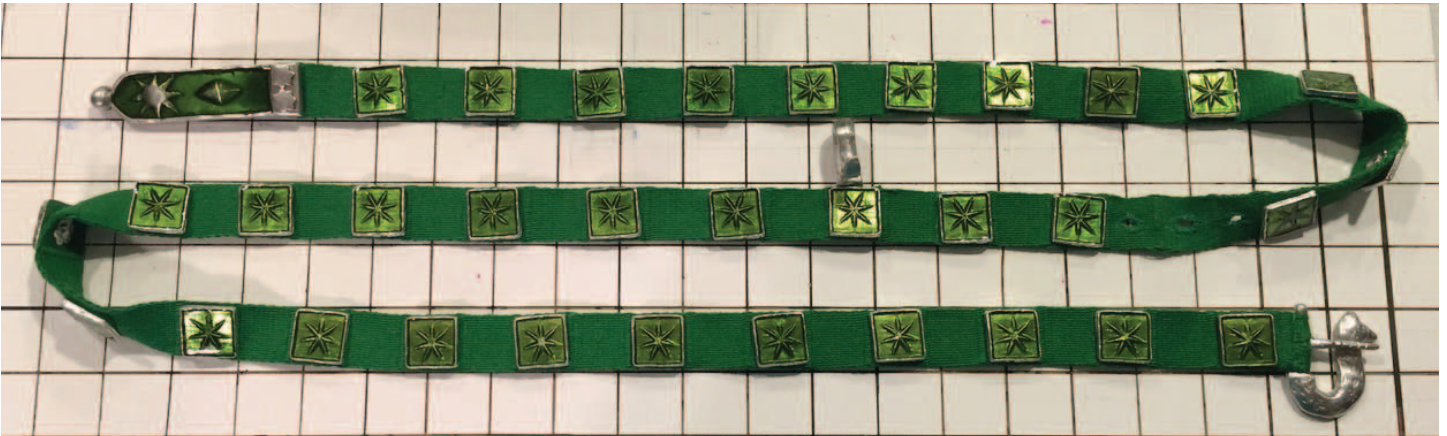


Pewter Belt Hardware Made in the Style of a 14th Century Italian Belt

Lady Stella di Silvestri
Stella Nova – Midwinter 2017



What Is It?

I've made an apprentice belt to be worn in the SCA in the style of several surviving belts from the 14th century. During this time in Italy, luxurious belts would often be included in dowries or given as gifts to new brides. Ladies would use these belts to fasten their dresses below their bust or waist ("Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures"). The extant pieces have a woven band with belt mounts riveted and peened over a washer, or rove, securing the back (Egan and Pritchard 162). The belt tip and buckle were made of gilded silver and decorated with *basse-taille*, an enamel technique ("Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures"). I will only be entering the pewter mounts, buckle, and belt tip for this entry.

How Was It Made?

The band of the belt appears to have been woven based on the photos of extant pieces (Fig 1 and 2).



Fig 1 - "Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*



Fig 2 - "Belt for a Lady's Dress." *Cleveland Museum of Art.*

The mounts were cast in silver ("Belt for a Lady's Dress"). The technique for the enamel work is known as *basse-taille*. The artist would have cast the silver pieces, engraved or chased designs and then applied colored enamel (Maryon 211). The enamel is translucent, so the highs and lows from the engraving can be seen. Light still passes through the enamel and reflects off the metal, so the pieces seem to glow from within. Fig 3 shows where some of the enamel is missing, revealing the engraving underneath.

This particular technique for enamel became popular in the 14th century due to changes in sumptuary laws that restricted the use of gems in jewelry for certain ranks. During this time, goldsmiths were able to refine this technique (Hourihane 451). After applying the enamel, the pieces were gilded ("Belt for a Lady's Dress").



Fig 3 - "Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

The buckle, belt tip, and purse hook were also cast in silver and gilded (ibid.). The mounts were attached to the textile belt with rivets that were peened on the back of the belt over a washer (Fig 1). In Fig 3, you can see where the rivet comes in from the front of the mount, indicating that the rivets were separate pieces.

How Did I Make It ? - Parts

The Mounts

In period, the mounts would have been cast in silver as previously stated. However, due to cost limitations and not having worked with silver before, I decided to use modern pewter as my metal. Pewter is a metal that was also used for belt mounts and hardware during the same time period, although it would have been lead/tin based (Egan and Pritchard 19).

First, I made a mold from soapstone for the front of the mounts, using gouges and metal tools (Fig 4). I occasionally pressed Play-Doh into my mold to test the depth of the carving. Stone molds have been used to cast belt mounts and buckles during this time period (Egan and Pritchard 105). Next, I chose to have an integral rivet with my mounts since I was working with pewter instead of silver and mounts found made from lead/tin "almost all...have integral rivets" (164). I also chose integral rivets for stylistic reasons. In order to have the mounts be cast with an integral rivet, the mold had to be done in two pieces. The channel for the rivet was drilled into the second part of the mold. The two pieces of the mold were lined up by drilling through the back of the rivet mold into the front mount mold and then pouring pewter into the channel to create registration pins.

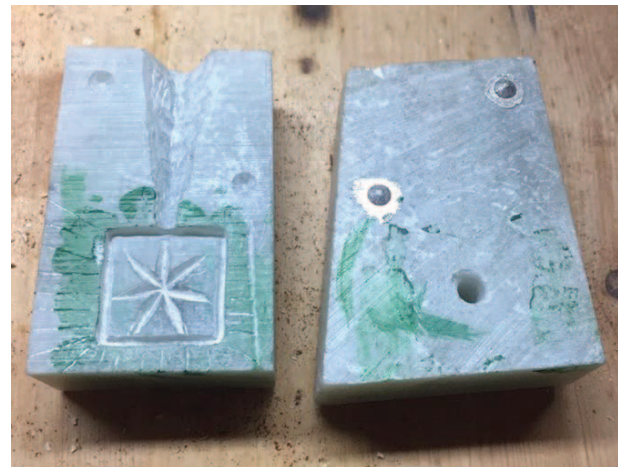


Fig 4 - My two part belt mount soapstone mold

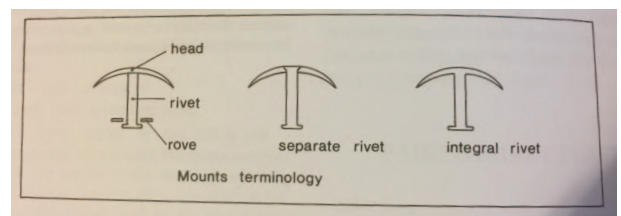


Fig 5 -Types of rivets (Egan and Pritchard 162)

Then, I melted pewter in an electric melting pot and poured it into the two-part mold. I held the mold together with a gloved hand and removed the mount once it had set.

The Buckle

The style of buckle for this belt was interesting because of the shape. It's a U-shaped buckle in the form of a woman (Fig 6 and 7) or an animal (Fig 8). The belt is slipped in through the top opening and the tongue of



Fig 6 - "Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*



Fig 7 - "Belt for a Lady's Dress." *Cleveland Museum of Art.*



Fig 8 - "Buckle." *British Museum.*

the buckle goes through eyelets on the belt. In Fig 2, you can see the eyelet on the far right.

I decided to cast the buckle in sand. The technique of casting in sand appears in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (Maryon 241), and doesn't require carving a stone mold, thus saving me time. I only needed one piece for the belt so I believe this was the best approach.

In order to cast in sand, I needed to create a positive of what I wanted. I used modeling epoxy and metal wire to create my positives (Fig 9). I used this material for its quick curing time and hardness when cured. They would have used either wood, plaster, or wax for their positives (Ayers Ch. 15). I decided to go for an animal-shaped buckle over a woman-shaped buckle. The buckle and tongue were casted separately, but the wire was kept in each piece. It allowed the tongue to have a hole at the top. Once both pieces were cast, I clipped the tongue loop open so that it could be wrapped about the bar on the buckle (Fig 10 and 11).

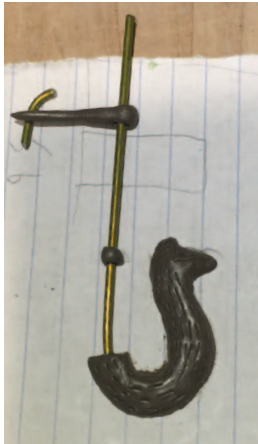


Fig 9 - My buckle and tongue positives



Fig 10 - Cast buckle with attached tongue



Fig 11- Back view

The Tip

I approached the tip much like the buckle since I only needed to make one. I made a positive on a piece of metal with modeling epoxy and cast the piece in sand (Fig 12). Since I was getting apprenticed to two Laurels, I incorporated badges from each of their heraldry into the design.

The Purse Hook

I cannot take credit for this part of my belt because Master Lorenzo Petrucci made my purse hook.

The Washers, or Roves

I cannot take credit for these because Master Lorenzo Petrucci made these. They were based on a belt in a similar style that has flower-shaped roves on the back from the Albert Figdor Collection (Fig 13).



Fig 12 - Cast belt tip removed from sand

Fig 13 - 4, Albert Figdor Collection.



Flower-shaped roves

The Band

I wove my band using cards on an inkle loom with cotton thread. I am excluding the band from the entry since it is beyond the scope of this project.

Clean up and Finishing

Once the mounts came out of the stone molds, only minimal clean up was required to clip off the sprue and any flash, excess metal that squeezes out between the mold pieces, that occurred during casting.

The pieces cast in sand required much more clean up. Casting in sand had made them a little dull compared to the stone mold cast mounts. I had to sand the pieces with sandpaper, increasing the grit as I went. I used #0000 steel wool as the final sanding round, then I used tripoli and finally jeweler's rouge, both polishing compounds. I used a buffing wheel on a dremel for the final polishing round.

The "Enamel"

After casting and cleaning all of the pieces, I placed them on a piece of wood with holes drilled into it to allow the rivet to be inserted. The enameling process involves heating powdered glass in a kiln at extremely high temperatures and the melting point of pewter is very low (Maryon 199). Therefore, I had to find a substitute that would give me the same visual effect. I used a two part resin in transparent green to mimic the clear, glass-like appearance of enamel. Once I poured the resin into the mounts, I covered the pieces with foil propped up on toothpicks to prevent dust from falling into the resin, ruining the glassy surface. I let the resin cure for several days before handling the mounts and tip.



Fig 14 - Pouring resin into belt mounts



Fig 15 - Toothpicks to keep foil away from mounts



Fig 16 - Above, Resin in belt tip

Fig 17 - Left, Mounts and tip with resin

How Did I Make It? - Assembly

After completing all of the pieces, I took the woven belt and attached the buckle to one end. I wrapped the belt around the buckle bar and sewed it secure. Using an awl, I separated the fibers in the belt in the panels I wanted the mounts to be. I pushed the rivets through the holes and placed the belt on an anvil upside down. I used a piece of leather to protect the front of the mounts while hammering. This is a mentioned technique to attach pewter mounts specifically (Egan and Pritchard 164). I put a washer on the rivet, clipped the rivet close to the washer and then peened the end of the rivet with a ball-peen hammer.



Fig 18 and 19 - Clipping rivet and peening rivet



Fig 20 - Assembly set up

I continued adding mounts and wrapping it around my waist to see where I needed to add eyelets. Once I got to where I needed my eyelets, I used an awl and used a button stitch around the holes. Since I didn't make mounts to go all the way around my belt, I opted out of metal eyelets for my belt. I kept adding mounts until I got to the length I wanted and then I attached the tip with two star-top rivets that Master Lorenzo Petrucci made.



Fig 21 - Left, star-top rivet, made by Master Lorenzo Petrucci



Fig 22 - Right, Sizing rivet on top of belt tip

Lessons Learned and What I Would Do Differently

When I first started on this project, it was never designed to be an A&S entry, but merely a unique style to mimic for my apprentice belt. I've learned a lot along the way from making the item to documenting the pieces and history.

When I wove the belt, I was learning how to weave with cards. The pattern consisted of little squares to match up where my mounts would go. While this worked out beautifully, I think I would like to try to weave a pattern in the belt next time.

After wearing the belt, the pewter buckle bends open over time. Pewter is a soft metal and I learned that it may not be the best material for a buckle. I would like to try a different metal for a stronger buckle.

I busted one mount by hammering too hard. The resin cracked! Must remember - pewter is a soft metal.

I have been looking into various ways to gild pewter in a period way but have yet to find a dependable and lasting method, which is why my metal hardware is silver. If I find a good technique to gild on pewter, I would love to try this effect on gilded pewter.

My tip is just riveted on my belt, but there are other tips that have a plate on the back to fold over the belt (Fig 24). I would like to make one of these to protect the edge of the belt. The way I've attached it leaves an edge exposed and over time could lead to fraying.



Fig 23 - Finished belt

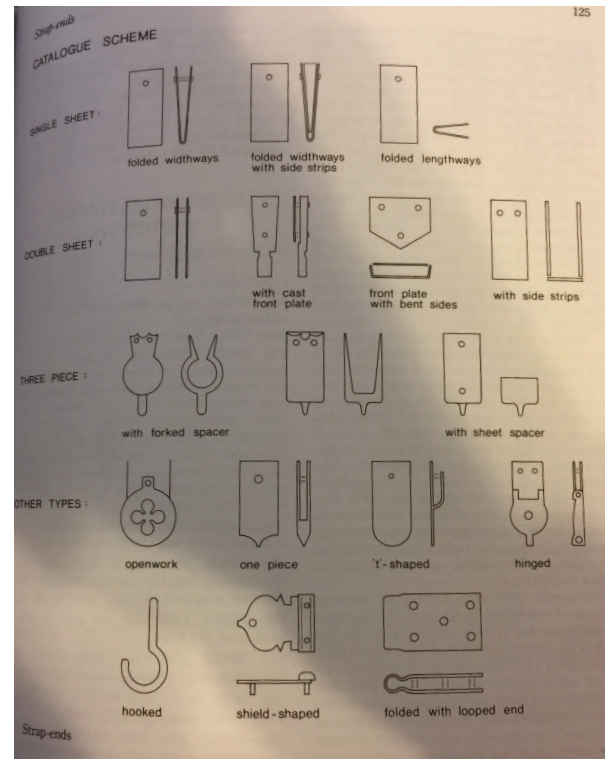


Fig 24 - Different belt tip styles
(Egan and Pritchard 125)

Works Cited

"4." *Ceintures formées de plaques d'orfèvrerie en argent repoussé, ciselé, émaillié on découpé, xv^e et xvi^e addcion*. Albert Figdor Collection.

Ayres, James. *Art, artisans & apprentices : apprentice painters & sculptors in the early modern British tradition*. Oxford Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2014. Print.

"Belt for a Lady's Dress." *Cleveland Museum of Art*. N.p., 21 Jan. 2017. Web. 27 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1930.742>>.

"Belt with Profiles of Half-Length Figures | Italian | The Met." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, I.e. The Met Museum*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464760>>.

"Buckle." British Museum. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Jan. 2017.
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=426379001&objectId=49826&partId=1>.

Egan, Geoff, and Frances Pritchard. *Dress accessories, c. 1150-c. 1450*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007. Print.

Hourihane, Colum. *The Grove encyclopedia of medieval art and architecture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

Maryon, Herbert. *Metalwork and enamelling; a practical treatise on gold and silversmiths' work and their allied crafts*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971. Print.