

Practical Science  
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**Red Velvet Pouch c. 1600 with Silver Braids and Ornaments**

This is a round pouch with 4 sides that taper toward the bottom, a drawstring, and girdle/belt hangers. It is fashioned after the pouch shown below from the Tassen Museum Hendrike Museum of Bags and Purses. It is described as Velvet pouch with silver balls, the Netherlands, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> C on the website – <http://tassenmuseum.nl/en/>. The book Bags, identifies it as “Velvet purse trimmed with silver thread and silver balls, holding silver key, the Netherlands, 1600”<sup>1</sup>.



Background on Round Pouches

While there are a number of variations on round pouches, this one and its predecessors have several defining characteristics. It has four (4) panels with the bottom tapering to a point. There is a drawstring that is threaded through holes in the fabric itself. Sometimes the holes are bound to some level and sometimes not. The pouches are lined. They have a girdle or belt cord that is attached to the top of the pouch at two (2) points. The seams or sides are decorated, usually by an applied braid.

This style of pouch first appears in a smaller form in the 14<sup>th</sup> C<sup>2</sup> usually as reliquary pouches. Slightly larger versions continue to be popular and worn on belt or girdle in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> C. You can see them in paintings such as Hieronymus Bosch's The Cure of the Folly<sup>3</sup> dated 1475-80 and Durer's Melencolia I<sup>4</sup> from 1514. The Fraudulent Muller

<sup>1</sup> Bags, Pepin Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Bildindex.de/bilder/M106543a.jpg Koln.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/bosch/1early/09folly.html>

tapestry from Basel dated 1470-80<sup>5</sup> also shows such a pouch. It also appears in effigies such as the one for Edith Pexall dated 1535<sup>6</sup>.

Most of the earlier ones have no additional decoration. The Calthorpe purse dated 1540<sup>7</sup> is done in extremely fine silk petit point. The French purse dated 1595<sup>8</sup> at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is highly decorated in silver bullion and pearls.



One of the fanciest and contemporaneous pouches is this pouch in the Rijksmuseum dated to 1600 - 1625. It is purple velvet fabric, 13 cm x 18 cm, 4 sided, heavily decorated with pearls, polychrome silk, gold braid and rubies.<sup>9</sup>

#### Fabric

The pouch is made with velvet, but neither the website or book talks about the composition of the velvet. Velvet is a tabby woven tufted fabric where the cut threads spaced to create a pile effect. It is

soft to the touch and requires specialized looms for production as it is produced by running an extra warp thread. Velvet was manufactured beginning in the late 13<sup>th</sup> C in silk weaving centers in Italy and Spain. It was made of silk with cotton or wool.<sup>10</sup>

#### Seam Braid

The seams are decorated with an applied braid of silver thread. The threads were made by wrapping flattened fine silver or mixed metal around a silk core or twisted silver wires. They were then braided usually in “bowes” or pairs in a method of finger loop braiding. This was a common method during the 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> C. and there are a number of extant manuscripts of how to create these braids. Most of these manuscripts are portions of household accounts. Most were written for use by the noblewomen in a household.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/d/durer/2/13/4/079.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.zum.de/Faecher/G/BW/Landeskunde/rhein/geschichte/spaetma/epoche/kleid/bauern01.htm>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.tudoreffigies.co.uk/browse/feature\\_popup.asp?id=135](http://www.tudoreffigies.co.uk/browse/feature_popup.asp?id=135)

<sup>7</sup> V&A, T.246-1927. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O74959/purse-unknown/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://collections.lacma.org/node/171906>

<sup>9</sup> Object number BK-NM-1110.

<sup>10</sup> Crowfoot pg. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Bennis & Barrett, pg. 25.

Specifically, the braid appears to be “A Broad Lace of 5 Loops”<sup>12</sup>. In Tak V Bowes Departed, the authors mention that “[T]This is one of the more widely known braids and is often found on medieval purses”<sup>13</sup>.

### Binding Braid

The braid around the top of the purse is a woven braid of silver threads made in the fashion noted above. Commercial braid of this kind were available from shops that carried narrow wares for various uses. These braids are commonly found in various widths on pouches throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> C.

### Drawstring and Belt/Girdle Long Braids

The braid is made of silk with silver metal thread woven into it. In Old English Pattern Books for Loop Braiding, Speiser documents from an anonymous booklet “A Purs Stringe with Silver in the Middle”. “It is braid with a 4 ridge 2 layer twill with a column of countertwining as a fancy addition.”<sup>14</sup> She further notes that it is a popular braid and “figures in almost every pattern-book, and I have spotted it frequently on old objects.”<sup>15</sup>

### Silver Balls and Key

Nearly all the pouches have some form of tassel decoration. Some are simple beads on the drawstrings and frayed out thread on the corners. Some are much more elaborate with very fancy woven threads over tassel frames. Many have knots, usually a variation on Turks Head knots in thread, wire or leather cord.

For this pouch it appears that commercially available filigree silver beads were used as the end decoration for the drawstring, belt/girdle braid and base of pouch. The anomaly is in that there is a braid holding a silver key. It was common in 16<sup>th</sup> C portraits of the merchant class women to show them with a form of key chatelaine. One example is on the *Melencolia I* by Durer<sup>16</sup>.



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<sup>12</sup> Bennis & Barrett pg. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Bennis & Barrett pg. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Speiser pg. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Speiser pg. 92.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/d/durer/2/13/4/079.html>

### Making the Pouch

Using the measurements from the purple pouch<sup>17</sup>, I made a pattern for cutting the velvet and silk lining. The velvet is a cotton backed silk velvet in red. The lining is a red silk taffeta. Taffeta is mentioned as used for both linings and garments in Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd.<sup>18</sup> I then sewed the pouch together by hand with silk thread.

The side braids are of silver metal wire (4 strands twisted into each strand). I made the braids to be applied to the sides.

The top of the pouch is the same woven braid of the same silver metal wires as the side braids. This was done on the Rijksmuseum pouch. It is not as wide as the one shown on the red pouch, but I could not find an otherwise acceptable substitute. It was woven and then applied to the top of the pouch.

The drawstrings and belt/girdle strings were done on a murudai (braiding stand). The "A Purs Stringe with Silver in the Middle" requires 6 hands. It can be translated to being done on a murudai. The silk thread is a 2 strand silk. The silver is called "passing thread" and is 90% silver flattened and wound on a silk core. The drawstring was passed through holes made in the fabric. The belt/girdle and key strings were sewn to the top of the pouch.

I used the largest commercially available silver balls I could obtain for the decorative ends of the strings and base. I could not find filigree ones that had a separate loop so created the loops from silver wire. The one on the base is sewn on. The key is also a commercially available one.

### Bibliography:

Bags: A Selection from the Museum of Bags and Purses, by Sigrid Ivo. Published by Pepin Press, 2004. 9054961090.

Beginner's Guide to Braiding: The Craft of Kumihimo, by Jacqui Carey. Published by Search Press 1997. 0 85532 828 2.

Braids & Beyond: A Broad Look at Narrow Wares, by Jacqui Carey. Self Published. 2003. 0 9523225 4 4.

The Manual of Braiding. Noemi Speiser. Self-published 4<sup>th</sup> Edition 1997.

Old English Pattern Books for Loop Braiding, by Noemi Speiser. Self Published 4<sup>th</sup> Edition 2000.

Note: this monograph surveys 11 extant manuscripts from the 15-17<sup>th</sup> C. It presents the original text, the authors interpretation, and diagrams for working the braids.

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<sup>17</sup> There was no response to attempts to obtain further information from the Museum about this specific pouch.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold, pg. 374.

Purses in Pieces: Archeological Finds of Late Medieval and 16<sup>th</sup> Century Leather Purses, Pouches, Bags and Cases in the Netherlands, by Olaf Goubitz. Published by Uitgevers, Zwolle 2007. 978-90-8932-004-9.

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Tak v Bowes Departed: A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Braiding Manual Examined, by Elizabeth Benns & Gina Barrett. Published by Soper Lane, 2005. 0-9542380-6-0.

Textiles and Clothing, c. 1150-1450 (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London), by Elisabeth Crowfoot and Frances Pritchard. Published by Boydell Press, 2012. 978-1843832393.

"Fingerloop Braids." *The Compleat Anachronist*, 108. By Lois Swales and Zoe Kuhn Williams. The Society for Creative Anachronism. July 2000.

#### Additional Source Material:

Website of Swales & Williams with additional material beyond CA 108

<http://fingerloop.org/>

A Transcription of the Lady Bindloss Braid Manuscript

<http://fingerloop.org/bindloss/> Transcription and translation by Zoe Kuhn Williams.

Phiala's String Page: Finger Loop Braids

<http://www.stringpage.com/braid/fl/fingerloop.html>

Sample Fingerlooped Braids from a Fifteenth – Century Manuscript

Website of Carolyn Priest-Dorman

<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/fingerloop.html>

Fingerloop Braiding – archeological finds in London

<http://www.bumply.com/Medieval/braiding01.html>