

Embroidered Linen Headdress



BY:

Fru Isabel Ulfsdottir

Table of Contents

[SUMMARY *](#)

[MATERIALS AND PROCESS *](#)

[LINEN HEAD-DRESS DOCUMENTATION *](#)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY *](#)

SUMMARY

Recent archeological excavations in the Norse world have greatly improved the knowledge that we have of the types of headdresses that the Norse women worn in the 10th and 11th Centuries. The excavation of 16-22 Coppergate in York, England produced an intact silk headdress. This headdress recovered was a silk tabby woven headdress with remnants of red linen thread that are believed to be the remnants of embroidery.

York was a Norse trading center during the 10th century and much of the textiles found at Coppergate can be attributed to being Norse in origin or influenced by the Norse. The silk headdress found is a hood-shaped cap that is very easy to construct. The cap is folded over the top and sewn up the back to the top fold including a curve to allow the cap to fit better to the head. A cap that is similar to the one found at Coppergate is depicted in the 11th century wall painting in the church of St Sophia in Kiev.

I choose to recreate a Norse headdress based on the archeological evidence found in York. My headdress is constructed from a tabby woven linen and adorned with embroidery. The Vandyke

stitch, which is prevalent in Norse embroidery, is the stitch that I used to decorate the edges of the cap. I enjoy the animals depicted in the Lindisfarne and decided to use the birds from that document as a pattern for my embroidery.

I greatly enjoyed creating this Norse headdress. I particularly like the Vandyke stitch because of its efficiency. The archeological finds of Norse embroidery depict a society that loves decoration and beauty.

MATERIALS AND PROCESS

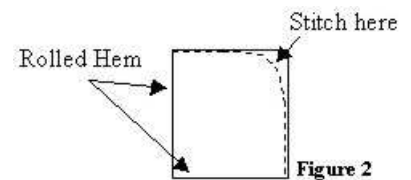
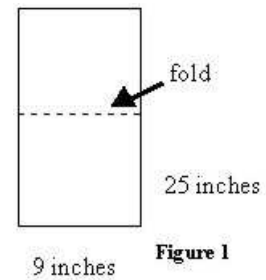
Linen Head Dress:

Materials:

1. 1 yard linen cloth in tabby weave
2. Thread
3. Needle

Process:

1. Cut a rectangle 9 inches by 25 inches.
2. Fold the cloth in half and pin in place.
3. Draw a curve from approximately 1/3 down from the fold to 1/3 in from the front of the head-dress. This curve will allow the cap to better fit the curve of the head.
4. Stitch up the back of the headdress following the edges and the curved line.
5. Hem all edges of the cap with a rolled hem.
6. Cut two strips of linen and fold in half tucking the raw edges to the inside of the tube.
7. Stitch up the length of the linen ribbons finishing the two ends.
8. Attach the ribbons to the front of the headdress approximately 3 inches from the bottom of the cap.



Embroidery:

Materials:

1. Embroidery thread
2. Needle

Process:

1. Choose an embroidery motif (I choose a motif from the bird from the Lindisfarne.)
1. Copy or draw the motif on the linen headdress.
2. Choose a stitching style. (I chose to use the Vandyke stitch, shown at the right, because of its prevalence in Norse textile finds.)



LINEN HEAD-DRESS DOCUMENTATION

The controversy over the type of headdresses that the Norse women wore during the height of the Viking era is slowly diminishing with the onset of improved archeological research of Norse fabrics. The excavations at Coppergate in York, England have begun to shed some light on the type of textiles in existence in the 10th and 11th centuries. The amount of textiles and textile related goods found in this excavation have clarified some of the questions concerning Norse headdresses.

York was a Norse trading center during the 10th century and much of the textiles found at Coppergate can be attributed to being Norse in origin or influenced by the Norse. One of the most exciting discoveries in the excavation is a silk headdress dating to AD975. The linen headdress I have created is based largely on this find. The silk headdress found is a hood-shaped cap that is very easy to construct. The cap is folded over the top and sewn up the back to the top fold including a curve to allow the cap to fit better to the head. The edges have a rolled hem. There are two pull marks in the fabric at the front edge, which possibly indicated where the ribbons were attached to tie the headdress on the head. The cap also had stitch holes that could indicate that the cap was adorned with embroidery. Small amounts of red linen are still attached to the silk cap. I believe that the stitch holes and the linen remnants are all that remain of the embroidery that adorned the cap.



Figure 4

A cap that is similar to the one found at Coppergate, is depicted in the 11th century wall-painting in the church of St Sophia in Kiev. The painting depicts four un-married daughters of King Yaroslav. The second oldest daughter, Elizabeth, seems to have a headdress that fits closely to the head and possibly ties under the chin. King Yaroslav was the King of Novgorod and Kiev that were Scandinavian-ruled trading towns on the main route of the silk trade.



Figure 5

The measurements of the silk headdress from Coppergate are approximately 8 inches by 24 inches with hems and darts still intact. When making the reproduction, I added one inch to the cut dimensions to take into account the hems and seams. I also created two linen ties, which are approximately 1/2 inch wide when finished. I made my ties as described by the archeologist from the Coppergate find. The fabric is folded in half lengthwise with the raw edges turned to the inside. The ribbon is then sewn down the length as close to the edge as possible. This method of creating a ribbon produces a very nice and durable ribbon for tying the headdress.

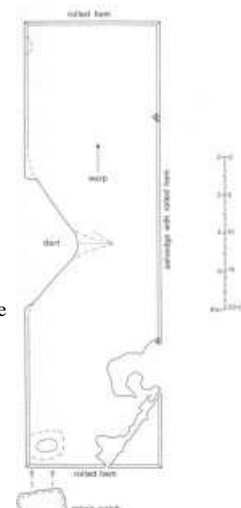


Figure 6

Embroidery was not adapted in the Norse society until the ninth and tenth centuries. The Oseberg Ship burial contains two gowns that contain extensive embroidery. In Birka a style of embroidery known as the Vandyke stitch is found (see Embroidery section of Materials and Process above for picture). The stitch is believed to have come to the Norse society from Eastern Europe. The stitch is often worked with silver wire without a needle but can also be worked with fibers with the aid of a needle. The stitch is remarkably efficient and would have appealed to the ever-practical Norse women. As I was practicing the stitch I noticed that a vast majority of the thread is piled up on the surface of the linen. Almost no decorative thread is lost to the backside of the piece. This would have been very important when using costly silver or gold wire.

I decided to choose a motif from the Lindisfarne because I like the depiction of the animals in that document. The Norse were found of using twined animals in their carving and other decoration. I particularly liked the bird from Lindisfarne. The shape of the bird is bold and simple making embroidery relatively easy. I choose to embroider just the outline of the bird in order to give a more delicate feel to the final piece. As a Norse woman I would have used the embroidered headdress as a means to display my skill and wealth. Because of this, I used a fine, white linen and a rich blue color for the embroidery. A rich blue color in fabrics is only obtainable by dyeing with indigo, which had to be imported from the Far East. A woman who could afford to embroider with blue thread would have been considered very wealthy in Norse society.



Figure 8



Overall this entire project was very enjoyable. I love the look of the Vandyke stitch and may attempt embroidery with silver wire in the future. The cut and style of the headdress is remarkably simple to make and wastes very little fabric. The more research I do on Norse society the more I am impressed with their love of decoration, practicality and ingenuity when creating garments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Walton, Penelope, *Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16-22 Coppergate*, Council for British Archaeology, London, England 1989.
2. Bertil Almgren, *The Viking*, Nordbok International, Gothenburg, Sweden, 1971,
3. *The World of the Vikings*, York Archaeological Trust and the National Museum of Denmark, Past and Forward Limited.
4. Jonathan Wooding, *The Vikings*, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. New York, NY,
5. Gram-Campbell, *The Cultural Atlas of the Viking World*, Andromeda Oxford Limited, Oxfordshire, England 1994.
6. Peter Sawyer Editor, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1997
7. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, Penguin Books Ltd. New York, NY 1998. P. 37
8. Meehan, Aidan, *Celtic Design, Animal Patterns*, Thames and Hudson Inc. New York, N.Y. 1992.
9. Priest-Dorman, Carolyn, *Viking Embroidery Stitches and Motifs*, The Society for Creative Anachronism Inc. 1995



[Back to our A&S page.](#)