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for  
the braiding artisan

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## A Set of Mongolian Hobbles.

### Introduction.

In a letter, of February the 18<sup>th</sup> 2003, Doug Van Tassel wrote:

It was interesting that a braid originating from a folded strap was in the Appendix for 2002. The enclosed article contains such a braid, although in this case it necessitates a different method as you will see.

A fellow that I know ranches with his brother up close to the Wyoming line. He does some braiding; very many whips and mostly uses a nylon cord. He does a fair job of braiding and very seldom ever changes methods that he has been using in the past. He did one day this winter cross path with a Mongolian herder that was trailing a bunch of cattle across country. The few Mongolians around here come for the same work as the South Americans do which is ranch work. They can all work in the U.S. for three years then have to go home for a year before they can come back. This Mongolian evidently spoke a limited English but enough to carry on a broken conversation.

He brought to the States all the rawhide equipment with him. It is similar to much of the South American tack that is used in every day work in that it is constructed from heavy rawhide. What it lacks in appearance it will easily make up for in durability. Among his equipment was a set of hobbles meant to bind three legs. The two front feet and one hind foot were hobbled together. I have not seen or heard of anything similar to these and what the purpose of hobbling three feet is I do not know. They are evidently a common piece of equipment in Mongolia. Whether these are used as every day hobbles on any horse or maybe used only on young horses for breaking or whatever was not made clear. Much of these hobbles is made of heavy rawhide strap, some folded and some not and a section of braid. These hobbles are detailed in the article.

He also had a rawhide rope meant for everyday use which was for almost its entire length simply folded in half. This does not right off seem like an easy rope to handle, but evidently he was quite adept in its use. Only on the honda end did the strap go into a 4-string round braid for a length of about 6 ft. and the honda fashioned on the end of this. The transition from a folded strap to 4-string round braid is drawn in Fig. 1199. The rope honda was then made in the same manner as the hind cuff closure on the hobbles.

A rawhide headstall and reins were not as easily parted with for a few of days as the rope and hobbles were, so I did not have a chance to examine their construction. I did see a photo of them, but it was not clear enough to get any details. He evidently was a very pleasant fellow so possibly come spring he will for a few days be in the same area again and I can get a look at some of the other items.

### The Set of Mongolian Hobbles.

Recently the opportunity arose to examine a set of hobbles made by a Mongolian herder. These hobbles are unusual in that they are meant to bind a horses two front feet with one hind foot. We do not claim to possess any reason or wisdom as to why a set of three-legged hobbles would be needed or used, but since they are evidently not at all uncommon in Mongolia we would assume, then, that they have their purpose in everyday or occasional usage. The hobbles are made from softened, unsplit rawhide and show a considerable amount of usage. They do, however, remain in excellent condition.

What they may lack in appearance, they make up for in durability. While many braiders might dismiss these hobbles as being too coarse for their own taste, they do, however, employ a few techniques that might be of interest. The entire construction process is detailed and the dimensions of the original hobbles are given. It is not known what size of horse these may have been used on, so all dimensions given can be considered suspect.

The hobbles are constructed from a total of 8 individual pieces as shown in Fig. 1187. There are two front cuff straps which are labeled 'a'. There is one hind cuff strap which is labeled 'b'. All three of these straps are about  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " wide. These three straps are brought together and tied into a three-way union labeled 'c'. In the vicinity of 'c', each of the three cuff straps will have been folded in half, as shown later, and these folded sections are tied into knot 'c'. The two ends of strap 'b' will be cut into a total of four strings which will go into a length of 4-string round braid, also detailed later. There will be a closure strap labeled 'd' for each of the front cuffs, each being about  $\frac{5}{8}$ " in width. And finally, there will be three hardwood pins labeled 'e', one each for the three cuffs.

The three-way union knot 'c' is made with a simple crowning operation. This knot can be done in a couple of ways as will be shown, but the method used on the hobbles is the best. Keeping in mind that the cuff straps 'a' and 'b' will be folded in half within the knot 'c', these three straps can be initially laid out and crossed as shown in Fig. 1188 where they are labeled simply as straps 1, 2 and 3. Using the ends of these straps that have last gone **under** an adjoining strap we can crown them as shown in Fig. 1189. Here strap 1 has been laid across to the left; then strap 2 is laid downwards over strap 1; then strap 3 is laid upwards over strap 2 and under strap 1.

We could also use the initial crossings as shown in Fig. 1190 which is the mirror-image of Fig. 1188. Again, using the ends of these straps that have last gone **under** an adjoining strap, we can crown them as shown in Fig. 1191. here strap 1 has been laid across to the right; then strap 2 is laid downwards over strap 1; then strap 3 is laid upwards over strap 2 and under strap 1.

It can be noted that when these crowning operations have been completed, that were the knot from Fig. 1191 be turned over that its underside will be identical to Fig. 1189. While the initial crossings shown in Fig. 1188 and Fig. 1190 are mirror-images of one another their respective crowning operations will produce the same knot, only turned over. These two knots do not hold their form very well and thus are not highly suited to this application.

We can return to the initial crossings as shown in Fig. 1192 which is identical to Fig. 1188. This time, however, we will re-label the straps and crown in the opposite direction. Again, using the ends of these straps that have last gone **under** an adjoining strap we can crown them as shown in Fig. 1193. Strap 1 is laid across to the left; then strap 2 is laid upwards over strap 1; then strap 3 is laid downwards over strap 2 and under strap 1.

We could also use the initial crossings as shown in Fig. 1194 which is identical to Fig. 1190. With the straps re-labeled we can crown these in the opposite direction, again using those ends of the straps that have last gone **under** an adjoining strap. In Fig. 1195, strap 1 is laid across to the right; then strap 2 is laid upwards and over strap 1; then strap 3 is laid downwards over strap 2 and under strap 1.

It can be noted that Fig. 1192 and Fig. 1194 are mirror-images of each other and that their respective crowning operations will also produce mirror-image results. Hence, the knots in Fig. 1193 and Fig. 1195 are not the same knot but are each other mirror-image. It is the knot in Fig. 1193 that was used in the Mongolian hobbles as the three-way union knot 'c' of Fig. 1187.

There does not appear to be any mention of these three-way union knots, when used as such, in either of the large books of knots. In the 'Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Rope Work' by Raoul Graumont and John Hensel these knots are treated as decorative knots. In principle they appear on page 104 in Figs. 363-A and B and on page 297 in Fig. 163 and referred to as *Two-Leaf Dragonfly Knots*. In each case the bights formed in the photographs would need to be cut and the results would be identical to Fig. 1191 and Fig. 1189 respectively of this article. On page 634 in Fig. 1190 and Fig. 1191 is 'A *Two-Leaf Ornamental Knot* based on the *Two-Leaf Dragonfly*'. If the two extending bights of this knot were cut we would get an asymmetrical knot with little value when employed as a three-way union knot. If, however, we were to leave bfall but one crossing identical to those shown, and the only exception would be to make the string-end hanging down on the right go under the string-end hanging down on the left. If this were to be done and the extending bights are cut, then we would obtain an identical knot to that tied in Fig. 1193 of this article.

In 'The Ashley Book of Knots' by Clifford W. Ashley on page 200 in Fig. 1102 and on page 392 in Fig. 2448 are knots referred to as 'based on the Chinese Crown Knot' and called a BUTTERFLY KNOT respectively. In each case if the bights are cut we would get knots identical to Fig. 1191 of this article. On page 91 in Fig. 554 is 'A decorative Terminal Knot ---' where we need to ignore the arrow-line entirely, and on page 200 in Fig. 1103 is a knot 'similar in appearance' to one 'based on the CHINESE CROWN KNOT'. In each of these cases, if we cut the extending bights, we would get a knot identical to Fig. 1193 of this article.

In Fig. 1196 is shown the construction of the two front cuff straps, 'a' in Fig. 1187. The lower part is folded in half, flesh-side to flesh-side to be half-width and this will tie into the three-way union knot 'c'. The upper part is the full width of the strap and forms the cuff. The strap is routed as shown and will form a four-layer bundle to be bound together with the closure strap. A slit is cut through the centre of each layer of the bundle. The closure strap makes a single warp around the bundle, then each end is taken through the slits in the four layers. The ends of the closure strap will exit the bundle on the cuff side, one to each side of the single warp. The bundle is cinched down tight with the closure strap. The two ends are then slit-braided together as shown. The two layers of the cuff will be formed and remain tightly together when made of rawhide. At the end of the two-layer cuff, two slits are cut about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " apart and 1" long in the middle of the cuff strap. No strap material is removed, but rather the  $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide strap is pushed between the two layers. A  $2\frac{1}{4}$ " long hardwood pin is inserted between the two layers of cuff with the  $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide strip fitting tightly into the notch cut in the hardwood pin, thereby holding the pin in its place. The cuffs are closed by putting the loop formed below the slit-braid in the closure strap around the extended ends of the pin.

Some dimensions of the front cuff pieces in Fig. 1196 are as follows: from the end of the folded loop to the centre of the slit in the bundle is about  $4\frac{1}{2}$ " on one front piece and about  $5\frac{1}{2}$ " on the other front piece. From the centre of the slit in the bundle to the

end of the two-layer cuff at the notch is about 7". The loop in the closure strap is about 4" measured from where an end of the closure strap exits the bundle to the beginning of the slit-braid.

Fig. 1197 begins the construction of the hind cuff strap, 'b' in Fig. 1187. At the bottom, this strap is folded in half, flesh-side to flesh-side, to be half-width for a short distance. This folded section is used to tie into the three-way union knot. Immediately outside of the knot the two ends of the strap are cut into a total of four strands, each about  $\frac{5}{8}$ " wide. One end will be cut into two completely separate strands for its entire length, while the other end will be cut into two strands using a long, terminating slit as shown at the top of Fig. 1197. These strands are braided into a 4-string round braid for a length of approximately 23" and ending with the final crossing shown with two strands marked 1 and 2. Note that for this braid to be accomplished, the two strands formed by the long, terminating slit must follow side by side in the same helix.

Fig. 1198 shows the completion of the hind cuff. The strap end that had the long, terminating slit, continues on as shown to form a two-layer cuff, and finally ends after making a bundle back at the end of the braid. A slit is cut through the middle of this bundle. The strand ends marked 1 and 2 are used to form the closure. Strand 1 merely passes through the slit in the bundle. Strand 2 makes a single wrap around the bundle and the cuff strap at the end of the braid. It then goes through the end of the long, terminating slit then through the slit in the bundle. It will exit the bundle on the opposite side of the single wrap as strand 1 and the bundle and cuff strap cinched tightly together. Strand 1 and strand 2 will then be slit-braided together and the closure completed by installing the hardwood pin in the same fashion as detailed in Fig. 1196.

In Fig. 1198 the length from the end of the long, terminating slit to the end of the two-layer cuff at the notch is about  $8\frac{1}{2}$ ". The loop in the closure is  $3\frac{1}{2}$ ", measured from where a closure strand exits the bundle to the beginning of the slit-braid.

The Mongolian herder also had a rawhide headstall, reins and rope. Only the rawhide rope was examined. This rope was, for nearly its entire length, merely folded in half, flesh-side to flesh-side, to be half-width. Only on the honda end did the rope go into a 4-strand round braid for about a length of about 6 feet. The folded strap was cut into four strands as shown in Fig. 1199, with half the folded strap being cut into two separate strands for their entire length, and the other half being cut into two strands using a long terminating slit. The 4-strand round braid is begun as shown. Note that for this braid to be accomplished, the two strands formed from the strap by the long, terminating slit must follow side by side the same helix. This braid was ended with the same crossings shown in Fig. 1197, and the honda formed in the same manner as the cuff closure in Fig. 1198.

With this article, by Doug Van Tassel, our expedition into the realm of knotting and braiding has come to an end. Hence this edition of *The Braider*, Issue No. 60, will be the last one. Since the article itself does not fill a full issue, it has been decided to print each of the accompanying Figures on a single sided page in order to facilitate the readability of the article. We like to note, as a final observation, that everything in the universe has been born to die and hence so has *The Braider*. Our expedition has been of interest to a very small number of people (nearly half the number of fingers on one hand), however, from time to time we did meet the odd hitchhiker and pirate. Finally, I like to thank the two co-authors for their unfading interest and participation. A.G.S.

## NOTE

Print the pages 1439 to 1451 single sided.

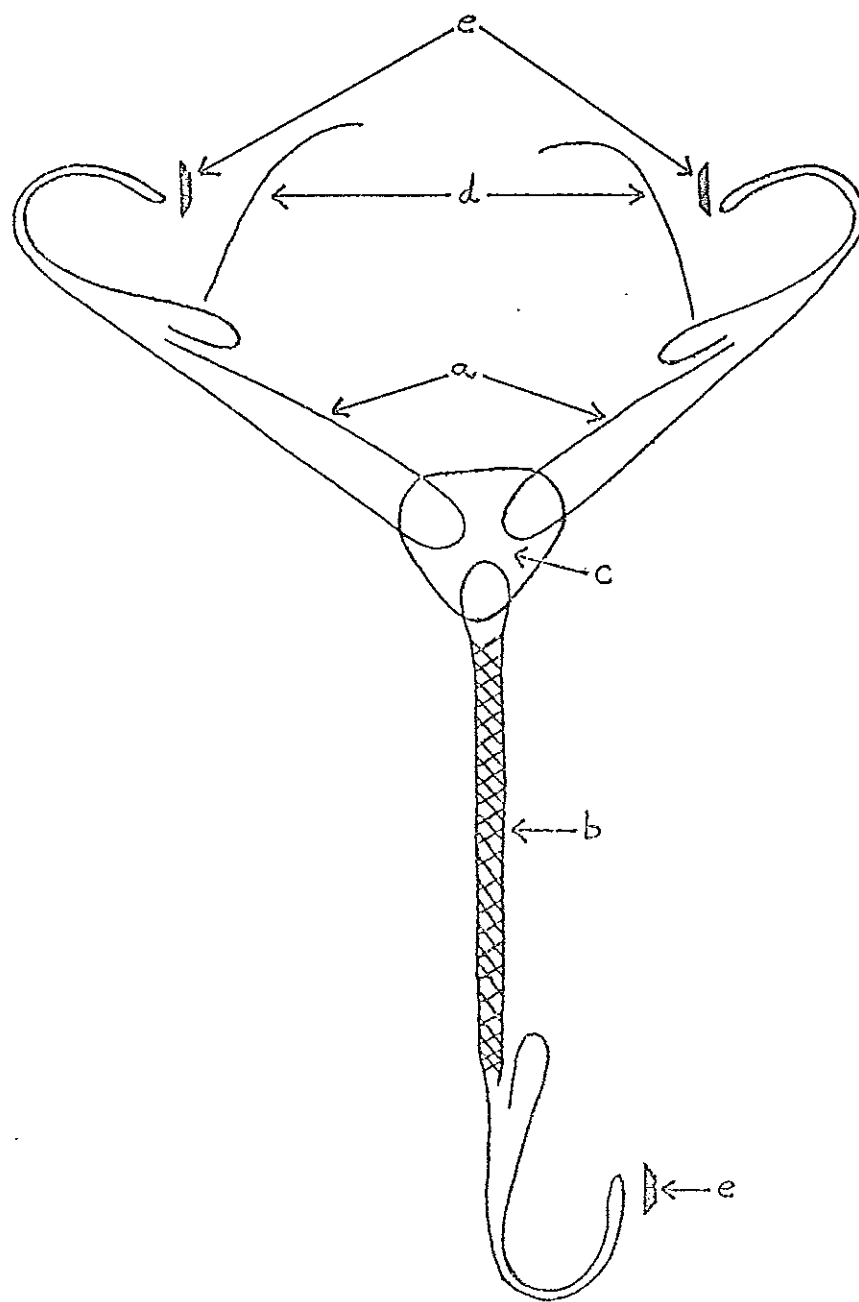


Fig. 1187.

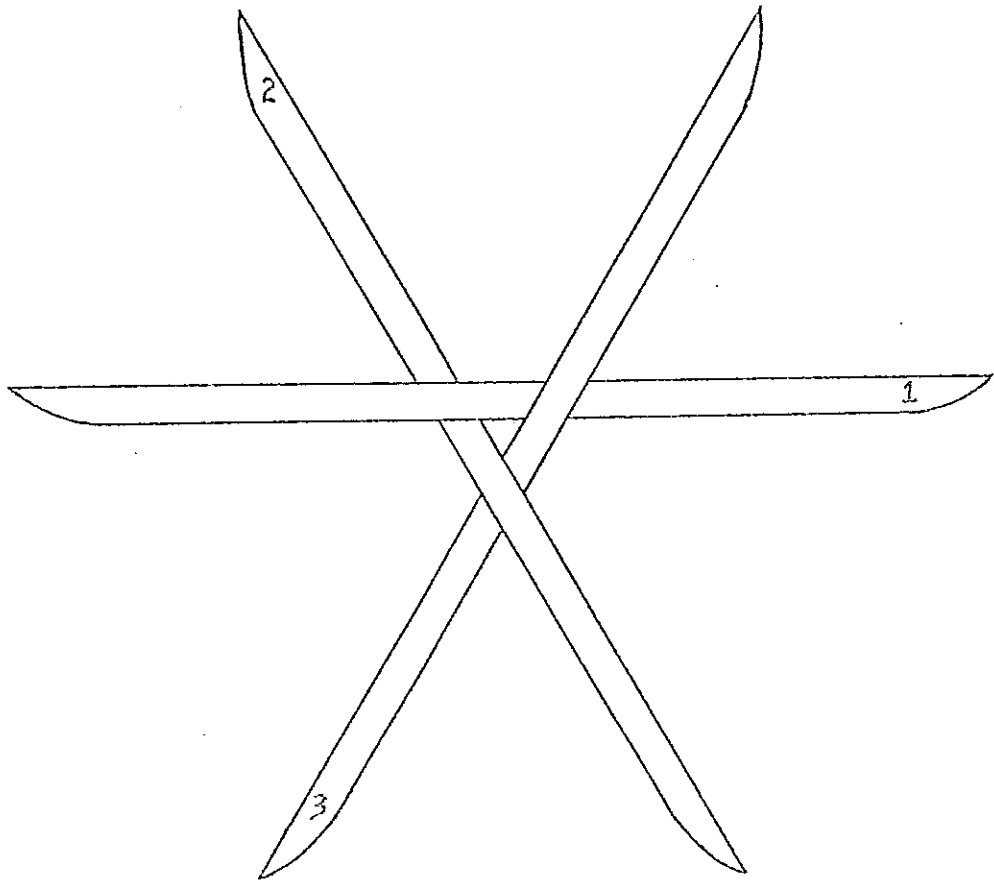


Fig. 1188.

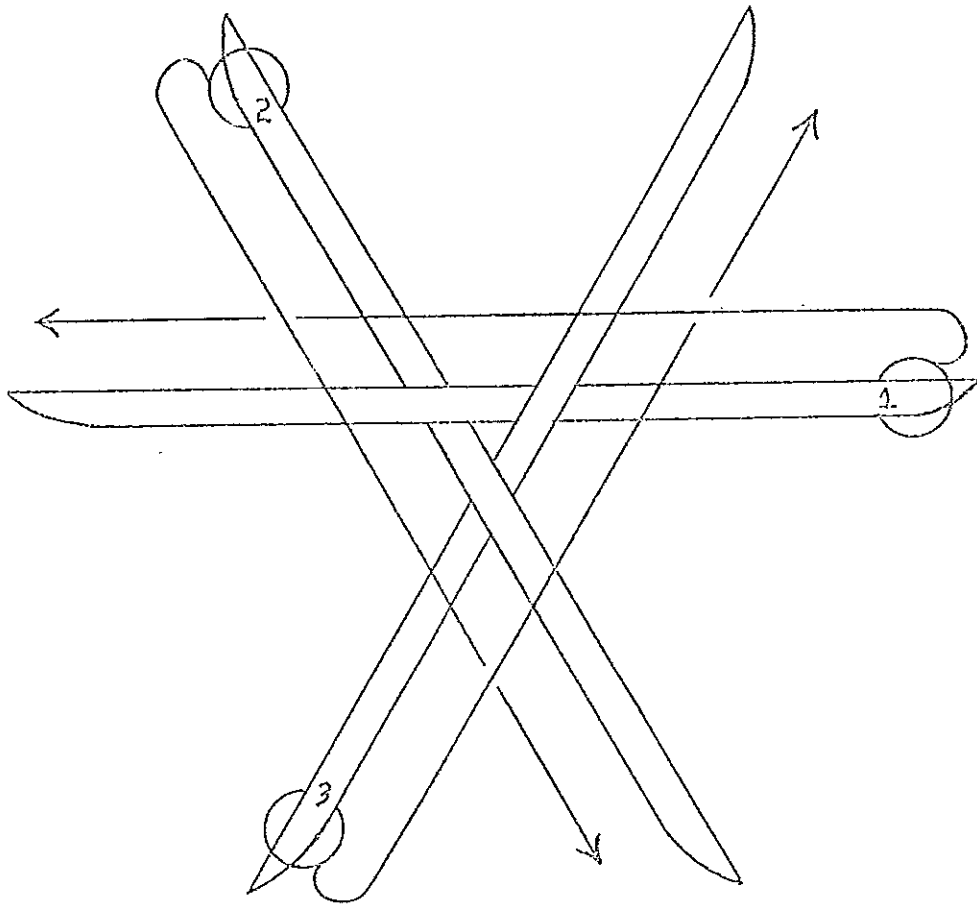


Fig. 1189.

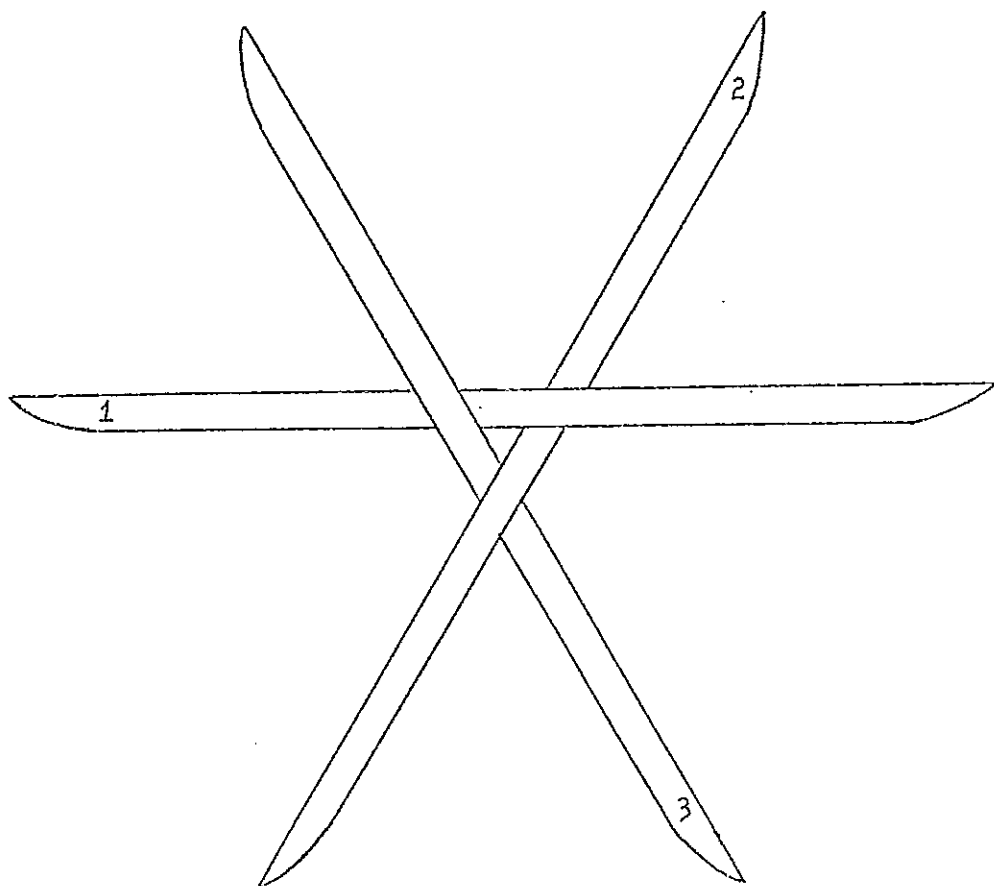


Fig. 1190.

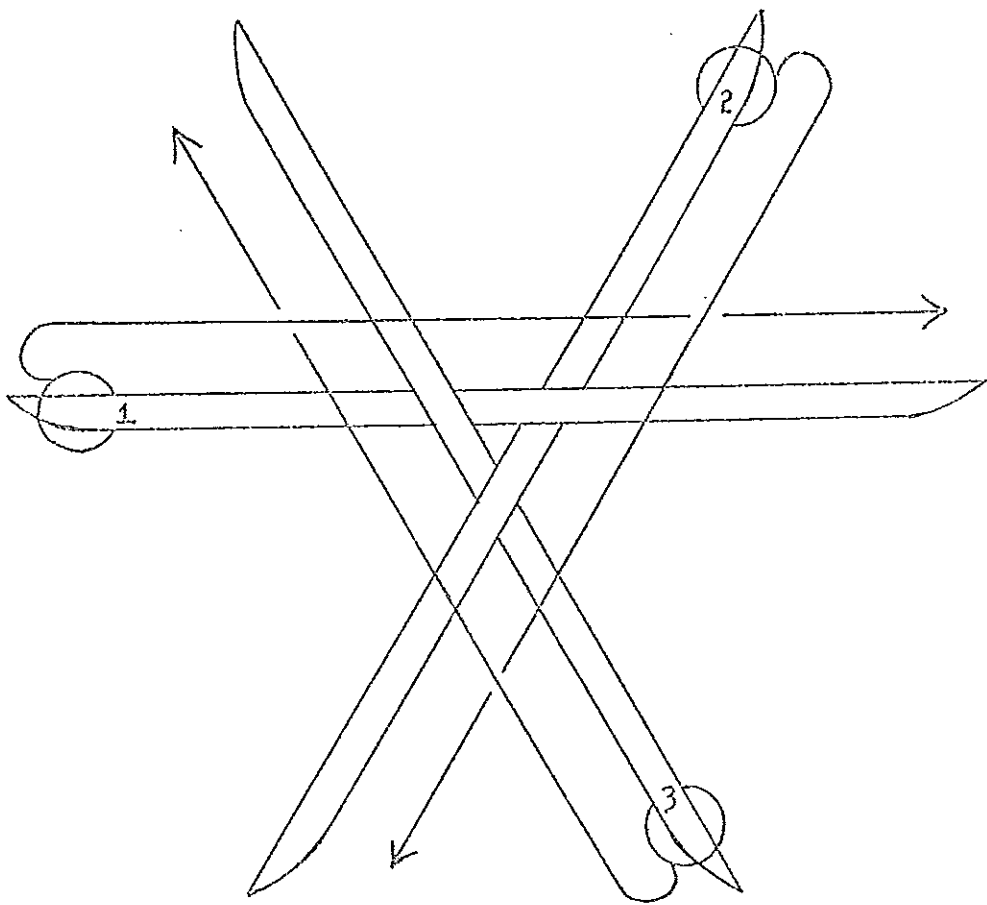


Fig. 1191.

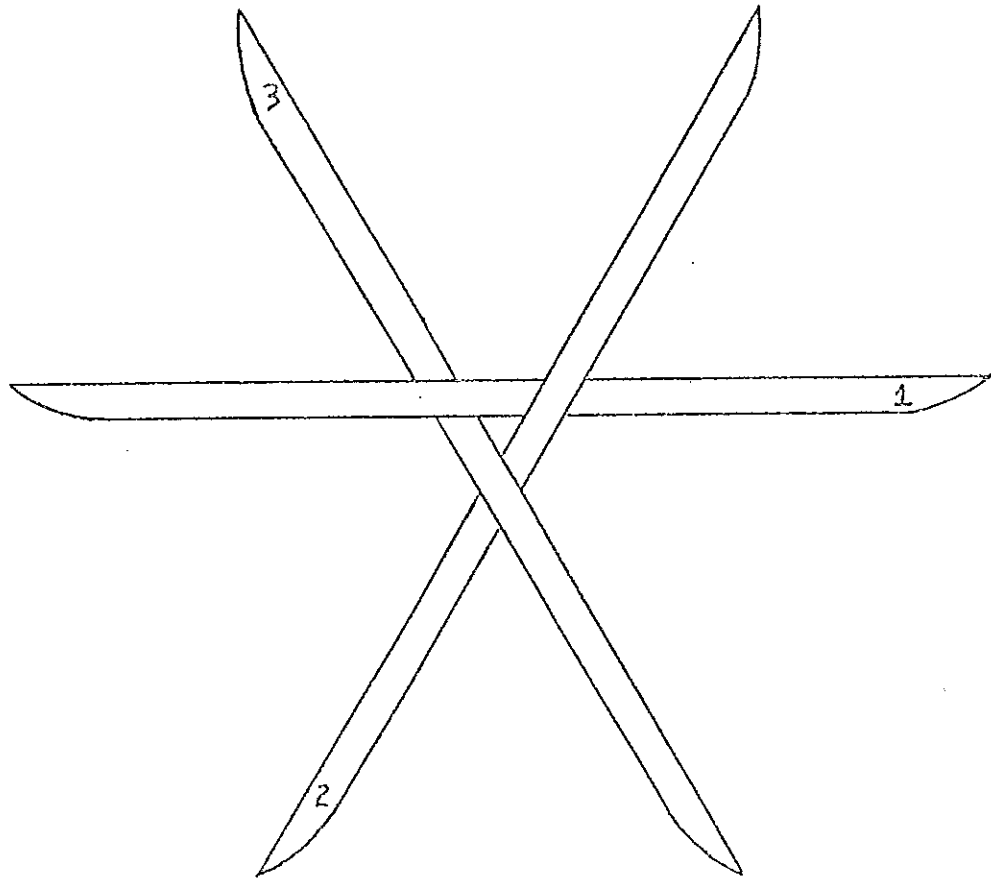


Fig. 1192.

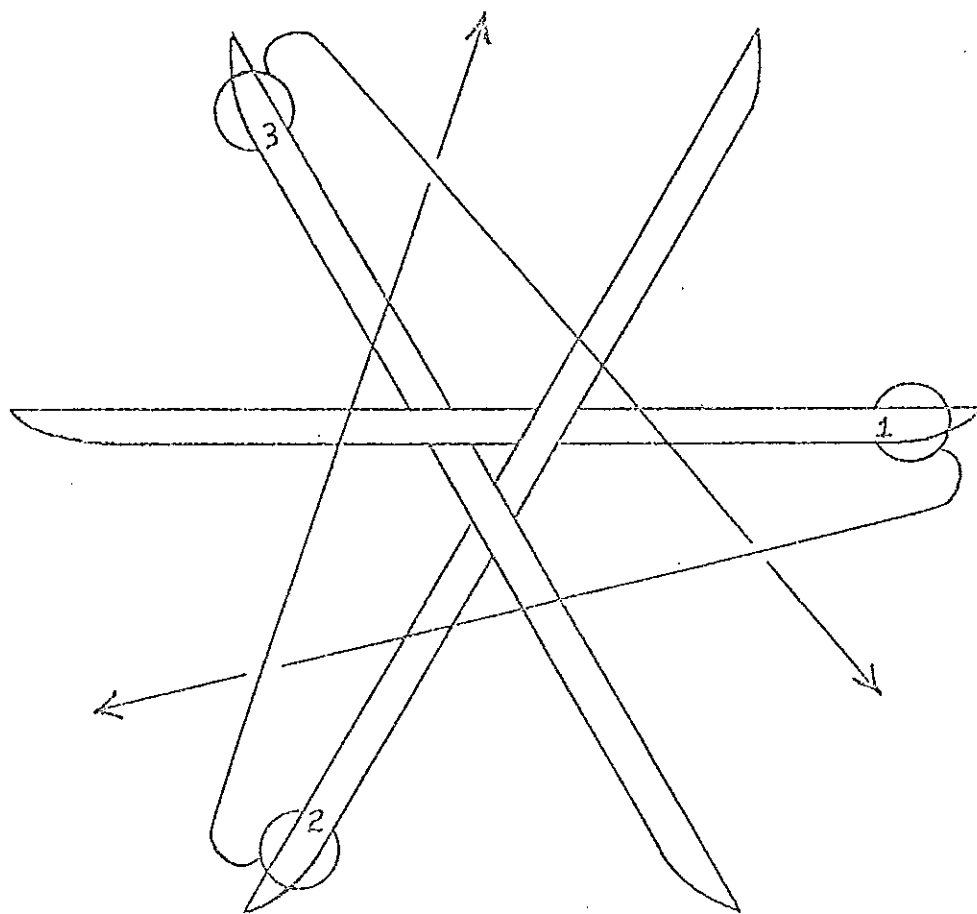


Fig. 1193.

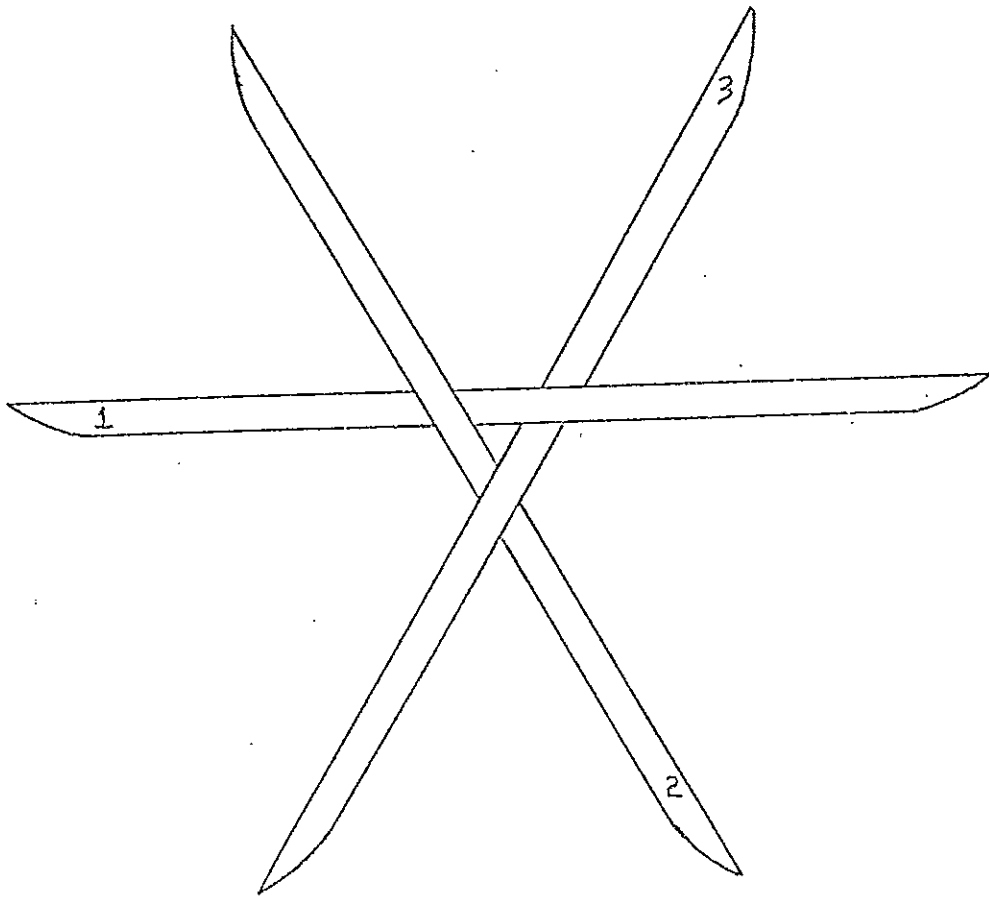


Fig. 1194.

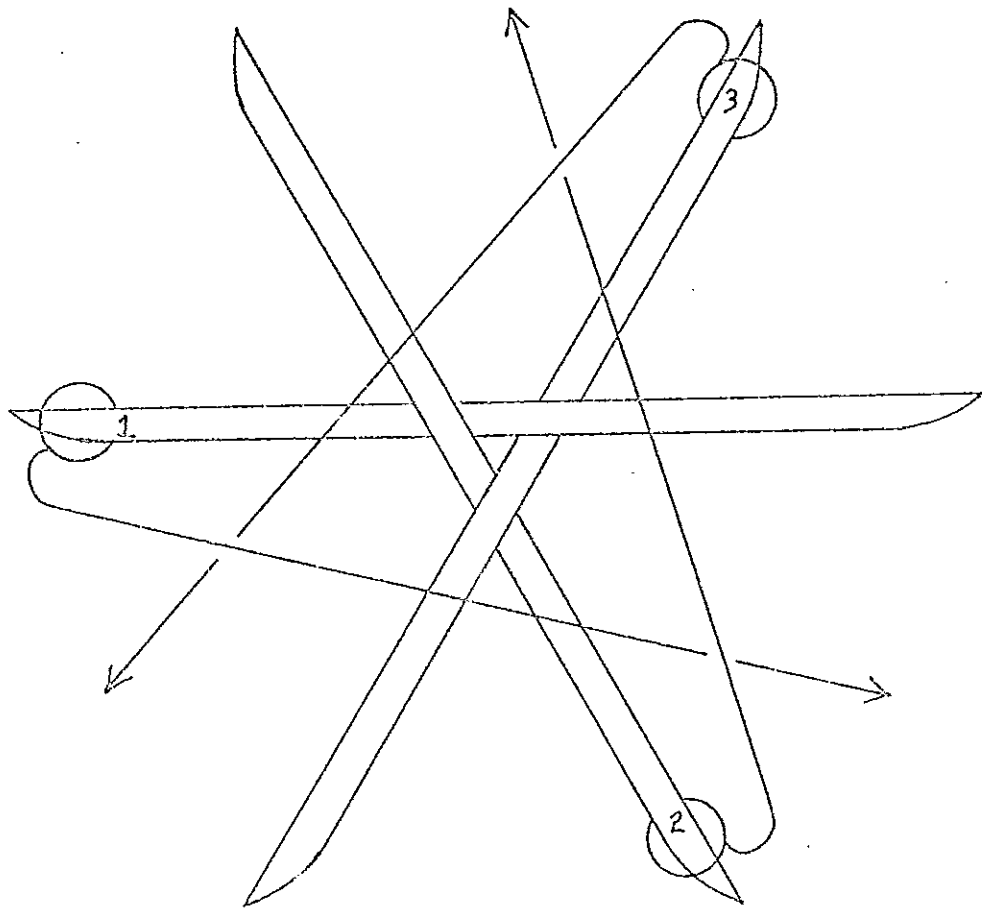


Fig. 1195.

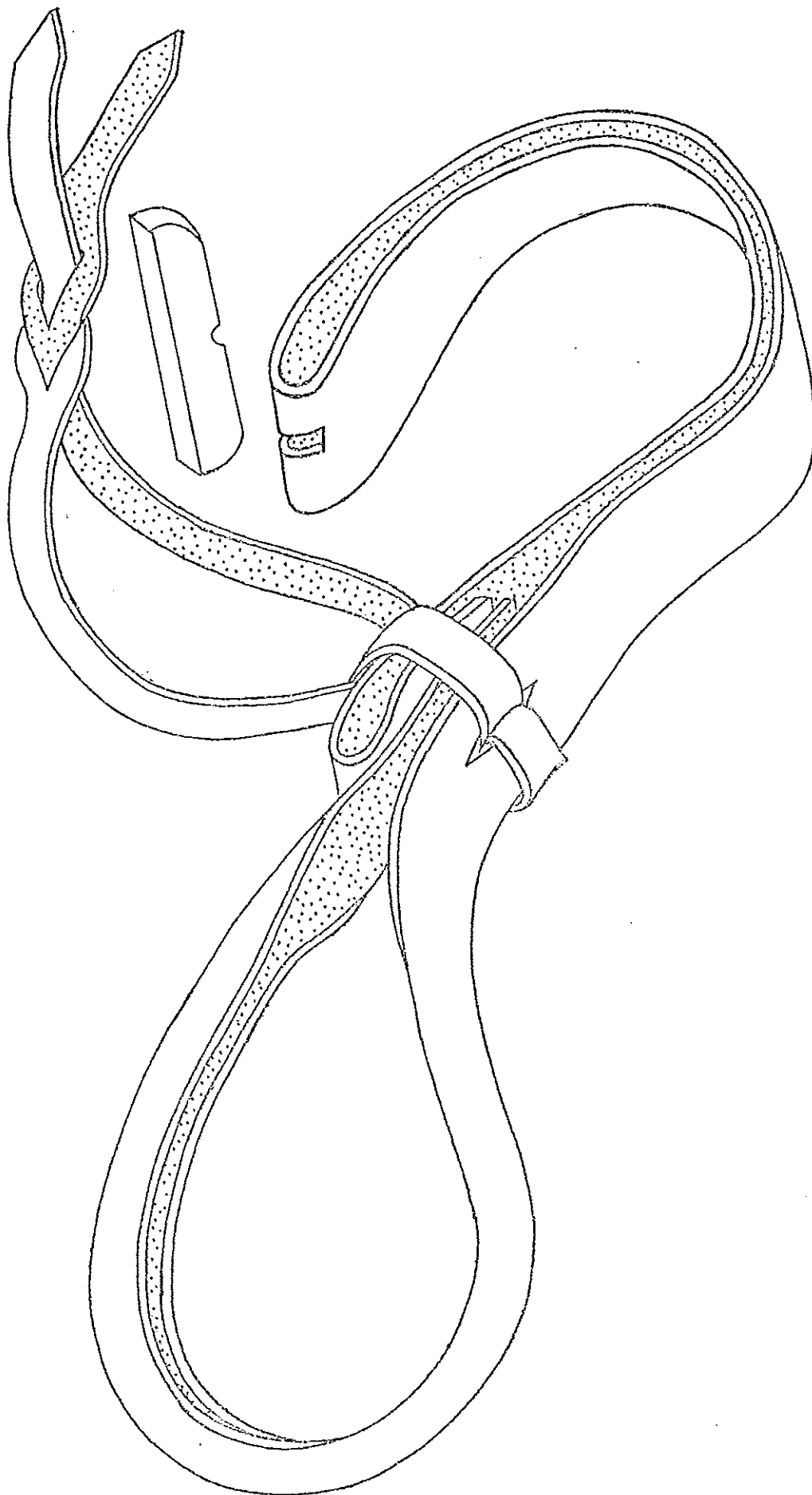


Fig. 1196.

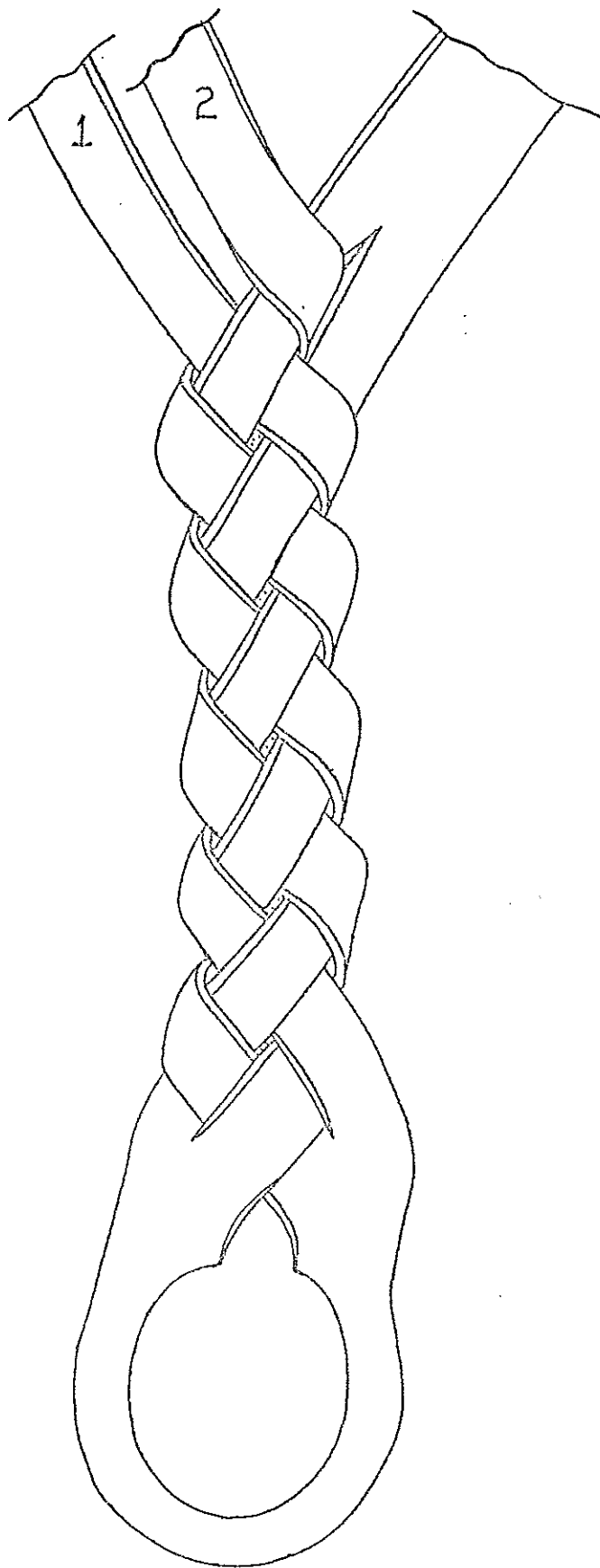


Fig. 1197.

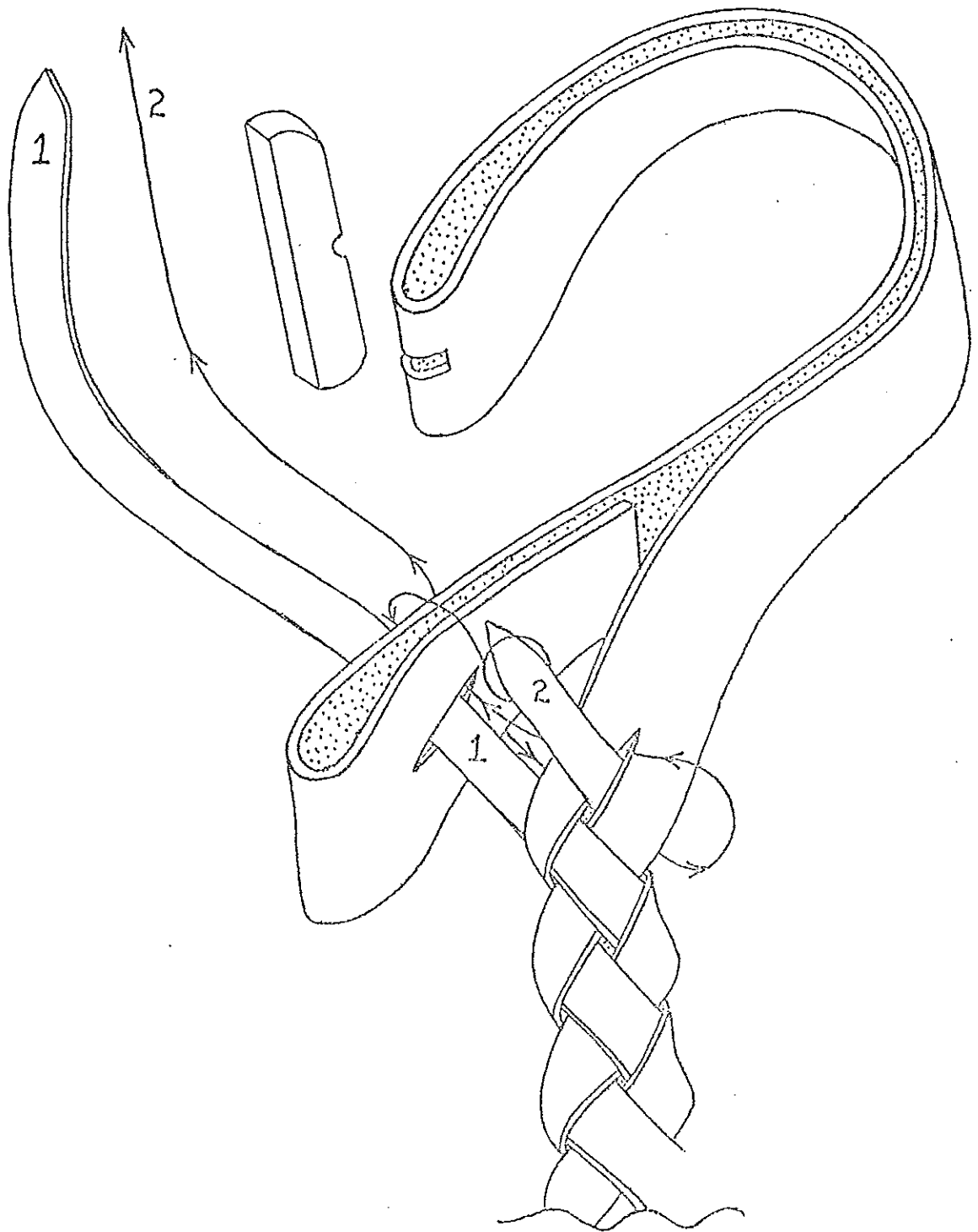


Fig. 1198.

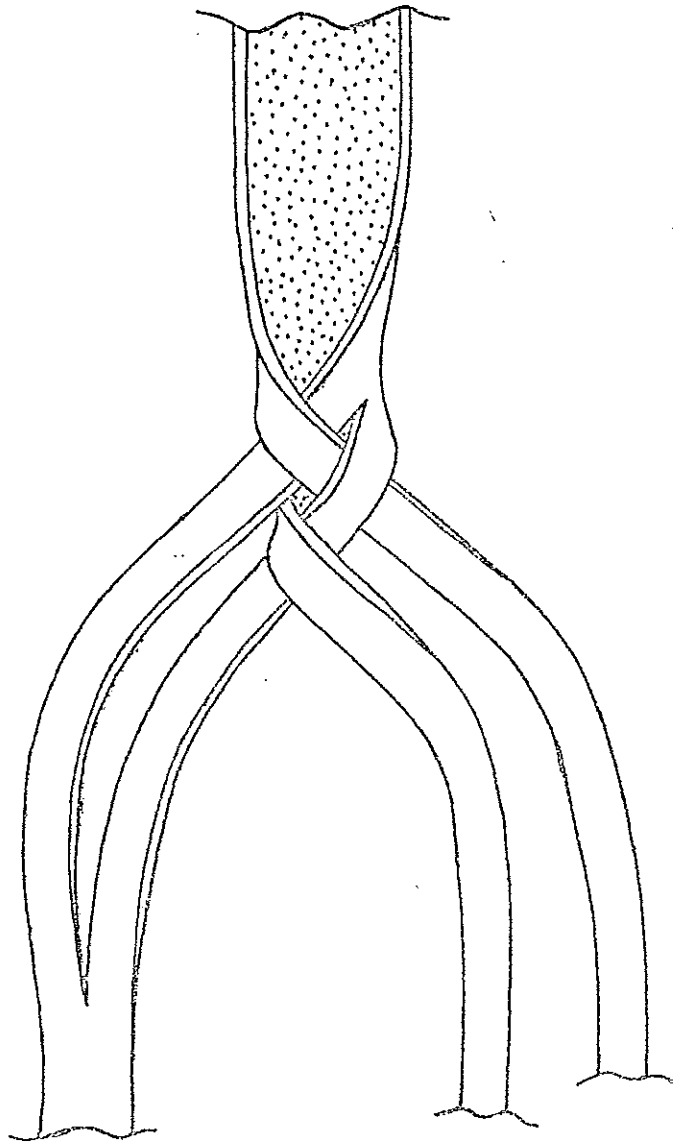


Fig. 1199.

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