

4.4.7 – Other Weaving  
Woven Apron Fore-cloth



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**Introduction:** I chose to recreate a woven fore-cloth apron and add it to my garb. By hand weaving it on a warp-weighted loom, I feel it will give more authenticity to my creative anachronism of Viking clothing. Women in the Viking Era spent most their time caring for the family. Their job required the ability to provide items needed for different aspects of their lives, food, clothing, and home. “Women living in rural areas in the Viking Age spent most of their time in the triangle of byre, dairy, and living quarters, providing their families with food and clothing.”<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1- Silver figurine from Tuna, Sweden

**Background:** While there are no physical remnants of a Viking Era fore-panel, the presence of additional straps found in the broaches leads us to believe that there is a possibility. “He believes that these variations are to be explained by the occasional presence of two garments, the apron fore-cloth and the train or backcloth.”<sup>2</sup> The figure to the left, depicts a woman, possibly wearing fore-cloth.<sup>3</sup>

**Design:** Viking era women were known for a variety of weaving patterns which include; “Tabby weaves, twills (2/2, 2/1, Diamonds), stripes, checks, and piles.”<sup>4</sup> Since, I have never done weaving such as this before and I know very

little about patterns I chose to do a very simple weave.

**Materials:** The fore-panel is made using hand spun and hand dyed wool. I acquired said wool from my mother who processed it herself.

**Colors:** The colors that I chose to use are brown, gold, and black. They would have been made using natural items. Gold/yellow is made from weld. The brown/tan color is made from tree bark and nut shells and the black is made from walnut shells and iron oxide.<sup>5</sup> While in period they would have used natural dyeing methods, my mother used commercial dyes to create the colors.

**Technique:** In starting the weaving, I used a starting border to create the selvage edge of the weaving. The starting border was used to provide the warp for the weaving on the warp-weighted loom. “The warp for the warp-weighted loom was prepared by weaving a starting border on a small band loom sometimes incorporating weaving tablets.”<sup>6</sup> Once I had woven the starting border on a smaller loom, I attached it to the cloth rod. The cloth rod is the upper rod that will hold the warp for the weaving. The starting border provided me with a straight edge to line up the weaving. When I warped the loom, I separated the threads to prepare for setting up the weaving. Alternating the threads is how you set up the pattern for the weave. Once



this was completed a portion would be behind the shed rod the others would be in front. I then created a stabilizing strand. This strand is attached to keep the threads evenly spaced while weaving. Once the strands are separated it is time to attach the warp threads to the weights. When the loom was set up, I wove left to right passing the shuttle with the weft, the horizontal thread, through the warp, the vertical threads, that are attached



to the weights. Also, I had to create the heddles that would allow me to separate the front and back warps threads. During the weaving, I realized that using handspun wool had its issues. The wool has an uneven twist and therefore made the spacing and my ability to keep the tension even was a challenge. While weaving, the wool would often get stuck on itself and fray. In fact, I had to tie strands of the warp together after they had become thin and had broken.

**Final Construction:** To attach the fore-panel to the broaches I included two loops at the top of the selvage edge. “The upward-pointing pin did not go through the fabric of the dress or shirt, but was attached to a short overdress, a fore-cloth or



apron,...”<sup>7</sup> In completing the project, I hand tied the warp ends and then took the warp ends and tied the fringe to the bottom.

**Conclusion:** Weaving on a warp weighted loom is very difficult. Unlike a modern loom or a tablet weaving loom, the warp-weighted loom is free hanging and the warp tends to move. This final piece is my second attempt at weaving on the loom. The first attempt was using commercial wool and while it was easy to use because of the consistency of the thread it did constrict quite a bit and I was unhappy with the outcome. I was excited to start a new piece and make modifications. I changed the number of warp strands that I used in the weaving of the starting border. This helped with the constriction of the cloth and I was much happier with the outcome. Since finishing this piece I re-warped the loom and made additional changes to the starting band and warp.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jesch, Judith, *Women in the Viking Age*. pg.41

<sup>2</sup> Ewing, Thor; *Viking Clothing*. Pg. 31

<sup>3</sup> Thunem, Hilde; *Viking Women: Underdress*

<sup>4</sup> Ostergard, Else; *Woven into the Earth*. pgs. 67 - 73

<sup>5</sup> Newman, Paul B.; *Daily life in the Middle Ages*. Dyes, pgs. 100-101

<sup>6</sup> Ostergard, Else; *Woven into the Earth*. pg. 64

<sup>7</sup> Ewing, Thor; *Viking Clothing*. pg. 59