



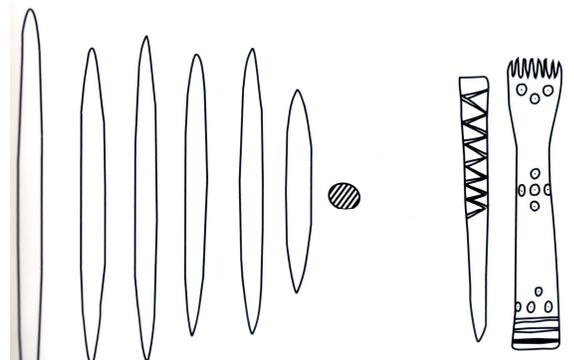
Roman funerary sculpture holding a pin beater. (Rogers, pg. 34.)

Anglo-Saxon Pin Beaters by Baroness Kaleeb the Green Eyed

The next tool in my textile tool collection is a pin beater. It is a simple tool, yet a very useful one. Pin beaters are sometimes referred to as hraell in Old Norse or kerkis. In other texts a kerkis is often translated as a spool or shuttle, however “Mrs. Crowfoot feels that the poetic allusion to the kerkis, which is said to have made a humming sound during weaving...compares passing the kerkis across the warp threads to the action of the plectrum on the strings of a lyre.” (Hoffmann, p. 320) In either description the pin beater is described as an important tool in weaving on a warp weighted loom. It is sometimes used as the only symbol to describe a weaver. It can be a plain bone, antler or wooden pin or stick. It can be straight or curved. It can be the same on each end or different.

There are three main types of pin beaters or shorter dagger beaters. The most common are cigar shaped beaters “circular or ovate in section and tapering to a point at either end from an intermediate swelling.

Very often the maximum girth is not in the centre, with the result that one point is more slender than the other.” (McGregor, p.188-189) These pin beaters are sometimes referred to as double headed (Ewing, p.139.) Some pin beaters have only a single point on one end while the other end has been roughly cut from the bone and only finished to the point of having no sharp edges. The final type of pin beater has a single point with a wedge or chisel shaped butt. It is unknown if the third type of pin beater was used for a specific task. Some archeologists have added a comb beater to the list of pin beaters, feeling that it performs the same type of task.



Drawing by Rob Oldfield of several Early Anglo-Saxon Pin Beaters and a toothed comb beater from Birka.

Despite being such a simple tool a pin beater is necessary to make cloth on a warp weighted loom. The way a warp weighted loom is woven on is upside down from what many people think. The finished cloth is rolled to the top of the loom, while the warp is suspended underneath the working area of the loom. A shed is opened on the loom, then the weft is sent through. A pin beater is kept in the weavers hand to lift up the weft. It is inserted between the warp threads and picked up. After a few passes have been made with the weft, then the sword beater is picked up and beaten up to pack the weft a little tighter. A pin beater can also be used to even out the weaving.” (Ewing, p.137.) Ewing comments that a pin beater is an unremarkable-looking little tool at 3-6 inches long. As a result of a pin beater being a somewhat common and unexciting tool pictures can be a bit difficult to locate. “Ian Riddler has noted that two lengths are particularly common, the first 80-110mm and the second 130- 140mm” (Rogers, p. 33) Rogers notes that the two sizes are sometimes found together in a grave, implying that they may have been part of a set of tools. She also notes that a groove will develop on a heavily used tool.

I have chosen to make my pin beater from bone. I do not know what type of bone my pin beater is made from, because I remade a broken hair stick. The reuse or remaking of one item into another is a well documented practice. I like how my pin beater feels in my hand. After a bit of use it will warm nicely.



Anglo-Saxon weaving equipment (Hook and MacGregor, p.29.)

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