

BUILT FJORD TOUGH: THE ETHEREAL SEAMSTRESS EDITION

THE PREPARATION

Prep for this challenge began by creating a notebook on my iPad in GoodNotes. I imported the rules document and marked it up, highlighting things I didn't want to forget (and often forgot anyway) and making lists of items and materials and resources.

First I brainstormed.

Creativity • Fit • Scope Workmanship
Completeness

Special points

- 25 - Inspiration & vindication of how/why you did what you did, written (should be done in advance) or oral
- 25 - Accessories made during competition
- 50 - General WOW! factor of what you tried to accomplish
- 50- If team members complete items with enough time to get all pieces to the model in time for the judging show

Total possible points 250

Project

- * Linen serk * Wool serk?
- * Wool smøkk (Køstrup style)
- * Wool hose
- * TW trim & garters ← 36" EACH
- * Accessories? chatelaine? comb?
belt & buckle?

Then I refined my plan and drilled down deeper.

ITEMS & MATERIALS

KØSTRUP DRESS

Brown twill wool
Metro textiles
Gutermann silk thread
Color 230
(order wool thread
from Madeira) } stash

LINEN SERK

Yellow handkerchief linen
Fabrics-store.com
Linen thread ← stash
Vävstuga

TABLET WOVEN TRIM & GARTERS

Jaggerspun 2/20 wool yarn
"French Blue" color 0440
EpiC 2/18 wool yarn
"Lichen" yellow color 287
"Fire" red color 218
"Bleach white" color 800
~~"Frog" green color 276~~
"Teak" brown
"Madder" red color 218
"Terracotta" red color 215

Walnut weaving cards
Ampstrike
Cherry "Harpichord" floor loom
Windhaven Fiber Tools

can't see this color against
the French blue wool

ACCESSORIES

BELT

Vegetable-tanned leather
Waterstain leather dye
Tandy Leather

HEADSCARF

Wool/silk blend
Amazon.com
Linen thread
Vävstuga

HOSE

Wool
stash
Wool-acrylic yarn
Madeira USA

SHOES

Vegetable-tanned leather
waxed linen thread
Tandy Leather
Artificial sinew

Cut down to size
& hemmed

STRETCH
GOALS

THE SMOKKR.

The Køstrup smokkr was excavated from Grave ACQ, in a cemetery in Køstrup, Fyn, Denmark, in 1980-1981. The textile fragments from that grave were very small, woolen, with fine pleats between two oval domed brooches. In addition, a small strip of tablet weaving was also found, with discernable designs.

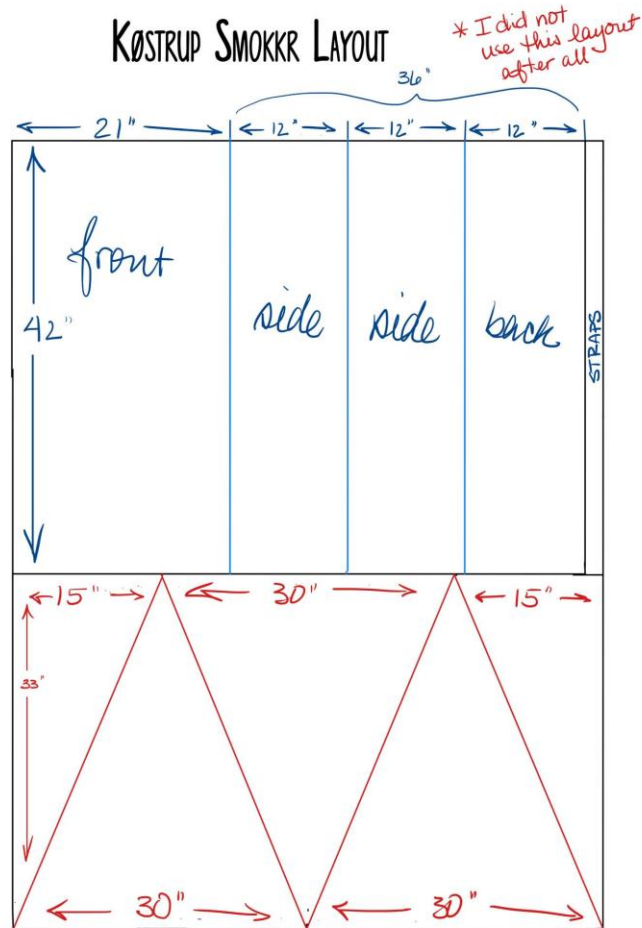
There is some controversy about where the fragment was positioned, because the body had shifted in the grave and the archaeologists doing the excavation could not be sure which brooch was on the right and which on the left. Additionally, they excavated the earth containing the brooches and textile fragments and took them elsewhere for examination, which further confused matters.

The fragment could either be on the front or on the side of the garment. Predominant thinking has it on the front, which I tend to agree with since there doesn't seem to be the sort of wear you would seem from the arm rubbing on the fabric, though this could be explained away by this garment having been made specifically for burial. I doubt that this is likely, and that the pleating was used to add fullness to accommodate pregnancy.

Given that the longest measurement of this fragment is about 13cm, we have no idea how long the garment was or what shape the skirts took, so basically I winged the shape and had fun with it.

I used a reddish-brown wool twill I bought online from Metro Fabrics in New York City. It's beautiful fabric and an absolute joy to work with. I used Madeira Burmilana thread to sew the pleats and seams and EPiC 18/2 wool yarn to fell down the seam allowances. I'd have used the EPiC yarn for everything, but I had a limited amount and didn't think I'd have enough. (I was wrong, but here we are.)

My original plan for my smokkr had me cutting the fabric into long panels, one of them wider than the others. I planned to pleat that panel, then insert gores between them and sew it all up. It would basically be a riff on the Hedeby dresses I've been making for years.



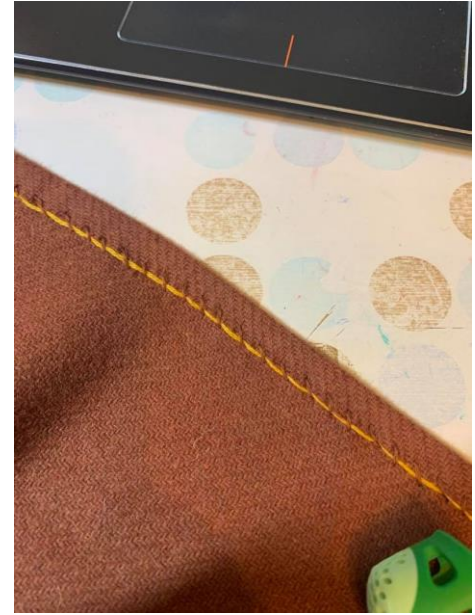
While I was arranging the wool to cut the body panels on my smokkr, I had a rush of brains to the head.

I realize that I didn't have to cut the body panels on my smokkr. I could just pleat the center of the length of fabric, wrap it around me and cut off the bits in the back that are excess, and insert the gores into the fabric. So that's exactly what I did. I think this differs from the original, because there was a vertical seam on one edge of the fragment, but I thought it best in terms of time and brain power to take advantage of the width of modern fabric.

The top edge of the fragment was hemmed, so I hemmed my fabric as well, and then started pleating.

No one is sure how the pleats were made: gathering, smocking, steaming? Steaming, to me, seems the least likely, because it would require the most upkeep.

Gathering would only make pleats at the top (or wherever the gathering thread was sewn), and these pleats seem to be quite regular and extend to the bottom of the fragment. Also, no gathering thread is in evidence.



Smocking seems the most likely, but again, there are no threads that would lead one to believe that smocking was the method used – there aren't even needle holes.

I was inspired to use a technique similar to smocking by a video published on YouTube by Mistress Morgan Donner of AnTir, wherein she sewed a false seam on a Herjolsnes gown (https://youtu.be/Wjk_sHn_Pws?t=354).

Alas, would that I had gone back to the video and reviewed her technique. My pleats might have been neater, less wobbly, and I might have worked them faster, though truth be told, I was absolutely not mad at how fast my pleats worked up.



I used a sort of slip stitch that pulled the inside edges of the pleat together but had the unintended side effect of making the pleat a bit... wavy. I liked them, though, so I carried on.

My intentions were to pleat the entire portion between the brooches (about 8"), but I got



halfway done, held it up to myself and looked in the mirror and realized that it would look ridiculous. The point at which I stopped to look was just about perfect, so that was one more thing I could check off my list.



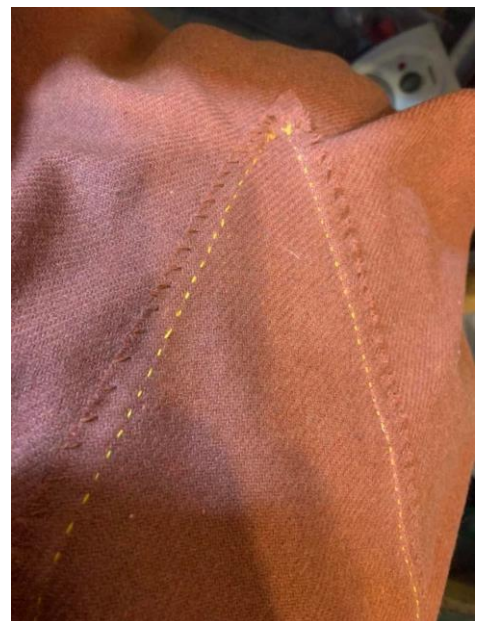
Next up was inserting the gores. I wrapped the length of fabric around myself, pinned it in place, marked where I wanted the tip of each gore with a piece of chalk, drew a line from there to the bottom of the dress and cut the line open.

I drew stitch lines on the edges of the gores with the chalk, and then drew a line parallel to the bottom of the gore through the point where the stitch lines crossed. I lined that point up with the top of the gore slit, aligning the edge of the gore with the edge of the slit on the outside of the garment.

I sewed the gore from tip to hem with a running stitch, then turned the gore to the inside of the dress, lined up the other edge of the gore with the other edge of the slit, and sewed that down. I felled down the seam allowances to the outside of the gore with an overcast stitch using the EPiC yarn.

This left a hole at the top of the gore that was not the nice sharp pointy top that we think is the mark of a correctly sewn gore. It's not.

I sewed in the top of the gore by rolling under the edges of the slit and stitching them to the flap of the gore that was underneath with closely set buttonhole stitches. The top of the gore ends up curved using this technique, but since the objective is to have a solidly and neatly sewn inset gore, I don't care. Also, my gores don't all have the same amount of stitching and I don't care about that, either. I want to do what's needed, not what matches.





With the front pleated and the gores inserted, I needed to close the back. Fitting it to myself was a challenge with shoulders that are not as mobile as I wish they were, but I managed. The back of this dress ended up fitted through the curve of my back in a way that looked *really* funny on the ironing board.

These seam allowances were spread out to either side and felled down as well.

All in all, assembly on this dress went pretty smoothly. If I had it to do over again, I don't think I'd change much other than doing the pleats differently, as I said. I hand

sewed and hand finished everything and it only took two or three days.

Hemming the bottom did not go as smoothly; the dress was shorter than I'd anticipated so I didn't want to make it any shorter by turning the edge. In retrospect, I wish I'd bit the bullet and after this challenge is over, I might go back and turn a very narrow hem and hand sew it. But as it is, I bound the edges with silk shantung, and I don't hate it.

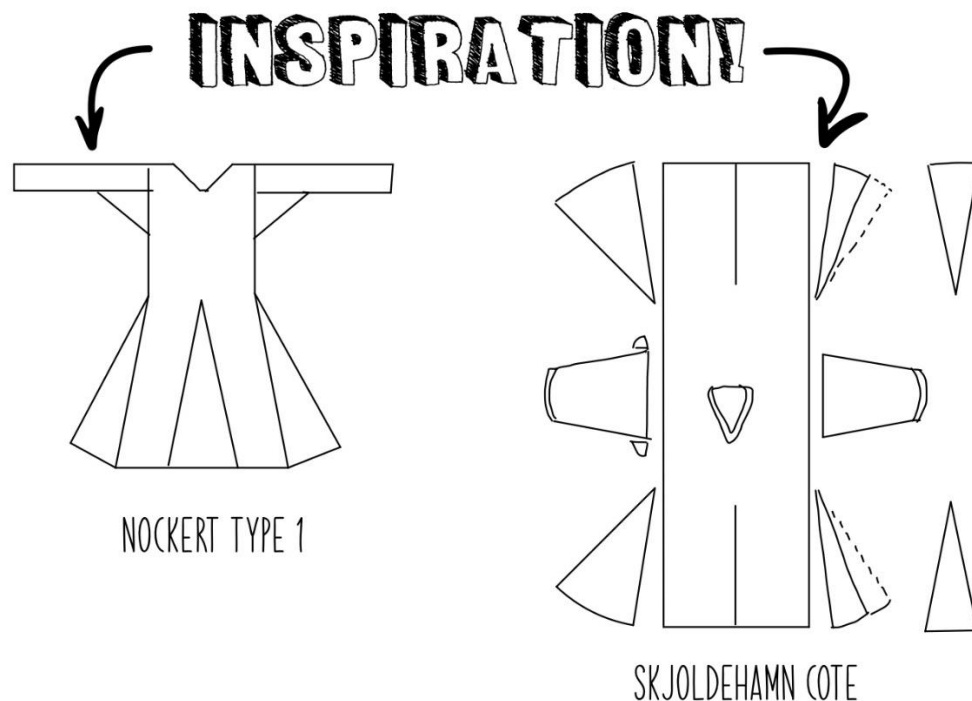


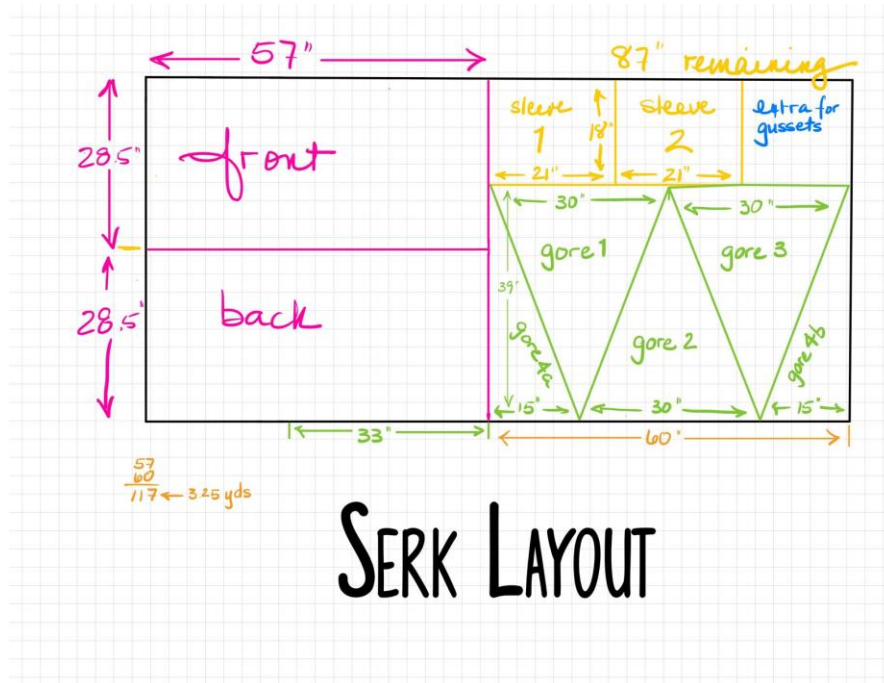
The straps were made the way I usually make them: cut a long 2" strip, fold it in half and iron it, fold the raw edges inside and iron it, and overcast the folded edges together. I didn't take any pictures of this process. They're straps. Also, as of this writing (10pm on March 20, 2021), they are not yet sewn to the dress, so there's really not much to report.

THE SERK

The serk is made of 3.5 out linen in an exceedingly pale yellowish color from Fabrics-store.com.

There are basically no women's undergown type garments surviving from the Viking Age, so I took my inspiration from the Skjoldehamn and Kragelund tunics, taking the layout drawings from I. Marc Carlson's "Some Clothing of the Middle Ages" ([www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-Carlson/cloth/block home.html](http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-Carlson/cloth/block%20home.html)) and making them longer and proportional to my measurements.





Since there are no extant women's serks, not even fragments, I've had to look to men's tunics, and lengthen them for my purposes. This is a pattern that I've made many *many* times before, so I was very comfortable with the process. I went back to a tunic I made for the Calontir Clothing Challenge and adapted the cutting layout I developed for it. The sewing went quite smoothly. I'm really used to doing run and fell seams, so that wasn't much of a challenge.

However...



That neckline. I am so proud of that rolled hem. It worked up quickly and I didn't stretch the edge. I was really worried that I would - I've done it before. But no, it went perfectly and I couldn't be happier. I will do this again.



I did change my plan towards the end of construction, and opted to leave out the gores I was going to insert in the center front and back. It was a decision based on time management rather than shying away from them based on skill. I still needed to make a tablet-woven band for my smokkr and I wanted to give myself extra time. (See the tablet weaving section for more details.)

Leaving off the center front and back gores did not affect the fullness of the skirts, but it did make the hemming go faster, so that was nice.

I put the selvedge on the cuff of the sleeves. Cheating, I know, but fear not, before all is said and done, I will hem them, because not only are they too long, they are really ugly.

The last real challenge I had with my serk was getting the blue chalk I used to mark my cutting lines out of my dress. I washed it in the washing machine and got some of it out, but didn't realize there was some left when I put it in the dryer. I was very concerned - VERY CONCERNED - until I ran some cold water over it, rubbed a bar of soap on it, scrubbed it and rinsed it and all was well. I felt incredibly relieved and kind of silly that I got so wrapped up over something easily solved with a bar of soap.

THE TABLET WEAVING

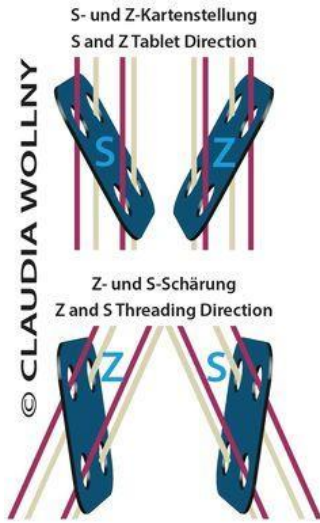
I finished the tablet weaving for my project in three days. It went a lot faster than I expected — brocading is a LOT simpler than you'd think. You don't have to keep track of how you manipulate the cards; you just keep turning them. All you have to do is count which threads you go over and which you go under with the brocading weft, which is comparatively easy.

About the only mistake I could make is to pass the brocading weft without passing the ground weft, and I countered that by starting the two different wefts on opposite sides of the band. If they're on the same side when I go to turn the cards, I've done something wrong.

So according to the archaeology, the original band was woven with two empty holes in each card. Originally I wasn't going to do that, because the tablets can go all squirrely with only two holes holding warp and the warp threads can get out of place *really* easily. Upon doing some accounts written by other weavers (SCA and not), I decided to test it and see what I thought.

I bought a one-pound cone of Jagerspun Maine Line 2/20 in color 0440, French blue, and used that as my ground color. I warped 14 pattern cards with threads in opposite corners, based on the pattern found in the article on the Køstrup dress by Hilde Thunem, and then added two selvedge cards on each side with threads in all four holes to add a bit of stability on the edges.

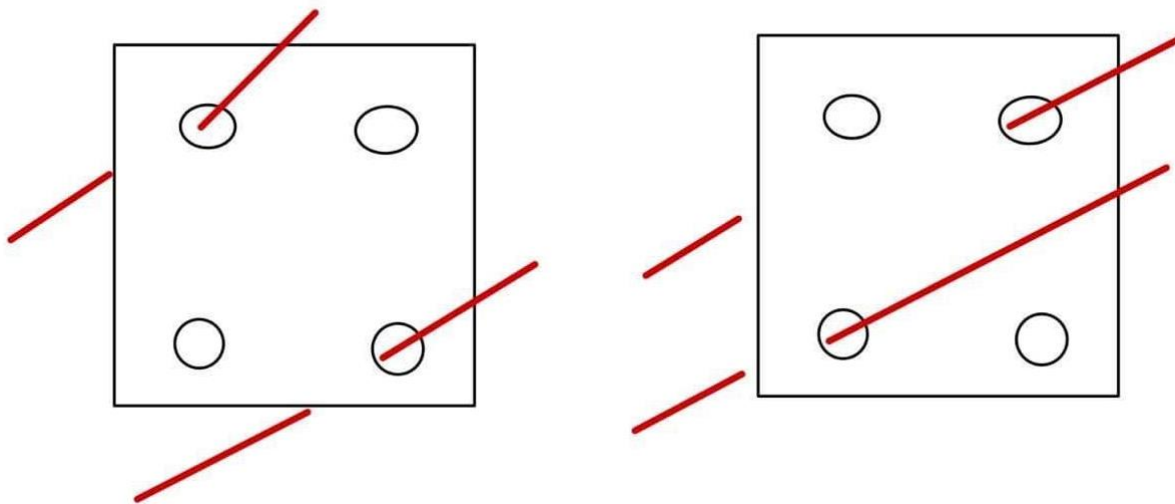
I used doubled strands of Madeira Burmilana wool/acrylic thread for the brocading weft, and Bockens 60/2 dyed linen lace thread that I purchased from Vävstuga for the structural weft. I'm happy with my weft choices, though I wish I'd gone with something a bit sturdier and heavier for my warp. The band turned out narrower than I would have wished, and the yarn got very fuzzy — I was waiting for a thread to snap, at which point I probably would have cried bitter, bitter tears.



The outside cards were arranged so the cards leaned towards each other, while the pattern cards all leaned towards the left, or in an S lean (also known as Z threaded).

It's important to know the pattern writer's intent when they specify S or Z: do they mean threading or card lean?

My reading had turned up a recommendation from [Shelagh Lewins](#) to arrange the pattern cards so that they were offset from one another as shown, every other card having the top thread in the front hole and their neighbors having the top thread in the back hole.



With the cards arranged this way, they stayed in place more readily, but also the structural weft would be caught every quarter turn instead of every half turn, making the weaving much simpler.

I set up my warp on my copper pipe loom, which my friends have dubbed my steampunk loom. I use this loom when I don't need a lot of length. It's quick to assemble, gives extremely fine control over tension, and the warp glides over the pipe, making it easy to advance.



It's an incredibly versatile set-up.

After warping, I held all the cards in place with a knitting needle. I used another knitting needle to pick up threads to make passing the brocade weft easier.

There were five motifs on the original band. Four of these are shown in the gallery above, while the fifth looks like an unfinished swastika and I do not wish to recreate it.



Having all the pattern cards leaning the same way has the side effect of making the band twist once it's off the loom (and it makes a damn good stab at twisting while on the loom), so I ironed it with a lot of steam to try to kill that tendency. It's reduced, but I think that if it got wet it would spring back to the original attempt at spiraling.

Overall, I'm quite happy with the results. I will be sewing loops on the ends of the band so it can slip over the loops of my apron dress. This was my first time brocading for a project, and it's much less daunting than I anticipated (who am I kidding — it intimidated the hell out of me!). I fully expect to do a full-on fancy project in brocade in the future.

The best part of all this is that I warped this up on Wednesday and finished it on Friday night. I know that it's only 5 little motifs and 13" of weaving total, but I really did expect this to take longer.

THE HOSUR

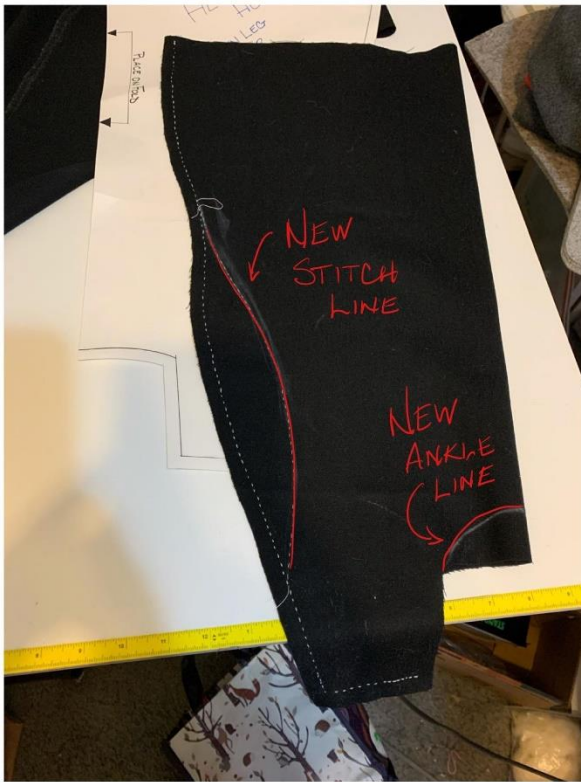
The hosur are basically Viking thigh-highs. I am basing my interpretation on hosur that were found at Hedeby. They were cut on the straight grain and the major part of the leg came up over the knee and was sewn to another tube that went up the rest of the thigh. Holes in the top of the tube held a thong or cord that attached to a belt to hold the hosur up.

I started developing the pattern before the challenge started, and I actually thought that it was all set, so I cut one foot and one leg out of the fashion fabric and started sewing everything together... annnnnd fail.

I mean, at least they were too big...

So I've been doing a lot of tailoring with these, and it's been going a lot better than when I was developing the original pattern. I've been having a lot of trouble with my back and when I originally tried to pattern these, reaching my own feet was a problem. Thanks to physical therapy and good pain drugs, this time I was able to reach my feet and do the needful things.

I completely redid most of the back seam of the leg, and it fits much better. I marked the line with chalk, tested it with safety pins, redid the chalk line and basted it, then trimmed it down and traced the new shape onto the paper pattern with a contrasting pen. I also changed the shape of the edge going over the top of my foot.



There is also a new angle on the heel, not pictured above.

The rest of my thoughts on doing these hoses are summarized below:

Modifications

- ☐ open foot stitches
 - ☐ cut 1/4" bigger all around
- ☐ change heel angle on leg
- ☐ lapped seam to join foot to leg?
 - ↳ if not this then the seam needs to go on the bottom
 - ↳ THIS MIGHT BE BETTER ANYWAY

I was trying to put the seam of the foot of the hose on top of the foot, and it was a giant pain to try to sew it to the leg with the seam on the underside of the heel. So I thought I'd be clever and put the seam on the bottom, and upon looking at my resources, *that's where it goes anyway*. Good thing I was trying to "think with my persona's mind" (and also have at least two brain cells to rub together).

What had happened was that in my mind, I was taking the foot of the Skjoldehamn socks and combining that with the leg of the Hedeby hose, and maybe I should try getting more sleep. With the seams on the bottom, I can sew all the horizontal seams and then all the vertical seams, and it should go well and quickly.

As of this writing, I haven't done any more work on the hosur. I don't anticipate too many issues, now that I can reach my feet. I expect they will be quite comfortable, even with the seam under the foot.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE?

I also plan to make cords to hold up the hosur and a leather belt to tie them to. The belt will probably just be a strap of leather with a slit in one end, through which the other end is fed and then tied around the belt, similar to a ring belt.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS?

This challenge has been amazing. I'm really happy with how fast I'm able to put a handsewn garment together, and I'm looking forward to testing myself against the clock in the future, just for my own knowledge. I want to make another Køstrup dress already, just to try new things, and I might need to time-travel to Herjolfsnes as well.

Thank you to the organizers and judges for taking the time to set all this up and give us feedback. I'm excited to make my presentation to all of you.

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Shelagh Lewins has made available an English summary of pages 38-42 and 168-170 at

http://www.shelaghlewins.com/reenactment/hedeby_apron/hedeby_apron.htm.

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