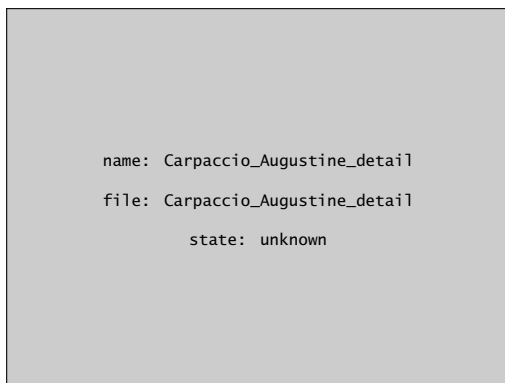


Multiple-strand bookmarks by Mari Voipio

The medieval and Renaissance manuscripts did not always have numbered pages. If numbering existed, it got cut off when the manuscript was (re)bound. Thus, to refer to a certain place in a book, the learned men and pious women of the period often used multiple-strand ribbon bookmarks that were either fastened directly to the top of the book binding or loose, fastened into an anchor - a button, a knot, a fabric bolster - on top. The bottom ends were finished with e.g. knots, beads or tassels.

So far only some 30 medieval or Renaissance bookmarks are known, the delicate ribbons preserved by the manuscript they were used in. However, this type of bookmark does commonly appear in paintings of learned men and pious women. The existing multiple-strand bookmarkers are either braided or woven. The bookmarks on display are all fingerloop braided with the same pattern, "A Broad Lace of Five Boes", done according to 15th century instructions. It is quick to braid and gives a sturdy flat structure, perfect for bookmarks.



A detail of *Vision of St Augustine* by Vittorio Carpaccio (1502)



Detail of *The Virgin of Chancellor Rolin* by Jan van Eyck (c. 1435)

Braid 1 in blue silk is modeled after an existing bookmark, found in a book from 1463, described by Swales & Blatt as *Anchor: Self-knot. Strands: Five single-length ?loop-braided strands, unknown fiber*. Filament silk is used for braid samples in the 15th century braiding manuals and blue dye was widely available and thus an appropriate choice for this type of bookmarker.

Braid 2 in red silk is a so-called bar bookmark, described in period texts. It consists of four double-length fingerloop braids folded over a holding string and sewn with a few stitches underneath the string, that is fastened to a metal bar. The ends of the braids are decorated with metal beads.

Braid 3 is of tightly-spun bleached linen thread. For each of the four braids, five strands of linen were first threaded individually underneath metal knob, then braided out. Because there's no distinct order for the braids, I put differently shaped silver-coloured beads on the ends to differentiate them.

Braid 4 is a modern bookmark inspired by the medieval bookmarks. Whenever I'm doing intermittent reading e.g. research, I like to insert a bookmark by a passage I need to get back to. I braided the bookmark with multi-colour cotton embroidery floss, choosing a different combination of 4+1 loops for each braid for identifiability, then added the resin beads to make sure my marks stay in place.

References:

Swales, Loise and Blatt, Heather, **Tiny Textiles Hidden in Books: Toward a Categorization of Multiple-Strand Bookmarkers**. Medieval Clothing and Textiles 3, p. 145-179. The Boydell Press 2007. ISBN 978-1-8438-3291-1.

Medieval Bookmarks Lead the Way by Frank X. Roberts. <http://www.bibliobuffet.com/on-marking-books-columns-195/archive-index-on-marking-books/749-medieval-bookmarks-lead-the-way-042708> (or <http://tinyurl.com/bmxn-qhb>). Last fetched on July 14, 2012.

On me

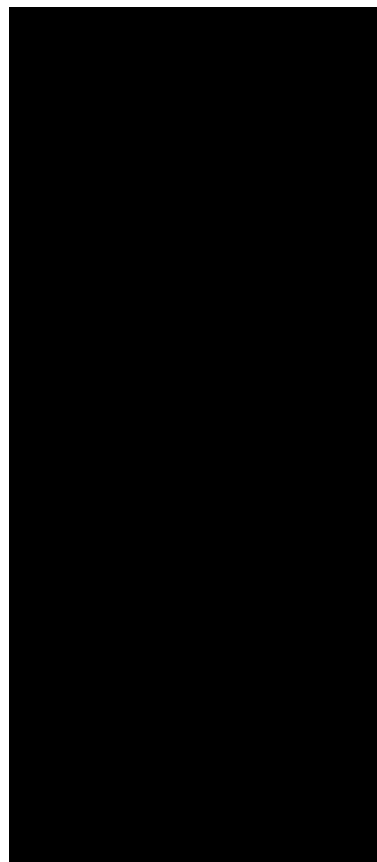
I'm a native Finn in my early forties. I've studied Scandinavian languages and history, but I work as Documentation Manager in a Finnish hi-tech company that makes measuring instruments for process industry. However, apart from this main job I research and teach traditional textile crafts, especially those that involve thread and yarn.

I love both of my "careers" and they coincide more often than one might think: both are about collecting information and distilling it and passing it on, as well as about structures and connections. Teaching experience gained at braiding demos benefits my work and the need to keep up with advantage and technical software has given me new ideas about braiding and textiles.

I wasn't good at crafts as a child, I was a bit clumsy and slow, and thus always lagging behind. Still, I liked playing with yarn, and I remember teaching myself braiding out of a book Mum brought me when I was at home sick. I still have a few samples of various braids from when I was about 12 years old and those braids are evenly worked, so I wasn't totally hopeless even then. But I've really matured late as crafter, and even now I know more about theory than practice.

I returned to doing and learning narrow wares via my interest in history and my participation in the Society for Creative Anachronism. I learned new skills like fingerloop braiding and tabletweaving and finally found a use for the older ones. Most of the braids I've produced over the years have been used as gifts and prizes inside our society, including my first multiple-strand bookmarks.

Lately I've started to widen my perspectives and taken a step toward teaching outside of that group. I was a bit hesitant to take that step, but it has been refreshing for a change to work with colours and materials and products that are not found in the medieval context. I've also found a lot of joy and pride in being able to introduce seasoned crafters to skills they aren't familiar with, fingerloop braiding being one of them alongside luceting and sprang.



Working on a lucet braid at Häme medieval market in August 2011.

Mari Voipio
www.lucet.fi