flat-angled ribbing" (chapter 5) offer possibilities; these were tested with successful results.

However, it is not the aim, nor is it within the limits of this book, to publish any particular projects. Even if it addresses the practitioner, it will not satisfy the hobby-worker who is looking out for models. Such suggestions, anyhow, are necessarily influenced by the fashion of the period and limited by the taste and the abilities of the designer. Therefore they will not appeal to everybody and they will soon be outdated.

The illustrations

I offer a great number of diagrams which should be clear enough to give information even to a person who cannot read the text. A lavish supply of photos would have enhanced the appeal of this publication considerably, but at the same time it would have increased its costs. Since it is meant as an unpretentious manual for the specialist and not as an object

of idle luxury, I decided to reduce the photos to a minimum.

The text

I ventured to write this book in English, because, owing to a large correspondence with specialists, I am more familiar with the English than with the German technical terminology in this field, and I find it better applicable to my special subject. In fact the complete lack of agreement between the English terms "plaiting" and "braiding", both covering only a fraction of the very extensive meaning which has been given to the German word "flechten", proves to be the main obstacle to a parallel vocabulary.

Yet with literally NO English speaking partner in my near neighbourhood I was in a completely isolated position when composing my texts. I am very conscious that there are bound to be mistakes of diction, and that I certainly could not present matters as lucidly as I would have done in German. It was my realization of this fact that prevented me seeking publication through normal channels.

Thanks

My research into such a specialized subject was a real adventure and brought about delightful contacts. It is impossible to name everybody to whom I owe thanks.

Let me thank especially the staff of "Museum für Völkerkunde Basel", in particular Marie-Louise Nabholz, curator of Asian textiles, and Elisabeth Krehl, conservator of textiles, who assisted my research from the very beginnings.

Among my correspondents I mention in particular Ann Pollard Rowe (on general questions), Adele Cahlander (on sling braiding), Marian Cardale (on loop-manipulation), Virginia Harvey and Judith Stein (on ply-splitting), Dorothy Burnham (on the Assomption sashes), Shimpei Domyo and Toshiro Adachi, both with their families (on Kumi-Himo), Torben Juul (on hair-braiding).

As a particularly indefatigable help, I point out Mary Frame, specialist on Peruvian textiles, who generously offered her splendid collection of slides and her meticulous documentation, and who shared the discoveries she made in her attempts to reconstruct unusual patterns.

But most of my thanks are due to Peter Collingwood who never deserted me in my lengthy efforts. When correcting my

texts, on the one hand he tried to behave like an ignoramus and warned me whenever he thought the "average reader" could not follow, and on the other hand he pointed out most astutely the weaknesses of my reasoning on the level of a high specialist. Being, however, an eminently warp-weft minded man he faces the facts of oblique interlacing with a firmly rooted apprehension, and this made me think of my texts as a plea in the cause of braiding!

I want to conclude this preface with thanks to the authors of three most important books I worked with when I started my textile education (about in 1948). Raoul d'Harcourt: Les Textiles anciens du Perou, Alfred Bühler: Systematik der textilen Techniken (originally called "Iklé Katalog") and Irene Emery: The Primary Structures. Only later in my life I realized how thoroughly I had absorbed the contents. Often when rereading passages I stop short, because I hit upon conceptions and views which I thought I had made up myself.

A young student is extremely susceptible. It is of greatest importance that his fundamental training is of first quality. In particular he should acquire the ability to see the principles underlying single incidents, and the notion of a solid system of classification. Once this is imprinted in his mind, he will be able to place every new discovery in its proper context.

PREFACE SECOND EDITION

The first edition (1000 copies) was sold out in 1987. The Manual being still in demand, I prepare a second edition (500) which will appear in 1988.

In trying to keep the price within reasonable limits, I decided to reduce the size of the printing. One page of the new edition is equal to two pages of the original.

The quality of the typing as well as of the diagrams is heterogenous; it is, therefore, possible that the reduction will cause some inconvenience.

Many diagrams will be come clearer if you mark the different parts with colours.

The second edition is thoroughly revised. Many minimal amendments, some minor supplements and a few large and very important updates in text as well as in diagrams are added. For technical reasons the photos had to be taken away from the black and white

pages. Therefore the mounting of the maquettes, in many cases, had to be altered completely.

Rewriting, retyping and remounting were done by myself. All this had to be coordinated in one single working-process; decisions had to be taken on the spur of the moment. Therefore it was practically impossible to submit the altered and added bits of text to an English-speaking corrector. For so much non-professionalism I must apologize.

Certainly the field of braiding is by no means drained. I know about several research projects going on.

Among these is Masa Kinoshita's work on loop-manipulation in Japan (cf. 14C.3.1+2). With intense acuteness she deciphered and interpreted old Japanese braiding instructions. In discussing her discoveries with me, she finally worked out the theory that some of the most complex antique braids could have been worked on loops.

Such arguments will always go along with additional daring speculations, reaching far beyond the points which had to be proved.

Frieda Sorber, another one of my correspondents, is the keeper of textiles in a Belgian Museum. She studies the history and techniques of Passementary, together with Lotus Stack, USA.

Mary Frames vast research project on old Peruvian textile techniques develops in silence.

Peter Collingwood carries on exploring and teaching the vigorous and masculine techniques of ply-splitting. He spent ten weeks on a successful field research in India, but there is still no end to it. This technique, which apparently is in a state of prolific development, yields more and more prospects.

Peter certainly does not face the facts of oblique interlacing with apprehension any more, - if ever he did so! In his delightful new book "The makers Hand" the whole range of textile techniques is discussed in a most knowledgeable way.

And as for myself: a few weeks ago I was shown six small purses for relics and "aumonières" with drawstrings, which appeared out of a casket belonging to the cathedral of Vannes, Brittany. The purses are called "Hispano-mauresque", XII or XIII century.

Each one of the braids has its own, unusual feature. Two of them are so tightly interlaced and, alas for me! in such perfect state of preservation, that I was unable to extract the secrets of their internal construction.

A frustrating experience! And to think that perhaps innumerable such humble but tell-tale objects lead an obscure existence in crammed caskets of cathedral treasuries. Will I be able to prove one day that loop-manipulation like 14C.3. did exist in Europe?

Recently Joy Boutrop, a textile teacher in Copenhagen, introduced herself to me and displayed a number of intricate samples she had done solely by following the Manual. Before that she knew nothing about braiding and therefore, being unprejudiced, has fully adopted my classification and terminology. This proved to me that the book, in spite of its terrifying conciseness, offering general rules instead of explicit recipes, still can convey its message. When the first edition was out, Peter Collingwood wrote in a personal letter to me: "... a veritable mine of information for those who just want to know methods, PLUS a rigorous intellectual framework into which any structure can be logically fitted. You have both explored a strange country and provided a fool-proof way for those who want to follow." - This was, indeed, my high-pitched aim. If it is attained, I am very satisfied.