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## “ALIENOR REGINA ... ME FECIT”: Production and Patronage of Medieval Tablet woven Bands

by  
Nancy Spies

Someone, somewhere in northern Europe late in the fifth century or early in the sixth century AD, successfully translated a technique known from woven fabrics to the simple methodology of tablet weaving and started adding supplemental brocading wefts of precious metallic threads to bands woven with fine wool and imported silk warp threads. For the next thousand years until the new art of lacemaking grew in popularity during the sixteenth century, brocaded tablet woven bands were one of the favorite forms of ornamental fabric trim in Europe. The question of who wove these beautiful bands is one which has not been addressed in depth before. Drawing on archaeological evidence and literary and legal references, as well as economic and social history, it appears most probable that women were responsible for weaving these exquisite bands. They worked in public *gynaecea* (women's fabric workshops, Roman institutions that continued in northern Europe following the collapse of the western Empire) or in workshops associated with manors and religious institutions. In fact, the actual names of a handful of very noble ladies who either wove such bands themselves or commissioned them to be woven are known to us. These bands were intended for use by the upper echelons of both the church and the state, and extensive archaeological evidence exists which shows that every item of medieval ecclesiastical vesture could be trimmed with brocaded bands and that those in the secular sphere who could afford them also utilized these silk and gold bands extensively.

Nancy Spies has recently completed a book on the history and techniques of brocaded tablet weaving. With a Masters in Education from Fresno Pacific College in California, she taught in public schools before turning to full-time research in the field of early textiles. Articles based on her work have appeared in *Ars Textrina* and in *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter*, and she has given presentations to the Costume Society of America and at Convergence.