

Some time ago, I was asked to create costuming for the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic's newest exhibit entitled "Vikings, the Vinland Mystery". My task, as the Museum's Costume Interpretation Specialist, was to create men's and women's clothes circa 900, for two of our senior interpreters.

Researching the project proved to be a rather interesting experience, given my limited access to information and of course, a challenging language barrier to overcome. The men's trousers, in particular, became my primary focus due to certain discrepancies my research unearthed in terms of cut and style. Therefore, this article will compare the theories of leading Scandinavian re-enacting groups, the SCA and my own, as they relate to the Viking trousers.

"Statistically, fewer finds of known clothing-related textiles exist for Viking men than for Viking women. This is largely because textiles are most often preserved by proximity to metal (in jewellery or other grave goods) or tannin (from wood) in a protected inhumation (ground burial); but many men in the pagan Viking Age were cremated rather than buried."¹

When researching period clothing, it is necessary to begin by examining contemporary artwork and extant clothing. This process can be extremely time consuming and with only a few months before the opening, I faced quite the uphill battle. I knew that the modern 'pyjama pant' and 'poofy pant' construction, commonly found in SCA costuming, wouldn't meet the specific criteria of authenticity that the Museum desired. Therefore, I began analyzing pieces such as the Oseberg Tapestries, contemporary engravings and searched the internet for relevant articles.

Christina Krupp's article, 'Simple Viking Clothing', directed me to several valuable websites that specifically addressed the cut of the trousers that I needed to create, while the Oseberg Tapestry 'look' was what I would eventually aim for. The complete costume would consist of a tunic, trousers, caftan like jacket and accessories such as wicklbander (legbindings), hat and belt.

¹[An Archaeological Guide to Viking Men's Clothing](#); Carolyn Priest-Dorman, 1993, p.2

Eventually, I selected a cut developed by the Swedish re-enacting group, Historiska Varldar. The group's choice of cut was based on two pieces of cloth found in Hedeby Harbour during an excavation of a Viking ship. Research and current knowledge of traditional clothing lead the group to the assumption that the pieces comprised the trouser's crotch area; a theory supported by the cutting diagrams of the "Thorsbjerg" trousers found in Ms. Krupp's paper. See Historiska Varldar's layout by visiting <http://www.historiska.se/histvarld/drakter/monster/dvmpasbyxor.pdf>

The "Thorsbjerg" trousers consist of two straight leg pieces, under leg triangular gusset like pieces, crotch piece and a rectangular piece that goes across the back. The two pieces found in Hedeby Harbour were similar to the crotch and back buttock piece, meaning the remaining pieces of the theorized Hedeby style trousers would be knee bands, a waistband and two leg pieces. Construction was an interesting task, as part of what would ordinarily be considered an added crotch piece is actually used to form the back leg. In order to ensure the proper construction of the trousers, I was obliged to create a small scale paper leg from traced pieces and tape before I could move on to drafting the full size version.

Once finished, the trousers had an exceptional 'look', but the cutting layout that remained afterwards left my head full of unanswered questions, specifically, why would Vikings choose to waste such a large amount of fabric during the cutting process? At the time, the fabrication of cloth was labour intensive and timely given that it needed to be woven completely by hand. I theorize that anyone cutting the cloth for the purpose of creating trousers would have chosen a method that created the least amount of waste, rather than squandering the material. Other garments from this period are constructed with pieces cut in the shape of squares, rectangles and triangles, effectively utilizing the material for greatest efficiency.

It is my belief that achieving the look of "Hedeby" trousers can be accomplished by cutting the leg piece into several smaller pieces that consist of a large rectangle, small rectangle and two triangles. My proposed method of cutting not only allows one to create a pair of authentic looking trousers, but equally as important, it promotes efficient use of the cloth, making the process used to create the trousers historically authentic as well.

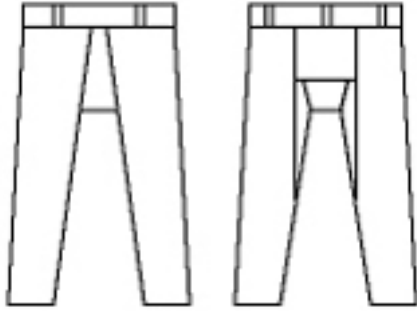
Images



Partial view of the Oseberg Tapestries showing several men in poufed trousers and tunics. It is a stylized view of men's clothes at the time.



“Thorsbjerg” trousers in their original condition. These look very much like closed hose of a later period, and will require further research.



Here you can see the piecing for the above trousers. Two of the pieces are very similar to the pieces found in Hedeby Harbour.



The first pair of reconstructed trousers shows the same crotch detailing as the line drawing above of the “Thorsbjerg” trousers.



I self lined the crotch and back panel to encase the seams and to add strength to the hardest wearing area of the pants. In the top left corner, you can see the open felled seam where the leg extension is sewn to the leg seam.



What you are looking at here is the leg extension where it meets the leg seam, crotch piece and back piece. As the leg extension and leg are cut in one piece, but at right angles to each other, the fabric changes direction. This is why the little paper pants came in handy when trying to figure out the pattern.



This is the front of the trousers. At a loss as to how they would close in the front, I slashed the centre front crotch panel. I then turned the edges to the inside and hand finished the slash. I then attached the waistband and added the fly panel. The fly panel is similar to the full seated hose of later period. I am thinking about removing it and adding more lacing holes to close the slash in the centre front.



A close up of the lacing holes that tie the front waistband together. Eventually I would like to have hand made cording to lace with.



The leg ends were then cartridge pleated onto bands that fit under the knee.

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