

The Åsle mitten

THL, Arina de Träntorp from Cynnabar

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The mitten was first thought to date to viking age, but later dated with C_{14} methods to have been made during 1510 – 1640. It was found by Frithiof Svensson, a farmer, while digging up peat in a bog. The Åsle stitch is described as U(U)O/UO:UOO in Hansen's system (Carolyn Priest-Dormant), with two additional comments, since the first reconstruction description was backwards and very complicated to do. The second reconstruction is easier, but you had to finish the mitten and then turn it inside out to reach the same result as in the original. That said, we do not know which side is the "right side", only which side was outwards when the mitten was found.

The Åsle stitch is also special by having a different back and front side - and it also differs in having a smooth surface while most other needle binding techniques show a herring bone pattern on both sides, with more or less pronounced ridges. The Åsle stitch has running verticals on the front side, and horizontals on the back side. The original was a left-hand mitten, 27 cm long, and was made with undyed wool. Around the edge there are remnants of a fringe, made in red, green and white wool yarn (Picture from the Swedish History Museum's website).

My reconstruction is also a left-hand mitten, it is 24 cm long and slightly narrower than the original, since I have very long fingers and narrow hands. The length of the fringe or the method of how to construct and attach the fringe was not mentioned. The picture only shows a few threads remaining, and since it does not look like the remains of a very thick fringe, I chose to reconstruct a single layer fringe with alternating colors.



This is the color picture from the museum's archive (public domain photo), showing the current brown color. The black and white accompanying pictures are copied from M.Hald (1980), and they show the inside and outside of the mitten clearly.

My reconstruction:



Material used for the reconstructions:

I make my own needles for needle binding, except for a bone needle I bought several years ago, which is my favorite for very tight bindings. I prefer flat needles for the looser and more flexible techniques, since the shape of the needles stops the binding from getting too tight. My home made needles are made from oak, ash, lilac and bog pine. Lilac because it is a very soft wood when fresh, but dries to a very hard wood. Bog pine is pine wood that has been dyed red by being buried in the peat.

For the Åsle mitten I choose not to use my hand spun yarn, since my yarn is a bit too hairy to make the stitch show clearly. Instead I found a good substitute, a light gray store bought yarn with stray dark fibers, since even with a good separation of the two fibers, there would be stray dark hair in the light yarn in yarn spun from the short tail sheep. The separation and use of both the light wool yarn and the dark kemp yarn together in textiles, can be seen and compared to the threads of the garments found in Greenland (Lilli Franzen etc). The fringe is also bought wool, but in quality and color close to what would have been used. The green is slightly darker, and a little bit bluer, but still close to a green possible to get from dyeing with Saint John's wort. The yarns would also have been single ply and softly spun, to prepare for felting of the finished garment, while the modern substitute is double or four ply and a bit harder spun, and therefore not making felting necessary to finish off the garment. The stitch is also fairly substantial, that felting does not feel necessary, besides by usage.

Book references:

Nålbindning, 12 varianter, Västmanlands läns Hemslöjdsförbund. 2001. A second edition of a local craft society collection of locally occurring stitches and stitch variations. The book contains the description for the Åsle stitch, and the Olso stitch, among others.

Medieval garments reconstructed, Norse clothing patterns. Lilli Franzen, Anna Nørgaard, Else Østergård. Aarhus University Press. 2010. A very good garment reconstruction book that has some very valuable insights in the actual making of the fabric and the wool qualities available to the people in Greenland.

"Ancient [Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials: A Comparative Study of Costume and Iron Age Textiles](#)", Hald, Margrethe. trans. Jean Olsen. [Archaeological-Historical Series Vol. XXI. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark, 1980](#)

Website sources:

The Swedish History Museum website "The story of the

Åslemitten"<http://www.historiska.se/historia/manadensforemal/2003/mfjanuari2003/>

This museum has both English and Swedish available as languages, and it also hosts a item database which anyone can use to search for items found in Sweden. The link will lead directly to this item's article.

Nålebinding Techniques in the Viking Age, 2001 Carolyn Priest-Dorman <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/nalebnd.html>

This is a good general overview of several needle binding stitches, it is made by a fellow scadian, and it is from this page I got the Hansen and the Hald classifications of the stitches. She has a nice bibliography.

Sources for the nomenclature- these books are part of Carolyn Priest-Dorman's excellent biography, and should be mentioned in full, as the source of the information I could get from her web page.

["Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16-22 Coppergate"](#). Walton, Penelope. [York Archeological Trust 1989.](#)

"Nalebinding: definition and description." *Textiles in Northern Archaeology: NESAT III Textile Symposium in York 6-9 May 1987*, Hansen, Egon H. ed. Penelope Walton and John P. Wild, pp. 21-27. London: Archetype Publications, 1990.